

## 8 THE NAME OF GOD ACCORDING TO A FEW TALMUDIC TEXTS

### 1 THE LIMITS OF THE TALK

Professor Enrico Castelli has asked me to talk about the 'Name of God in the Talmud'. Did the book I had published with Editions de Minuit under the title *Quatre lectures talmudiques* [Four Talmudic Readings] have anything to do with it? I had pointed out in the preface, however, that I was not a Talmud specialist. Like an amateur practising on a violin, this small volume was just an attempt. But in the case in point, the violin, as it were, is an orchestra, even several orchestras. To hold the conductor's baton as one holds a bow is certainly to betray the work being interpreted. The Talmud, which represents the oral tradition of Israel – written down between the second and the end of the sixth century after Christ – is, with its sixty-eight Tractates, an immense text: more than three thousand pages in-folio, covered with commentaries and commentaries on commentaries. This covering was built up over a period of almost fifteen hundred years in the intellectual life of the Jewish communities dispersed throughout the world. The text is a living dialectic sustaining the discussions of Israel's scholars. It airs more problems than it imposes solutions, despite the apparent or real concern that guides it, which is to determine the ritual, legal and moral life of the faithful. There is nothing folkloric in this text: in its very train of thought it remains scholarly, a hidden science, but reserved for extreme requirements. It will be readily understood that this science has a particular style that distinguishes it from philosophical discourse. A style that is in no way contingent in relation to its subject matter and truth, but a style that is entirely different from our methods of exposition.

A whole lifetime is needed to master this science. What I might give today – having spent my life in other exercises and coming

late, though under the firm rule of a prestigious master, to these difficult readings, unfortunately reserving them just for my spare time – what I might give, as an 'amateur Talmudist', will be but partial and approximative.

At least I will not give way to the temptation to speak about this science as if it were an ethnographical or archaeological curiosity. Nor will I make homiletic or apologetic use of it (whatever the inevitable element of apologia in any discourse may be). Indeed, I think that on the specific point that interests us today, a philosophical option can be distinguished in the Talmudic positions. I shall try to extract it from a thought that moves in multiple dimensions. We need not go into it any further today – fortunately for my incompetence – nor even delineate the meta-physical space figured by these dimensions. I think, too, that in order to seek out this option it would be a good idea to confine ourselves to a few particular texts rather than vacuously skimming over those three thousand pages in-folio.

### 2 TO KNOW AND TO OBEY

The names of the revealed God are known from Scripture. This platitude – which needs to be fully understood – means that these names are letters traced on parchment, and that a living oral tradition is necessary to learn how to read them. These names are pronounced whenever the Bible is read aloud, in prayers, when an oath is taken, and in various circumstances of Jewish ritual life. They are said to be holy. I shall come back to the meaning of this expression, for it is essential to the whole of our talk. But it is not the relation with these Names that, by itself, would constitute the greatest intimacy with God, according to traditional – that is, Talmudic – Judaism. Nor the knowledge which, by some miracle, would seek the essence behind the Names. Intimacy is of a different order. This must be said right from the beginning.

All relation of the believer to the revealed God admittedly begins in his relation to the Scriptures: reading and also the transcription by the scribe which perpetuates them by protecting them from all corruption. But writing and reading, tracing and uttering, protecting and studying, are observances. They come and take their place among all those other observances – ritual, ethical and liturgical – that Scripture commands and determines

in the *Name* of this very God that it reveals. The relation to God, at the time of writing and reading the Name, admittedly depends on the intention and fervour of the reader or scribe. It depends above all on the faithfulness of this act to the commandment (the *mitzvah*) that the reader and the exegete will have drawn out from the actual text. And this is the characteristic method for Judaism. A different relation altogether with Him who is named is superimposed on the honesty of the intention towards the Name: the obedience to his commandments. All other relation is dominated by the relation with God through the ritual act that has been commanded. This relation is not measured by the uprightness of knowledge, as if it were only its approximation. It is thought and lived in Judaism as the greatest proximity, as a total adherence, prior, in some way, to all initial act of adhesion; yet as distinct from identification. The adjectives *tam* or *tamim* express this totality, which is also said of the lambs intended for sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> The Talmud can proclaim that the person who practises according to the commandment that has been received is greater than the person who practises without having received any commandment at all.

