

JUDAISM IN THE MODERN WORLD

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I read Father Stylianopoulos' paper last night, and therefore, as though by an act of prophecy, I know what he will say later about a significant similarity between the Orthodox tradition and the Jewish tradition. It also relates to something that Prof. Halpérin already spoke of when citing the prescription of repentance, prayer and charity. I emphasize the word charity. That has to do with *caritas* in Latin, which is the background to the word "caring" in English. It has to do with having regard for other peoples' sensibilities as well as for other peoples' needs. The third element in the triple phrase in Hebrew to which Prof. Halpérin alluded as part of the liturgy of our high holy days, *tzedakah*, has many meanings. It is sometimes translated as charity, but its essential meaning is righteousness. And in the Jewish tradition, the caring of one for another is the essence of what is meant by righteousness. It connotes fair and just treatment as between man and man; this is not less important, says Jewish tradition, than the relation between man and God. The latter loses its worth if unaccompanied by the other.

I address you, my Orthodox brethren, in the knowledge that we share by tradition, duty and outlook, the common heritage of not regarding the salvation of our own soul as the entire circumference of our purpose. Indeed, in Jewish tradition, it is doubtful whether that phrase would have any meaning. The way we approach the ultimate test is through how we behave today, in the here and now, among ourselves, and with our fellows, particularly those who differ from us. There is that common bond between us.

There is also the common bond of sheer antiquity, with all the accumulated wisdom and experience that our two traditions have inherited over the ages. Furthermore, when one remembers the collapse of the Soviet Union and what has flowed therefrom, with all the emerging challenges and opportunities in which the Orthodox world is so much involved, one perceives at the same time the new types of challenge and opportunity also faced by the Jewish people. At times the Jews sense danger, threat, old prejudices and stereotypical adverse thinking about themselves. They are bound to be closely attentive to these old/new developments. One sees many common strands of concern and aspiration that bind us together, despite our vastly different histories; we both want to retain our respective spiritual and cultural heritages in freedom.

Allow me to refer to certain particular features in the Jewish tradition without which the Jewish experience would be unrecognizable. We Jews have had the most improbable history. The improbability gives our history its altogether special character. The unusual predicaments, the unusual contradictions, not just in any one century or country, but everywhere and consistently over the centuries, have had an impact that is with us still. It was millennia ago that a Gentile sage is recorded (Num. 23:9) as having said that the Jewish people are a people which dwells alone, not counted among the nations. What an extraordinary statement this is, especially when one realizes that it was said long before the coming of Christianity; it has remained in a curious kind of way true all the way through history.

What is special about the Jewish experience? We, the Jewish people, have made distinctive contributions to the evolution of Western civilization. Take that role away, take that Hebraic element away, and Western civilization is utterly distorted. Hardly a single feature would remain. We Jews do not wish to abandon that Hebrew element in our lives or to see it abandoned in the world. It is too precious. It has made us what we are, and it is and will be part of the continuing experience of both Jews and of the world in general for the good of all.

The predicaments and the contradictions arise and arose in this way, namely that for their role, the Jews were by the habit, policy and convictions of others grotesquely ill-requited. It was as though we were considered deliberately perverse and subversive. The world in fact treated the Jewish people as though they had entered history in order to undermine high standards. It is a contradiction about which many Jews consciously or unconsciously feel deeply. This is history! This is memory! Call it what you like. It runs deep.

Part of the central Jewish experience also relates to the times when the Christian crusaders marched across Europe with the intention of wresting the Holy Land from the Muslim infidels, as was the phrase.

They stopped on the way in innumerable Jewish localities to destroy the Jewish infidels. Those Jewish communities had lived by the very oracles which those Christian knights carried with them to the Holy Land. In the one hand, they held the sword against the Jews; in the other, they held the books telling the history of the people they were slaughtering, the very books which enshrined the message which in their eyes justified their going to the Holy Land to take it. On the lips of those Jews was the word *Jerusalem*, the very Jerusalem which the knights were proceeding east to procure for Christendom. In the hearts of the Jewish survivors, there remained the aspiration that the Jews would one day, in a national sense, return to that land. That hope and prayer constituted their very being. This was an extraordinary sort of encounter and an extraordinary contradiction. It has parallels in Jewish situations, including enforced conversion, through the ages. This feature lives on in our historic memory. It went to the heart of Jewish sensitivity.

