

JEWISH STUDIES: *Listen to Talmud Torah*

PIERRE LENHARDT

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REMINDER OF SOME KEY CONCEPTS

The following pages are the written notations of **an oral presentation**. They lean on the following publications:

1. *Talmud Torah des Juifs et Etudes Juives des Chrétiens* [Sens Mars 2003]
(This article, approved by Prof Moshe Bar Asher, has been translated in Hebrew by my friend Amots Gliladi and published in the periodical *Kiwwunim Hadashim* 21, December 2009)
2. *L'importance des études juives pour un chrétien* [Cahiers Ratisbonne, n° 7, Décembre 1999]
(This article has been translated in Italian and published in 'Secondo le Scritture', Bologna, 2002)
3. *A l'écoute d'Israël, en Eglise. Tome I* [Editions Parole et Silence, Paris 2006]
4. *A l'écoute d'Israël, en Eglise. Tome II* [Editions Parole et Silence, Paris 2009]
5. *L'Unité de la Trinité, à l'écoute de la Tradition d'Israël*. [Editions Parole et Silence, Paris, 2011]

Talmud Torah, Jewish Studies, these terms need to be explained.

TALMUD TORAH

Talmud Torah designates the activity of studying and teaching the Torah. Studying and Teaching must not be separated: Teaching without Studying is dishonest, Studying without Teaching is perverse.

Talmud Torah is the complete name.

Talmud shortly said is used in the formula '*Talmud lomar*' in rabbinic debate to indicate the sense of Scripture that has to be adopted. **Talmud of Babylon, Talmud of Jerusalem** designate the two great collections of rabbinic traditions completing the **Mishnah**.

Talmud is the name of the intensive form (*piel*) of the verb *lamad* = *to learn*. **Limmud** is also the name of the intensive form. It designates the

preparatory studying and result that will have to be used for the teaching of **Talmud Torah**.

Having dealt with the word *Talmud*, I should also deal with the word **Midrash**. *Midrash* like *Talmud* is first the activity of searching for God; in a restricted sense, it designates the search for the meaning of the word of *God* in Scripture. It also designates the result of the search and finally the collections of the results. *Midrash* and *Talmud*, *House of Midrash* and *House of Talmud* are interchangeable in the old rabbinic sources.

JEWISH STUDIES

Jewish Studies designates studies made by Christians in contact with Jewish sources, Jewish masters, Jewish prayer, Jewish life, respecting the Jewish identity.

Jewish Studies should have an analogous value and role for Christians as does **Talmud Torah** for the Jews.

Talmud Torah is of vital importance for the Jews. So are, I believe, **Jewish studies** for Christians, which is the *raison d'être* of this presentation.

Thus, I speak in the name of my Brothers and Sisters of *Sion*, as well as of the many teachers and former students of the *Institut Saint Pierre de Sion (Ratisbonne)*.

In **Jewish studies**, our common point of departure was and is Christian life and faith. We do not think that putting aside our Christian faith would help us to study Judaism in a neutral and scientific way. In reality, no scientific study can be done without a hypothesis. Our hypothesis is that Christian faith is coherent with the Word of God which comes to us from Jewish sources, as it also comes from specifically Christian sources.

Our **Jewish Studies** have made us conscious of the extreme importance of the Tradition, of the Oral Torah, for the Pharisees, for the Rabbis, for the Jews who follow their teachings until today. My congregation pays special attention to the **Orality of the Word of God** which is underlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church 108*:

“Christian faith is not a ‘religion of the Book’. Christianity is the religion of the ‘Word of God’, not of a written and mute verb, but from the incarnate and living Verb’.”

The Constitutions of my Congregation (*Religious of Notre Dame de Sion*) coherently say the following:

Constitutions –July 2006. The formation of its members

& 34. *Our formation is centered on Jesus-Christ that we learn to know ‘through a predication and its teaching which are conform to the truth which is in Him.’ (Eph 4, 20-21) This predication and this teaching are those of the Church whose inspired Tradition is rooted in the Tradition of Israel, illuminated by Scripture.*

& 35. *The formation comprises for us, according to our specific vocation, an *Auditio Divina*, that is to say a listening and a study of the living Tradition, old and new, of Israel and of the Church.*

For us, the **Lectio Divina**, practiced in the Church and recommended by the Church, is situated inside such an **Auditio**.

Practicing the **Auditio Divina**, we explore the richness of our Christian faith. We read and study the *New Testament*. We know from the **Second Vatican Council**, from its developments and from our experience, that Jewish sources are relevant for our study of the *New Testament* and for our Christian life.

