

(English translation)

Buenos Aires, 20 April 1998

## **The points of the spirituality and their roots in the Old Testament**

...

And now I am here with you. I am here with brothers and sisters with whom we share an authentic faith in the One God. We hold in common the invaluable patrimony of the Bible in what we call the Old Testament.

... What could happen if the Lord were to begin to clarify that it is his will to bring about also among us Jews and Christians a brotherly rapport?

As I was preparing to come to you I read something about our relationship. First of all I further reflected on and first of all shared the high regard that my Church has shown for you especially through the document of the Second Vatican Council *Nostra Aetate*.

I let the divine truth of which your Jewish tradition is endowed and that we also share, enlighten me. This truth can cement together our and your spiritual life. As a consequence I felt in my heart the desire to tell you the Movement's secret of success. It lies in its spirituality which emerged, certainly, from the gospel of Jesus but with its roots in the Old Testament. Therefore, it could be rewritten in a certain way, almost with its words.

I had this dream: to be able to live these truths together and give the world new hope through our profound communion, our collaboration.

Our Movement came to life because of the observation a group of young women, myself included, made considering the reality around them under the impact of the bombings of World War II. It was 1943-44; the place was Trent, in northern Italy. In the midst of the destruction brought about by the war they experienced firsthand that "all things are vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). Already here we received light from the Qoheleth.

They saw that everything passes and, under an undeniable impulse from God, seeing that every ideal was crumbling, they chose for their life one which no bomb could destroy: God. They made the commitment to love him with their whole heart. They decided, therefore, to put into practice, and this is required of anyone who wants to live in accordance with the Movement's lifestyle, Jesus' words which are already found in Deuteronomy, in the *Shema'* (6,4-5): "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. Therefore you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength."

They understood from the gospel that to love God means to do his will. We read in Matthew, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21).

This is stupendously written in "The Sayings of the Jewish Fathers" which are part of the *Mishna'*, the important work of rabbinical tradition: "Be strong as a leopard, and swift as an eagle, and fleet as a hart, and courageous as a lion, to do the will of thy Father who is in Heaven" (*Mishna'* 5,20).

Central for us Christians is to do that will of God which demands we love our neighbor. In this, as Jesus affirms, lies the Law and the Prophets.

We love our brothers because we see in everyone Christ who for us is God. We know that only in this love we will find salvation. The majestic description of the universal judgment made by Jesus says so. To the good he will say that all the good they have done for their neighbors, and also the possible evil, he holds done to himself. "You did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

But you, too, have the rabbinical tradition which states that love of neighbor is "the most fundamental principle of Torah" (Rabbi Akiva), because, since God created man in his image, whatever is done to any person it is as if it were done to God himself.

Furthermore we have received the same commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lv 19:18). And the Talmud asks, just like Jesus does: "The Holy One clothed the naked. As he did for Adam, so do you also clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, as he did with Abraham, so do you also visit the sick; The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted the mourners, as he did with Isaac, so do you also comfort the mourners. The Holy One, blessed be He, buried the dead, like Moses did, so do you also bury the dead" (The Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a).

Love of neighbor, when more people live it, becomes mutual. Herein lies the heart of Jesus' thought. He gave us a new commandment and he called it his. "I give you a new commandment: love one another" (Jn 13:34).

But if we love one another with this love we are assured by the gospel that Christ is in our midst: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

The majority of scholars maintains that this verse is based on a Jewish tradition. In "The Sayings of the Jewish Fathers" we find: "If two sit together and the words between them are of Torah then the Shekinah (the divine dwelling) is in their midst" (Misnha' Avot, 3,2).

The mystery of Jesus on the cross who cries out the words of Psalm 22 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46) is central for us.

It is believed that he suffered, together with all the other atrocities of the crucifixion, also the abandonment by the Father, with whom he was one, in order to recompose the unity of men with God and with one another which had been broken because of sin.

I was moved by the words commenting on Psalm 22 written by a contemporary Jewish author who recently died. "What better personification can we find for the Jewish people than that of this poor rabbi of Nazareth?"<sup>1</sup>

This Jewish author sees in the cry of Jesus, also and especially, the sufferings of the Shoah. He wrote, "'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' is not only the Psalm of David and a word of Jesus on the cross but, I would almost say, the leitmotif of those who were deported to Auschwitz and Maidanek." He added: "Isn't this rabbi who bleeds to death on the cross the authentic incarnation of his suffering people which is too often being crucified by the hatred for Jews which we too experienced in our youth?"<sup>2</sup>

The abyss of suffering and the sense of being abandoned by God was also expressed with the idea of God hiding his countenance. Martin Buber, after the Shoah, spoke of "the eclipse of God."

Only a few weeks ago the document of the Catholic Church on the Shoah was released. It is intended to be an urgent plea not to forget such an abominable crime, and to become free once and for all of the scourge of anti-semitism which has polluted for centuries the relationships between Jews and Christians.

But that unspeakable suffering of the Shoah and of all the more recent bloody persecutions cannot not bear fruit. We want to share it with you for it not to be a chasm that divides us but a bridge that unites us. May it become of seed of unity, yes, of unity!

Unity is the word which summarizes our spirituality as it is Jesus' desire expressed in his last prayer: "So that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Unity is very dear to the Jewish People, too. The famous philosopher, Abraham Heschel, wrote: "Unity of God is power for unity of God with all things. He is one in Himself and striving to be one with the world.... The unity of God is a concern for the unity of the world."

<sup>1</sup> P. Lapide, cf H. Waldenfels in "Gesù Crocifisso e le grandi Religioni," Naples 1987, p.35 (own translation).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

These are the key ideas of our spirituality. And these are aspects of your Jewish tradition similar to ours even if not always identical.

Reflecting on them, we can think for a moment before God: can it be that he wants us to embark on a common journey, hand in hand, to tell all that He has made us brothers in order to show today's materialistic, secularized, hedonistic world the wonderful adventure of people who live so that His name be announced, faith in Him strengthened, values highlighted by Him restored. They are the values of peace, solidarity, defense of human rights, freedom, justice and more.

May the Lord inspire us.

One thing is sure: today we met and this gives me and the members of the Movement present here great joy. I hope it is the same for you.

May love triumph!

Thank you for listening to me with such great attention.