**A *Tembel* Hat in the Streets of Nazareth: Paul Gauthier’s Israeli Experience**

**Abstract:**

The French Paul Gauthier (1914 - 2002) was a former theology professor who, after a short period as a *prêtre-ouvrier* in Marseille, decided in 1955 to settle in Nazareth and practice his working apostolate there. For the next twelve years, and until his abrupt departure shortly after the Six Day War in 1967, Israel became Gauthier’s home.

Some years after his arrival, Gauthier was invited to the Second Vatican Council by the archbishop of the Galilee. There Gauthier led the group the “Church of the Poor,” which aimed to bring the issue of poverty and pastoral service to the forefront of Council discussions.

Gauthier spent his years in Israel between two physically close but culturally and politically distant worlds. On the one hand, he lived and worked with the vulnerable Arab population of Nazareth. On the other, he was in close contact with Israel’s new Jewish society, which greatly aroused his curiosity. In addition to his friendly contact with the Israeli civilian and military authorities, who would help him foster his cooperative for Arab housing, he was attracted by the *kibbutz* lifestyle, and was especially moved by the philosophy of the Zionist thinker and pioneer Aaron David Gordon.

Gauthier believed that his experience in Nazareth and Israel, where he saw an interchange of many worlds, could shed light on the worker-priest apostolate, and provide a model for priestly spirituality in a working-class environment, in its various aspects. This paper analyses the influence of the ‘Israel experience’ in Paul Gauthier’s theology.

1. Introduction: Paul Gauthier -The spiritual father of Liberation Theology

While living in Nazareth, where he spent eleven years (1956-1967) the now forgotten figure of the theologian and priest Paul Gauthier (La Flèche 1914 – Marseille 2002), was invited to the Second Vatican Council by Georges Hakim, archbishop of the Galilee. There, Gauthier led the group the “Church of the Poor,” which aimed to bring the issue of poverty and a working apostolate to the forefront of Council discussions.[[1]](#footnote-1) Thanks to his religious charisma, his deep social commitment, and his relentless work behind the scenes at the Council, by the end of the 1960s, Gauthier’s message would inspire the nascent Latin American liberation theology movement, with its “preferential option for the poor,”[[2]](#footnote-2) i.e. a doctrine that places the figure of the poor and the oppressed as the historical subject of theology, and the struggle for his or her liberation as the goal of theopolitical action.[[3]](#footnote-3) This concept began to permeate Latin American theology in the Second Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), a pivotal event for the Latin American Catholicism that took place in Medellin, Colombia in August 1968.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Gauthier inspired the emergence of this new theological-political trend, through at least two channels. The first, the personal experience of one of its founders, the Argentinian Enrique Dussel (born in 1934), who in his youth spent two years (1959-1961) as one of the disciples of Gauthier in Nazareth. Even after more than half a century and many other experiences, in the introduction to a recent compilation of writings Dussel would recall those years in Israel, as he did in many autobiographical references all along his career, as fundamental and formative: “I founded all my works (starting with *El Humanismo Semita*, which I began writing in Paris in 1961, back from Israel) on that experience.”[[5]](#footnote-5) For him, the period he spent with Gauthier in Israel was “the fullest” of his life:[[6]](#footnote-6)

All what liberation theology will theoretically express, I experienced in advance with Paul in Nazareth. The option for the poor was his obsession, and the criticisms that will be thrown at us liberation theologians in the 1970s will fall under the weight of the judgment of history. The sacred experience of this “option for the poor” is essential to Christianity, and I discovered it in Nazareth in 1959.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The encounter between Gauthier and Dussel in the context of Nazareth and Israel changed the latter’s system of thought: from that point on Dussel began to see the world “from below,”[[8]](#footnote-8) it opened his mind to the “discovery” of the poor and the oppressed[[9]](#footnote-9) -perspective that will become the main innovation of liberation theology. In opposition to the classic Catholic theology, which did not make differences between believers from different social classes, liberation theology sought to foster an affirmative action for the poor.[[10]](#footnote-10) One of the central exponents of liberation theology, the Brazilian Clodovis Boff explained this difference in the following words: “it must be noted that the poor in Medellin [the abovementioned Latin American Episcopal Conference] are treated as a ‘subject’. [This approach] was a novelty in relation to the assistentialist [Christian] view of the past, which saw the poor reduced to an ‘object’ of care.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

The second channel of influence of Gauthier’s message on liberation theology was his participation at Vatican II. One of the central liberation theologians, the Peruvian Gustavo Gutierrez, placed Vatican II as one of the starting points of this new trend:

Liberation theology (which is an expression of the right of the poor to think out their own faith) has not been an automatic result of this situation [of the poor of Latin America becoming agents of their own destiny] and the changes it has undergone. It represents rather an attempt to accept the invitation of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council and interpret this sign of the times by reflecting on it critically in the light of God’s word.[[12]](#footnote-12)

One of the main reasons for the strong footprint that Vatican II left on liberation theology is that in the Council a special focus was put on the issue of poverty and the poor. This social turn of the Church was possible, among other things, due to the intervention of Paul Gauthier and the group the “Church of the Poor,” an informal group that began to meet in parallel to the sessions of the Council. The words with which the French Cardinal Pierre Gerlier (1880-1965), archbishop of Lyon, opened the first meeting of the group on October 26, 1962, reflect its aim and spirit:

