

## The Future of Israel

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The process known as the *Emancipation of the Jews* in Europe, certainly fruit of the Enlightenment, solved the problem of the Jew as citizen, freed from the boundaries of the Ghetto. However, it also made a strong contribution to the dissolution of the community's microcosm, a place where - despite the problems - an autonomous Jewish culture was preserved and developed.

At that point, the problem of the future of the *Jewish group* burst onto the scene. At most, that group could be accepted as a religious minority, whereby "religious" we mean a model resembling Christian group(s), but with some distinctive characteristics. Whatever the original redefinition used for religious services, rules and the education of new generations, it was inevitably called "religious". So, a *reform* Judaism could be born, but not an "other" Judaism defined as something other than a religion, with its ministers, organization and rites.

Actually, there was no need to invent this "other" Judaism. It already had not one but two languages (originally borrowed from German and Spanish, but adapted during the migrations through European and Mediterranean lands), its own musical tradition, a civil and penal law, set forth in the numerous tractates of the *Mishna* and amply discussed in the *Gemara*. This law could only be partially applied since the Jews were - out of principle - subject to the laws of the local rulers, but it was jealously preserved, studied and passed down. It was the Jews' way of telling themselves that in Judaism, everything concerning the law governing man's relationship with God (in Hebrew, *ben adam la-makom*) has a dignity, but everything regarding people's relations with each other (*ben adam la-chavero*) is equally important.

Translated into European terminology, it was like saying that, along with the traditional culture, there was also a secular tradition in Judaism. It was often said that the two traditions were indissolubly intertwined, secularizing religion into something like secular culture. But that is untrue. A tractate like the *Baba Metzia* is only secular, while the *Berachot* is strictly religious. Both are found in Judaism, without confusion and without overlapping. But Judaism also failed to find an autonomous space for itself in the Europe of nations and nationalism, for a human group like the Jews was dispersed and separated by political borders.

First Zionism and then the birth of the state of Israel gave shape and life to this space that was missing before. When Theodor Herzl proclaimed, with both prophetic fervor and a certain approximation, *Wir sind ein Volk*, he was expressing a specific need.

I thus believe that we can give a positive answer to the question of whether there is a future for a Jewish identity in Europe, though many see this future as threatened by a