Consequently we look for what in Jewish sources might enlighten the *New Testament* and Christian life. This process from Christianity to Judaism can be called ‘**analytical**’.

There is another process which goes from Judaism to Christianity. It can be called ‘**synthetical**’, for lack of a better term. This process, inseparable from the first, is pursued in the encounter with Jews and Judaism as they express themselves.

By listening to the Jews, we learn more about the *New Testament* and the Christian faith than that which we received through the analytical process.

We discover that Jesus-Christ and Christianity have a wider meaning than what has been understood by Christians until now.

Let us give an example of how the two processes can interact.

Being Catholics, we know the value of Christian Tradition taught by the *Second Vatican Council (Dei Verbum 12)* but we do not see clearly enough whether *Tradition* is anterior to *Scripture* and whether it has priority in its relation to *Scripture*.

We look therefore to the *Talmud* in order to know more about *Tradition (analytical process)*. We then learn from the *Mishnah (Abot 1,1)* that the *Torah* was **received** orally from God and **transmitted** orally to all the disciples after Moses.

In order to know more, we now enter the **synthetical process**.

We then learn from the *Talmud* the fundamental anteriority and priority of the *Tradition (Oral Torah)* in its relation to *Scripture (Written Torah)*.

We receive gratefully this precious information that illuminates our understanding of Christian Tradition.

Having had this rich experience, we are motivated to ask:

Is it not necessary that the New Evangelization makes a clear distinction between *Biblical Studies* and *Tradition Studies including Jewish Studies*?

As Jacques Maritain said:

“It is necessary to distinguish in order to unite. Biblical studies are strongly recommended and intensively pursued in the Church. They should not however lead to adopt in fact the ‘Scriptura sola’ principle of our many Protestant friends.”

After these preliminaries, I have to deal with the subject indicated in the programme of our session ‘*In ascolto di Israele*’:

I. TALMUD TORAH AND JEWISH STUDIES.

TALMUD TORAH, A SPECIFIC FEATURE OF ISRAEL

I shall start from the fact that **the commandment of the Talmud Torah is the most characteristic trait of the Jewish religion**. My venerated teacher Professor Ephraim E. Urbach, of blessed memory, builds on this fact in his magisterial article:

'The search for Truth as a religious duty (baqqashat ha-emet ke-hovah datit)' in 'The Bible and us', in Hebrew, Tel Aviv 1987.

(This article, as far as I know, has not been translated into a European language. The fact that Hebrew has taken the place of German as the first semitic language is not yet fully known nor accepted in the scholarly world. This article cannot be summarized. It must be read and studied. I brought here a copy of it for whoever would like to see it).

Professor Urbach shows how *Talmud Torah*, being specifically Jewish, searches for the Truth. That search is a religious duty for the Jews. This reality helps Christians to search for the Truth, for Jesus who is the Truth.

WHAT IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT?

In the perspective of our colloquium, I shall examine some consequences of the specificity of the commandment of *Talmud Torah*.

First we have to know that...

"The question of the relative value of the commandments found expression in many varied forms in the teaching of the Sages"

(Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Jerusalem 1975 . P.345 & s.8)

We must also have in mind what said Rabbi (Yehudah ha-Nassi):

"Be careful in the case of a light precept as in that of a weighty one for thou knowest not how the rewards of the receipts are given"

(*Mishnah Avot 2, 1*)

I think however that we can receive an answer about the first commandment, and the value of the *Talmud Torah*'s teaching of the first commandment.

We receive the answer from Jesus and from a scribe. Both interpret Scripture (Deut. 6, 4-5), the verse read and proclaimed in the '*Shema Reading*' of the Morning Prayer.

We hear from the *Gospel of Mark* (12, 38-34) that Jesus and the scribe agreed on the value of the *Talmud Torah* that interprets correctly the '*One*' of Scripture (Deut 6,4) and that teaches the necessity of reading *Deut 6, 4-5* in Prayer.

In the *Gospel of Mark*, the love of God and the love of the neighbour are designated as the first commandments. The scribe, who belongs to the Pharisees (Mt 22, 35), agrees with the teaching of Jesus. He says:

"You are right, Teacher, you have truly said that he is one and there is no other but he."

From the scribe we know **how Jesus** understood the verse of Dt 6, 4:

« *Hear, Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One* »,

One (eis), and not 'The Lord our God is the only God'

and for the scribe:

"He is one and there is no other than He"

and not "He is the only and there is no other".

Such bad translations ignore the Greek and the fact that a scribe would not commit a pleonasm.

