

The End of Zionism? *

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In “Cahiers Ratisbonne”, I wrote¹ an article entitled: “La Terre d’Israël, Jérusalem, le Temple, leur valeur pour les Juifs et pour les Chrétiens” (The Land of Israel, Jerusalem, the Temple, their value for Jews and for Christians).² It seemed to me that these values were being ignored too much by Christians in general and by Arab Christians in particular. I was struck by this when I heard a lecture by N.S. Ateek given at the “Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel” and then when I read his book, *Justice and only Justice. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, New York, 1989.³ My perspective was explicitly religious, in order first of all to foster listening to Jewish Tradition, and then so as to situate myself as a Christian within the resonance of that tradition. My article, which has been translated and published in Dutch, Spanish and Italian, received good echoes. It also brought me some at times vehement criticism from certain Christians who are opposed to every territorial, political, or national dimension of a Jewish presence in the Holy Land. The same article was translated into English and sent to Father Michael Perko, a Jesuit in the USA, who is a professor at Loyola University in Chicago. It was well received by him, but he did not give any opinion on the “pro-Zionist” stance taken by me (“*the pro-Zionist stance taken by Pierre Lenhardt in his elegant essay*”).⁴

In reality, my article was not about Zionism and it did not give a justification for it. The word “Zionism” did not even appear in the article, but without doubt, my plea for a recognition by Christians of the value which the land of Israel, inhabited and cultivated by Jews, could have for them, could be considered to be a Zionist position. So in fact, I accept being considered a “Christian Zionist”. However, since I am neither Jewish nor an Israeli, I prefer to introduce myself as a Christian who is convinced of the religious and humanist value of a certain

* First published in French in *Sens* no. 3, 2004, pp. 99-138.

¹ In this article, I speak of myself in the first person. This is not because I claim great fame or doctoral authority for myself. I have neither. It is because the reality about which I want to speak is currently a burning question. We do not have the time to completely examine all its aspects, and the question demands a personal commitment which is incompatible with any seemingly academic neutrality.

² No. 1, December 1996, pp. 106-140.

³ While acknowledging the value of this beautiful book and the legitimacy of its call for justice in the face of many abuses and violent acts, of which Israeli Jews have become guilty within the context of the State of Israel, sometimes in its name and even in the name of the Bible and of the Tradition of Israel, I felt the need to affirm first verbally, in friendly conversations with N.S. Ateek, and then in writing, the value which the Land of Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple have for the Jews and can have for Christians. My article refers to N.S. Ateek, but it does not give a critique of his book. Such a critique has been written in depth by Raniero Fontana in: “‘Preghiera da Gerusalemme’ – Riflessione su un teologia palestinese della liberazione”, *Studi Fatti Ricerche*, Milano, no. 59, Luglio-Settembre 1992. It is difficult to assess Arab Christian ignorance regarding the value of the Land, Jerusalem and the Temple for religious Jews. However, cf. Francesco Rossi de Gasperis, who tries to make such an assessment: “La Shoah spirituale attuata dagli arabocristiani”; Prima parte: “Ma Cristo non ha cancellato Israele. Le Chiese di Palestina e l’ebraismo”, in *Mondo e Missione*, Milano, febbraio 2002; Seconda parte: “L’intifada palestinese, una pietra sul dialogo ebraico-cristiano?”, *ibidem*, marzo 2002. It is regrettable that the important teacher of comparative literature in the USA, Edward Said, a recently deceased Arab Christian who was baptized in Jerusalem, considered it to be normal that he write the preface to the Arabic edition of Israel Shahak’s book, *Jewish Religion – The Weight of three thousand Years*, Pluto Press, London-Chicago, reprinted in 1997 (the Arabic edition reprinted in Beirut in 1997). This book, which is violently anti-Zionist and coarsely anti-Judaic, can only harm readers who are not prepared.

⁴ Michael Perko, “*Jerusalem Trodden Down*”: *Christian Ideology and Biblical Narrative in Israeli/Palestinian Politics*, Chicago, May 2003; cf also by the same author “Contemporary American Christian Attitudes to Israel Based on the Scriptures” in *Israel Studies* vol. 8, no. 2, Summer 2003, p. 9.

Zionism. I shall try to say what I mean by that today, in the dramatic context of the existence of Jews and Arabs, Muslims and Christians in the land of Israel and of Palestine.

I am writing this article because it seems to me that it is impossible to remain silent while the Jews risk being abandoned yet again in their history by Christians as a whole. For it seems obvious to me that the vast majority of Christians do not recognize what is specific in the situation of the Jews who are citizens of the State of Israel or who are implicated in one way or another by its existence. One aspect of that specificity is the solitude which the Jews in the world are experiencing, a solitude of which the Christians know nothing and which they aggravate all too often.

The concern which I am expressing as a Christian is not new. Germaine Ribi re already expressed it clearly in an article published in 1976 under the title, “La conscience chr tienne devant la solitude d’Isra l” (The Christian conscience in the face of Israel’s solitude).⁵ According to G. Ribi re, the Christian conscience must be touched by that solitude and by the danger which it brings with it for the Jews in a world which is hostile to them.⁶ This Christian attitude corresponds in a striking way to what Israel’s Tradition says about Israel’s solitude. Here, I will refer above all to two masters, Andr  N her (1914-1988) and Ephraim Urbach (1912-1991), of blessed memory, whom I knew personally and whose teaching marked me in a particular way. Israel’s solitude is perhaps the reality which appears with the greatest insistence in Andr  N her’s thinking. I cannot do any better here than to refer the reader to the whole of his work.⁷ For Ephraim Urbach, who is less known by Christian readers, Israel’s solitude is like the backdrop on which Israel’s life is drawn in the context of the State of Israel.⁸

In the first part, I shall speak about this solitude. In the second part, I will examine Zionism and the State of Israel. I will then propose that we listen to Israel’s prayer, the prayer for ordinary days and the prayer on Independence Day. I shall conclude by making a statement on the legitimacy of Zionism and of a “Christian Zionism”. Right from the start, it is obvious that my conclusion will be positive. All the realities that I will examine will always be seen from a point of view which is favorable to the Jewish and Zionist positions, even when I consider criticisms that are made by Jews, by non-Jews and by myself.

Israel’s Solitude

Israel’s solitude is proclaimed by Balaam in the name of God as a blessing (*Num 23:9*): “*Here is a people living alone (le-badad), and not reckoning itself among the nations.*” This solitude is seen by a “prophet” from the nations who wants to curse Israel, as Balak, the king of Moab, had asked him to do. So the solitude could be a curse. But God wants it to be a blessing. The

⁵ *Rencontre* no. 45, 1976, pp. 84-86. This article was published in Italian in *Documenti e Fatti*, Milano, nos. 16-17, Luglio-Ottobre 1976. This periodical, which was directed by the sorely missed Maria Baxiu, had the knack of always discerning at the right time what Christians needed to understand.

⁶ Cf. also the beautiful “M ditation spirituelle   propos de l’hostilit  actuelle envers les Juifs” by Fadiev Lovsky, *Sens*, Paris, 2003, nos. 9/10, pp. 413-422.

⁷ “L’Alliance ou la solitude messianique” in *Mo se et la vocation juive*, Seuil, Paris, 1956; *L’Existence Juive. Solitude et Affrontements*, Seuil, Paris, 1962; *L’identit  juive*, Seghers, Paris, 1977 et 1989, in particular, “La dimension juive de l’espace: le sionisme”, pp. 112-137.

⁸ E. Urbach, “medinat israel – metsi’ut we-hazon” (The State of Israel – Reality and Vision) in *Al tsionut we-yahadut – iyunim u-massot* (On Zionism and Judaism – Studies and Essays), Jerusalem, 1985, p. 82. E. Urbach is known above all for his book: *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Jerusalem, 1975. His activity and writings in the area of Zionism are much less known and esteemed, even in Israel, even among those who read Hebrew. Cf. however, the beautiful “Homage   Ephraim Elimelekh Urbach (1912-1991)” by Chief Rabbi Ren -Samuel Sirat in *Rashi, 1040-1990, Hommage   Ephraim E. Urbach*, Cerf, Paris, 1993.

biblical context, which takes care to underline this, leaves no room for doubt (*Num* 24:1): “Now Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord (YHWH) to bless Israel.” This biblical landmark serves the authors mentioned above⁹ as a point of departure. Above all, it establishes solitude as a consequence of Israel’s election, as a distinctive sign of its covenant with God, as a condition of its life that is marked in the world by forms of behavior, by commandments, and by particular teachings. This solitude is a solitude for God and with God. Thus, solitude is above all what is experienced as “*le dur bonheur d’être juif*” (“the hard happiness of being Jewish”).¹⁰

But there is another solitude, a negative solitude, the solitude of separation from God. The Tradition of Israel speaks of the two kinds of solitude. It opposes them in a homily which “opens up” the meaning of the first verse of Lamentations (*Lam* 1:1): “How (eikhah = alas) lonely (badad) sits the city...” The opening is given by Jeremiah (*Jer* 15:17): “I never sat in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone (badad)...” Jeremiah is complaining about his suffering, and with him, Israel complains because it suffers from its solitude *with God* and for God. But the isolation which is imposed from the outside and which scoffs at Israel’s specificity and its fidelity to God, is nothing compared to the solitude which Israel experiences when God separates himself from Israel and abandons it by letting the Temple be destroyed. Now it is no longer a solitude with God, but a solitude *without God*, a result of the isolation which Israel wanted in separating itself from God by sin (cf. *Isa* 59:2). Thus, the meaning of the lamentation is opened up: “How (eikhah = alas) lonely (badad) sits the city...”¹¹

Solitude with God

Above all, Christians should know and respect Israel’s solitude with God. They should all understand that this solitude is the consequence of Israel’s election. To the extent to which Jews, in accordance with their religious tradition and the prayer which it establishes, declare themselves to be chosen by God in order to witness to God in the world, Christians must see Israel’s concrete existence and its solitude as the necessary condition for this people’s election and thus as an irrevocably positive reality.

I want to refer first of all to the Catholic position, according to which “*the Old Covenant has never been revoked.*”¹² According to this assertion, Israel’s election, which is an essential element of the covenant, is maintained in the Christian economy. Far from endangering Christian identity, it constitutes its root.

It seems to me that it would be useful to mention two Protestant positions. The first is that of Peter von der Osten-Sacken, a Lutheran exegete and theologian, in a book in which he backs up Luther’s catechisms on Jewish prayer: “*A fundamental proposition must be brought to theological awareness and practice: the certainty that God maintains Israel’s election and his predilection for his people, even when his people says no to Jesus Christ. This certainty is a*

⁹ G. Ribière, A. Néher, E. Urbach. The proceedings of the 15th Colloquium of French-speaking intellectual Jews organized in Paris in November 1974 must also be cited: *Solitude d’Israël. Données et Débats* (Israel’s Solitude. Facts and Debates) (published under the direction of Jean Halpérin and Georges Levitte, PUF, 1975) and Joseph Dov Soloveichik (1903-1993), *Le croyant solitaire*, Translated and with a preface by Dr. Benjamin Gross, Organisation Sioniste Mondiale, Département de l’Education et de la Culture par la Torah dans la Diaspora, Jerusalem 1978, pp. 170-175.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Néher, *Le dur bonheur d’être juif*. (Victor Malka interviewing André Néher), Le Centurion, Paris, 1976. Cf. also René-Samuel Sirat, *La joie austère*, Cerf, Paris, 1990.

¹¹ *Eikhah Rabbah*, Ed. Buber, p. 5.

¹² The expression was originally used by Pope John Paul II (Mainz, November 17, 1980). It has been repeated in Church documents (“Notes of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism”, June 24, 1985, I §3) and can be considered to be the expression of a common doctrine.

*fundamental part both of the creed and of the Christian catechism.*¹³ Another position held by another Lutheran exegete and theologian presents Jewish existence as the basic reality with which all Christian theology must begin. This is what Rolf Rendtorff asserts: “*God’s history with humanity, the history of the election which he made of an interlocutor, begins with Israel. After that, we, the pagans, were grafted on as branches of the saving olive tree. The decisive fact then is that Israel is and remains Israel, remains the chosen people of God with whom God concluded his covenant.*”¹⁴

Thus, from a Christian point of view, we must think and say that the concrete existence of Israel as such has meaning and a religious value which nothing can abolish. Just as no sin can destroy the image of God given to man and woman at their creation (*Gen 5:1-2*), so “*Israel, even if it has sinned, is Israel.*”¹⁵ A Christian cannot deny the religious value of Israel’s election, its identity and its existence, even when Israel has sinned.