The duty of the Church in our age is to adapt itself in the most responsive way to the situation created by the suffering of so many human beings and by the mistaken idea, fostered by certain appearances suggesting that these human beings are not a primary concern for the Church…If I am not mistaken, it seems that no room was allowed for this, at least directly, in the program of the Council. … We must insist with the authorities that it be raised. Everything else is in danger of remaining ineffective if this problem is not studied and dealt with. … The Church must be seen for what it is: the Mother of the Poor, whose first concern is to give her children bread for both body and soul, as John XXIII himself said on September 11, 1962: ‘The Church is and wishes to be the Church of all, and particularly the Church of the poor.’[[13]](#footnote-13)

One of the sources of inspiration of the group was the experience that Gauthier and his small fraternity, “Les *Compagnons et Comagnes de Jésus Charpentier”* [The Companions of Jesus the Carpenter] had in Nazareth, out of which he wrote in 1963 *Jesus, l’Eglise et les pauvres*, a document that was distributed to the fathers of the council by initiative of the archbishop of Galilee Hakim, and the bishop of Tournai (Belgium), Charles-Marie Himmer.[[14]](#footnote-14) More than fifty bishops, who felt identified with that document, attended the meetings of the group.[[15]](#footnote-15) In addition, five hundred conciliar bishops signed the petition that came out of it demanding for reforms of the Church including the renewal of the worker-priest movement,[[16]](#footnote-16) and “signs of goodwill” of the bishops to give up wealth and titles for a more humble lifestyle.[[17]](#footnote-17) Although this petition had a cool reception by the hierarchy and was ultimately forgotten,[[18]](#footnote-18) some echoes of the message of the group “the Church of the Poor” did make their way to the Council’s final documents, in the form of some, albeit marginal, references on the issue of poverty and the Church (for example, *Lumen Gentium* 8).[[19]](#footnote-19)

The region where the message of Paul Gauthier and the group “the Church of the Poor” had the greatest impact was in the Latin American post-conciliar theology, being that many of the most active members of the group, besides Gauthier, were bishops from that continent. Among them was for example Helder Pessôa Câmara, then auxiliary bishop of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and one of the precursors of the “*Comunidades Eclesiais de Base*-Base Ecclesial Communities,” which began as a form of local democratic social organization of citizens at working class neighborhoods in the spirit of the Gospel, and became in the 1970s, the breeding ground of liberation theology.[[20]](#footnote-20) Câmara’s notes and letters during the Council reveal his proximity to Gauthier and his fraternity.[[21]](#footnote-21) Another prominent example is the Argentinian bishop Alberto Devoto, who, following the work of Gauthier’s group at the Council, in which Devoto recalled “having the bliss of participating,”[[22]](#footnote-22) will foster the Commission “Poverty of the Church” at the Medellin Episcopal Conference in 1968,[[23]](#footnote-23) out of which emerged the first formal articulations of the new theology.

However, despite the scope of his message, in the literature on the Council the figure of Gauthier is usually brought briefly, enigmatically and in an epic tone. Here is one example:

Established in Nazareth from 1958, he had founded there the *Compagnons et Compagnes de Jésus Charpentier* recognized by the local Melkite bishop. Mons. Georges Hakim (Saint John of Acre), as well as by his Patriarch Maximus IV Saigh. In a cave in Nazareth, located on the side of Schneller's hill, with a group of young people, he went to pray and meditate. In a way, the movement called the "Church of the poor" was being created, finding itself at the beginning of what would later become the "theology of liberation."[[24]](#footnote-24)

Neither this nor other sources provide details on the content of the experience from which that message emerged, even though Gauthier’s writings and interventions around the Council are full of those details. In them Gauthier repeatedly remarks that Nazareth must not be taken as an isolated Catholic holy place, but as a city inserted in the modern State of Israel. Nazareth and Israel constituted for him a complementary religious experience. This is how he explains the origins of his project in the Holy Land in *Jesus, l’Eglise et les pauvres*, the document distributed to the fathers of the Council:

In order to be in communion with Jesus the worker, this priest [Gauthier], asked his bishop and obtained permission to live and work among the little ones. He thought that Nazareth, in the modern and very social Israel, would be a privileged place to deepen the spiritual bases of an apostolic life in a working milieu, for the evangelization of the poor and the establishment of the Church in the world of labor. The Melkite Archbishop of Galilee, Mgr Georges Hakim, offered him to come to his diocese. … Thus, was born the Fraternity of the Companions of Jesus Carpenter.[[25]](#footnote-25)

In the next pages, we will dive into Gauthier’s years in Israel in all their complexity, in order to shed new light on this unknown chapter of the entangled histories of the young state of Israel, Vatican II and the Latin American liberation theology.