A scribe of the pharisees and Jesus as a Jew teach the most fundamental article of the Pharisaic-Rabbinic-Jewish faith:

The Lord (YHWH), the God (Elohim) of Israel, is **One,**
One and Unique, Unique because One.

As we shall see further on, that message is prepared by the benediction *Ahavah Rabbah* (Ahavat Olam, Jer.31, 3 sefarad version) which precedes the ‘*Shema Reading*’ of the Morning Prayer

Professor Urbach insists on the fact that the Jews, through the Shema Israel Prayer, proclaim the **Absolute Unity of God**.

(E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Jerusalem, 1975, p. 19 ss)

We, Christians, receive from the *Talmud Torah* of the Jews and from Jesus the Jew the proclamation of the **Absolute Unity of God** which will be experienced as **Trinity**.

On the other hand, very explicitly, at least since Hillel, it is the love of the neighbour, known as inseparable from the love of God, which sums up “*all the entire Torah*”.

(T.B. Shabbat 30b-31a; Sifra on Lv 19, 18, Genesis Rabbah on Gn 5, 1).

Knowing what is the first commandment, we have to know how to situate it in the **multiplicity of the other commandments** that comes by virtue of the covenant concluded at Sinai with the gift of « *the Torah and the commandments* » (Ex 24,12) and elsewhere « *Torah and commandments* ». (2 Kings 16, 34; 2 Chr 14, 3; Neh 9, 14).

TALMUD TORAH, LOVE OF GOD FOR ISRAEL, AND LOVE OF ISRAEL FOR GOD

The connection between the Torah and the Commandments characterizes Jewish life as Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashiah said:

“The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to make Israel gain merit. That is why He multiplied for them the Torah and the Commandments, as it is said (Is 42, 21): ‘Because of his righteousness, the Lord was pleased to magnify and to make glorious the Torah’.”

(Mishnah Makkot 3, 16. Misnah Avot 6, 11)

The righteousness mentioned in the verse is that of the Servant-Israel (Is 42, 1, 19).

(Interesting is the formula “*The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to make Israel gain merit.*”

The formula corresponds to the position of the Catholic Church after the *Council of Trent* closing the discussions about **merit** and **grace**).

The Servant-Israel shall *magnify and make glorious* the Torah (oral and written Torah).

From that we see how the verse of Ex 24, 12, rightly understood, teaches that **the Torah** (Oral Torah-Talmud Torah) **precedes the Commandments**.

Rabbi Hananiah ben Akashiah (who is not known elsewhere in Jewish sources) gives a beautiful justification of the precedence of **Torah** (Talmud Torah)...

Rabbi Aqiba (who is known as a great master) teaches this precedence and receives the agreement of his colleagues:

“Talmud is greater than Action (maaseh) because it leads to Action”

(Sifre Deut. in Dt 11, 13 p. 85)

TALMUD TORAH, THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

Clear evidence of the link between **Talmud Torah**, the love of God and the election of Israel is given by the **benediction ‘Ahavah rabbah’** (or in the sefardi rite: *Ahavat olam-Jer 31, 3*) which precedes the ‘*Reading of the Shema*’ in the morning prayer as was mentioned before.

The benediction uses *Scripture* without citing it. This absence of quotation is intentional.

In fact Tradition wants to teach that the election mentioned in *Scripture* (Deut. 7, 7) is still valid in the present time of the prayer.

The benediction says:

“Our Father, merciful Father, Who acts mercifully, have mercy on us, instil understanding in our hearts to understand and elucidate, to listen, learn, teach, safeguard, perform, and fulfil all the words of your Talmud Torah with love.”

(And further: *“unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name, The unification of hearts prepares the proclamation of The Lord is One*)

The conclusion of the benediction is:

“Blessed are You, O Lord (YHWH), who elects His People Israel with love.”

The link between Talmud Torah, the love of God for Israel, the love of Israel for God is clearly manifested.

From this we learn that **the Talmud Torah is the specific way of Israel to love God.**

An anonymous tradition on Hosea 6, 6 gives the same message in a different way.

It teaches that ‘*Talmud Torah is more beloved by God than burnt offerings*’.

(Abot de-Rabbi Nathan A Chap. 4 9b).

The verse says:

*“For I desire **love** (hesed) and not sacrifice, **knowledge** (daat) of God more than burnt offerings”.*

The parallel between **love** (*hesed*) and **knowledge** (*daat*) teaches that the love of God (*hesed*) motivates the need of Israel to know Him through the Talmud Torah.

The love of God nourishes the need of Israel to know Him through Talmud Torah.

The absence of Talmud Torah would manifest that Israel does not love God.