Solitude without God

We must consider the dangerous, painful, catastrophic aspects of this solitude. It can certainly bring with it disastrous consequences for Israel; these are discussed clearly by E. Urbach. The worst consequence is when Israel, with or without reference to Balaam’s oracle, considers itself to be alone in the world in deciding over its life and in judging its actions.¹⁶ Ben-Gurion’s phrase: “*What is important is not what the nations (goyim) think, but what the Jews do*”, corresponds to such an attitude. If applied literally, it would transform Israel’s positive solitude into a negative isolation from the world, which can be disastrous at the political and military levels. If taken as a qualification of its existence in the world, the phrase would lead to an intolerable self-sufficiency from the moral point of view, both for the Tradition of Israel, which constantly teaches the greatness of humility, and for the nations, which have the right to judge Israel on its behavior.¹⁷ A passive and resigned acceptance of solitude in a world hostile to Israel is less serious; such an acceptance would cause Israel to lose its conviction that this solitude is the price to be paid for the message that Israel must give in the world. In both cases, the solitude, whether it be voluntary or undergone, is lived badly. It becomes an isolation (*biddud*) which is called forth by Israel or imposed upon Israel.

From a religious point of view, solitude without God, isolation from God, is catastrophic. The destruction of the first Temple can be seen as the consequence of idolatry, that of the second Temple as the consequence of groundless hatred among Jews. An even greater catastrophe could come as a consequence of too much injustice within Jewish society in Israel or towards Palestinian Arabs. The disappearance of the Jewish people through total assimilation to a modernity without any point of reference other than economic well-being and universal tolerance set up as a principle would be even more serious, but unthinkable.

¹³ Peter von der Osten-Sacken, *Katechismus und Siddur*, Institut Kirche und Judentum, Berlin, 1984, p. 16.

¹⁴ “Ist Christologie ein Thema zwischen Christen und Juden” in *Christen und Juden heute. Neue Einsichten und neue Aufgaben*, Neukirchener Verlage des Erziehungsvereins GmbH, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1998.

¹⁵ T.B. *Sanhedrin* 44a on Josh 7:11.

¹⁶ E. Urbach, “ha-mashma’ut shel ha-tzionut be-yameinu” (The religious significance of Zionism in our day) in *Al tсионut we-yahadut...*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Cf. what Marcel Dubois wrote: “*Thus, on the part of the Jews, the awareness of being the ‘chosen people’ exposes Israel to the temptation of an exclusive and intolerant solitude... There is a French word that one can play on in order to express this ambiguous situation: it is the word sufficiency [suffisance]. Chosen by God for the ‘sanctification of the Name’ and to be God’s witness among the nations, the Jewish people is by that very fact called to be satisfied [se suffire] only with God...*” “Un Chrétien devant Israël”, *Etudes*, février 1986 (364/2), p. 227.

However, once again, Israel's sin and errors cannot strip Israel of its identity nor can they authorize Christians to deny the foundation and the religious value of that identity. The invisible origin of Israel's identity is in God. It is manifested in the world in an irreducible visibility. Because of its origin in Israel and its link with Israel, the Church is also irreducibly visible.

The visibility of Israel and of the Church

Israel's visibility consists of two elements which today are inseparable: the visibility of the Jews in the Diaspora and their visibility in the State of Israel. The visibility of the Jews in the Diaspora has always existed as the visibility of a group which does not mix with the larger group that identifies the nationality of the whole. There is a relationship between the Jews' wish to be different and religiously separate (the *havdalah*) from the others, which since the beginning is religious in its foundation, and the non-Jews' wish to confirm this difference and separation. We find that the solitude desired by the Jews and the isolation imposed by the non-Jews are inseparable.

Israel's election by God for the revelation of God's creation and in view of redemption by God is the origin of Israel's solitude and visibility. Jewish prayer, which teaches the election every morning before reading the *Shema Israel*, knows why it calls upon God's mercy in saying, "*Father, merciful Father, the Merciful*". Since Israel has been given the responsibility of announcing the Word (*Torah*) and of illustrating it through the practice of the commandments (*mitsvot*), it knows that it must be visible and that it is exposing itself to the judgment of human beings and of the nations of the world, who rightly or wrongly will inevitably accuse it of hypocrisy and injustice. David Hartman clearly expressed the risk taken by Israel in accepting the gift of the *Torah* at Sinai. He underlined the new and dramatic dimension of this visibility which is a consequence of the establishment of the State of Israel. "*The traumatic events of the Shoah could have resulted in a collective decision to go private, to hide, to become invisible [...]. In contrast to this prudential reticence, this galut [Diaspora] attitude to survival, the establishment of the State of Israel had its source in a bold decision to make Jewish visibility a permanent feature of Jewish life. Israeli politicians, unable to bear the onerous burden of interdependency, often quote David Ben-Gurion's famous statement: 'What's important is not what the goyim think, but what the Jews do.' For them, political independence means one thing and one thing alone: being masters of our own fate.*"¹⁸ I shall return to this phrase of Ben-Gurion's, which I quoted above and which E. Urbach criticized.¹⁹

At this point in my article, I want to emphasize above all the positive value of Jewish visibility in the Diaspora as well as in Israel, not only for the Jews, but also for the Christians. It seems to me that for the Jews this visibility is the means for upholding their identity by attaching themselves to their community, which is appointed through election and given responsibility for revelation. For Christians, Jewish visibility is the guarantee that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of the living God, is truly human, born of a Jewish mother, with his place in a real and holy history that is in reference to God. The difficulties, the sufferings, deserved or not, which are connected with this visibility were always overcome through fidelity to the covenant, in conformity with the teaching of Hillel before the Christian era: "*Do not separate yourself from the community!*"²⁰

¹⁸ Cf. his article: "Light in a time of tyrants", *Ha'arets*, English Edition, December 16, 2001.

¹⁹ E. Urbach, "medinat israel – metsi'ut we-hazon" [The State of Israel – Reality and Vision], in *'Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, p. 82.

²⁰ *Mishnah Abot* 2,4.

This courageous acceptance can serve as a model and a support to those Christians for whom the Church's visibility is disturbing. This concerns not only Catholics but many other Christians as well, for whom the Church is too visible. Fadiey Lovsky wrote about this difficulty in Chapter II of his book, *Pauvrette Eglise* (Poor little Church).²¹ As Oscar Cullmann pointed out well, it is clear that the Church's visibility does not depend on the number of faithful, but on their fidelity.²² It is surely the action of Christians and their acceptance of their suffering for Christ's Kingdom which makes the Church visible. However, for a Catholic there is an indispensable point of reference where visibility is concerned: the existence of the apostolic succession, which the Western Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox consider to be essential. Henri de Lubac, who suffered for the Church and because of the Church, underlined the importance of this point of reference. He spoke lucidly and from experience of the negative consequences due to bad or incapable pastors.²³ However, according to Hillel and H. de Lubac, suffering because of the community cannot justify separation from that community nor its abandonment. Thus, visibility is always deeper than the criteria of numbers and pastoral appropriateness.²⁴

Thus, because of his or her attachment to the Church, a Catholic can find reasons for not abandoning the Jewish people when its visibility causes difficulties for it, both in the Diaspora and in the Land of Israel.

The Hatred of the Nations

The hatred of the nations, the hatred of non-Jews towards Jews is from time immemorial. As Bernard Lazare believed, the first root of this hatred can without doubt be found in the fact that the Jews exist and that they can be recognized there where they exist.²⁵ Thus, if the Jews did not exist, there would be no Antisemitism, but how can one explain the fact that there is Antisemitism even where there are no Jews? So we have to go further in searching for the causes, as Yves Chevalier did in a masterly way.²⁶ Antisemitism is a specified hatred which aims at the Jews insofar as they are different from others. This hatred can go more or less far. It went so far as to inspire the condemnation of Dreyfus in France, the persecution and massacre of the Jews by Nazi Germany. Its deepest root is the hatred of the God to whom Jewish life testifies. Eliezer Berkovits asserted this in 1973.²⁷ In our time, Father Jean Dujardin confirms it definitively and clearly reveals it.²⁸

Antisemitism existed before Christianity, but we have to acknowledge that too many Christians were contaminated over the centuries by covering it over with "pseudo-Christian" justifications and by putting it into practice in numerous massacres and assassinations over

²¹ Mame, Tours-Paris, 1992, "Où l'invisibilité de l'Eglise donne lieu à quelques remarques", pp. 33-46.

²² O. Cullmann, *Royauté et Eglise selon le Nouveau Testament*, Delachaux et Niestlé, Neuchâtel, 1971, pp. 78-79.

²³ H. de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Eglise*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1985 (1953), Chapter III: "Les deux aspects de l'Eglise Une", pp. 71-77. Cf. also Saint Augustine, *De vera religione*, 6 (11), quoted by H.I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et l'augustinisme*, Seuil, Paris, 1955, p. 135 ("Souffrir par l'Eglise").

²⁴ Paul Valadier's shrewd and pertinent book, *L'Eglise en procès. Catholicisme et société moderne*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1987 (Flammarion, Paris, 1989), discusses the Church's visibility, what it is and what it should be today, without however referring clearly to what justifies this visibility in depth. Cf. pp. 187-196.

²⁵ Bernard Lazare, *L'Antisémitisme, son histoire et ses causes*, 1st edition 1894; final edition, Crès éd. 1934 (New edition: Documents et Témoignages, Paris 1969, p. 11).

²⁶ Yves Chevalier, *L'antisémitisme*, Cerf, Paris, 1988. Cf. his critique of B. Lazare's positions, pp. 23-27.

²⁷ E. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, Ktav Publishing House Inc., New York, 1973, pp. 114-120.

²⁸ Jean Dujardin, *L'Eglise catholique et le peuple juif. Un autre regard*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 2003, pp. 76-86.

many centuries, from the first Crusade up to the *Shoah*. Certainly, the *Shoah* was not organized for Christian reasons, but it was decided upon and implemented by people who were baptized. We can understand only too well the horror of Christianity that was experienced and expressed by Jewish teachers such as Joseph Dov Soloveichik and Eliezer Berkovits.²⁹

Hatred of the Jews is inadmissible for Christians, who should know “*the Sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people*” and Judaism, which interprets them.³⁰ Christians ought to know that the particularism of the Scriptures and Tradition of Israel has a universalist goal. The prophet Zechariah’s message in chapter 14 sheds light on the feast of *Sukkot*, on which Israel celebrates with anticipatory joy the unification of the nations in adoring the One and Only God. Christians ought to know that Israel prays for the nations and used to offer sacrifices for them in the Jerusalem Temple.³¹ How can the hatred of the nations be explained? How can one not hear Israel’s complaint in *Psalms* 109:3-5: “*They beset me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. In return for my love they accuse me [yistenuni], even while I make prayer for them. So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love.*”³² The errors, sins and crimes committed by Israel throughout its history cannot justify the *accusation* by Christians mentioned in the *psalm* (109:4) quoted above, an accusation which, at the risk of treating the Hebrew roughly, could be translated literally as “satanization” (or “demonization”).

I mentioned above the difficulty which Arab Christians have in knowing how religious Jews value the Land, Jerusalem and the Temple.³³ In the tragic context of attacks perpetrated against the Jewish population and the bloody reprisals against the Arab population, we must note the heroic courage of Arab Christians who, together with Father Emile Shoufani from Nazareth, acknowledge the specificity of Jewish suffering in the *Shoah*.³⁴

Zionism and the State of Israel

Zionism

As we saw, a Christian cannot strip Israel of its identity. The latter always remains the bearer of the positive possibility, grounded in God, of giving to Christians and to all of humanity a message about the goodness and meaning of the creation of this world. The question which arises today with renewed acuteness is whether Zionism still contributes towards passing on this message.

I say, “still contributes” in order to distinguish between two aspects of the question. The first aspect is that, unless one is systematically hostile to the Jews and to Judaism or unless one

²⁹ J.D. Soloveichik, *Le croyant solitaire...*, pp. 130-138; E. Berkovits, *Faith...*, pp. 25-26; 124-127.

³⁰ By reading the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, “*The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*”, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2002, Catholics would receive what they need in order to fight against the hatred of the Jews.

³¹ Cf. *Ezra* 6:10; *1 Macc* 7:33. Cf. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Revised and Edited by Geza Vermes, T&T Clark LTD, Edinburgh (1979), 1986, Vol. II, pp. 309-313.

³² Cf. *Numbers Rabbah*, Par. 21 § 24, the homily on Num 29:35-36, which speaks of the 8th day of the feast of *Sukkot* and of the sacrifice of a single bull for Israel (whereas during the 7 first days of the feast, 70 bulls were offered for the 70 nations).

³³ Cf. footnote 3.

³⁴ Cf. what was said in *Sens*, 2003, no. 1, pp. 1-4 and 2003, no. 7/8, pp. 386-390 about the trip to Auschwitz with Arab Palestinians and Israeli Jews in May 2003, initiated by Fr. Shoufani. Cf. also Emile Shoufani, *Comme un veilleur attend la paix. Entretien avec Hubert Prolongeau*, Albin Michel, Paris, 2002, pp. 225-226.

knows neither the one nor the other, one cannot doubt that Zionism did contribute towards the message, and that for the Zionist Jews, it did bear the message. The second aspect is that of the present time: is Zionism still the bearer of the message for certain Jews? Or must we believe that the end of Zionism has already come for the Jews? And again, if that end has come, does the State of Israel still have a reason and a chance to exist? Briefly: the Jewish people is the bearer of a message. Is this message still entrusted, at least in part, to the Zionism of the Zionist Jews, and is it still conditioned by the presence of Jews within the national framework and on the territory of the State of Israel?