1. **A charismatic figure within a complex reality**

The lectures that the French priest and theologian Paul Gauthier gave after his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1952 became so popular that they were recorded and reproduced, accompanied by the colored slides Gauthier took during the trip, in several towns and villages near Dijon, where Gauthier worked as a theology teacher at the Grand Séminaire. Gauthier’s charisma and visual sensibility attracted the attention of a cameraman, who suggested to Gauthier that they travel to the Holy Land together and make a film about the life of Jesus Christ. Gauthier, who at that point (1954) had abandoned his career as a teacher to become a worker-priest in Jacques Loew’s mission of *prêtres-ouvriers* in Marseille,[[26]](#footnote-26) saw this opportunity as an extension of the working apostolate he had chosen for himself, since, as he said, “more workers attend cinema than Mass.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

They departed in November 1955 for what Gauthier thought would be a short absence but in fact turned out to be a long and life-changing experience. When work on the film had finished, he decided not to return to France but to become a worker-priest in Nazareth, while exploring the new Jewish society of Israel, which greatly aroused his curiosity. Thus, for the next eleven years, Nazareth in particular and Israel in general would become his home. While he had set out to search for traces of the life of Jesus for a film, Gauthier ended up “incarnating” him in his own life.

Gauthier first spent a couple of months in Nazareth in 1956, and after a short return to Paris, he settled in the Galilean city in 1957. Soon after his arrival, he became a recognized figure in the local landscape, inspiring the sympathy and respect of both the Arab population of Nazareth and the Jewish authorities. Even the Israeli daily press showed an increasing interest in him. For example, an article from December 1958 reads:

The priest walks through the main street of the city. Dressed in khakiclothes and a tembel hat, he goes to his workplace. … When the tembel hat of Father Paul is seen in the main street of Nazareth, dozens of hands rise up to greet him. He is known in Nazareth as an affable man, capable of resolving any conflict peacefully.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Gauthier’s choice of wearing khaki clothes and a *tembel* hat (a round brimless hat), both strong hallmarks of the Jewish pioneers, was a statement that would differentiate him from both the many Christian clergymen living and working around religious institutions in Nazareth, and the Arab population of the city, most of which opted for a more traditional clothing style.

Nazareth in the 1950s was a city mired in social crisis. The Israeli-Arab War (1948) had left Israel’s Arab population in a fragile situation. Many Arabs, especially residents of rural villages, had fled or were forced to leave their homes and became refugees in the neighboring Arab countries or in large Arab towns within Israel. Nazareth took in a great share of internal refugees, provoking the emergence of a social crisis. This is how Gauthier described the situation in thedocument he wrote for Vatican II:

“Up until 1948, it had been a village of 12,000 inhabitants, a trading center for the villages of Galilee, with its *souks* (Arab market places), its donkey markets, cobblers’ shops, its carpenters … Suddenly, the Judeo-Arab War provoked an influx of refugees to this small and holy town, where everyone, whether Christian or Muslim, feels protected by a maternal presence. In eight days, the city had doubled its population. People crowded in everywhere: in the schools, at the Casa Nova Hospice, in the slums, in caves, in stables, in chicken coops, in pig sties, not to mention the barracks and hastily built shantytowns. Churches and religious communities, in their generosity, do everything they can to help these refugees, and distribute donations received mostly from Belgium. But how to provide them with decent work and housing?[[29]](#footnote-29)

This crisis strongly contrasted the economic and social situation of the Jewish population at that time. On the one hand, the first decade of the state of Israel was characterized by an accelerated economic development.[[30]](#footnote-30) Gauthier even wrote enthusiastically on this development in the issue prepared to the fathers of the Council, as an remarkable example of the redeeming aspect of labor:

[The Jews] Returned to their land and constituted as a strong, equipped and armed nation, they received consideration and esteem. … Back in their land, the work and the workers' organization allowed the resurrection of the state of Israel, which was judged to be able to support only 500,000 inhabitants. Today it feeds almost 3,000,000 and milk production and eggs shows surplus.[[31]](#footnote-31)

However, the truth is that this economic development hardly reached the Arab population, which became the poorest sector in the country. For example, a headline from a daily Israeli newspaper from October 1958 reads:

“Nazareth workers are struggling to prevent hunger from their families”

The financial situation of most Nazareth workers is deteriorating in view of the paucity of sources of employment in the city and the traffic license policy that does not allow them to leave the city and look for a job. Many of these workers are forced to work in public work projects that do not guarantee their families the minimum living.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Nevertheless, the economic gap between Jews and Arabs in Israel concerned Gauthier less than the gap opened between the properties and living conditions of the clergy of the numerous religious institutions established in Nazareth, and those of the general population, in “a city which should shine with all the glory of the Gospel, to be a home of social justice and peace.”[[33]](#footnote-33) The denunciation of this dissonance between the Christian spirit of care for the poor and the material conditions of the Church would become one of his strongest agendas at the Council.

From the time of his arrival, he dedicated all his efforts to finding a solution for the work and housing crisis he had encountered in that city. In his *Les mains que voici: journal de Nazareth* (published in 1964), Gauthier describes the first steps of the enterprise that had begun in 1956:

After three months spent trying to think of diverse solutions, it seems that a workers’ cooperative for building houses could provide a solution. With my friend Gurevitch, an attorney at law, we have built the legal structure, and with the approval of Mgr. Hakim, we have assembled about forty workers. A committee has been elected, comprised of workers, myself among them. The project has been closely examined and will permit the idea of communal social action to spread in the people’s consciousness.[[34]](#footnote-34)