The rabbinical reflection on God is never separated from the reflection on practice. To reflect on God by reflecting on his commandments is, admittedly, an intellectual act of a different order to the philosophical thematization of God. It would be a mistake, however, to consider it as a simple stage towards philosophy, as its infancy. But, this being understood, the mode of Talmudic thinking tolerates philosophical contact. The specific truth of Talmudic reflection, at the expense of some oversimplification, can be reflected in the philosopher's mirror.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> NEITHER EFFACE NOR PRONOUNCE THE NAME AND THE BEYOND  
Let us now take a text, in the Tractate Shebu'oth (35a), which refers directly to the names of God. Its practical character may no longer surprise us. It teaches us first that in copying the names of God one must on no account efface them.<sup>3</sup> It lists those names that are proper names; there are nine of them in our text,<sup>4</sup> among which figure names like *El* or *Eloha*, which are usually translated, however, as 'God'. It lists the names that may be effaced, such as the names made up of substantival attributes: the Great, the Mighty, the Revered, the Majestic, the Strong, the Powerful, the

Merciful and Gracious, the Long Suffering, the One Abounding in Kindness. It refuses to raise to the position of a name the invocation of heaven and earth, even though heaven and earth refer to their Creator. In the final section of the extract that concerns us, the text wonders whether all the names of God mentioned in Scripture fall under the rules that have just been expressed, and which ones are the exceptions.

It is obvious that behind the practical problem of 'which names may be erased?' the text deals with the question of the dignity of the various names and, ultimately, the very meaning of the relation to God. What the text sets forth – which we have listed, and which appears at first sight to be unimportant – corresponds to problems that we shall try to draw out.

The first point is that the Hebrew terms of the Old Testament that we are led to translate by *God*, or *Deus*, or *Theos*, are proper names according to the wishes of the Talmud. The name of God is always said to be a proper name in the Scriptures. The word *God* would be absent from the Hebrew language! A fine consequence of monotheism in which there exists neither a divine species nor a generic word to designate it. The first book of the famous Tractate in which Maimonides, in the twelfth century, summarizes and systematizes the Talmud, begins in fact as follows: 'The foundation of the foundation and the pillar of wisdom consists in knowing that the Name exists and that it is the first being'. The word designating the divinity is precisely the word *Name*, a generic term in relation to which the different names of God are individuals. To say 'Dieu' [God] as we say it in French, or *Gott* like the Germans, or *Boz* like the Russians, is in the Talmud to say 'the Holy One, blessed be He' (the naming of an attribute, Holiness, by means of an article). In rabbinical thought holiness evokes above all separation (like our word 'absolute'). The term thus names – and this is quite remarkable – a mode of being or a beyond of being rather than a quiddity. It is the same for the word *Shekhinah*, equally used for God. The term *Shekhinah* means the dwelling of God in the world or, more exactly, his dwelling in the midst of Israel, which still indicates a modality, a way of being. In the Talmudic texts God is commonly found as: 'Master of the World' or 'King of the World' or 'our Father in Heaven'. Here again the terms express relations, not essence.

But revelation by the proper Name is not solely the corollary of the unicity of a being; it leads us further. Perhaps beyond being. Our text teaches us a gradation: the names not to be effaced, and the substantival attributes that can be effaced. These latter names refer immediately to Him who bears them. They give Him a meaning that the substantive-Names can receive but not confer. Only they thematize Him too. In so doing they get nearer to God as though to an essence which then distances them from the unrepresentable and holy, that is, absolute God, who is beyond all thematization and all essence. But as we have said, our text disputes the dignity as a name of the invocation of Heaven and Earth, unique beings like the Creator they evoke, for 'they belong to him'. One must not adjure someone by Heaven and Earth! They are excluded from among the holy appellations. The God who is revealed by his Name is not originally a cosmological principle. To refuse substances the dignity of the Name, even if they are unique and consequently suggestive of divine unity, is to exclude from the paths which lead to God the ascent to the Unconditional. It is also to refuse God all analogy with beings which are admittedly unique but which make up a world or a structure with other beings. Approaching through a proper name is to assert an irreducible relation to the knowledge which thematizes, defines or synthesizes and which, through these very acts, understands what this knowledge correlates as being, as finite and as immanent. It is to understand revelation both as a modality which paradoxically preserves transcendence from what is revealed, and consequently as something that goes beyond the capacity of an intuition, and even of a concept.