Within the many aspects which should first be distinguished and then examined at greater depth, I shall advance in the hope of finding a minimal, irreducible kernel of acceptance of the Zionist project by the Jews. Such a kernel would then be the place for Christian solidarity with the project. We must clarify what constitutes the essential of Zionism for moderate Jews.³⁵

The foundations of Zionism and its definition

The distant foundation of Zionism is religious. It is the call to *return to God (teshuvah)* and to *the Land (the return to Zion – shivat tsion, Ps 126:1)*, which, after Israel's sin and its resulting exile, are presented by Scripture and Tradition as inseparable.³⁶ Based on that, Zionism can be defined as the thought and action (*Torah* and *Mitsvah*, cf. *Ex 24:13*) which, starting in the places and countries of the world where the Jewish people are dispersed (the Diaspora), turn them *towards the Land of Israel* and *towards Zion (Jerusalem)*.³⁷

The word "Zionism" and the reality it describes are recent (19th century) and not necessarily religious. Zionism, as limited to the return to the Land, was first of all not religious. Religious Zionism, for which the return to the Land is inseparable from the return to God, is more recent, and it remains the minority attitude as compared to non-religious Zionism. What characterizes this modern religious Zionism in relation to its ancient foundation is the fact that it tends to teach and to practice the return to the Land as a condition for the return to God; it is seen as a precondition which, when taken to the extreme, might get the upper hand over the return to God, to the point of causing one to forget the obligations, and in particular the obligation to practice justice. As for non-religious Zionism, it cannot be denied that its aim matches that of religious Zionism. That aim is a future which goes beyond the limited boundaries of the Jewish people in the present time and which opens up to the universal.

³⁵ "Moderate Jews": my use of this adjective does not mean that I have the right to qualify certain Jews or groups of Jews in this way in order to disqualify the others. With that expression, I simply want to exclude from the definition of Zionism which I want to propose, the opinions of those who hold the following extreme positions: those who, for religious reasons, reject Zionism and the State of Israel as an abomination (*Satmar Hassidim, Neturei Qarta*); those who, for religious reasons, refuse to give any religious value to Zionism and the State of Israel (*Yeshayahu Leibowitz*); those who, for non-religious reasons, give no religious value to Zionism and to the State of Israel (*Ben-Gurion*); those who, for non-religious reasons, refuse Zionism and the State of Israel and who obviously don't see them as having any religious value (*Michel Warschawski*).

³⁶ For Scripture, cf. *Deut 4:25-40*; for Tradition, the central blessing in the *Amidah* in the additional prayer for Shabbat.

³⁷ Whether they are religious or not, Zionist Jews base their Zionism on the ancient message of Israel's Tradition, which teaches that the return to God (*teshuvah – repentance*) is inseparable from the return to Zion (Jerusalem) and to the Land (of Israel). For religious Zionists, the return to Zion (*shivat tsion*, cf. *Ps 126:1*) is desired by God as a sign and action of the return to God, to his *Torah* and to his commandments, as is taught by Scripture and oral Tradition (*Deut 4:29-40*; the 5th blessing, that of repentance in the community prayer for ordinary days; the 4th blessing of the community prayer in the evening after the end of *Shabbat*). For non-religious Zionists, the return to Zion is not necessarily limited to the Land. It can be accompanied by a universally humanitarian project which would be inspired by the return to the Land and the organization of a model society.

Here, we could refer to the enlightening presentation by Pinhas H. Peli (1930-1989), according to which religious and non-religious Zionists are united by three common convictions: the priority given to assuming the people's *destiny* (*goral*), solidarity in suffering and in joy; secondly, the people's *heritage* (*morashah*), its historical memory, its cultural tradition, its passion for study, its constant questioning and criticism of the present; and thirdly, the people's *task* (*yi'ud*), its *specific role* among the other peoples and nations of the world to make of this world a definitively better world.³⁸

The Zionism which was inspired and organized by Theodor Herzl was non-religious Zionism. It was the majority opinion in its beginning, and this has remained so until now. This is the Zionism which “*proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national rebirth in its own country*” and which took responsibility for the stages which prepared that rebirth.³⁹ It made itself responsible for the establishment of a “*Jewish State in Eretz-Israel, the State of Israel*” created in 1948.⁴⁰ Until today, it still orients the State towards the future.

The Birth of the State of Israel

According to the Declaration of Independence, the State of Israel was founded on May 14, 1948. However, I would prefer to speak of the “birth” of the State rather than of its foundation, in order to emphasize more that it owes its existence to the coming together of many factors at various levels; these were inspired by very varying motives and were often contradictory and at times far from any humanitarian concerns.⁴¹ The State was born in the midst of a bloody war in which all the Arab countries in the region were the Jewish people's enemies.⁴² It seems to me, the birth of the State of Israel resembles the birth of a human being; it happens with anguish, suffering and blood, and it is not always the result of pure and

³⁸ Pinhas H. Peli, *Lessons on the Philosophy of the Jewish State* [in Hebrew], Beit El, 1990, p. 10. Here, I will not spend time on the subtle but useful distinction he made between religious Zionists and Zionist religious Jews.

³⁹ The phrase, “*proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national rebirth in its own country*”, is that used in the Declaration of Independence to sum up the stance taken by the First Zionist Congress in 1897. According to T. Herzl, “*Since those days in Basle, the Jewish people has its national representatives; the ‘Jewish State’ will follow in its own country.*” Cf. his *Autobiography*, which is quoted in the brochure: *The Jubilee of the First Zionist Congress 1897-1947*, The Executive of the Zionist Organisation, Jerusalem Press, Jerusalem, October 1947, p.6.

⁴⁰ These phrases are those found in the Declaration of Independence of May 14, 1948.

⁴¹ Cf. Ilan Greilsammer, *La nouvelle histoire d’Israël*, Gallimard, Paris, 1998. In Chapter 4 of this book, “La naissance de l’Etat d’Israël”, pp. 160-212, the author describes in detail and without pity what happened and what has been understood of what happened. It seems to me that it would be good to borrow the title of this chapter from him and to speak of the “birth of the State” before trying to say what that State is. Two other authors, both religious and Zionist Israeli Jews, present the birth of the State of Israel in a more profound and more balanced way than I. Greilsammer, obviously based on a favorable view of the State. I would first mention E. Urbach's critical, though positive, judgment, to which I shall return in this article's next section on the State of Israel. The second author, a historian and Talmudist, is Jacob Katz, who describes and assesses the context and the consequences of the proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948. Cf. Jacob Katz, ““et la-haqor ‘et le-hitbonnen...” [A Time for Investigation, a Time for Reflection] in *Israel throughout the Ages* [in Hebrew], Merkaz Zalman Shazar, Jerusalem, 1999, Chapter 4: “*medinat israel hessegeihah we-mehdaleihah – hakrazat ha-medinah we ha-‘ribbonut*” [The State of Israel, its accomplishments and its failures. The proclamation of the State and sovereignty], pp. 129ff.

⁴² The war with the Arabs began before the Second World War. It started again after the end of the latter, when British power ceased to contain the Arab violence. Launched by the neighboring Arab countries, it broke out already on May 15, 1948, the day the British mandate ended and the day after Israel's Declaration of Independence. It continued until the cease-fire called for by the UN Security Council, that was accepted by the warring parties on July 17, 1948.

exalted motives.⁴³ Where the birth of the State of Israel is concerned, we have to see what preceded it in the hope and intention of those who prepared it.

Reading the *Acts* of the “Jubilee of the first Zionist congress”⁴⁴ can give an antidote to the negative, often hate-filled Arab and non-Arab interpretations of everything on the Jewish side that prepared and produced the birth of the State of Israel. That first Zionist congress after the Second World War, which was held in Jerusalem and Basle in August 1947, brought together all the people actively involved in Zionism, in particular Haim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, Isaac Ben-Zvi. It took place in the midst of the conflict with Great Britain, before the United Nations vote on November 29, 1947 and before the war launched by the Arab countries on May 15, 1948, the very day after the proclamation of the State of Israel. During it, the creation of the State of Israel was announced - with great determination on the part of D. Ben-Gurion, which is understandable in the context of the foreseeable war on all sides, in a more moderate tone on the part of I. Ben-Zvi, and on the part of H. Weizmann, with a call full of pathos to Jews and non-Jews to stop the violence and injustice.⁴⁵ I shall return to the jubilee declarations when I speak about the State of Israel, leaning mainly on E. Urbach’s criticism of D. Ben-Gurion. I shall mention them again in my conclusion.

These positions need to be known in the present-day context with its massive anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli public opinion, which, lacking all points of reference and manipulated by anonymous forces, is already sliding towards anti-Semitism. Christians must know and be able to understand that the State of Israel is not the product of evil, capitalist, imperialist, colonialist, racist or other intentions, but of a timeless Jewish aspiration for a future of the Jewish nation which is significant for all nations. Christians must accept to see that the birth of the State of Israel merits being welcomed and celebrated with joy by the Jews, on condition that they do not forget that for many Arabs, this birth is experienced as a catastrophe, the *Naqba*.⁴⁶

The “Declaration of Independence”

⁴³ Cf. Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Levi in the *Kuzari* (3,53); against those who are repelled by the bloody nature of the sacrifices instituted by the *Torah*, he put forward the analogy with the birth of a human being, which happens as a consequence of “basely” material acts.

⁴⁴ *The Jubilee of the First Zionist Congress 1897-1947*, The Executive of the Zionist Organisation, Jerusalem Press, Jerusalem, October 1947.

⁴⁵ The following is what D. Ben-Gurion said during the congress in Jerusalem on August 17, 1947: “*It is my belief that we stand on the threshold of the Jewish State. It is not the State as conceived in the age-old dreams of the Jewish people or even as seen in Herzl’s vision. It is the first stage of a State determined by the measure of visible power that has been generated in Palestine and that is forcing a path by means of ‘illegal’ immigration... After fifty years ... we are approaching the establishment of the Jewish State...*” (*The Jubilee...*, pp. 27-28). At the end of his speech, I. Ben-Zvi said that same August 17, 1947 in Jerusalem: “*This anniversary is being commemorated with a Jewish population in Palestine of 650,000 souls – more than the number of Israelites who left Egypt in Pharaoh’s day. May the next anniversary take place in a free Jewish Palestine.*” (*The Jubilee...*, p. 31) H. Weizmann said in Basle on August 31, 1947: “*I think I am entitled to appeal to both the Jewish and the non-Jewish worlds. I call upon them to halt! Averah goreret averah - violence breeds violence, and injustice breeds injustice. We are caught in a vicious circle which somebody must have the courage, once and for all, to break. I see with sorrow that even among us certain acts are committed which our fathers and mothers would not have allowed*” (*The Jubilee...*, p. 24).

⁴⁶ Cf. Michel Warschawski, *Israël-Palestine, le défi binational*, Les éditions Textuel, Paris 2001, “le péché originel”, pp. 37-46. The joy of the feast of independence cannot be authentic if it does not take into account the suffering it caused and still causes to the Arabs. This reservation draws inspiration from Israel’s Passover prayer: the *Hallel* of Passover is not said in its entirety on all the days of the feast, because God does not allow Israel to forget the death of the Egyptians who drowned in the sea over their joy at being freed from Egypt.

This declaration, made on May 14, 1948 by the “*members of the People’s Council, representatives of the Jewish community in Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist Movement here assembled on the day of the termination of the British mandate over Eretz-Israel*”, founded the State of Israel.⁴⁷

This text, like the State of Israel itself, has a complicated genesis. It is the result of a compromise which was far from satisfactory to the Zionists as a whole, and it satisfied the Jewish people in their totality even less. Here, I cannot offer a detailed study of the document; I would prefer to limit myself to a few points which seem to me to be important. I base my assessment of these points on a deep study which is critical but not hostile, done from a religious point of view by Yaaqov Rotschild in the book on *Independence Day (Yom ha-‘Atsma’ut)*, published by the World Zionist Agency.⁴⁸

First of all, the Declaration is not a religious document, even though its authors did choose to include a few indirectly religious formulae which were deliberately left imprecise. The Declaration begins with the assertion: “*Eretz-Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people.*” This is inexact, as Y. Rotschild shows at great length; he regrets that the authors deliberately ignored the promise of the Land given to the Fathers of the Nation. Do we have to do with a lie here, as Y. Leibowitz harshly puts it?⁴⁹ I think this accusation should be avoided and that we should understand that “exact” formulae could not be used, as they would have given the Declaration a religious character, which was unacceptable to the majority of signatories. The present-day French positions on secularism and the plans for a European Constitution can help us to understand the concern of the Declaration’s writers and why they preferred “inexact” expressions.