From this we learn again that **the Talmud Torah is the specific way of Israel to love God.**

The knowledge (*daat*) of God is the highest experience that can be reached by man.

‘Knowledge (daat)’ is higher than ‘wisdom (hokmah)’ and ‘understanding (tebunah)’.

Rashi on Ex 31, 3 succinctly says: « *daat Holy Spirit* »

(Jesus in Mt 9, 13 and 12, 7 cites the first half of the verse. The context of that quotation being different, it shows that one verse of Scripture can have many different interpretations.)

A last praise of the Commandment of the Talmud Torah is to be heard from the Mishnah (Peah 1, 1) which says:

*“There are things for which no measure is prescribed: Peah (corner of the field), First fruits, Festal offerings, Deeds of loving kindness (gemilut hasadim) and Talmud Torah. These are things whose fruits a man enjoys in this world while the capital is laid up for him in the world to come: honoring one’s father and mother, deeds of loving kindness, making peace between a man and his fellow, and **the Talmud Torah is equal to them all.**”*

Listening to these Jewish praises of the Talmud Torah, we clearly hear the main resonance that a Christian must hear:

**Jewish Studies are the activity by which Christians manifest their love of God.
Jewish Studies have a religious value and are a religious duty.**

DOES SUCH A LINK LEAVE A PLACE FOR JEWISH STUDIES OF CHRISTIANS?

The link of love between Israel and the *Talmud* is extremely close. Does such a link admit the entrance of *Jewish Studies* of the Christians in the *Talmud Torah* of the Jews?

At first sight the answer to that question is negative.

From the Jewish point of view, the Torah cannot ‘*be magnified*’ or ‘*made glorious*’ without the Jewish practice of the commandments. Since Gentiles are not obliged to practice the Jewish commandments, the teaching of Proverbs 6, 23, « *For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah is Light* » does not apply to them.

There is however the possibility of making necessary exceptions in order that Israel might be a ‘*light to the Nations*’.

(Isa 42, 6; 49,6- D. Bleich, *Teaching Torah to non-Jews*, in Contemporary Halakhik Problems, Ktav Publishing House, New York, 1977-1983, Vol II, p. 311).

A Christian should always be grateful to the Jews when they open the door and give access to the *Talmud Torah*. Christians should always remember their duty to merit the trust which they receive.

From the Christian point of view, the Holy Spirit received at baptism and giving access to Jesus-Christ, teaches that the election of Christ and of the Jews affirmed in Ephesians 1, 4 is also extended to non-Jews (ibid. 13 ss). Thus a Christian can receive light from the *Torah* as studied, taught and practiced by the Jews.

According to the *Second Vatican Council* and to its further developments:

“*The Old Covenant has never been revoked*”.

The Christian receives from Jesus-Christ the possibility of being enriched through contact with the Jewish identity and with all the wealth of the *Torah* which this identity causes to be ‘*magnified*’ and ‘*made glorious*’. The only condition is that the Christian must not teach and practice the *Torah* (Scripture and Oral Tradition as interpreted and put into practice by Jews) and the commandments (practiced by Jews) in place of the Jews.

(Raniero Fontana, *Le Shabbat des Juifs, Spécificité et Universalité*, Sens, 12-2001).

DIFFICULTIES OF JEWISH STUDIES

We have already seen some good results of *Jewish Studies*. However, *Jewish Studies* meet with difficulties.

I shall first present the exterior, negative difficulties and then the interior, positive difficulties.

Exterior difficulties, negative

1- First of all, to a large extent, Christians, even those who are in charge of teaching, do not know the reality and the value of *Talmud Torah*.

2- Furthermore many Christians, among them some renowned theologians and exegetes, do not accept that the election of Israel remains valid in the *New Covenant*. Against that, the following is affirmed by P. von der Osten-Sacken, a Lutheran exegete and theologian;

“*One...basic premise must be made theologically conscious and put into practice: the certainty that God maintains the choice of Israel and the partiality to his people, even*

when this people says no to Jesus Christ. This certainty belongs fundamentally both to the Christian creed and to its catechism.”

(Katechismus und Siddur, Institut Kirche und Judentum, Berlin, 1994)

It seems that, on the Catholic side, the difficulty in accepting the election of Israel proceeds from a general difficulty in accepting the teachings of the *Second Vatican Council*.

3- Another type of difficulty might come from a conception of God conditioned by a sort of law of the communicating vessels. According to that conception, new ways of understanding Jesus-Christ and Christian life proposed by *Jewish Studies* linked with *Talmud Torah* would be seen as dangerously undermining the teachings of the Church and the competence of Christian professors.