1. **The housing cooperative: a bridge between Jews and Arabs**

It did not take Gauthier long to understand the workings of the young state’s political apparatus and identify the different officials who would help him execute his project. Directly following the War of Independence, and up until 1966, a separate military regime was put in place to deal with the Arab population. Gauthier soon succeeded in creating personal communications channels, and “conquered the hearts of both the military regime officials and the representatives of the various government departments in Nazareth,” as was written in an article in the Israeli press on his behalf.[[35]](#footnote-35) For example, in the *Journal de Nazareth,* Gauthier recalls a friendly visit from representatives of the Israeli government and the Histadrut (the national trade union), who had come to Nazareth to ask for Gauthier’s advice on how to improve the living conditions of the Arab citizens, and listened to what he had to say “with surprising attention and good will.”[[36]](#footnote-36) And indeed, shortly after that meeting in 1957, the Israeli civilian and military authorities gave their accord to the creation of the cooperative, and promised their financial and technical support.[[37]](#footnote-37) Thanks to Gauthier’s intervention, it would be the first time the State of Israel invested money in Arab construction, financing three-fifths of the houses’ cost outright, and giving long term loans for the payment of the rest, together with donations Gauthier collected in Europe.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Gauthier was well aware of the polarities of Israeli reality and politics. He expressed as much in the “State of Israel” entry he wrote for the French Catholic Encyclopedia published in 1966: “The State of Israel presents particular characteristics, which can be summarized by the following four antinomies: peaceful and belligerent, occidental and oriental, capitalist and socialist, democratic and Jewish.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

On the one hand, working and living among the marginalized Arab workers in Nazareth, Gauthier witnessed the effects of the military regime on the Arab population. Nevertheless, when describing his experience in Nazareth both in his writings[[40]](#footnote-40) and in the interviews he gave to the Israeli press, he found it important to remark upon the “goodwill” of the Jewish leadership toward the Arab population, and saw his cooperative as not just a solution for the work and housing problem, but also as a bridge that would put an end to the suspicion and hostility between Jews and Arabs in Israel. As he says in an interview for a Hebrew newspaper from April 1959:

At Christmas [1957], the cooperative received the map with the land plot demarcated for the construction of housing. “Indeed, it was a nice Christmas present,” smiles Father Gauthier. “However, despite the readiness and willingness of all the relevant ministries, especially that of the military regime, to help us realize our initiative, many [Arabs] were still reticent and suspicious. … Indeed, even I, ever the optimist, did not believe that things would start happening at such an expedient pace. And here you are today, witnessing the magnificent two-family homes erected on this mountain. This is a good beginning for a big enterprise, but moreover, this housing will put an end to the distrust, fear and baseless naysaying among the Israeli Arabs,” Gauthier promised.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Throughout his life in Nazareth, Gauthier saw himself as a mediator between Jews and Arabs in Israel, helping bring about peace between the two people at the local level.

1. **An apostolate of poverty**

As mentioned previously, Gauthier settled in Nazareth while in search of the traces of the life of Jesus. Spiritually nourished by the religious experience of Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916), the French Catholic priest who traveled to Nazareth and the Middle East to imitate Jesus’ life of poverty and manual labor,[[42]](#footnote-42) Gauthier had placed these two principles as the pillars of his theology.

First of all, he made the decision to live in poverty, and demanded the same commitment to poverty from all Catholics, directing his critique specifically at the influential clergy of Nazareth, many of whom were “tragically unwilling to apply pontifical directives on fair salaries,”[[43]](#footnote-43) despite owning large properties. For Gauthier, poverty should be a precondition for any missionary work:

Christ has pronounced this prophecy: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). But before he spoke, here, in Nazareth, Jesus wanted to live and suffer with the little people, working at the mercy of difficult employers, in order to save humanity from sin and give it hope. How might we hear this Psalm and transmit the invitation of Christ to the damned of this earth or those crushed by the sin of the world? Should we not take the humblest place in the harsh human condition?”[[44]](#footnote-44)

In Nazareth, Gauthier strictly adopted the principle of poverty as his lifestyle. He asked that his salary be food alone, but when the cooperative fellows insisted, he would only accept to be paid the bare minimum.[[45]](#footnote-45) He gave up the apartment offered to him at the cooperative to a large family who had been living in an ancient cave in the Schneller Quarter in Nazareth (a piece of land under German Christian ownership), and made his residence instead in an extremely humble hut. A description of Gauthier’s hut is provided by a journalist who visited him in 1966: “The hut, made out of bits of tin and tree branches, is almost empty of furniture. It has only two beds and a bookcase full of philosophy books in different languages. Here lives Father Paul Gauthier. … ‘Jesus Christ too lived in a miserable hut,’ he says.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

In an earlier article from 1958 another journalist wrote that the hut did not even have electricity or running water.[[47]](#footnote-47) The cave where the family had resided was transformed by Gauthier into a meeting and prayer space for his small group of disciples, a few young European and Latin American Catholics, members of *Les compagnons de Jesus Charpentier.* In May 1967, only a few weeks before the war, an article about Gauthier and his group had appeared in the mainstream daily newspaper *Maariv*:

Father Gauthier does not wear a cassock. He puts it on only when leading prayers, every day at six, exclusively for the disciples living with him. They walk to an ancient cave, twenty meters away from their cabin. … [The cave] is lit up by two small oil lamps and contains a wooden table as well as two or three ritual articles. The door to the cave was hand made by Gauthier out of wooden panels taken from the housing construction sites where he himself used to work as a builder. This is how he still views himself now, even though these days—he says apologetically—he spends most of his time writing books.[[48]](#footnote-48)