In addition, other formulations, in spite of their deliberate ambiguity, express something in relation to the origin and religious vision of the Jewish people. For example, it is said that the Jewish people “*gave to the world the eternal Book of books*”, that “*throughout their dispersion, (it) never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it (to their land)*”, that the State of Israel “*will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisioned by the prophets of Israel*”. The Declaration “*appeals to the Jewish people throughout the diaspora to rally round the Jews of Eretz-Israel in the tasks of immigration and upholding and to stand by them in the great struggle for the realization of the age-old dream - the redemption of Israel.*” Finally, the Declaration was signed on the 5th of Iyar according to the religious calendar, “*on the basis of the trust placed in the Almighty* [in Hebrew, literally: in the Rock of Israel – Tsur Israel].” It was not easy to get the non-religious signatories to agree to these formulations. It was not

⁴⁷ The facsimile of the “Foundation Scroll of the State of Israel”, dated and signed, is reproduced in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1971, Article: “Declaration of Independence”, Vol. 5, pp. 1451-1455, on p. 1454. Along with the Hebrew text, there is a translation into English, which I have used in this article, although it does not always correspond with the original. I would just point out, for example, the free translation of the original “Tsur Israel” = “Rock of Israel” into “the Almighty”.

The Declaration foresaw the adoption of a constitution. For various reasons, this did not happen. “The legislative assembly of Israel”, which picked up from the “State Provisional Council” – which wrote the Declaration of Independence - and which was called *Knesset*, was supposed to be the “constitutive assembly”. This assembly did not write a constitution. Between 1958 and 1992, it passed 11 fundamental laws, thus acting “*effectively by virtue of a permanent constitutive power.*” Cf. Claude Klein, *La Démocratie d’Israël*, Seuil, Paris, 1977, Chapter 6, “Le débat constitutionnel”, pp. 117-161.

⁴⁸ *Yom ha-‘Atsma’ut*, Editor: Hayyim Hami’el, World Jewish Agency’s Department of Education and Culture according to the Torah in the Diaspora, no date; *The Scroll of Independence* (analysis) [in Hebrew], pp. 251-267.

⁴⁹ Y. Leibowitz said of the Declaration’s first sentence: “*The State of Israel’s Scroll of Independence begins with a deliberate lie: ‘Eretz-Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people.’ The Jewish people did not come forth in the land of Israel; rather, it came to the land of Israel as a people that had been thrown out...*” [translated directly from the Hebrew] “The Significance of the Land of Israel for Judaism” [in Hebrew], in *Emunah, historiah we-arakim* [Faith, History and Values], Aqademon, Jerusalem, 1982, p. 119.

easy to succeed in getting a compromise text which is still beautiful and which adequately situates Zionism within the historical context which was dramatically real in the year 1948. In the Declaration, the three basic elements uniting religious and non-religious Zionists, of which P. Peli spoke, are clearly visible: historical solidarity (destiny – *goral*), with the mention of the *Shoah*, heritage (*morashah*) with the mention of the prophets of Israel, the task (*yi'ud*) with the mention of Israel's redemption.⁵⁰

The declaration proclaimed “*the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel, the State of Israel*”. It does not say how “Jewish State” is to be understood. It announces that the State of Israel “*will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex*” and that it will “*guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture.*” The declaration does not say how the State of Israel, a Jewish State, will be a democratic State. I will come back to these difficulties in the following.

*The State of Israel, a Jewish State, a State of the Jews?*⁵¹

The Declaration of Independence founded the State of Israel and announced that this State would have a constitution. This did not happen, and the political, judiciary, and administrative structures of the State were established through a series of decisions, the coherence of which is not obvious, and it is difficult to ensure their equilibrium. The Jewish character of the State of Israel, as announced by the Declaration, has found expression in two types of legal measures.

There are first of all the measures which give to the rabbinic tribunals and the Chief Rabbinate jurisdiction regarding the marriage of all Jews residing in Israel, with consequences flowing from this as regards the children. The following also belong within this context: the observance of *Shabbat* and of the Jewish religious feasts as days of rest; the army's observance of the religious dietary laws; the removal throughout the country of all food containing leaven during the seven days of the feast of *Pessah*. Does this make the State of Israel a Jewish State? Obviously not for the religious parties, which are opposed to the writing of a constitution, because for them the *Torah* is the only possible constitution. Also obviously not for the religious Jews who do not want the Jewish religion to be nothing but an ornament which embellishes the State of Israel. However, for the non-religious Jews and for the non-Jews, these decisions are enough to give to the State of Israel the character of a Jewish State (not necessarily Zionist).

The second element, which gives the State of Israel not only a Jewish but also a Zionist character, is the Law of Return, passed on July 5, 1950. When this law was voted on, D. Ben-Gurion emphasized that the right to come to the Land is inherent to every Jew and that this right precedes the State of Israel, to which it gives what it needs in order to be built up. The Law of Return did not say who is Jewish any more than did the Declaration of Independence. It accepted as Jewish *every person who, in good faith, declares him- or herself to be Jewish*. Modifications which were introduced by the Ministry of the Interior, starting in March 1958, led to adding *not belonging to another religion* to the condition of *good faith*. The consultation of 50 Jewish personalities in Israel and the Diaspora, begun in October 1958 by

⁵⁰ Cf. above, footnote 38.

⁵¹ Cf. Claude Klein, *Le Caractère juif de l'Etat d'Israël: étude juridique*, Cujas, Paris, 1977, and in *Théodore Herzl: L'Etat des Juifs*, followed by *Essai sur le Sionisme*, Editions La Découverte, Paris 1990: “Note sur les différentes éditions du *Judenstaat* et sur la présente traduction”, pp. 5-10. Cf. also E. Shoufani, *Comme un veilleur...*, “Quel Etat d'Israël?”, pp. 219-230.

David Ben-Gurion on the question, “Who is Jewish?”⁵² confirmed the Orthodox religious formulation: “Every person who was born of a Jewish mother or who has duly converted to Judaism is Jewish.” In 1962, the Supreme Court, in its famous decision concerning Fr. Daniel Rufeisen to whom it refused to apply the Law of Return,⁵³ declared that the Law was a non-religious decision and that being Jewish was to be understood in the way Jews in general understood it. Thus, it decided that the Law did not apply to a person who was born Jewish and later converted to Christianity. This Supreme Court definition, which is coherent with the instructions given by the Ministry of the Interior for applying the Law of Return, is neither the definition given in religious law (*halakhah*): “every person who was born of a Jewish mother or who has duly converted to Judaism is Jewish”, nor the definition accepted by the Law of Return: “every person who, in good faith, declares him- or herself to be Jewish”. Finally, on March 10, 1970, the Law of Return and the law for registering the population gave the following definition: *That person is considered to be Jewish who was born of a Jewish mother or who converted to Judaism and who does not belong to another religion.*⁵⁴

There remains a difficulty which it has not been possible to overcome, neither through a text nor through the lived reality over the years. The State of Israel is a Jewish State, characterized by certain traits which are unquestionably Jewish, but which do not make it a religiously Jewish State. It is rather a State of Jews, who are in the majority without it being possible to define clearly who is Jewish.⁵⁵ The fact that the State of Israel bears the beautiful name of Israel corresponds with the complexity of Jewish identity.⁵⁶ It is indisputably a State of Jews and a State for the Jews, whoever they might be.

Jewish State, State of Jews, State for the Jews: this raises a question about the democratic nature of this State and the status of its non-Jewish citizens.⁵⁷ Is the reality proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence, as we saw above, and incontestably lived in events from 1948 until today, that of a democracy as it is commonly understood? Do the Muslim, Christian, Arab, European, Asian minorities, even those of their members who have Israeli citizenship, enjoy exactly the same rights as the Jewish majority? We have to acknowledge that this is not entirely the case while admitting that, for understandable reasons, for example security, the

⁵² Cf. *Qu'est-ce qu'être juif?* Followed by *50 sages répondent à Ben Gourion (1958)*, edited by Eliezer Ben-Raphael, Balland, Paris, 2001. E. Urbach was asked, and his answer can be found on pp. 339-341, as can that of A. Néher, pp. 290-293, and of J.D. Soloveichik, pp. 331-332.

⁵³ Cf. Nechama Tec, *Dans la fosse aux lions. La vie d'Oswald Rufeisen* (translated from the American by Cécile Le Paire), Editions Lessius, Brussels, 2002, pp. 355-358.

⁵⁴ Cf. Claude Klein, *La Démocratie d'Israël*, Seuil, Paris, 1977, pp. 268-273.

⁵⁵ Cf. Moché Catane, *Qui est Juif? Le jugement de janvier 1970 de la Cour suprême d'Israël*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1972 (re-edition: Colbo, Judaïca-poche, 1990); Claude Klein, *Le caractère juif de l'Etat d'Israël. Etude juridique*, Editions Cujas, Paris, 1977; Gershon Weiler, *La tentation théocratique. Israël, la Loi et le politique*, Calmann-Lévy, Coll. Diaspora, Paris, 1991; Michel Warschawski, “L'Etat des Juifs”, in *Israël-Palestine, le défi bi-national*, Les éditions Textuel, Paris, 2001, Chapter 2, pp. 25-35.

⁵⁶ Cf. A. Néher, *L'identité Juive...*; cf. also “Qui suis-je?” in *Dans tes portes, Jérusalem*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1972.

⁵⁷ Cf. Claude Klein, *La Démocratie d'Israël*, Seuil, Paris, 1977. The author examines in depth all the aspects of the State of Israel, “Jewish and democratic”, which “was led to develop slowly and progressively an original democratic formulation”, p. 14. Cf. in particular the pages on “the Jewish and democratic State”, pp. 286-294, and the quotations from Aharon Barak’s positions in 1992 and 1996, pp. 287-290: “In my opinion, the expression ‘Jewish and democratic’ does not contain any contradiction, but rather, two elements which complete one another and are in perfect harmony” (1992), p. 287. “There are many democratic States, but the State of Israel is the only one which is Jewish and democratic” (1996), p. 289. C. Klein, in commenting on these declarations, which he thinks are very beautiful, points out that Judge Barak was aware of how extremely difficult the subject is. R. Fontana speaks of this difficulty in “Gentils en Israël, entre démocratie et Torah”, published in this same issue of *Sens*: how can democracy in the State of Israel really be not only compatible with the Torah, but inspired by it?

State of Israel works with discrimination in certain areas. The question which arises is thus not whether the State of Israel's way of functioning which, in spite of everything, is democratic, is bad or worse than that of other States;⁵⁸ a comparison with the Arab countries as to the real rights granted their citizens as a whole would certainly be to Israel's advantage. The question is whether it is possible to imagine a Jewish State, or a State for the Jews, which would be a State not only of the Jews, because it would have within it a consistent minority of non-Jewish citizens, who would have the same rights as their Jewish fellow citizens. In order for the State to be fully democratic, must there be a separation between the State and the Jewish religion? Certain Jews, whether religious or not, think so and desire this. Y. Leibowitz, who is religious and a Zionist, wanted a radical separation.⁵⁹ Ben-Gurion, a non-religious Zionist, did not want a total separation.⁶⁰ E. Urbach, a religious Zionist, accepted the *status quo*, which he considered to be a lesser evil.⁶¹ As Alain Michel said, the *status quo* seems to confirm "an obligatory and problematic non-separation" between State and religion.⁶²

I would now like to look at Moshe Greenberg, who asks clearly whether the Zionism of the State of Israel can find a way to respond to the complex problems of modernity in the religious heritage of Judaism.⁶³ I quote the sentence which sums up his thinking: "*The great value of the Land and the State is that they allow the ultimate experiment with Judaism, testing whether Judaism can supply the ideology and wisdom to engage modernity.*"⁶⁴ I am

⁵⁸ Democracy, like all regimes, works badly. For Plato in *The Republic*, democracy was the worst type of regime. For Churchill, it was the least bad. The French constantly seek to improve the way their democracy works, which can be seen in the impressive number of constitutions they have adopted one after the other.

⁵⁹ Yeshayahu Leibowitz advocated a "radical separation of religion and State": cf. *Israël et Judaïsme. Ma part de vérité*, followed by *Job et Antigone*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris (1993), 1996, pp. 154-155.

⁶⁰ On D. Ben-Gurion, cf. Claude Klein, *La Démocratie d'Israël*, Seuil, Paris, 1977, pp. 256-258; cf. also Alain Michel, *Racines d'Israël – 1948: une plongée dans l'histoire*, Editions Autrement, Paris, 1997, pp. 261-275.