Would the interdiction to efface mean that these letters of the Name have the capability of a God that 'heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain' (I Kings 8: 27)? Would it not sketch out another religion? Whatever our mistrust towards the letter and our thirst for the Spirit may be, monotheistic humanity is a humanity of the Book. Scriptural tradition provides the trace of a beyond of this very tradition. Monotheistic humanity, despite its philosophical claim to be posited at the very origin of its self and the non-self, recognizes in the Written the trace of a past that precedes all historical past capable of being remembered. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Talmudic text I am commenting upon should forbid the effacement not only of the written Name

as a whole but also of its first syllable. But it is in this way, precisely, that there appears the ambiguity – or the enigma – of this manifestation, by which it contrasts strongly with the 'objectivity' of the perceived and the historical and, through this, with the world where this objectivity would enclose it. It is thus outlined as a modality of transcendence. The square letters are a precarious dwelling from which the revealed Name is already withdrawn; erasable letters at the mercy of the man who traces or copies out. A writing that is quite ready to merge with the writings subjected to history and textual criticism, a writing that opens itself up to the search for its origin and, in doing so, becomes contemporaneous with the history which can be remembered and in which transcendence is cancelled out, an epiphany bordering on atheism.

But this uncertain epiphany, on the boundary of evanescence, is precisely the one which man alone can retain. This is why he is the essential moment both of this transcendence and of its manifestation. And why, through this ineffaceable revelation, he is called upon with unparalleled rectitude.

But is this revelation precarious enough? Is the Name free enough in respect of the context in which it is lodged? Is it protected in its written form from all contamination by being or culture? Is it protected from man whose vocation is certainly to retain it, but who is capable of every abuse?

Added to the obligation not to efface is the obligation in Judaism not to 'utter for no purpose'. This is how a passage from the Tractate Temurah (4a) interprets the verse in Deuteronomy 6: 13: 'Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and serve him'. As if this presence of the Name in Scripture must not be rendered present in saying it for no reason and at any time at all. Is not the notion of holiness best translated by the separation from whatever from time immemorial is (and perhaps from whatever, quite simply, is)?

A new gradation is established; this time, among the names not to be effaced. The Tetragrammaton – the 'explicit' Name, *Shem Hamephorash* – is privileged. This privilege consists in this strange condition for a name of having never to be pronounced (except at the moment in which the high priest enters the Holy of Holies, on the so-called Day of Atonement – that is to say, for post-exilic Judaism, never). The name *Adonai* – which, in its turn, must not be pronounced in vain – is the name of the Tetragrammaton. The name has a name!

The name is revealed and is hidden.<sup>5</sup> Whatever comes in the context of meaning must also always be anchoretic or holy; the voice which resounds in speech must also be the voice which softens or falls silent. The proper name can have this modality. It is a name which 'sticks' to what it names, in a quite different manner to the common name which, clarified by the language system, designates a species but does not stick to the individual and embraces him, so to speak, in indifference. But the proper name, close to what is named, is not connected logically with it; consequently, despite this proximity, it is an empty shell like a permanent revocation of what it evokes, a disembodiment of what is embodied through it. Through being forbidden to be uttered, it is held between the two: a Tetragrammaton that is never pronounced in the way it is written.

But is not this withdrawal, contemporaneous with presence, maintained in the proximity of prayer? Throughout this talk we have avoided conceptions taken from the Kabbalah.<sup>6</sup> Let us make an exception here, for it is an illuminating one.

According to the Kabbalists, here is the intention of Israel's ancient scholars who had instituted the blessings. The role of these expressions is considerable in Jewish liturgy. The blessing begins by invoking God in the form of Thou. But the second-person personal pronoun is followed by the Tetragrammaton. There is no blessing that does not invoke the Tetragrammaton as the Lord (Tractate Berakoth 12a). The expression for the blessing, in the second person up until the Name, is in the third person in the words that are placed on the other side of the Name. The Thou becomes He in the Name, as if the Name belonged simultaneously to the correctness of being addressed as Thou and to the absolute of holiness. And it is without doubt this essential ambiguity – or enigma – of transcendence that is preserved in the standard expression in the Talmud for designating God: 'The Holy One, blessed be He'.