4-Last but not least, can ordinary Christians and Christian authorities accept with humility to depend on Jews for the knowledge of God, for spiritual experience?

How Christians understand what Jesus declared to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4, 22):

“Salvation is from the Jews”.

(A Biblical background of which is likely Isaiah 2, 3:

“For out of Zion comes the Torah and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”)

Interior difficulties, positive

Anonymous pharisaic-rabbinic sources teach that ***“all beginnings are difficult”***.

(Kol hathalot qashot –Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 19, 5 p. 208. Rashi on Ex 19, 5).

Rashi helps us to understand that the Lord announcing the difficulties before giving the Torah and the Commandments implies that after the difficulties of the beginning will come the enjoyment. The difficulties open the way to enjoyment that comes later.

“All beginnings are difficult”: this may apply to the *Talmud Torah*.

It is difficult at the beginning but it becomes pleasant and enjoyable afterwards.

My experience is that *Jewish Studies* also know such passage from difficulty to enjoyment.

What makes this passage possible for the *Talmud Torah* and for *Jewish Studies*?

What is the root of this easiness?

The homiletical *Midrash* on Leviticus 26, 3 says anonymously:

“If you walk according to my prescriptions’... This teaches that the Place (maqom=God) ardently desires that Israel take pains in the Torah”.

(Sifra on Leviticus 26, 3 110c).

Indeed how can Israel walk according to the prescriptions if Israel does not know them?

And how can Israel know them if not through the *Talmud Torah*?

This is coherent with what we have seen before. The beginnings are difficult. God knows that. Out of love, He ardently desires that Israel out of love takes the pains of the *Talmud Torah*.

This character of the **Talmud**, which is difficult and pleasant is specifically Jewish.

Jewish Studies inspired by the Holy Spirit are illuminated by the Jewish message.

They find support in the words of Jesus addressed to his Father (Jn 17, 3):

“This is eternal life, so that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

The difficulties that I have exposed are real but they do not make *Jewish Studies* impossible. On the contrary, the fact that these are difficult is the condition of their being not only pleasant but joyful. They can bring us to the summit of joy, a joy connected with **the Joy of the Torah** (*simhah shel torah*) of the Jews.

Such a joy of the Jews is experienced when the *Talmud Torah*, or equivalently the *Midrash*, reaches God, God who is One, who is the Living God (*el hai*)

Jewish Studies only make sense if they are inspired by love in resonance with the love that inspires the *Talmud Torah* of the Jews.

This is why *Jewish Studies*, as they were conceived and suggested by the founders of the *RATISBONNE CENTRE (Institut Saint Pierre de Sion-Ratisbonne-Jerusalem)*, could not be only determined by the academic framework and requirements to which they had to give space.

Indeed *Jewish Studies* are not pursued to train exclusively Christian specialists for the dialogue with Jews. They are first of all meant to nourish Christian faith and life in all their possible dimensions.

II. TALMUD TORAH AND OUR KNOWLEDGE (DAAT) OF GOD

In the first part of this presentation, we have learnt that Talmud Torah is beloved by God because it leads to our knowledge (daat) of God.

I now intend to give two examples of such knowledge

- First, our knowledge of God as the Vital Element (*milieu : hiyyut*) of Israel
- Second, our knowledge of God as a paradoxical reality of presence and absence, of transcendence and immanence, of a Presence (*shekinah*) which is known and, being One with the Unknown Absence, makes it known (Jn 1, 18).

TALMUD TORAH AND GOD AS THE VITAL ELEMENT OF ISRAEL

In the *Talmud of Babylon* and in the *Talmud of Jerusalem*, we have two complementary versions of the martyrdom of Rabbi Aqiba in 135 C.E. during the repression of the Bar Kokeba revolt.

The *Babylonian Talmud* (T.B. Berakot 61b) brings a fundamental teaching of Rabbi Aqiba in prison before his execution...

“Pappos ben Yehudah finds Rabbi Aqiba: ‘bringing together public assemblies and being occupied with the Torah. He said to him: ‘Aqiba! Are you not afraid from the kingdom (the Romans)?’ Rabbi Aqiba answers with a parable of fishes and a fox. The fox would entice them to come on dry land in order to eat them. The fishes answer the fox saying: ‘If we are afraid (of the fishermen) in our vital element (hiyyut), how much more must we fear to go to a place that is our death’.

“Rabbi Aqiba says: ‘It is the same for us. If now we are afraid while we are seated and occupied with the Torah of which Scripture says (Deut. 30, 20): ‘For this (Hu= this or it) is your life and the length of your days’, how much more must we fear if we would abandon and leave it!’”