⁶¹ Cf. E. Urbach, "al ha-wikkuah be-inyan hafradat ha-dat min ha-medinah" [On the debate concerning the separation of religion and State] in *'Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, pp. 213ff. He believed that total separation is impossible, as it is impossible everywhere else in the world (pp. 213-214). In this article as in all his activity, his concern was to work starting from the *status quo* so that "Torah Judaism", in conformity with the name of the non-political movement which he founded, would support Zionism in seeking truth, justice and peace. Cf. his article "baqqashat ha-'emet ke-hovah datit" [The search for truth as a religious obligation] in *'Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, pp. 364-383. Above all, he did not want religion to be used for purely political ends, so as to obtain material advantages. The search for trust includes that of justice. It demands that the judge give "true judgment in conformity with truth" (*din emet la-amito*), that is to say, that he/she go all the way in considering possible compromises between the conflicting parties (pp. 369-375). As for the search for peace, it must go before political or military opportunistic considerations. When M. Dayan declared in June 1968 that "*in his personal opinion, the present borders (after the Six-Day War) without peace were preferable to a peace or an agreement with Egypt which would include abandoning Sharm El Sheikh*", E. Urbach immediately expressed his disagreement in the newspaper *Maariv*: "*The personal opinion of Mr. Moshe Dayan, who is responsible for the life of our soldiers, cannot be reconciled with the (preceding) declarations (by Golda Meir, the Prime Minister: "We want peace, for we are suffering not only because of the death of our sons and brothers; our pain is also great if we have to force our young sons to kill the sons of our enemies.") The interpretation (M. Dayan's personal opinion) is that 'even if the Egyptians are willing to sit down with us at the negotiating table to discuss the borders, and if the question concerning Sharm El Sheikh comes up for discussion', M. Dayan would prefer that the negotiations fail and we do not reach peace*" (cf. "'oz le-bedeq-bayit u-le-utopiyah" [Courage to put in order and utopia] in *'Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, pp. 61-62).

⁶² Cf. A. Michel, *Racines...*, "Les questions religieuses", p. 261. Cf. also C. Klein, "Le *statu quo* et ses ambiguïtés", in *La Démocratie d'Israël*, Seuil, Paris, 1977, pp. 256-264.

⁶³ Cf. Moshe Greenberg, "Theological Reflections – Land, People and the State", *Immanuel*, 22/23, 1989, pp. 25-40.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 28.

not competent to discuss Jewish religious positions on the question of the relationship between Judaism and democracy in general and within the framework of the State of Israel. I refer the reader to the writings of Claude Klein and to Raniero Fontana's article.⁶⁵ They show to what extent the nature of the State of Israel, which describes itself as a "Jewish and democratic" State, is problematic and controversial.⁶⁶

Listening to the Prayer of Israel

The petitions in the community prayer

Jewish prayer, statutory and obligatory (*qeba' we-hobah*), is where Jewish faith and hope are expressed in the most authorized way.⁶⁷ The community prayer, which is said standing and which, by its most common name, is called *Amidah* (Station), includes 18 (in reality 19) blessings on ordinary days and on Independence Day,⁶⁸ 7 blessings on *Shabbat* and the feast days, 9 blessings at the additional prayer on the feast of *Rosh Hashanah*.⁶⁹ I shall discuss the 7th, the 10th, and the 11th blessings of the *Amidah*, as well as the link between the 9th and 10th blessings. The blessings were revised and confirmed in Yavne after the destruction of the Temple (in 70 CE); they were "ordained according to their order", which is to say, in a pedagogical order, as we shall see.⁷⁰

The 7th blessing: "The beginning of redemption" (athalta di-ge'ullah)

This blessing asks God, who is called "mighty redeemer" (*go'el hazaq*), for redemption (*ge'ullah*). At its conclusion, it blesses God as the one who "redeems Israel" (*go'el israel*). The use of the present participle in the conclusion means that God redeems in the present and in the future. Redemption in the present, which the blessing has in mind above all, prepares redemption in the future. The former is the condition for the latter. Rashi in his commentary, which we shall look at in the following, clarifies the relationship between the present and the future. The *Talmud* asks why this blessing of redemption is the 7th one. The answer to that question leans on a tradition according to which Israel will be redeemed in a 7th year in the seven-year count of the years which is the basis for the sabbatical and jubilee years. In

⁶⁵ C. Klein, *La Démocratie d'Israël*, Seuil, Paris, 1977, and *Théodore Herzl: L'Etat des Juifs*, followed by *Essai sur le Sionisme*, Editions La Découverte, Paris 1990; Raniero Fontana, "Gentils en Israël..." Cf. also Eliezer Berkovits, "Le Judaïsme dans un Etat démocratique" in *Crisis of Judaism in the Jews' State* [in Hebrew], Jerusalem, 1987, pp. 103-111.

⁶⁶ Cf. R. Fontana, "Gentils en Israël...", footnote 5.

⁶⁷ Cf. S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, (1909), Schocken Books, New York, 1961, pp. 10-11; and J. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin-New York, 1977, pp. 30f. Whether people are aware of this or not, the traditional Catholic saying, "*Lex orandi, lex credendi*", according to which prayer is the school and the expression of faith (and of hope), comes from the Jewish Pharisaic root of Christianity. I would underline that in his book cited above (footnote 13), P. von der Osten-Sacken explains Christian faith according to Luther's catechisms by constantly referring to Jewish prayer. The title of his book clearly indicates this: *Katechismus und Siddur*.

⁶⁸ The number 18 is ancient and still causes the prayer to be called "18 Blessings", although it has had 19 blessings on ordinary days since the first centuries CE. It is not necessary to discuss this change in this article, as the blessings which we shall study here were not affected by it.

⁶⁹ The following are the reasons why "statutory and obligatory" prayer gives a privileged place to the form of blessing: God is blessed and called *barukh* (blessed) as the source of all that is good; God is addressed directly in the second person, "you"; God is named with his revealed and ineffable name, YHWH, which is pronounced "Adonai"; the praise or petition addressed to God in the blessing is not in vain, because God, who is present to prayer, hears and receives it.

⁷⁰ T.B. *Berakhot* 28b and T.B. *Megillah* 17b. In T.B. *Megillah* 17b, the Sages tried to justify the prayer's pedagogical order by leaning above all on Scripture, but not exclusively, as we shall see in the 7th blessing (cf. also T.J. *Berakhot* 2, 4, 4d).

response to the objection which is then made, that the 7th year is still a year of war and that the Son of David will only come the following year, the *Talmud* teaches that the war in question will not prevent the 7th year from being the “beginning of redemption” (*athalta di-ge’ullah*).

The “beginning of redemption” is a formula that has been used to describe the realization of the Zionist project in the Land of Israel at least since Rav Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) in his reaction to the Balfour Declaration in 1917. It was used in significant ways before the establishment of the State of Israel and afterwards, in particular in the prayer on Independence Day.

It seems to me that it is important to know the commentary by Rashi (1040-1105) on this “beginning of redemption” in order to understand what this “beginning” might be for Jews and for Christians. The following is the commentary:⁷¹ “Even though this redemption is not the redemption from exile, but that by which we are redeemed from the distress which constantly comes upon us – for let us note that the blessing of the ingathering [of the exiled, the 10th blessing], that of the building of Jerusalem [the 14th blessing] and that of “David’s shoot” [the 15th blessing] are blessings which each have their own value independently of this redemption [of the 7th blessing] -, although it is thus, the minute it was given the name redemption, they [our masters] established it as the seventh blessing.”⁷² Because of this commentary by Rashi we can believe that the history of Israel is the history of a redemption which is constantly being done in the present in order to announce the final, messianic redemption, which will have a “beginning”, the “beginning of redemption” (*athalta di-ge’ullah*). Thus, the 7th blessing means that there is a continuity between the redemption in the present, with the promise of a redeemer that is given in the *Amidah*’s 1st blessing,⁷³ and with the request for the final redemption that is made in the 10th, 14th, and 15th blessings.

The messianic petitions (10 to 15 and 17)

The 10th blessing

The first explicit messianic petition is made in the 10th blessing of the “ingathering of the exiles”. Israel asks God to “blow the great shofar” (*Isa* 27:13) and to “raise the standard” (*Isa* 11:12), which in messianic times (“on that day” linked with “the shoot of Jesse”, *Isa* 11:1.10) will proclaim the ingathering of Israel’s exiles (*Isa* 11:12; 27:13). The fact that this request is the first of the messianic petitions does not mean that the ingathering of the exiles will necessarily be the first of the realizations of the final redemption. For as we saw, the “order” of the blessings is not chronological but pedagogical.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, according to the

⁷¹ on T.B. *Megillah* 17b *athalta di-ge’ullah*.

⁷² E. Urbach quotes this commentary, “ha-ge’ullah bi-tefisat hazal u-me’ora’ot yameinu” [Redemption in our Sages’ Thinking and the Events of our Time] in *‘Al twionut we-yahadut...*, pp. 20-21. I must confess that I don’t understand what he wrote: “Rashi’s words are doubtlessly true for the 2nd Temple period...” This seems to me to contradict what he said before about the *Talmud* itself: “It is clear that we already have here [in T.B. *Megillah* 17b, which says: ‘Israel will only be redeemed in the 7th year’] a commentary that is based on the assumption that the blessing of redemption [the 7th blessing] is looking towards the future messianic redemption.” In fact, it seems to me that the blessing, which is enlightened by the idea of the “beginning of redemption”, is looking towards the future redemption, while teaching that the future redemption demands the present redemption, which makes it possible, which prepares it by implicitly announcing a “beginning”.

⁷³ The 1st blessing says: “You lead [and will lead] a redeemer to the children of their children...”

⁷⁴ A reading of the profound studies by the great Talmudist and decision-maker Rav Shelomoh Goren (1917-1994) on the “Foundations of Redemption” (*yesodot ha-ge’ullah*) [in Hebrew] in *Torat ha-Mo’adim*, Tel Aviv, 1964, pp. 303-320, must lead to the conviction that the Tradition of Israel is not fundamentalist either in its interpretation of Scripture or in that of the *Talmud*. “The order” of the

Talmud, one can see an organic link between the 10th blessing and the preceding 9th blessing. The 9th blessing requests prosperity and productivity of the Land (of Israel) for the current year. Material abundance is asked of God and is described in the conclusion: “*Blessed are you, Lord, who blesses the years.*” In God, who is blessed as the source of all blessing, the material goods point to a spiritual reality which goes beyond the time of the current year. In an imprecise and open way, the blessing can suggest a passage from ordinary time to the end time. According to the *Talmud*, such a passage could be seen in the light of Ezekiel (*Ezek* 36:8).⁷⁵

If the establishment of the State of Israel is considered to be the “*beginning of redemption*” (*athalta di-ge’ullah*), as is done in the prayer established by Israel’s Chief Rabbinate, as we shall see, then this vision is confirmed by the fact that the valorization of the Land and the return of a large number of exiles are incontestably grandiose, spectacular realizations of Zionism; these began prior to the State of Israel and were assumed by it. I shall return to this question in my conclusion, but already now I draw the reader’s attention to the fact that the return of the exiles in our time, as spectacular as it may be and as miraculous as one might consider it to be, is a reality which manifests Zionism’s failure as much as its success.⁷⁶

The ingathering of the exiles, the return to the Land and to Zion-Jerusalem, is the foundation of Zionism and the main *raison d’être* of the State of Israel. The latter, in collaboration with the Jewish Agency, has to ensure that the Jewish immigrants are absorbed and that they are given the necessary land for their implantation. This raised and raises in an ever more obvious and acute way the problem of justice, which the State of Israel must respect as regards the Arab population in the various parts of the territories for which it is responsible. Land possession and sovereignty over Jerusalem are the cause of old and recent conflicts, the solution of which can receive light from the teachings given in the 11th, 14th, and 17th blessings.

The 11th blessing

The *Talmud* does not state clearly what is the link between this blessing and the one preceding it and those which follow. Here, I shall lean on Elie Munk, for whom it “*opens the group of pleas for spiritual help for the nation. It refers to the restitution of the old and proven system of Jewish Justice as the fundamental prerequisite for the return of the Shekhinah into Israel’s midst and for her future redemption.*”⁷⁷ In fact, the blessing explicitly goes back to the promise God made in Isaiah (1:26-27): “*I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.*”⁷⁸ This will only be possible if God, and only God, reigns over

blessings offers a basis for reflection and discussion so that prayer might nourish enlightened and responsible action both at the private and at the public level.

⁷⁵ Cf. T.B. *Megillah* 17b. Certain masters thought that, according to Ezekiel (*Ezek* 36:8), the prosperity of the Land is a manifest sign (*qets megulleh*) of the redemption which is beginning (cf. T.B. *Sanhedrin* 98a and P. Lenhardt, “La Terre d’Israël...”, *Cahiers Ratisbonne*, no. 1, December 1996, pp. 130-131).

⁷⁶ Cf. E. Urbach, “darkah u-mashma’utah shel ha-tzionut be-yameinu” [Path and Significance of Zionism in our Days], *‘Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, pp. 6ff.; “tsionut le-ahar qum ha-medinah” [Zionism after the Establishment of the State], *‘Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, pp. 95-96. E. Urbach underlines how difficult the ingathering of the exiles is, something which has always been known, as is proven by Deuteronomy (*Deut* 30:3) and Rashi *ad locum*.

⁷⁷ Elie Munk, *The World of Prayer*, Feldheim, New York, 1961, p. 139. E. Munk refers to *Deuteronomy Rabbah*, Par. 5 on *Deut* 16:8.

