

A Catholic Jew reflects on his Jewish identity
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Introduction

What meaning should a Jew who believes in Yeshua give to his/her Jewish identity?

A diversity of understandings, a diversity of realities...

Are Jews the only ones with no right to be a distinctive people in the Church?

Context for my reflection:

- Blessed times: As a Catholic after Vatican II. I can be proud to be a Jew.
- We now say: Yeshua is a Jew and not Yeshua was a Jew. I can say: I am a Jew and not I was a Jew.
- Shoah: Awakening among Jewish believers in Yeshua: we were sent to the camps too! Belief in Yeshua is not synonymous with assimilation.
- Three modalities: assimilation – "we were Jews", religion – "living mitzvot" (Kinzer), nation- "living culture" (Kaplan).
- Jewish identity today: Shoah, State of Israel as definitive more than religion.
- Jewish believers in Yeshua rejected as Jews in the Israeli polity.
- Are we part of the Jewish people? Respecting refusal... and yet fighting perceptions...
- Kehilla: being "Israeli Jews": Living in Hebrew in the midst of the Jewish people in a Jewish state.

Precaution:

- Double identity – catholic (Kehilla as our people) and ha-am (Israel as our people).
- Tension between words "catholic" and "ha-am" –universal and particular.
- Precaution in emphasizing ha-am: 19th century European nationalism and Zionism.
- Yet long tradition of Jewish internationalism: From prophets to Marx and Freud.
(Footnote: Challenges of being one Church in a fragmented nationalist society at war).

A theological view on belonging to Ha-Am as a Jewish believer:

- Two separate issues: theology and identity (psychology/sociology/politics).
- Distinction between Christian theology of ha-am and sociology of ha-am?
- Ha-Am in OT: defined by Torah – rituals and ethos (Lev 18) – you do not do as they do...

"You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. My ordinances you shall observe and my statutes you shall keep, following them: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 18:3-4).

- Origins of Am Yisrael in call of Abraham – Genesis 11 versus Genesis 12.
- Universal vocation of Ha-am – preparing a people out of which Mashiah comes.
- Tension between boundaries and openness – Dt 23 versus History (Ruth, Jonah).

"No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. 2 Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. 3 No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 23:1-3).

- What is Am after Christ? What is the eschatological newness of being in Christ? No more boundaries as all included within Israel.

23 On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. 24 On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, 25 whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage." (Isaiah 19:23-25)

"13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:13-20).

- What happens to the Law? Ethnic marker but not condition for salvation.

- Ha-am in NT gives way to Kehilla. Between ha-am (laos/ethnos) and kehilla (ekkllesia/koinonia) in the New Testament.

- Ha-am that resists Kehilla – resists the erasing of boundaries (Acts 13).

"45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, **they were filled with jealousy (zh,lou zeal)**¹; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. 46 Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers" (Acts 13:45-48).

- What is the ongoing specificity of Am Yisrael after Christ?

The mystery of Israel's refusal.

"25 So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery (to. musth,rion tou/to): a hardening has come upon part of Israel (o[ti pw,rwsij avpo. me,rouj tw/l Vlsrah.l), **until (a;cri)**² the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, "Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob." 27 "And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." 28 As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:25-29).

The eternal gratitude of the nations towards Israel.

30 Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they have now been disobedient **in order (i[na)** that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. 32 For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Romans 11:25-32).

The continuing witness of Israel: One God – God loves, God speaks³.

The mystery of Israel's suffering.

The hope in a final ingathering.

¹ The word "zeal" is used in Ac 5:17 as jealousy (negative) – only two times in Luke. In Romans cf. 10:2 (problematic zeal regarding the Law) and 13:13 (list of vices). In 2Cor most usages are positive (7:7,11, 9:2, 11:2)...

² Cf. Benedict XVI in second volume of Jesus of Nazareth on evangelizing Jews.

³ Pope Benedict – *Deus caritas est* and *Verbum Domini*.