1. An apostolate of manual labor

Indeed, despite his relatively advanced age by the time of his arrival (forty-two), his lack of training, which caused him to endure much physical pain while working, and the “oppressive” Israeli heat,[[49]](#footnote-49) Gauthier spent most of his years in Israel as a manual laborer. Manual work was for him the most profound religious experience, an activity which allowed him to feel as if he were physically incarnating Jesus. His *Journal de Nazareth* is full of descriptions of the spiritual experience of labor, such as:

As I am mixing the concrete, I see four companions carrying heavy stones. They are 150 meters lower down and must climb up three terraces of five to ten meters each. The concrete is finished, I must join the stone bearers. I go down to where the team is. There it is, the pile of big stones. Each weighs about 50 kg. Do I just lift them? A comrade solves my dilemma: he places one on my shoulder. I may have placed it wrong, because I get tired fast. Arriving to the half-way point, I have to muster all of my strength. I think of those Jerusalem haulers burdened with loads three times heavier than this, and of the One whose back carried, along with the Cross, the sins of the world. Are not the comrades ahead of me, carrying stones heavier than mine, a living testimony of Jesus’ burden that is earthly sin? This meditation allows me to get to the top. Undoubtedly, this is the best Way of the Cross I have been given the opportunity to experience. Is it me who carries the stones with Jesus or Jesus who carries them with me?[[50]](#footnote-50)

Through this experience of hard manual labor, Gauthier felt the two thousand years separating him from the father of Christianity disappear. That was, according to his own testimony, the answer he used to give to his fellow workers when asked why someone like him, who certainly had other options in life, would choose this kind of work.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Gauthier saw collective labor as an act of religious love. For him, the spiritual meaning of collective work is based on the idea that the individual effort is a potential relief for one’s fellow workers. By taking the heaviest stone, he says, one reduces the suffering of one’s comrades. Thus, for humanity to take hard work upon itself is an act of brotherly love.[[52]](#footnote-52) For working people, as for Jesus before them, “work is a redemptory sacrifice.”[[53]](#footnote-53) That is why, Gauthier says in an attempt to promote a working apostolate among the Catholic clergy, the task of the priest is to offer this sacrifice to others as God’s gift.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Besides the physical effort that makes work a religious sacrifice, Gauthier also noted the potential of the meditative dimension of manual work. Monotonous and intellectually unchallenging, it leaves man’s mind free for contemplation and prayer. In his own words:

The work of digging is considered to be the basest trade that can be accomplished by the basest of imbeciles, provided he has strong enough muscles. That leaves the mind unoccupied during work. But very quickly, the mind finds itself engaged, buried in your arms, your back, in your hands, in this earth you dig, you bring up to the surface.[[55]](#footnote-55)

It was during these long hours of digging that Gauthier claimed to have reached the highest religious and social insights, which would shape the theology he would write throughout his years in Israel and disseminate at Vatican II. For example, he narrates the occasion when, while digging a trench, Psalm 130, *De Profundis*, appeared on his lips and revealed itself to him in a new light. Although the trench reminded him of a tomb, he suddenly understood that the abyss from which the author of the Psalm is calling God at its beginning is not the shadow of death, as it is traditionally interpreted. “No: the abyss from the bottom of which I cried out to You, o Lord, is this depth of the misery of my digger brothers, the lowest of the laborers, the damned of the Earth. *De Profundis* had never taken on such a meaning.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

Consequently, the last verse of the Psalm, which is usually translated as: “And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities,” is translated by Gauthier as “He will liberate humanity from its injustices.”[[57]](#footnote-57) In Gauthier’s contemporary scenario, wherein Israel is no longer the oppressed and the weak, humanity takes the place of the Biblical Israel, and social injustices that of personal sins. At this point in his philosophy, this is not necessarily a political statement, but the religious aspiration of imitating Jesus in his carrying of the burden of the Cross, along with the burden of human suffering.

1. The kibbutz – a source of sublime wisdom

As noted previously, during his years in Israel Gauthier established close relations with Jews, relations that went much further than pragmatic dealings related to his workers’ cooperative. He studied Hebrew while staying and working in kibbutzim (collective agrarian settlements) and showed interest in the *kibbutznik* lifestyle. He found in the kibbutz a social corrective to the unjust economic and social system dominating the modern world, which was responsible for marginalizing and oppressing the people for whom he claimed to be speaking up. As he wrote in his *Journal de Nazareth*:

Certainly, from what I have learned so far, the kibbutzim represent an extraordinary accomplishment in contemporary human society. This way of life and work breaks with ordinary custom: communal life, the suppression of salary and money, communitarian work! All this seems utopic, impossible. And yet, there are nearly three hundred exemplars of it in Israel, comprised of a total of around a hundred thousand men and women. […] There were the kibbutzim which paved the way for the creation of Israel; they fashioned a new type of man, remarkable for his patience, his action and altruism, like Ben Gurion, and they continue to sustain the pioneer spirit in this country.[[58]](#footnote-58)

I find this statement ironic, since it is well known that Ben Gurion, whom Gauthier presents here as the prototype of this Zionist remarkable “new man,” is the same politician who as prime minister strongly rejected and opposed every initiative attempting to abolish the military regime upon the Arab population,[[59]](#footnote-59) a regime which Gauthier witnessed daily. This dissonance makes me think that Gauthier lived his years in Israel much more embedded under a messianic-eschatological consciousness rather than driven by a real political-historical connection with his surroundings.