#### 4 THE NAME AND ITS MEANINGS

Does not this enigma or ambiguity of presence and withdrawal, a modality that in some way is formal, receive any signification, any content? Is this anchoretic nature of God when he reveals himself – where the *Klingen* [sounding] is already *Abklingen* [fading away] – only negative theology? What is it positively?

The text I am commenting upon, in its final and longest section, asks whether the Names mentioned in the various books and episodes of the Bible are all holy. From the reply that lists some of the episodes in which the 'Names are holy', we understand that the God revealed in his Names is given a meaning from out of the human situations, of misery or happiness, in which he is invoked. 'The Lord is near to all who call upon him' (Psalms 145: 18).<sup>7</sup> Ritual, invocations and – as we shall see forthwith in trying to determine the meaning of the anchoretism and effacement – the responsibility for the other man: according to the Rabbis of the Talmud, these constitute a proximity that is closer than that of thematization, which, if we are to believe the philosophers or Spinozism, is said to be intimacy itself.

But what is the positive meaning of the withdrawal of this God who says only his names and his orders? This withdrawal does not cancel out revelation. It is not purely and simply a non-knowledge. It is precisely man's obligation towards all other men. According to the words of the prophet (Jeremiah 22: 16), to judge the cause of the poor and needy, 'Is not this to know me? says the Lord'. Knowledge of the unknowable: transcendence becomes ethics. This is why, in the terms of a discussion mentioned in the text we have commented upon, the objection disputing the holiness of the Name *Zebaoth* is rejected. Does not this name, meaning multitudes, refer to the multitudes of Israel? Does it not name the Absolute through his relation to men? Now the Law is not in accordance with this objection, and the scholars wish to ignore it. Let us comment on this: the reference to Israel is essential to the Name. Its holiness and the holiness it suggests, 'beyond all objectivization and all thematization', mean precisely the constitution of a human society which is under obligation. The notion of Israel in the Talmud, as my master had taught me, must be separated from all particularism, except for that of election. But election means a surplus of duties, in accordance with the phrase from Amos (3: 2): 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities'.

The transcendence of the named God could not be expounded thematically. Hence the extreme precariousness of this revelation of the Name for which the interdiction to efface provides some help. But here is a case where the Name is traced only with a

view to its own effacement. It is discussed at length in the Tractate Sotah (7a-7b).<sup>8</sup> The woman suspected by her husband, without proof, of adultery must, according to Numbers 5, be brought by the jealous husband to the priest at the Temple and submit to a test (which sociologists will recognize as an ordeal but which, all things considered, is a good way to take the heat out of the conflict by the very appearance of a third party, in the form of the priest). At a certain moment, according to the rite described in the Bible, the priest entreats the woman: 'If some man (other than your husband) has lain with you, then ... "the Lord [written as the Tetragrammaton] make you an execration". ... And the woman shall say, "Amen, Amen"'. The priest will write these words (mentioning the Tetragrammaton) in a book, and efface them in the water of bitterness. This effacement also effaces the Tetragrammaton written with a view to this effacement. The Talmudic text, going beyond the particulars of a very ancient rite, asserts a new idea: the effacement of the Name is the reconciliation of men. Beyond this specific case, the phrase figures as purely paradigmatic. Here is another parable that echoes it (Tractate Sukkah 53b): King David digs the Pits in order to discover, in the place where one day his son will build the Temple, the source of the running water necessary for the future libations of the altar. The water suddenly rises up and threatens to submerge the universe. How can the cataclysm be stopped? David then receives advice: 'If, for the purpose of establishing harmony between man and wife, the Torah said, Let My name that was written in sanctity be blotted out by the water, how much more so may it be done in order to establish peace in the world!'