The message is clear: being seated and occupied with the *Torah*, practising *Talmud Torah* or more simply *Talmud Torah* itself is the Vital Element (*hiyyut*) of Israel.

Rav Dov Baer of Lubavitch (1773-1827, son of Shneur Zalman, the Founder of HABAD, wrote:

“Why does Scripture say (Deut 30, 20): ‘For He (hu) is your life?’ The literal meaning of Scripture, which is certainly understandable for everyone, is that He (Hu, God) is your life. That is why you shall love Him. Why must you love Him? Because He is your life.”

The two interpretations are deeply meaningful : **the Talmud Torah and God Himself are the Vital Element of Israel.**

The Christian resonance of the Jewish message is that *Jewish Studies* as a way to Know God or/and Jesus himself are the Vital Element of the Church as it can be heard from the *Gospel of John* (14, 6) where Jesus says:

“I am the way, and the truth and the life.”

The *Talmud* gives a full account of the last moments of Rabbi Aqiba. The master gives up his life with the conscience of accomplishing *Scripture* (Deut, 6-5): *“and with all your soul”* as he interpreted it: *“even if he takes your soul”*.

Rabbi Aqiba explicitly accomplishes *Scripture* at two levels: the level of exegesis-*midrash* and the level of action (*maaseh*).

He died prolonging the word One (*ehad*, Deut.6, 4) until he gave up his soul.

He died reaching the Unity.

Did he reach the reality of Union with God? It is not possible to say so. It is nevertheless more prudent to say that he reached Communion with God.

Alltogether, the approach is positive

The *Jerusalem Talmud* (T.J. Berakot 9 14 has another account of the last moments and words of Rabbi Aqiba.

Reciting the first words of the Shema Reading *“he was filled with joy”*.

He said to the astonished Roman official:

“I am not a sorcerer and I do not despise suffering... Now that time has come to prove ‘with all my soul’, now that the time for Reading the Shema has come, I have not turned aside from it.’

We can also understand that he said: *“My soul did not become divided.”*

Rabbi Aqiba reached the Unity of God by the negative (apophatic) approach of Non-Division, the approach of Perfection (*temimut, tamim*, Mt 5, 45-48 , Heb 5, 7-11)

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AS A PARADOXICAL REALITY

A paradoxal reality...

of presence and absence,

of transcendence and immanence,

of a Presence (*Shekinah*) which is known and whose being One with the Unknown Absence makes it known (Jn 1, 18).

The tenets of faith through prayer

Tradition has engendered prayer. The synagogal prayer, as **statutory** (*qeva*) and **obligatory** (*hovah*), reflects and teaches the basic beliefs and tenets of the Jewish people from the time of the Second Temple until the present day.

This is clearly affirmed in the magisterial research of Joseph Heinemann
(*Prayer in the Talmud*, Walter De Gruyter, Berlin- New York, 1977, p. 30-31)
anticipated by the most valuable teaching of Solomon Schechter
(*Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, Schocken Books. New York, 1961, 1972).

Tradition institutes numerous benedictions that celebrate the Sanctity of God.
The *Qedushot* are called *Qedushah*, plur. *Qedushot*

The *Qedushot* are located as third benedictions in the community prayer (*Amidah*) of ordinary days, of the Shabbat and of the Feasts, in the Additional Prayer (*musaf*) of the Shabbat and of the Feasts. The *Qedushah*, being the third benediction, is specially developed and therefore called the *Great Qedushah* (*qedushah rabbah*). It deserves to be listened to with special attention.

The community receives from the prophets the experience of the celestial liturgy.
(Isaiah 6, 4 and Ezekiel 3, 12)

According to God's will, the community assumes the prophetic message and brings it down to earth. The message is proclaimed in the present time of the Prayer. This is done in a special way by the *Great Qedushah*.

The terrestrial liturgy culminates with the proclamation of the *Shema Israel* (Deut 6, 4), followed by the confirmation of the God-given Scripture (Numbers 15, 41):

"I am the Lord your God".

The other *Qedushot* are less developed.

The *Qedushah* inserted in the Benediction *Yotser* of the daily *Shema Israel*, the *Qedushah de-Sidra* after the morning prayer, all the *Qedushot* of the community prayer and all the *Qedushot* of the different *Amidot* (Community prayers: evening, morning, afternoon) bring the dialogue between the *Seraphim* who say (Isaiah 6, 4):

"Holy, holy, holy..." and other beings "Facing them (they, the Living = ha-hayyot) give Him praise saying (Ezekiel 3, 12): "Blessed is the Glory of the Lord (YHWH) from His place"

Paradoxes of divine Glory and Place. The Shekhinah

"From His place" is to be understood: *"from His unknown place"*.

