

marked secularization. It is indeed possible to think of a Judaism, and of a Jewish identity, *independently* of (though not necessarily in contrast to) "religion". To deny this possibility would be to negate of the very state of Israel.

A first assertion, derived from what I said earlier, is that the future of Israel "concerns" us Jews of the Diaspora, out of a general sense of solidarity that often includes family ties. This future can (depending on the road taken) either mean a new consolidation and perhaps even an expansion of the Jewish life in our communities - from Paris and Berlin to Rome and Brussels - or a serious crisis.

So what is the future?

I could try to find a formula that satisfies everyone: a formula of peace and security. But that I will not do, not because I deny that need, but because formulating it, without taking into account the obstacles that exist, is useless. The obstacles are not only local, lying in the small piece of land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. The obstacles are global. I believe that the sentence, "the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a danger for the stability of the Middle East," is untrue. The truth is that the general tensions in the Middle East have always had a casual influence on Israeli-Palestinian relationships. Our world has always seen a confrontation of countries and peoples, unequal in economic development and with entirely different social structures. But in a certain sense, as in the times of classic colonialism, they lived far apart. It is not that way anymore. We know that the world has become much smaller, the economy is becoming global and not everything in backward countries can really be called backward: at least in terms of quality, economic and military techniques are not backwards, nor are the ways of life of the privileged classes, which are also the leading political classes. But we also know that the gap between the two worlds is widening. The poor, who once managed to survive at modest levels, are threatened by the rich world's technology for the transformation of raw material and the very nature of the environment.

The result is a dangerous tension, which cannot be eased by "teaching" parliamentary democracy, which is typical of a mature industrial society but very far from an impoverished one, or by building it on that thin "Westernized" layer of society that is in fact disliked by most of the population.

In this framework, Israel is a state with the structure and culture of a modern industrial state, literally brushing against a prevalently agrarian-artisan society that lacks technological know-how. The leadership group of this society is worried about the possible cooperation between two independent states, out of fear of being dominated by the stronger country.

One attempt to stop and delay closer contact between the two cultures comes from terrorism. But it comes even more from religious fundamentalism which, for example, declares the whole land *dar-al Islam*, and calls for a mass mobilization with the careful use of a mixture of demagoguery, "religious" extremism, racism and anti-Jewish hate. They partly welcome but partly just tolerate the generous and brilliant Israeli initiative, with the cooperation of some regions of Italy, to provide free medical care for pediatric illnesses in Palestinian towns. Even that initiative is criticized by many because "nothing should be accepted from the Jews".

This is not an invitation to suspend the initiative, which I appreciate immensely and to which I have invited a number of personal friends to join. I would only like to state