Jews have in many fields been highly influential. Yet they have been a group with the least power. Influential individually and collectively powerless. What a contradiction it has been! Only in this century have the Jews for the first time in the common era experienced the acquisition of power. That has taken the form of the State of Israel. Indeed it may well be that the Jewish people has not fully accustomed itself to the fact of that power unaccustomed to it over the millennia. But influential they certainly have been. At many stages in history, remarkable though it may sound, Jews were so often in the forefront. They were in the forefront at the birth of Christianity, and in a number of ways at the birth of Islam. Some would say they were crucially involved in the development of medieval capitalism; some would say they were centrally involved in the growth of eighteenth-century rationalism as well as in nineteenth-century commercialism. They were regarded by forces which did not relish such movements, as being both the beneficiaries and the instigators thereof. In the nineteenth century, for instance, it was the Jews against whom the enemies of the French Revolution turned and said it was they who inspired it, who created it, who benefited from it. It was the Jews whom they felt they must attack if they wanted to attack the French Revolution. The *ancien regime* lived on far into the nineteenth century. In the 1890s these elements could still turn upon the Jews as being allegedly the root cause of all their troubles. Again and again throughout Jewish history, and it mattered not whether Jews were rich or poor, communists or capitalists, there was this characteristic loneliness of the Jew.

These phenomena, of influence without power and of being perceived as the beneficiaries of movements which others sought to bring about and in regard to which the Jews sometimes tended, for historical reasons, to be their natural allies, were attractive pegs on which the dis-

affected, the malign and the demagogues could readily hang their populist rallying cries. They could so readily assert the existence of a Jewish conspiracy beginning in ancient times and living on to this day. We Jews have long grown acclimatized to such groundless charges, but their impact remains. No one can understand Jewish sensitivity or aspiration without appreciating this facet of the special character of the Jewish experience.

That brings me of course to what is called antisemitism. As Bishop Irineos told us, it should more properly be called anti-Jewishness. Although we do not wish to exercise our memories irresponsibly, it is impossible for the Jews to divest their history of its elements of memory. To the Jews in Europe, it is not fanciful to say that Europe sometimes seemed to them as though drenched in the blood of ceaseless Jewish martyrdom. It is an astonishing thing to have to say. I wish to be practical and avoid high-flown or excessively emotional language. The reality is that in every century, in country after country, there have been these factors, massacres, hate, oppression, expulsions.

These special features somehow or other lie at the root of the yearning of the Jewish people for statehood, for recognized membership in the family of nations, instead of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Yet all these special features are combined with remarkable similarities between Christians and Jews, which we have to work together to cultivate, without prejudice to our different identities and different philosophies. In fact those similarities are directly concerned with our respective identities. The Jewish people entered European society in the modern age, let us say from the eighteenth century onwards, as a people of a faith, a communion; they gained their civic and political emancipation while remaining members of a distinctive religious communion. Not as Jews who were Jews genetically only, but as people who were what they were because of their particular distinctive religious outlook, tradition and hope.

Many factors have since those years come together to transform the meaning of the word *Jew*. So that now, to some extent and maybe to an increasing extent, there are secular definitions of the word *Jew*. Antisemites are little interested now, if at all, in the religious definitions. They are more interested in the fact of the existence of the Jew. Paradoxically the creation of the State of Israel has encouraged the notion of the politicization of the word *Jew*. I am deeply attached to the State of Israel and regard it as a culmination of Jewish history, with enormous good to come therefrom both to the Jews and to the whole world, if only peace can be found in that region. One has to face the fact, however, that there is a widespread idea that the word *Jew* has an overriding political content.

As a consequence of secularization, Jewish scholars, teachers, lay leaders, are all concerned with a question which could not have arisen a few generations ago, namely the question of Jewish viability. How to secure distinctive Jewish survival in the modern liberal open society? Much of the planning that one finds in the Jewish community today is largely concerned with ensuring Jewish viability in modern society in the face of opportunities for social advancement, the new science, the new psychology, the wide-ranging travel, the new styles of leisure and entertainment, and the new kinds of authority and fashion which are so pervasive.