Even in a time when the Catholic Church targeted atheism as one of its biggest concerns, as formulated in the conciliar declaration *Gaudium et Spes,* 19: “Thus atheism must be accounted among the most serious problems of this age,”[[60]](#footnote-60) Gauthier did not hesitate to voice his admiration for the kibbutz in his interventions at the Council. For example, in a lecture from September 28, 1965, Gauthier warned on the dangers of a crusade directed to Marxism and atheism, arguing that although many kibbutzim in Israel define themselves in those terms, couples and families live there a life of fidelity and love. From there we learn, he added, that the spirit of fraternity and solidarity, exists also among humanist atheists.[[61]](#footnote-61) “In the kibbutzim,” he wrote to the Fathers of the Council, “there is no exploitation of man by man, but a certain wisdom, a more human way of life.”[[62]](#footnote-62) Moreover, Gauthier identified in this new Jewish structure, a fulfillment of the “Christian” values presented in the New Testament and put into practice by the early Christian communities in first century Judea:

[In the kibbutzim] the Jews had abolished the system of wages, applying more generally the ways of the monks in their monasteries, and understanding the value of work just like the first community of Jerusalem. They share their goods and their work, as it is written in Acts 4:32–34: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had… there were no needy persons among them.”[[63]](#footnote-63)

It is clear that his experiences working and living in the kibbutzim drove Gauthier to the conclusion that Christians should learn from these Jews how to fulfill the Christian beatitudes regarding social issues.[[64]](#footnote-64) His aspiration was for Catholic priests to learn from this new Jewish way of life, and to use it as inspiration for a new apostolate oriented toward the vast majority of modern-day society which, being largely secular, would no longer accept clericalism and paternalism.[[65]](#footnote-65) He thought that this experience could provide tools for worker-priests serving in working-class neighborhoods such as the Paris suburbs.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Hence, he made an agreement with Kibbutz Ginosar, on the northern shore of the Lake Tiberias, and began bringing over groups of Christian volunteers—members of the fraternity he founded*—*to work in the different manufacturing and agricultural branches for a period of six months side by side with kibbutz members “in great friendship,”[[67]](#footnote-67) while studying Hebrew in the kibbutz *ulpan* (the Israeli system for adult Hebrew learning). The success of this partnership eventually went so far as to reach the ears of Pope John XXIII who in 1960 delivered a special greeting to the kibbutz for their hospitality toward the many Christian pilgrims who had sojourned there, as reported in the Israeli press:

Pope John XXIII delivered a personal greeting to Kibbutz Ginosar today through a special emissary, the priest Pierre [*sic*] Gauthier of Nazareth. In it, the Pope wished to thank the administration of the kibbutz for the wonderful hospitality they had extended to a group of pilgrims from a special Christian fraternity whose members advocate fulfilling the ideals of Christianity through manual labor. Dozens of pilgrims belonging to this fraternity have recently been hosted in Ginosar. These pilgrims continue to be in close contact with Kibbutz Ginosar.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Staying in kibbutzim also allowed Gauthier to connect with another central aspect of the Israeli experience. While Nazareth allowed him to feel close to Jesus, the kibbutzim offered him the connection with Biblical nature and landscapes. The kibbutzim he visited in the Jezreel Valley, on the shores of Lake Tiberias, and in the Negev desert provided Gauthier with living proof that “the Holy Land is not a relic. It is a reality.”[[69]](#footnote-69) And it was a reality that reverberated with Biblical references not only in his mind, but also for his fellow Jewish workers. This is reflected, among other places, in a paragraph from his journal in which Gauthier narrates his day working as a shepherd in Kibbutz Mishmar HaNegev:

In the afternoon, at three o’clock, I get to lead the sheep to the desert with Moumousse [the person in charge of the flock, a former teacher in France]. In a thick cloud of dust raised by the one thousand and two hundred legs, we head away from the kibbutz. The sheep glean seeds or bits of straw along the way. After an hour or two of walking, we stop and Moumousse tells me about the topography and the archeology of this land formerly walked by Abraham and Jacob. He takes from his bag a Hebrew Bible from which he comments on the passages referring to this area and to the flock.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Of course, the flock and the shepherd are central motifs in the Christian tradition, a fact that charges Gauthier’s experience with unambiguous messianic overtones:

I quote to him the passages from the Gospel about the Good Shepherd, the sheep without a shepherd … he knows these texts but interprets them in a naturalistic sense. We share a piece of bread. A sheep called Kouki approaches familiarly to partake of our snack.

As the shepherd helps the lost sheep to rejoin its flock, reflects Gauthier, we too need to be prepared to receive the lost flock of Israel with love when it finally finds its way home.[[71]](#footnote-71) This reflection hints at hidden signs of a traditional Christian aspiration of converting all the Jews, which he probably could not help, despite feeling so comfortable among them, or perhaps because of that.[[72]](#footnote-72)

In the kibbutzim, Gauthier was exposed to a new approach to reading the Bible, different to the one his religious background had taught him. Gauthier noticed that the *kibbutzniks*, like most modern Jews, read the Bible as a historical, “profane” book.[[73]](#footnote-73) And indeed, the Bible played a central role in the Zionist ethos. It was, for the founding fathers of the Zionist movement, not only an instrument for galvanizing the internal unity of the Jewish people and motivating them to engage with Zionism, but also a weapon in the struggle for the land itself.[[74]](#footnote-74) The historical dimension of the Bible, emphasized in modern Israel, is what gave the Jewish people, in their own eyes, the right to the land, and the justification for the Jewish return to it.