⁷⁸ The blessing also alludes to Hosea (*Hos* 2:21-22): “*I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.*”

Israel. This is what the prayer requests before ending: “*Blessed are you Lord, who love righteousness and justice.*” The *Psalm* (33:5) which is used and fulfilled in that conclusion, makes it possible to teach that one must seek righteousness and justice in an absolute and universal way, both in relations between Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora and as regards the Arabs and other Gentiles. God alone must reign, and no other instance, as for example the State of Israel, can put itself in God’s place. This message is addressed to the Jews. No one has the right to tell them how far their search for justice must go. It is up to them to decide whether they must go so far as to risk suicide, or whether they must rather seek a “*judgment of truth in accord with its truth*”, which is to say, a compromise which would go as far as possible with possible concessions and which could really be accepted by the two sides.⁷⁹

The 14th blessing and the 17th blessing

These blessings bless God who “*builds [and will build] Jerusalem*” (*Ps* 147:2), and who “*re-establishes [and will re-establish] his presence [Shekhinah] to Zion*”. These requests are not empty. They will be fulfilled when God so desires and as God will desire. The reconstruction of Jerusalem means the reconstruction of the Temple, the place of the divine presence. This presence, which will be re-established, is the condition for the re-establishment of the sacrifices.⁸⁰ The “Christian” disgust and anxieties as regards these realities are unfounded. It is enough to think with Rashi that “*the future temple for which we are waiting will appear constructed and complete, and it will come from heaven, as it is written (Ex 15:17): ‘the sanctuary, Lord, that your hands will have prepared’*”.⁸¹ It is also good to know that the divine presence is not like a liquid which obeys the law of communicating vessels. This presence can be more present in one place, for example in the Temple, and for us Christians in Jesus Christ and in the Eucharist, without being less present in another place because of that.⁸² In all that, the State of Israel’s field of action is very limited. Its value is that at its level, it can seek and establish justice, make possible a Jewish life which prepares redemption, organize a police force which can prevent untimely demonstrations by small groups which want to “hasten redemption” by beginning, for example, to build the Temple.

The Independence Day feast (yom ha-atzma’ut)

Independence Day, which was declared a national feast by law in 1949, is celebrated every year on the 5th of the month of Iyar, the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. If this anniversary falls on a *Shabbat* or a Friday, it is celebrated on the preceding Thursday. It is characterized by various ceremonies and demonstrations. Since 1949, this “Day” has been recognized by a large number of Jews as a religious feast. The prayers instituted already in 1949 by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel were given their final form in *The Order of Prayers for Independence Day* [in Hebrew, *sefer ha-tefillot le-yom ha-atzma’ut*], which was written in 1962 by Rav Moshe Zvi Neriah and published with the authorization of the Chief Rabbis of Israel.⁸³

The prayers for the feast

⁷⁹ Cf. above, footnote 61.

⁸⁰ Cf. P. Lenhardt, “La valeur des sacrifices dans le Judaïsme d’autrefois et d’aujourd’hui”, in *Le sacrifice dans les religions*, Institut Catholique de Paris, Beauchesne, Paris, 1994.

⁸¹ Rashi on T.B. *Sukkah* 41a *i nami*. Cf. *Rev* 21:2.

⁸² Cf. P. Lenhardt, “La Tradition d’Israël sur la Présence Divine (Shekhinah)...”, *Cahiers Ratisbonne*, no. 2, June 1997, pp. 137-161.

⁸³ I used the last edition of this *Order* published in 1978 by the Jewish Agency [in Hebrew].

I shall distinguish between the prayers or rites which are not proper to the feast, but the use of which on the feast constitutes something new, and the new prayers which were especially written for the feast. In both cases, an authority that is recognized by a certain number of Jewish communities made some renovating decisions (*hiddush, hiddushim*). The authority in question is Israel's Chief Rabbinate, and it seems that its decision has been accepted by the majority of Jewish communities in Israel and in the Diaspora.⁸⁴ As I am not competent to do so, I shall not say anything more precise. I shall limit myself to mentioning briefly the questions which the main innovations pose, and in discussing them, I shall lean on Rav S. Goren's conclusions at the end of his detailed study on *Independence Day in the Light of Halakhah*.⁸⁵

His first conclusion, which concerns all the "Day"'s innovations, is that "*the people in Zion has the power to institute a day in the year as a holiday of joy and gladness for the miracles that occurred for the community and the people, along the lines of the holidays similar to those which were instituted at the time of the Second Temple and which are listed in the Megillat Ta'anit ("Scroll of Fasting" = a 2nd Temple document giving a list of the days on which it is prohibited to fast)..."*

After the evening prayer

The blowing of the *shofar* is preceded by:

- a proclamation of *Deut* 6:4 and 1 *Kings* 18:39, as at the end of the *Kippur* liturgy;
- a mention of the miracles done for the Fathers and the redemption from Egypt;
- a request for full redemption (*ge'ullah shelemah*).

It is followed by:

- the proclamation: "*Next year in Jerusalem rebuilt!*";
- the prayer: "*May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, that just as it has been given us to receive the "beginning of redemption" (athalta di-ge'ullah), so we might hear the voice of the shofar of the Messiah.*"

Like at the end of *Kippur*, the blowing of the *shofar* announces and calls for redemption. And by association, it invites the voice of the *shofar* of the Messiah. Like the blowing of the *shofar*, the mention of the miracles is an innovation in that it is applied to "Independence Day". The mention of the "beginning of redemption" is completely innovative. Rav S. Goren does not explicitly authorize it in his conclusions. However, it is difficult to imagine that he would be opposed to its use. Further on, I shall come back to this "beginning of redemption".

After the morning prayer

The *Hallel* (*Ps* 113-118) is read with the blessings before and after it. The innovation consists in saying the blessings; this is not accepted by everyone, as can be seen in *The Order...* that was published by the Jewish Agency, where the blessing before the *Hallel* is in brackets. Rav S. Goren justifies these blessings.

The *Hallel* is preceded by the mention of the "miracles". Rav S. Goren justifies this mention, which was already made in the morning *Amidah*.

The *Hallel* is also preceded by the blessing "*she-heheyanu*", which is said before the blessing preceding the *Hallel*, if that blessing is accepted: "*Blessed are you, Lord (YHWH pronounced Adonai = Lord), King of the universe, who gave us life [she-heheyanu], who maintained us (in*

⁸⁴ I believe I can say that the majority of religious Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora pray for the State of Israel on Independence Day and on *Shabbat*. However, cf. Y. Leibowitz's refusal to consider Independence Day as a religious feast and to pray for the State of Israel, *Israël et Judaïsme...*, pp. 48-50.

⁸⁵ *Torat Ha-Mo'adim...* pp. 596-597. Cf. above, footnote 74.

existence) *and who brought us to this time.*” This blessing, which is said during the *Kiddush* for feasts, has not been accepted by everyone for the feast of Independence. However, Rav S. Goren justifies it. Rav Meshullam Roth, a member of Israel’s Chief Rabbinate, authorized and justified it in a *Responsum* in 1952.⁸⁶

The *Hallel* is followed by:

- the reading of *Isa* 10:32-34; 11:1-16; 12:1-16, which serves as the *haftarah* to the reading from the *Torah* that is done when Independence Day falls on a Monday or a Thursday;
- the “prayer for the peace of the State (of Israel)”: “*Our Father who art in heaven, rock of Israel and its redeemer, bless the State of Israel, beginning of the growth of our redemption* [reshit tsemihat ge’ullatenu]; *protect it under the wings of your love, and stretch over it the sukkah of your peace...*”⁸⁷

If I explicitly state Rav S. Goren’s position, this is obviously not in order to tell the Jews what they should do. I am referring to him in order to show the message which follows from his overall decisions. Since he had to decide according to *halakhah*, he insisted on showing that the blessings or the simple prayers over the *Hallel*, over the miracles were possible. They are not blessings or prayers “in vain”, which would be forbidden. He even went further when he said that, where the *Hallel* is concerned, they are obligatory. I did not see any text in which he gave an opinion on the prayers which mention the “*beginning of redemption*” and the “*beginning of the growth of our redemption*”. I believe I can say that these prayers are not blessings; they are more of the type: “*May it be your will... [yehi ratson]*”, so do not risk being “said in vain” and thus being forbidden.

We still have to discuss the formulations which the Chief Rabbinate proposed in the prayer to designate the State of Israel. The most moderate one is the “*beginning of the growth of our redemption*”, which is used in the morning prayer. This formulation is not traditional.⁸⁸ However, it is meant to signify the “beginning” of redemption, a beginning which calls for growth. In reality, it says with moderation that redemption has already begun. Ultimately, it is equivalent to the stronger formulation, the “*beginning of redemption*”, which is used in the evening prayer.⁸⁹ How can this prayer be interpreted?

For Rashi, as we have seen, the “beginning of redemption”, which according to the *Talmud* can still be accompanied by wars, looks towards the beginning of messianic redemption. The redemption which is requested in the 7th blessing precedes the “beginning” of messianic redemption; it is the redemption that is needed each day in order to redeem Israel from the distress which it constantly experiences. This redemption is the continuous background on which the “beginning of messianic redemption” will appear. According to the texts of the

⁸⁶ This *responsum*, which was published in *Responsa Qol Mevasser* no. 28, p. 68, says the following about the *she-heheyenu* blessing: “*Where the law is concerned, it follows from what has just been said: even though the obligation to recite She-Heheyenu on Yom Ha-‘atsma’ut (Independence Day) cannot be imposed upon everyone, whoever wishes to do so is certainly authorized. There is no basis on which to see this as a blessing said in vain (berakhah le-vattalah). Everyone for whom the State’s anniversary constitutes a real occasion of joy and happiness, is not only authorized to say the She-Heheyenu blessing on this occasion. That person is obliged to do so!*”

⁸⁷ In many communities in Israel and in the Diaspora, this prayer is also said on *Shabbat* after the *Torah* reading, before taking the *Torah* scroll back to the synagogue shrine (*aron*) in procession. Cf. Rabbi Joseph Bloch’s *Siddur, Tefillat Yosef*, Association Sefer, Paris, 1994, p. 141.

⁸⁸ It possibly leans on the conclusion of the 15th blessing in the *Amidah* on ordinary days: “*Blessed are you, Lord, who causes the horn [the strength] of salvation to grow.*” This last phrase is rare; it can be found only in this blessing and in the Gospel according to Luke (*Lk* 1:69).

⁸⁹ E. Urbach does not like it, though he does not explain his reservation. Cf. “Redemption according to the Sages and the Events in our Time” [in Hebrew] in *‘Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, p. 52.

prayers instituted by Israel's Chief Rabbinate, the establishment of the State of Israel is the "beginning" of messianic redemption.

The point of departure for this vision seems to have been given by Rav Abraham Isaac Kook. As we have seen, he welcomed the Balfour Declaration, which decided upon setting up a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, as the "beginning of redemption".⁹⁰ In his speech on August 31, 1947 for the jubilee of the first Zionist congress, Haim Weizmann noted a new stage in the use of the phrase. He did so on the eve of the signing of the report by the United Nations Special Commission for Palestine, a report which led to the United Nations vote (November 29, 1947) calling for the creation of a Jewish State in the Land of Israel. This is what H. Weizmann said: "*I have not been initiated into the secrets of UNO and I saw the members of UNSCOP only a few times. But I believe that on this very day, symbolically, a document will be signed which, with God's help, may become the Athalta Digeula, the Beginning of Redemption.*"⁹¹ H. Weizmann, who was not religious but who called upon God, adopted Rav Kook's vision.

The prayer that was instituted by the Chief Rabbinate confirmed the vision of Rav Abraham Isaac Kook and Haim Weizmann. It is innovative in that it expresses that vision in the statutory prayer, thereby doing what Rav S. Goren, in the first of his conclusions quoted above, considered to be legitimate.⁹² With the formulation, "beginning of redemption", the innovation is clearly assumed by Rav Itshaq Herzog, the Chief Rabbi of Israel, in his 1956 letter of approbation of *The Order of Prayers for Independence Day*. Rav Herzog qualified the creation of the State of Israel as a miracle, and in so doing he justified the setting up of the "Day" as a "*day of commemoration [of the event] in order to strengthen the faith, according to which we truly have to do with the beginning of redemption.*" However, he added: "*But in all that, we must be vigilant so as not to go beyond what is good.*" Rav Herzog's prudence corresponds entirely with his realistic vision of the State of Israel, which for him was "*neither fully theocratic nor fully democratic.*"⁹³

The Chief Rabbinate's decision finds support in the opinion of Samuel (beginning of the 3rd century CE), who said: "*Nothing lies between this world and messianic times except subservience to the [foreign] kingdoms, for it is written [Deut 15:11]: 'Certainly, the poor shall not disappear from the earth.'*"⁹⁴ It is indisputable that the establishment of the State of Israel as an independent State among the nations allows those Jews who so wish to no longer be under foreign domination. The fact that, since the beginning, the State has upheld its existence in the midst of wars and attacks of all kinds, does not contradict its being the "beginning of redemption", of which the *Talmud* speaks while saying that it will be accompanied by wars.⁹⁵ The question is whether this "beginning of redemption", proclaimed by the prayer and of which it also says that it is the "beginning of the growth of our redemption", is a definitive, irreversible beginning of the growth of redemption.