Does not the transcendence of the Name of God, in comparison to all thematization, become effacement, and is not this effacement the very commandment that obligates me to the other man? We believe that this is the meaning of one of the apologues of the text we have been pondering over from the beginning. It is grafted on to a verse in Genesis and is introduced, as is proper in the Talmud, in connection with a practical question: must all the names of God mentioned in the Bible be treated as holy names? The reply is affirmative in particular for all the verses relating the story of Abraham. The obvious and first meaning of this reply is that humanity according to Abraham invokes the

true Name. But is not the name 'Adonai', which Abraham pronounces in Genesis 18: 3, addressed to one of the three angels who visit him? 'Adonai (Lord), if I have found favour in your sight, do not pass by your servant.' Is saying Adonai to an angel who, in human form, is an unknown passer-by for Abraham, really to pronounce the Name of God? To get out of the difficulty, there is an apologue. God is said to have appeared to Abraham at the same time as the three passers-by. It is to him that Abraham said: 'Adonai, do not pass by your servant'. He said to him: 'Wait for me to receive the three travellers', because since the passers-by were overcome with the heat and thirst, this comes before the Lord our God. The transcendence of God is his actual effacement, but this obligates us to men. Humility is higher than greatness. This is the meaning of monotheism according to Abraham. I said a short while ago that the Talmud grafts an apologue on to a verse. Yet is it a graft? Is not the meaning suggested already in the very fact of saying Lord, Adonai, to an anonymous passer-by lost in the wilderness? Is not the apologue merely paying extreme attention to the letter of the text?

But the Revelation that becomes ethics signifies a new vision of man. The human soul here is not the origin of self, a subject aware of self and the universe, nor is it an existence concerned in its existence with this very existence. It is obligated before all commitment. It is not only practical reason, the source of its obligations for others, but responsibility in the forgetting of self. Here is a text<sup>9</sup> that tells us of those who are worthy to pronounce the Name - that is, of those who, alone, can accede to the Name. It concerns names other than the Tetragrammaton, names of twelve and forty-two letters, Kabbalistic themes about which I am saying nothing. 'Our Rabbis taught: At first (God's) twelve-lettered Name used to be entrusted to all people [priests]. When unruly men increased, it was confided to the pious of the priesthood, and these "swallowed it" during the chanting of their brother priests.' This is followed by: 'Rab Judah said in Rab's name: The forty-two lettered Name is entrusted only to him who is pious, meek, middle-aged, free from bad temper, sober, and not insistent on his rights'. Humility, discretion, forgiving of offences, which must not be taken solely as virtues; they 'turn inside out' the ontological notion of subjectivity in order to see it in renunciation, effacement and a total passivity.

## 5 PHILOSOPHY

It remains for me to show that the possibility of a transcendence staying absolute despite the relation it enters through revelation – a possibility suggested to us by the texts relating to the Name of God that we have just analysed – can be thought philosophically, that is, independently of the authority of Scripture and its exegesis. But I will be able to move forward here only by leaps and bounds.

The first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* ends up in the impossibility of the One separated from Being which should be 'neither named nor described nor thought of nor known' (142a), whereas it is named, described and known in the words and the thought that ensure it this absolute transcendence.

We wonder whether this contradiction is not based on a postulate that dominates Western philosophy, a postulate that is even taken for the definition of this philosophy. It posits the relation of the soul with the Absolute as knowledge, consciousness and discourse. Knowledge, consciousness, discourse, thematizing an object or something that is said; but in a movement that is as one with freedom – which is admittedly expressed in the old (or new) term of 'intentionality', where the idea of noetic purpose does not succeed in cancelling out the idea of intention, that is, of free spontaneity.

In fact, thematization, whether actual or virtual, by which consciousness is described is the modality in which the relation with the Other separated from it – with the Absolute – is achieved as freedom. Thematization is the fact that the soul is affected so as *not to be subject to*: what affects it reveals itself to it, 'presents' itself. Nothing enters it by being smuggled in, without being declared. Nothing that concerns it escapes from truth. All clandestine entry is confessed or recuperated in memory or History. No past that is not present is conceivable. Being, the fact of revealing itself, has an origin in a present – that is, it begins with my freedom, miraculously removed from the depths of the past that seems, however, to carry it. Being has an origin; it is *arkhe*. In Western philosophy, rationality is identified with the search for the origin. It is essentially archaeology.

In the light of this it is understandable that the Transcendent, or the Absolute, or the One, cannot enter into relation with the soul without beginning within it; but by doing so it ceases to

justify its transcendence. The One can do nothing but resist knowledge. Not only sensory intuition, but all forms of thematization: concept, idea, symbol.

But is thematization the only event of the soul? And is the Absolute's only modality the act of entering into the present, becoming origin, revealing itself, becoming being?