We have here the paradox:

from the **Glory which is known**, we experience the **Lord who is unknown**.

The proclamation of the *Seraphim* in Isaiah 6, 3 is: « *The whole earth is full of His Glory* »'is followed in the *Qedushah Rabbah* by : *"His Glory fills the world"*.

This addition has been adopted by the Catholic liturgy of the *Sanctus*.

(The Lutheran liturgy, according to the principle *Scriptura Sola* does not adopt the addition.)

In any case the Glory, the immanent presence of God in the Temple and in the whole world, is designated in the pharisaic-rabbinic tradition by the name of *Shekhinah*. The Midrash of the Sages (*midrash hakamim*), connected with the prayer, brings in the name of Rabban Gamaliel (the grandson of Gamaliel, the teacher of Saint Paul) the following tradition:

“*No place on earth is empty of the Shekhinah.*”

(Pesiqta de-Rav Kahanah, Pisqa 1, p. 4)

Being present everywhere, God wants to be especially present in certain places.

God is present **everywhere** in the world by his ‘**ongoing creation**’ which is...

- taught in the liturgical prayer of Israel (*Benediction Yotser* of the morning prayer before the *Shema* reading),
- taught also by Christian theologians,
- and recently reaffirmed by the *Second Vatican Council* (*Dei Verbum* 3 magnificently commented upon by Henri de Lubac).

But God, who loves Israel and all humankind, wants to dwell by his *Shekhinah* in all places and at every moment, wherever and whenever He wants to be met by men and women in order to speak with them and to save them:

- by **Moses in the Burning Bush** (Ex 3);
- by **Israel in Egypt during the night of Passover** (Ex 12), at (Ex 14 and 15), at **the gift of the Torah on Mount Sinai** (Ex 24:10; Deut 5:24), in **the Tent of Meeting** (Ex 25:8,22; Lev 1:1; 16:1,16), in **the Temple in Jerusalem** (1 Kings 8:10-13; Isa 6:3; Ezek 3:12);
- **by each community and each person who calls upon God’s Name** (Ex 20:24).

The *Shekhinah* manifests itself in various appearances, but those who see it recognize that it is always the same God, the God of Israel, One and Unique, who is revealing Himself.

(Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 20, 2, p. 219-220. Ibidem on Ex 20:24, p. 243 and Rashi ad locum; Mishnah Avot 3,2,6; T.B. Berakhot 6a)

No appearance of the *Shekhinah* ‘diminishes’ another appearance. As we have said before, God is not like a liquid obeying the law of communicating vessels.

It is possible that the *Shekhinah* was ‘less effective’ when Israel was not worthy of its action. This was the case in the time of the Second Temple.

(T.B. Yoma 21b, Tosafot on *we-urim we-tummim*)

The inefficiency came from Israel, from the **evil generation**.

(T.B. Sanhedrin 11a; Tosefta Sotah 13, 3-4; Matthew 12, 39 and parallels)

But the *Shekhinah*’s diminished effectiveness is not due to its absence.

It is not possible to argue from an unique and isolated tradition affirming such an absence. This tradition bears no weight compared to the evidence coming out of the liturgy of the 2nd Temple until its destruction: sacrifices, pilgrimage feasts, the service of the High Priest on *Yom Kippur* (*Seder Avodah*) which is acted out again today in the liturgy of the synagogue.

FOR A CHRISTIAN, CHRIST IS THE SHEKHINAH

To this, we must add the evidence found in the *New Testament* starting with the words and gestures of Jesus having to do with the Temple. It is because the *Shekhinah* was in

the Temple that Jesus declares himself to be '*greater than the Temple*', thus saying that as *Shekhinah* he is, in fact, greater than the Temple where the *Shekhinah* resides (Mt 12:6).

These words and gestures of Jesus bear witness to the fact that **Jesus presented himself as being the *Shekhinah* and that he was understood to be the *Shekhinah*.**

(Mt 18, 20 ; 23, 37 ; **25, 35-40, 42-45** ; Jn 1, 14 ; 2, 11 ; Ac 9, 4-5 and parallel ; 22, 17 ; 1 Co 12, 3).

(I insist on the fact that Jesus in Matthew 25 presents himself as the *Shekhinah*, even when Matthew does not know the word *Shekhinah* and ignores the teaching of the Pharisees on the *Shekhinah*.)

The fact is that **Jesus, even not knowing it and not saying it, presented himself as being the *Shekhinah* and that he could be understood to be the *Shekhinah*.**

This fact can explain the conflict which put Jesus in opposition to certain Jewish authorities of his time, a conflict which must have gone even so far as to cause Jesus to be accused of blasphemy (John 5, 18 ; 10, 33).