⁹⁰ Cf. Ts. Yaron, *Mishnato shel ha-rav quq* [Rav Kook's teaching], p. 273.

⁹¹ *The Jubilee...*, pp. 23-24.

⁹² Cf. footnote 85.

⁹³ On "Rav Herzog's hesitation", cf. R. Fontana, "Gentils en Israël...", footnote 2.

⁹⁴ T.B. *Berakhot* 34b quoted by Maimonides, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 12,2.

⁹⁵ In a profoundly analogous way, the resurrection of Jesus Christ marks the "beginning of redemption" for Christians. This beginning is irreversible, for if death has already been vanquished by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the world to come has already come into this world. This beginning does not prevent there still being people who are poor, as Jesus said (*Mt* 26:11; *Mk* 14:7; *Jn* 12:8): "*For you will always have the poor with you*". This certainly refers to *Deut* 15:11, which Samuel quotes, as we saw. For the Christians as for humanity, this world remains filled with wars, suffering, injustice. Seen from the outside, the joy of Christians because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is just as surprising as the joy of Jews because of Israel's independence.

It would seem that the message of the prayer established by the Chief Rabbinate, which a Jew has the right to consider prophetic, is, like every prophetic message, conditional and uncertain. Chief Rabbi Herzog's call to prudence quoted above would seem to indicate this. The State of Israel might disappear, either because the Jews will have failed to make it work or because Israel's enemies will have triumphed over its ability to resist. Israel's Tradition has known for a long time that the two factors in Israel's misfortune, Israel's sin and the hatred of the nations, can go together.⁹⁶ On the other hand, is Israel's independence, which according to Samuel can certainly mean the "beginning of redemption", absolutely sure? Without doubt, Israel as a nation in the midst of the "united nations" enjoys an independence that is at least just as legitimate as that of many countries. The first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897 declared: "*Zionism seeks to secure for the Jewish people a publicly recognized, legally secured homeland in Palestine.*"⁹⁷ The previous debates had envisaged the formulation "guaranteed by law" and "guaranteed by international law".⁹⁸ "The recognition" of the State of Israel "by the nations in international law" accomplishes Zionism as defined by the Basle congress.⁹⁹ But now that the independence of the State of Israel is recognized by international law, is it not fragile and precarious to the extent to which the Jews still consider it as linked to Zionism? After all, didn't a majority of the United Nations declare in November 1975 that "*Zionism is a form of racism and of racial discrimination.*"¹⁰⁰ Is the State of Israel really independent so long as the financial and military support given by the USA remains vital in maintaining it in face of the Arab and Muslim nations which, in the majority, wish its destruction and are clearly preparing it?¹⁰¹

Thus, the prayer's formulations cannot be used in a fundamentalist way. Moshe Greenberg asks that the Messianism in these formulations be strictly limited, because for him, the State of Israel is above all the great possibility that is offered to the Jews to "*see whether Judaism can face the test of politics, economics and social amelioration in modern terms*". The formulations' Messianism cannot justify the pursuit of a "national selfishness" that is concerned about military victories and territorial expansion, as "*all normality, rationality and common morality are suspended if we are living in the eschaton*".¹⁰² David Hartmann does not refer explicitly to the wording of the prayer for the State of Israel, but he is equally reserved as regards the fundamentalist use of Messianism. He says: "*Because I have no theology of history, I cannot say that God will guarantee happy endings in the historical process.*

⁹⁶ Cf. *Mekhilta* de Rabbi Ishmael on *Ex* 17:8, p. 176. Amalek would not have come if Israel had not sinned.

⁹⁷ Cf. *The Jubilee*..., p. 76.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

⁹⁹ As E. Urbach said (cf. footnotes 104, 105 and 106), this accomplishment is not to be understood as meaning "the end of Zionism".

¹⁰⁰ In November 1975, a majority at the United Nations declared that "*Zionism is a form of racism and of racial discrimination.*" In December 1991, the same general assembly simply annulled the 1975 resolution without any kind of explanation. Cf. Claude Klein, *Théodore Herzl*..., who comments on this: "*A strange procedure in which the official voice of the international community takes back an equally strange condemnation.*" (p. 169) In July 2001 in Durban, the "Nations" were also almost unanimous in condemning Zionism as being racist (cf. Philippe Haddad, *Durban, Hourban?*, Safed éditions, Paris, 2001).

¹⁰¹ On Israel's dependency on the USA, cf. Y. Leibowitz, *Israël et Judaïsme*..., pp. 43-44.

¹⁰² *Immanuel* 22/23, Jerusalem, 1989, pp. 28-29. M. Greenberg thus warns against the abuse that can be practiced with the "beginning of redemption" that is incorporated in the prayer instituted by the Chief Rabbinate for Independence Day. As for Y. Leibowitz, who did not recognize any religious value in the State of Israel and who wanted the radical separation of religion and State, he obviously refused the prayer for that State and rejected the phrase, "beginning of redemption". He said that "*to make* (of the State, as does the Chief Rabbinate's prayer) *the 'beginning of redemption' is a profanation of the concept of redemption. [...] If it* (the State of Israel) *is the 'beginning of our redemption', then everything is allowed. An article has been written about a pogrom that was carried out in this country against the Jews, but we forget that we have carried out pogroms against the Arabs.*" (Y. Leibowitz, *Israël et Judaïsme*..., pp. 48, 53).

*Tragedy is a real possibility. But I am nevertheless deeply committed to the God of history, because I believe that even without guarantees of redemption He makes our efforts worthwhile... My theology does not deny the possibility of messianic redemption, but I do not make my actions dependent upon it.*¹⁰³

As we have seen, Ephraim Urbach did not like the formulation which describes the State of Israel as the “beginning of the growth of our redemption”.¹⁰⁴ I will repeat here his criticism of a certain Messianism which is expressed clearly in the context of the prayer for the State of Israel.¹⁰⁵ E. Urbach first reminds the reader that every speaking about redemption does not allow Israel to consider itself as “a people living alone [Num 23:9]”, whereas “we do not act and cannot act as if this were the case at the political, economic, technological and scientific level. Even if we proclaim ourselves to be a people ‘which is not reckoned among the nations’ [Num 23:9], it is clear that we are forbidden not to see the reality which surrounds us.”¹⁰⁶ E. Urbach then reminds the reader that the phrase “beginning of redemption” was used by the *Talmud* to speak of the wars which will precede redemption and that, “if we are still fighting wars”, no one can say that these wars are those announced by the *Talmud* as preceding the messianic redemption. Certainly – still according to E. Urbach – even if in fact redemption is being worked out in all that, it would be a grave error to apply this or that word of the prophets and sages to what is happening today by saying: “See, this is it [which is happening].” Referring to Gershom Scholem, E. Urbach reminds us that “the price of the messianic vision which Israel has payed is high and great”, and he concludes by saying that “the world’s problems, the problems of humankind, society’s problems are not solved automatically by what we consider to be redemption.”¹⁰⁷ And he does not fail to mention turpitudes, bad actions, and many things which it is better not to spell out in detail.¹⁰⁸

Thus, to sum up E. Urbach’s position, the independence of the State of Israel remains relative, and having become visible among the nations, Israel cannot remove itself from their judgment. The words of the prophets and the sages cannot be applied automatically to present-day events, evil remains present in Israel. All this relativizes the range of what can be drawn from the phrase “beginning of redemption”, or its toned down version, “beginning of the growth of our redemption”. To conclude, I shall quote the last sentences in his study of “Redemption according to the Sages...”: “I do not like to use the phrase ‘beginning of the growth of our redemption’, but I would like to say that we must see our situation as an important realization which opens up and gives the possibility to continue, if we do not leave aside reality, and if we do not see ourselves as a people that is chosen according to a deformed idea of the concept of election. We must remember that the process of redemption in which we are, is still what is happening in the world of merit and obligation, of responsibility and also of the expectation of an additional redemption.”¹⁰⁹

The Legitimacy of Jewish Zionism and of a “Christian Zionism”

In this conclusion, I would like to bring together and summarize the message which I have received from the Tradition of Israel through my experience of Jewish prayer. I did not experience this by taking the place of the Jews, but rather by being with them and at their

¹⁰³ *Immanuel* 22/23, pp. 22-23.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. footnote 89.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. E. Urbach, “ha-ge’ullah...” {Redemption according to the Sages and the Events of our Time} in “*Al tsionut we-yahadut...*”, pp. 49-52.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52. Cf. G. Scholem, “Pour comprendre le messianisme juif” in *Le Messianisme juif*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1974, pp. 65-66.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

invitation, through what I have heard and read of Jewish teachers. I hope that what I am passing on in this article neither deforms my sources nor that I am amputating important elements which I might have missed. Based on the message I have received, I would also like to say what this message gives me to understand and to do as a Christian among Christians, on the one hand, so that Israel might not be abandoned in trial and distress, and on the other hand, so that Christians in their diversity might nourish their faith and their hope with what the Jews in all their difficulties give them to hear by means of Zionism and the existence of the State of Israel.

Above all, in connection with the birth of the State of Israel and the Declaration of Independence, we saw the secular nature of Zionism and the State of Israel. In order to emphasize its value more, I would like to refer to Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, André Néher, Haim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion.

Rav Abraham Isaac Kook recognized the religious value which non-religious, secular Zionism bore within it.¹¹⁰ André Néher also saw it and said it throughout his writings. I quote the luminous expression of his conviction: “*Whether he/she wants it or not, the Jew, by the very fact that he/she bears that name, has religious roots, is on the side of the sacred, in the mystical fringe of a history which, in its modern form, seeks to be entirely rational and objective, but which never succeeds in this.*”¹¹¹ I would also note E. Urbach’s basically positive judgment on the dominant role of D. Ben-Gurion in the creation of the State of Israel.¹¹² It seems to me that E. Urbach, this teacher and religious Jew to whom I owe so much, as I have said, gives the best image of Pharisaic and rabbinic Judaism along the lines of Hillel. Like Hillel, he accepts everything coming from the outside, and when such is the case, from non-religious Jews, which is good and can become *Torah*. If with Hillel, one accepts to use the Golden Rule to sum up “*all of the Torah*”, if with Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, one adopts the “*parables of the launderers*” and the “*parables of the foxes*”, expressions and motifs which are not specifically Jewish and which are not always in “good taste”, then it is possible to receive from non-religious Zionists inspiration and realizations which are compatible with the *Torah*.¹¹³ It is thus not bad that Zionism and the Declaration of Independence, which authorizes the former’s program as the source of inspiration for the State of Israel, are not religious. Zionism can thus gather together all Jews, whether they be religious or not, who have in common the basic elements of its program or who, in the words of Pinhas Peli, share the three common convictions.¹¹⁴

Certain people think that Zionism reached its goal with the creation of the State of Israel and that its role ended with that creation.¹¹⁵ Without doubt, Zionism had as its goal “*the*

¹¹⁰ Cf. David Hartmann on Rav Kook, in “Perceptions of the State of Israel in Modern Halakhic Thinkers”, *Immanuel* 22/23, pp. 15-16.

¹¹¹ Cf. A. Néher, *Dans tes portes, Jérusalem*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1972, p. 95.

¹¹² E. Urbach, “*medinat israel metsi’ut we-hazon*” [The State of Israel, Reality and Vision] in *‘Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, pp. 81-82. While underlining Ben-Gurion’s greatness, E. Urbach points out the bad influence which his phrase, “*What is important is not what the nations will say, but what the Jews will do*” had in Israel. *Ibid.*, p. 82. On this last point, cf. footnotes 16 and 17.

¹¹³ For Hillel and the Golden Rule, “*What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor – this is the whole Torah – all the rest is commentary on it. Go and learn!*” cf. T.B. *Shabbat* 30b and Jesus in Mt 7:12: “*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the Torah and the prophets.*” For the parables, cf. T.B. *Sukkah* 28b.