All this affects every religion to some extent or other. It deepens the problem of assimilation. We were all in favor of assimilation in one sense, but what does it mean? Assimilation, if it means sharing the rights and obligations of citizens, yes. If it means absorption without trace, no. How do you avoid assimilation becoming absorption, which means disappearance? That is a problem that I venture to submit is not confined to Jews. With respect, I suggest that it may be something that the Orthodox world is concerned about, particularly with regard to the younger echelons of their society. We face, Jews and Orthodox, common challenges as to how to respond to the new outlooks of which I speak, how to respond without diminution of our attention to our cherished heritages. How do we make the receipt of heritage modern without losing it? That may not be for this conference to examine. What we can more readily discuss are the consequences of our facing or not facing these problems in our respective spheres.

There is a yet further challenge that we both confront. I have already referred to it indirectly. I spoke of authority. Let me turn to it. There was a time when authority in Jewish life was vested in the religious heads. No major decision would have been taken without them. The heads may have been rabbis in the sense of holding rabbinic office or they may not have had any formal office at all. The cachet given to learning was always a marked feature in Jewish life, with considerable long-term effect. To acquire Jewish knowledge was regarded as the greatest virtue and in many ways is still regarded as one of the truly great virtues. The acquisition of knowledge for its own sake as we say, translating the relevant Hebrew phrase into English, was an act of piety.

There are now other avenues to authority, by a way of election to lay office, by way of eminence in society, by way of financial power or by way of past or present political power. This may well be true of all religions. How do we respond to that challenge? How do we ensure that authority and leadership are exercised in ways which are consonant with respect for traditional values? This does not mean to say that lay lead-

ers are bereft of those traditional values. What it means is that more and more, we find the emblems of authority in Jewish life moving away from the religious heads and moving in the direction of lay heads who may have no personal, emotional or intellectual connection with the fountains of knowledge and inspiration which made Jewish life distinctive in earlier generations. Ultimately it is a matter of education.

I would like to conclude with a further reference to the State of Israel. This came into being not only for the vital reason of providing a haven for those Jews who needed one, with doors closed to them in many parts of the world, against the background of the *Shoah*. That in itself would have justified the creation of the State, that is for the provision of an unquestioning haven, not a place where you are asked who you are, and what you are, and why you are here, and for how long. But Israel came into being in order also to deal with some of the problems which I have mentioned. That is to say to promote the development and strengthening of a recognizable and distinctive Jewishness, protected from the erosion associated with the freedoms and opportunities that were grasped avidly in the nineteenth century, but which took their toll in so many ways. This too was an objective of the Zionist movement. These two objectives together precipitated an irresistible urge toward the creation of Jewish statehood. That event was and is so momentous that one would have to consider most carefully before one could try to define its likely ultimate impacts. As far as the Christian world was and is concerned, and perhaps as far as the Orthodox world in particular was and is concerned, there arose certain questions.

Is the establishment of the State of Israel a wholly secular matter? Is it an illusion to say that there was some element of fulfillment of an ancient promise in the creation of the State? May it be part of the beginning of the fulfillment of such promises? Where are we all with regard to the promise and the covenant? Where are we, Jews and Christians, with regard to what, from the inception of the parting of the ways, was a built-in conflict of ideologies on these issues? These are questions which theologians may ask, but with which Israelis do not greatly concern themselves on a day to day basis. Yet they impose on us, my friends, special responsibilities of righteousness and understanding. For if we who are here assembled, particularly members of the great churches within Orthodoxy, do not engage in this dialogue with those qualities, how can we expect others to engage in dialogue at all?

And therefore, I conclude by saying that this particular colloquium has an immense task, namely so to conduct itself as to lead people to say that dialogue, even on such difficult questions, can be conducted as between gentlemen, and between ancient civilizations, all of them hop-

ing that divine providence will assist them to move forward with mutual understanding, prudence and realism and with a proper degree of practicality.

IMMANUEL 26/27