Admittedly, the modalities of the Absolute are unthinkable. They can be retreat and anchoretism only when thought is applied: a passing beyond all past that can be remembered, a total diachrony, in other words, no longer forming a structure with consciousness. But is there nothing in the soul that comes before the originary? Has nothing entered it surreptitiously, without suggesting itself to freedom as a theme and without opening out into the present and without offering itself to reminiscence?

This abstract idea of something that precedes the originary which we seem to be constructing is provided for us in a concrete way by the responsibility prior to all commitment, by the responsibility that obligates us to others, by my responsibility for the deeds, the fortune and the misfortune that are due to the freedom belonging to others and not to myself. Or, more simply, by human fraternity. A configuration of purely ontological notions turns here into ethical relations. As in the Talmud: the absolution of the Absolute, the effacement of God, is positively the obligation to make peace in the world.

A responsibility preceding freedom, a responsibility preceding intentionality! Do we not end up in a determinism where the soul is passive like an effect, even losing its ipseity? But in the responsibility for others – the subject, the self – I am summoned to appear rather than simply appearing, replying to a subpoena that cannot be declined and seizes me precisely in my non-interchangeable identity by calling to me.

How can such a subpoena affect me? Anarchically, without beginning in a present, without beginning at all. This situation of non-beginning must not be understood as a weakness or a primitive state of being where a self is still a slave to the unknown forces that one day it will discover – to assume them, convert them to its design, or break them. This anteriority of responsibility must be understood in relation to freedom as the very authority of the Absolute which is 'too great' for the measure or finitude of presence, revelation, order and being, and which

consequently, as neither being nor non-being, is the 'excluded third party' of the beyond of being and non-being, a third person that we have called 'illeity'<sup>10</sup> and that is perhaps also expressed by the word God. A beyond being, resistant to thematization and origin – something preceding the originary: beyond non-being – an authority that orders my neighbour for me as a face.

The illeity of the excluded third party is not some kind of power of obliqueness refusing the straightforwardness of thematization and causality, and thus perhaps causing the eye to squint. Illeity, in an extremely specific way, is excluded from being, but orders it in relation to a responsibility, in relation to its pure passivity, a pure 'susceptibility': an obligation to answer preceding any questioning which would recall a prior commitment, extending beyond any question, any problem and any representation, and where obedience precedes the order that has furtively infiltrated the soul that obeys. Neither expected nor welcomed: the contrary would still be a near activity, an assumption; a 'traumatizing' order coming from a past that was never present, since my responsibility is answerable for the freedom of others.

A responsibility which, before the discourse revolving around what is said, is probably the essence of language.

There will certainly be an objection to this: if, between the soul and the Absolute, there can exist a relation different to thematization, does not the fact of speaking and thinking about it at this very moment, the fact of wrapping it up in our dialectic, mean that thought, language and dialectic have sovereign power over this Relation?

But the language of thematization that we are using at the moment has perhaps been made possible only by this Relation, and is subservient to it.

## 9 REVELATION IN THE JEWISH TRADITION

### I THE CONTENT AND ITS STRUCTURE

#### 1 *The Problem*

I think that our fundamental question in these lectures concerns less the content ascribed to revelation than the actual fact – a metaphysical one – called the Revelation. This fact is also the first and most important content revealed in any revelation. From the outset this revelation is alleged to be unusual, extra-ordinary, linking the world in which we live to what would no longer be of this world. How is it thinkable? What model do we use? Suddenly, by opening a few books, there would enter into a positive world, open in its consistency and steadfastness to perception, to enjoyment and to thought, a world given over in its reflections, metaphors and signs to reading and science, truths that come from elsewhere – but from where? – and dated according to a 'chronology' called holy History! And, as in the case of the Jews, a holy History against which stands, without a break in continuity, a 'History for historians', a profane History! That the holy History of the Christian West is, in its greater part, the ancient history of a people of today, retaining a still mysterious unity, despite its dispersion among the nations – or despite its integration into these nations – is undoubtedly what constitutes the originality of Israel and its relation to the Revelation: of its reading of the Bible, or its forgetting of the Bible, or of the memories or the remorse that remain from this very act of forgetting. Against the transfiguration into myth that threatens, with degradation or sublimation, this 'far and distant past' of the Revelation, is the surprising present existence of Judaism, a human collectivity, albeit small and continuously sapped by persecution, weakened by half-heartedness, temptations and