¹¹⁴ Pinhas H. Peli, *Leçons sur la philosophie de l’Etat juif* [in Hebrew], Beit El, 1990, p. 10. Cf. footnote 38.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Georges Friedmann, *Fin du Peuple juif?* Gallimard, Paris, 1965; Ilan Greilsammer, *La Nouvelle histoire d’Israël*, Gallimard, Paris, 1998; Claude Klein, “Essais sur le sionisme” in *Théodore Herzl: L’Etat des Juifs*, La Découverte, Paris, 1990. On the end of Zionism and the establishment of a bi-national State, cf. Uri Avnery’s impressive plaidoyer for an Israel without Zionism: *Israël sans*

recognition by the nations and in international law of the people of Israel's right to its house and its State."¹¹⁶ This goal was attained in 1947-1948, even if the result remained fragile and seems again to be in a precarious situation.¹¹⁷ But there was and still is a second principle of action in Zionism, which is inspired by the following conviction: "A people that is not willing to take upon itself and into its hands the will to decide on its future and to orient that future in a creative way, does not have what it needs to exist and to act."¹¹⁸ According to the Declaration of Independence and the prayer for Independence Day, that future is not only the future of Israel. It is a future of Israel which is turned towards a redemption which is not only Israel's redemption. For E. Urbach, Zionism is not finished. A project remains which merits the commitment of religious Jews. That commitment must be unconditional in spite of, or rather, because of what is not right in Israel.¹¹⁹ The people who abandon Zionism and Israel and move to North America or Europe are often the Israeli Jews who have the best formation and are the most gifted professionally and culturally. According to E. Urbach, they are "deserters".¹²⁰

It seems to me that it is not a question of abandoning Zionism or the State of Israel. It is a question rather of seeing "Zionism and education to Zionism as an intense and courageous struggle against the pollution and the mindlessness of the human person..." "Zionism today more than ever, is convinced that without it there is no future for the Jewish people, but existence for its own sake is not enough; its goal is to uphold the people's task and specificity."¹²¹ These quotations show the extent to which E. Urbach saw Zionism as a Jewish humanism at the service of the human being, a vigilant humanism regarding money and power, and both within the Jewish people and in its relationship with the outside.¹²² This optimistic vision of Zionism was obviously inspired by the Judaism that E. Urbach lived and that is taught by the biblical and rabbinic Tradition which he knew better than anyone.¹²³ We can see how Zionism, the distant origin of which is religious, needs religious Jews who are

sionisme, Seuil, Paris, 1969; cf. in particular chapter 9 of the book: "L'erreur de Christophe Colomb", pp. 135-145.

¹¹⁶ E. Urbach, *ibid.*, p. 81.

¹¹⁷ Cf. footnotes 99, 100 and 101.

¹¹⁸ E. Urbach, "medinat israel metsi'ut we-hazon" [The State of Israel, Reality and Vision] in *'Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, p. 81. I had to take some liberties in translating from the Hebrew in the effort to express as well as possible what he wanted to say.

¹¹⁹ E. Urbach, "darkhah u-mashma'utah..." [The path and meaning of Zionism today] in *'Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, pp. 6-7,11.

¹²⁰ E. Urbach, *ibid.*, p. 6. I. Rabin spoke of a "fall of wastage" (*nefolet shel nemushot*, cf. Claude Klein, *L'Etat des Juifs...*, p. 25, footnote 8). These very harsh expressions are not aimed at the conscientious objectors of the past or the present who do not leave Israel but who refuse to take up arms. It seems to me that they are also not aimed at the soldiers who, today, refuse to take part in certain insufficiently motivated interventions which are liable to cause unjustifiable civilian casualties among the Palestinian population. Israel's Tradition teaches the right to legitimate self-defense. It thus permits the fight against terrorism. On the other hand, it passes on Rabbi Abbahu's teaching (Caesarea, end of the 3rd century CE): "May a person always be among the persecuted and not among the persecutors." (T.B. *Baba Qama* 93a, quoted by Maimonides, *Hilkhot De'ot* 5,13) It is difficult to say to the Israeli Jews from the outside where their right and their obligation are. Y. Leibowitz approved of the conscientious objectors' refusal to serve as soldiers in the occupied territories (cf. Y. Leibowitz, "Pour l'objection de conscience", in *La mauvaise conscience d'Israël*, Entretiens avec Joseph Algazy, Le Monde-Éditions, Paris, 1994, pp. 125-131).

¹²¹ E. Urbach, "darkhah u-mashma'utah..." [The path and meaning of Zionism today] in *'Al tsionut we-yahadut...*, p. 9.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹²³ Cf. the beautiful interpretation of Isaiah (*Isa* 49:3) which he quoted: "He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will glorify myself.' Based on this, they [the Sages] said: May the human person distance himself from the plundering against Israel and the Gentile, for the person who steals from the Gentile will end up by stealing from Israel... and the person who sheds the blood of a Gentile will end up by shedding the blood of Israel. And the Torah was only given in order to sanctify His great Name." (*Seder Eliyahu Rababh* 28)

Zionists to remind it of its origin based on what was “*envisaged by the prophets of Israel*”, as is mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. Thus, Zionism cannot limit its message and its activity to Israel.

It is true, as we saw, that the Declaration of Independence speaks of “*the great struggle for the realization of the age-old dream - the redemption of Israel*”, and that this wording seems to limit redemption to Israel. But the generations which preceded the State of Israel, and the vision of “*the prophets of Israel*” to which the Declaration refers, never separated the redemption of Israel from the redemption of the world. The particular redemption of Israel is the condition and the ineradicable preamble to universal redemption. Because of its religious foundation, Zionism continues to direct Israel’s future towards a future which goes beyond it without suppressing it. The expressions in the prayer confirm that this future remains the goal of Israel’s religious faith and hope. In faith, this future is considered to be so real that Israel dares to speak of its “beginning” or of the “beginning of its growth”, which has been inaugurated by means of the establishment of the State of Israel. The Land’s prosperity, the ingathering of the exiles, the search for justice are no longer simply material realities. As problematic and difficult as the realization of these realities still is, in the eyes of the believers, they can be signs which direct and nourish their activity.

Among the believers, there are those who do not see the miraculous aspect of these realities, which they have for others. Nevertheless, it is possible to say the prayer “over the miracles” before the *Hallel*, because in any case, the greatest miracles are not necessarily the visible ones, but rather the “hidden miracles” through which God’s immanence reveals God’s transcendence to the believer.¹²⁴ When the realities which Zionism has already brought forth before and after the establishment of the State of Israel are seen as signs which invite a person to become involved in action, these must be developed in such a way as to show that with the State of Israel, the “beginning” already has “something” about it of messianic redemption.¹²⁵

Seeing a reality of this world as a sign of what is beyond the world is not a flight from the reality of the world, but quite the contrary, it is a commitment in the world with all the necessary prudence and discernment, as well as with the courage to take the risk of not reaching the goal or of ending up with failure. Rabbi Akiba was involved in the great rebellion against the Romans (130-135 CE) because he believed that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah. He was mistaken: Bar Kokhba, who was killed by the Romans, was not the Messiah. Rabbi Akiba died, skinned alive by the Romans. During the war, many of Akiba’s colleagues reproached him for believing that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah. But no one in Israel reproached Rabbi Akiba for having committed himself, even though not everyone was certain that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah. It seems to me that the Jews who see in the State of Israel and in its positive accomplishments signs of the redemption which is drawing near and who therefore work so that those signs might become more luminous, have greater merit than those who wait for things to succeed before they bless them. A Catholic hearing his/her Church’s invitation to “read the signs of the times” must commit him-/herself to listening to the message which comes to him/her from Israel.¹²⁶ He/she must come to a decision for or against the signs which religious Zionism proposes. I for my part see these signs as being positive, as “signs of the times” in the midst of “wars” which still characterize the possible “beginning of redemption”.

¹²⁴ I dare to allude to the teaching of Nahmanides (1194-1270) on the “hidden miracles” (*nissim nistarim*); cf. his commentary on *Ex* 13:12 and *Lev* 26:11, *passim*.

¹²⁵ It seems to me that in the unprecedented, “miraculous” newness which is the existence of the State of Israel, there can be a kind of real anticipation of redemption. This would be analogous to what the Jews live on every *Shabbat* in this world, a reality which has or which is already “something” (*me’ein*) of the world to come (cf. the *Mekhilta* of Rabbi Ishmael on *Ex* 31:13, p. 341).

¹²⁶ On “the signs of the times” which the Catholic Church invites us to discern, cf. the Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, 4,1; 11,1. Cf. also P. Lenhardt, “La Terre d’Israël...” *Cahiers Ratisbonne*, no. 1, December 1996, p. 131, footnote 89.

For all Jews, the Declaration of Independence, and for religious Jews, the prayer for Independence Day, still give Zionism an important place today. The Christians who do not receive this message of faith and of hope from their Jewish brothers and sisters for their own life are depriving themselves of something very precious. If they deny that Zionism and the State of Israel remain carriers of this message, they risk contributing towards Israel's isolation in the world and its abandonment by the nations. It is better to listen to the religious Jews who humbly listen to the non-religious Zionists; these latter, without always being clear about it, were able to renew and actualize the timeless message of the value of the Land, of Zion (Jerusalem), and of the Temple concerning the One and Only God, who is at the origin of creation, revelation and redemption.¹²⁷

Zionism and the existence of the State of Israel disturb many Jews and Christians. For religious Jews, Rav Kook can serve as a model in his capacity for renewal. Just as Rabbi Eliezer, known for his respect for continuity, could say things which no one had ever heard, so "*Rav Kook heard in the sources of the Torah, of wisdom and of life what others had not heard.*"¹²⁸ The State of Israel, whose approach he sensed since the Balfour Declaration, is something which no one had ever seen and which disturbs many persons, groups and crowds.¹²⁹

If Christians believe that the election of Israel and "the Old Covenant" have never been revoked, they should not be disturbed by Zionism or by the existence of the State of Israel, which are projects and realities which can contribute towards causing "*the strength of salvation to grow*" (Lk 1:69), towards realizing the fullness of redemption, the "beginning" of which is already given in Jesus Christ.

Before coming to an end, I would like to mention a beautiful teaching given by Rav Judah Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger (1847-1905), called after the name of the collection of his teachings: *Sefat Emet*. This teaching was for the feast of Purim: "*It seems that the miracle of Purim was a preparation for the establishment of the Second Temple. For the children of Israel needed strength and vigor, and by means of the miracle, their heart was raised up again. Then they could return to the sanctuary. Thus, it is possible that a miracle like that of Purim will happen, which will come before redemption, as our Sages of blessed memory said: '[God] will raise up a king like Haman...'*"¹³⁰ [and the Jews will repent and redemption will happen', for the miracle [God's intervention in history] prepares redemption."¹³¹ Obviously, we cannot wish for the coming of a persecutor or an era of persecution as described in the Hebrew Bible in the story of Esther and Haman. The *Sefat Emet* did not want to threaten his community. Following Rabbi Yehoshua in the *Talmud*, he wanted to teach that "redemption" will come, even when the catastrophe seems to be final.¹³² A Jew cannot believe that God will abandon his people. A Christian who does not abandon Israel in its distress will believe and will see that God abandons neither his people Israel nor his Church.

¹²⁷ Cf. E. Urbach, who refers to Herzl, Weizmann, Ben-Gurion in "la-shuv la-tzionut bi-tehoratah" [Returning to Zionism in its Purity] in *Al tsiyonut we-yahadut...*, pp. 67ff.

¹²⁸ Cf. E. Urbach, "ha-yihudo shel ha-rav abraham yitshaq ha-koehn quq" [The unique character of Rav Kook] in Yovel Orot, *haguto shel ha-rab abraham yitshaq ha-koehn quq*, Jerusalem, 1988, pp. 109-113. However, it seems to me that Rav Kook's message, with all that is positive in it, can be interpreted by successors in a dangerous way, both at the social and democratic level and at the political and territorial one. Cf. R. Fontana, "Gentils...", footnotes 11 and 12. On Rabbi Eliezer, cf. T.B. *Sukkat* 28b and *Abot de-Rabbi Nathan A*, chapter 6, 16a and B, chapter 13, 16b.

¹²⁹ For all this, I do not want to ignore the legitimacy of the protests and revolt against the injustices committed by Jews, by the army and by the State of Israel against the Arab population that is under Israeli power.

¹³⁰ T.B. *Sanhedrin* 97b-98a.

¹³¹ *Sefat Emet*, "le-purim", 2, 178 (1874). This text is quoted in *The Order... Seder* (cf. footnote 83), p. 19.

¹³² Cf. the debate between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua in T.B. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

With Claude Klein, I would say that “the discussions on Zionism are far from being finished.”¹³³ I am aware of the incomplete and possibly inexact nature of this article, but I hope it will succeed in showing how Zionism and the discussion on Zionism are of vital interest for Christians. That discussion is at the heart of the present-day burning questions. To end, I will quote Claude Klein’s sober and realistic conclusion to his study on *l’Etat des Juifs* [the State of the Jews] and Zionism: “*Today, the creation of a Palestinian State seems inescapable, while it is not at all sure that this is an ideal solution. Ten or twenty years ago, it might have been possible to imagine other forms. But it is no longer possible to rewrite history. The State of the Jews must face up and renew itself if it wants to continue the historical mission it has given itself. Zionism was born as a movement for national liberation; it is important that it remain that.*”¹³⁴

National liberation is not finished. As we have seen, it must be seen within a larger and universalist context based on the vision “of the prophets of Israel”. Should not a Christian, believe and hope together with the religious Jews whom Raniero Fontana and I have mentioned and quoted, that the *Torah*, studied, taught and put into practice “*for its own sake*” (*li-shemah*), that is to say, for God, by the Jews in Israel, can enlighten and uphold the Zionism of all the Jews and the ever necessary reformation of the State of Israel? This State could become as democratic as possible and as modern as is desirable. It could welcome every Jewish or non-Jewish person desiring to receive its citizenship and to live thus his or her way of being part of the Jewish people or of being connected with it.

Br. Pierre LENHARDT, nds

¹³³ Cf. Claude Klein, “Essai sur le sionisme” in *Théodore Herzl: l’Etat des Juifs...*, p. 173.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 186.