We see that the Christian faith in the Incarnation, based on the Church's Tradition and on the *New Testament*, is supported by the teaching of the Tradition of Israel on the paradox of revelation and on the *Shekhinah*, which is known, and which reveals the unknown God.

Conversely, the Tradition of Israel for which the *Shekhinah* was in the 2nd Temple and which, since the destruction of the Temple, asks in prayer for the *Shekhinah's* return to Zion, receives striking confirmation from the Christian faith and from the *New Testament*.

Seen from the Christian point of view, the coherence of the *Torah* of the One God illuminates, with one single light, both the Jewish and the Christian message on the *Shekhinah* which is present in the Burning Bush, which is redemptive at Passover, and which teaches at Sinai.

At the same time, this coherence causes the *Holy Spirit* to break forth. The *Holy Spirit*, which is inseparable from the *Shekhinah*, makes people able to recognize the *Shekhinah* while at the same time the *Holy Spirit* proceeds from the *Shekhinah* (1 Cor 12:3).

This proceeding of the *Holy Spirit* from the *Shekhinah* could be invoked in favour of the **Filioque** taught in the *Credo* by the Occidental Church.

Seen in terms of continuity, what is new in Christianity – and this is, of course, irreducible – is that Christians see and proclaim that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, the Lord, whom no one can profess unless by the *Holy Spirit*, is the *Shekhinah*.¹

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the *Shekhinah*, thus confirming and illuminating all the past and future manifestations of the *Shekhinah* in the world.

He is also, inseparably, the incarnate *Word of the Father*.

Jewish sources continue to deeply nourish Christian faith in the Incarnation.

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

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

[The preceding pages are the written notations of an oral presentation.]

I wanted to plead the good cause of **orality** in *Talmud Torah* of Israel and *Jewish Studies* of Christians.

I hope to have shown clearly that...

the necessity of promoting *Jewish studies* in the great programme of the *New Evangelization* does not proceed from pastoral priorities.

That necessity has a higher origin, namely Christian identity which is inseparably linked with Jewish identity.

Talmud Torah is a religious duty and activity for Jews.

Jewish studies have the same qualities for Christians.

We Christians receive from the Jews the teaching (statement) of Isaiah 2, 3 :

“Out of Zion comes the Torah and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

F. Pierre Lenhardt, nds

Nov. 2014

FURTHER READING (AVAILABLE FILES ON REQUEST)

By Pierre Lenhardt

The exegesis (Midrash) of the Tradition of Israel. Its greatness and limits.

9,900 words

First published in French in *Cahiers Ratisbonne*, n° 5, 1998, pp. 9-43.

The End of Zionism?

19,800 words

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

The Importance of Jewish Sources for a Christian

11,400 words

First published in French in *Cahiers Ratisbonne*, n° 7, Dec. 1999.

Israel's Liturgy at the origin of Christian Liturgy – Teaching Orality

16,900 words

First published in French in *La Prière Liturgique*, Conférences Saint-Serge, XLVII^e Semaine d'Etudes Liturgiques, Paris, 27-30 Juin 2000, Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma 2001, pp. 55-90.

Jewish Prayer in the Past and Present as Service Rendered to the Shekhinah (the Divine Presence)

16,800 words

First published in French in *Notre Vie Liturgique – Etudes Inter-Religieuses*, 5, 2000, pp. 37-81.

The English translation has been revised and slightly modified.

At the origin of the Pharisaic movement, Oral Tradition and the Resurrection

22,700 words

First published in French in *Le Judaïsme à l'aube de l'ère chrétienne*, XVIII^e Congrès de l'ACFEB (Lyon, septembre 1999), *Lectio Divina* 186, Ed. du Cerf, Paris 2001, pp. 123-176.

Talmud Torah and Jewish Studies

6,700 words

First published in French in *Sens*, Mars 2003, pp. 99-113.

Paths of Jewish continuity. Aspects of the Teacher-Disciple Relationship according to Ancient Rabbinic Literature

12,300 words

First published in French in *Bulletin des Facultés Catholiques de Lyon*, n° 56, Juillet 1979.

By Anne Avril & Pierre Lenhardt

Three roads: Emmaus, Gaza and Damascus

21,500 words

First published in French in *Cahiers Ratisbonne*, n° 4, 1998, pp. 11-56.

By Yves Chevalier

The Future of the Ratisbonne Center of Jewish Studies

1,500 words

First published in French in *Sens*, Mars 2003, pp. 114-115.