1. **Gordon and the redeeming nature of work**

It is not by chance that the principles we presented here—the centrality of manual work and an unmediated connection with the soil and the Biblical landscapes—were the two elements that nurtured Gauthier’s religious experience in the years he spent in Israel. These were also the pillars on which the Jewish nationalist ethos that emerged by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries was built, and which shaped the character of the nascent State of Israel that Gauthier encountered on his arrival. These pillars were best formulated and developed by the Zionist philosopher and pioneer Aaron David Gordon, “the theoretician” of organic Jewish nationalism.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Aaron David Gordon (Podolia, today in Ukraine, 1856 – Degania, today in Israel, 1922) grew up in a traditional Jewish family but was attracted to secular studies and Zionist ideas. In 1904, at the age of forty-eight, he immigrated to Israel and—as a worker, a philosopher and a writer—became a symbolic figure of the Jewish settlement at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Gordon called for the sanctification of labor through the renewal of manual Jewish labor, not only as part of the Zionist nationalist project, but most importantly as an individual means of redemption.[[76]](#footnote-76) For Gordon, physical agricultural labor was a means to achieve humanity’s desired return to nature, and the thing that would enable the individual and the nation to reconnect with their most profound source of life.[[77]](#footnote-77) He succeeded in finding in physical work the romanticism that so many young men and women who had left their lives in the diaspora in Europe to build a new world in the Land of Israel, only to be disheartened by the extremely harsh conditions prevailing in the land at the turn of the century, could not. In the face of despair, Gordon found a source of hope in manual labor as a way for Jewish people to connect with this land of their supposed ancestors. At the same time, he emphatically negated the diaspora, which, according to him, was responsible for the state of atrophy in which Jewish existence found itself in his day. In a letter from 1909, published in a compilation named *Letters of a Worker from Palestine—*mentioned by Gauthier in his Journal of Nazareth, Gordon writes:

Listen, my brothers and sisters, to my dream, and remember that you too have dreamed like me. In my dream—I come to the land. … Remember, though, that beneath the ruins [of diaspora existence] there is a hot whispering coal, hidden from the ravages of that life, and the spirit of the land blows to revive it. … And I shake it off strongly, with all my might, I shake that life off myself. And I start everything from the beginning, everything from the beginning. From the A,B,C my life begins again; I do not change, I do not mend, I start everything anew. And the first thing that opens my heart to life, the likes of which I have yet to know, is work. Not work to make a living, or work as a *mitzvah*. But one’s life work, work from which shines forth a new light, a light which I have seen, a light which is one of the deepest roots of life. And I work ... Hence, whenever I continue to work, to toil, to suffer – no drop of blood, no effort of my strength or of my mind is lost, because every drop of blood is a flicker of fire, and every effort of strength and mind— a spark of resurrection for my soul.[[78]](#footnote-78)

As previously seen in Gauthier, we have here a description of manual work as a religious experience, capable of providing redemption to the land, the people and the individual. However, contrary to the Christian’s view, for Gordon this work has a prominent nationalistic element. Work leads to redemption only when it is performed by the Jewish people on the land to which their soul is inextricably linked. Thus, it is not only toil but also, and perhaps primarily, the ancient history of the Jewish people that links them to the land and gives them rights to it.[[79]](#footnote-79) Gordon’s thought had clear political content that was either missed or dismissed by Gauthier.

Another element that attracted Gauthier to Gordon is the religious, mystic tone he utilized in his writings, which in Gauthier’s eyes contrasted with the secular-Marxist atmosphere he found in most of the kibbutzim he visited (except the Shabbat he spent in the religious kibbutz Yavne, experience to which he dedicated several pages in his diary, confirming the strong impression it left on him).[[80]](#footnote-80)

It is not surprising then, that Paul Gauthier was deeply moved by the ideas of this Jewish thinker, of whom he had become aware of when, during a visit to Kibbutz Degania— the first kibbutz in Israel, established in 1909 on the southern shore of Lake Tiberias, a region which, in Gauthier’s words, “was nothing but swamps and malaria, and yet forty years later is an earthly paradise”[[81]](#footnote-81)—he had been taken to the Gordon Museum.

Like Gordon, Paul Gauthier had also moved to Israel at a relatively advanced age to experience physical toil among poor laborers. As mentioned previously, he also describes the physical effort of work as a source of religious joy and personal redemption:

Today, the work has been particularly hard. It was necessary to carry stones, to handle the shovel and the pick, to serve the concrete. The heat was overwhelming. I find myself, tonight, broken, all the painful muscles ... and yet a great joy has sustained me all day.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Gauthier found in Gordon’s philosophy a suitable articulation of his own romantic ideas about labor. However, there is a significant difference between the two, a difference that perhaps speaks more broadly of the divergent ways in which Judaism and Christianity view the essence of religious duty. For Gordon, it is labor itself which provides man with the opportunity to live a life in the image of God, in the sense of “being partners with God in Creation.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Gauthier agrees with Gordon that work means a partnership with God in creation, as well as redemption for humans and for the land.

However, Gauthier felt that, while containing some of the truth, Gordon’s words “are inexact from a theological point of view.”[[84]](#footnote-84) This is because, while Gordon emphatically insisted on the material and spiritual dimensions of work as being one and inseparable,[[85]](#footnote-85) Gauthier insisted in presenting them as two different spheres of redemption: temporal and eternal, earthly and divine:

These two orders are different and there is an atheist Marxist interpretation of work that is no more than a caricature of true redemption. However, there is also a Christian sense of work, which through Christ becomes redemptive. If the two orders are different, they are not separated. In the earthly, temporal and material sphere, through work man can emerge out of misery. There is in work an accomplishment of man. Work allows man not only to provide for his daily bread, but to become more human and to participate in human solidarity by helping build the earthly city. For the Jews, this point of view is powerful and clear.

In the spiritual, eternal, celestial sphere, work allows man to collaborate with the Creator, who had commanded “conquer and possess the earth,” to complete creation. Work permits man to redeem his pain through the offer of fatigue and sorrow that comes with toil. Work permits man to communicate with the Carpenter of Nazareth and through him with all his brothers and the Father who “works endlessly,” as well as with the Creative Spirit. That is wonderful.[[86]](#footnote-86)

In the earthly sphere, the accelerated development of the State of Israel is a vivid example of the power of work to “help build the earthly city,” which can bring temporal and material redemption to those who, like the Jewish pioneers, are fully invested in it. However, there is, for Gauthier, a second, Christian dimension of work, which makes work redemptive due to its connection to the figure of Jesus, and the sacrifice he made for humanity. Since Zionism—and Gordon’s philosophy within it—refused to go beyond the first dimension of redemption and “communicate with the Carpenter of Nazareth,” the Zionist process of redemption cannot be complete.

Indeed, Gauthier’s reference to work as an “offer of fatigue and sorrow,” brings us back to the concept of sacrifice, which Gauthier, following the Christian tradition, placed at the center of his theology of work. It is worthwhile to mention that Gordon, on the other hand, was entirely against the idea of sacrifice, as can be gleaned in particular from his personal letters.[[87]](#footnote-87)

1. **The Six-Day War and Gauthier’s radical turn**

Paul Gauthier’s religious experience in Israel lasted eleven years. During this period, although he was in a daily contact with the Israeli authorities, fostering his workers’ cooperative in Nazareth, he avoided making critical statements pertaining to the national and international spheres of the Israeli politics. On the contrary, in the entry on the State of Israel he wrote in 1966 for the Catholic Encyclopedia, he affirmed that “it is correct to say that the State of Israel is peaceful,” as expressed in its Declaration of Independence,[[88]](#footnote-88) and that it is clear that the state is guided by prophetic principles.[[89]](#footnote-89) This was the same religious apolitical spirit which, three years before, at the pick of the Council, brought Gauthier to send a letter to Pope Paul VI inviting him to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, (though he later knew that already in July the Pope secretly decided to realize that pilgrimage.)[[90]](#footnote-90) The short visit took place in January 1964 and although the Vatican had extreme care that it would not content the slightest reference to the local and political situation, the impression of Vatican observers was that that pilgrimage was the beginning of a breaking of the ice on the Church’s rejection of Zionism.[[91]](#footnote-91) Gauthier statement should be seen in the light of this precedent, and the atmosphere created by the debates on the *Nostra Aetate* conciliar resolution on the relation of the Church to Judaism and the Jewish people.

However, in June 1967, Gauthier would suddenly be confronted with a new reality that would undermine his messianic apolitical state of conscience regarding the Zionist state. Paul Gauthier and his associate, Sister Marie-Therese Lazcare, spent the war mostly on the Jordanian side of Jerusalem, trying to assist the civilian population affected by the events. The French Catholic journal *Cahier du témoignage chrétien* dedicated the volume of July 1967 to the diary of Sister Marie-Therese in which she recounts her experience of the war. References to the bullying and cruelty of the Israeli soldiers toward the civilian Arab population, including forced expulsions, looting and razing houses, can be found throughout the diary, although not without emphasizing that there were humane attitudes to be found among the Israeli forces as well.[[92]](#footnote-92) In that short volume there is also an article by Paul Gauthier about the war. This paragraph reflects the spirit of the article:

When the first Israeli troops entered Jerusalem, it seemed that everything was possible, everything, that is to say, peace. These troops were as dignified, simple, and human as soldiers in an army can be. Some of the Jewish and Arab soldiers could be seen fraternizing. But two days later, everything changed: plunder and brutality were not even the worst of it, since those are part and parcel of any war. The worst was the expulsions and the destruction that left so many refugees in its wake. We lost the chance for peace. It was a huge and bitter disappointment for those who, refusing to take the side of the Jews, love the one and the other as brothers.[[93]](#footnote-93)

From this paragraph we learn that Gauthier’s position regarding the war was not unequivocally negative, and that he did not automatically support the Catholic world’s hostile reaction, including Pope Paul VI’s condemnation of the Israelis’ use of force, the demand for an immediate solution for the Arab refugees and for the creation of an international regime to take control of Jerusalem.[[94]](#footnote-94) Even after the beginning of the war, and faced with the sight of Israeli soldiers entering Jerusalem, Gauthier still believed in the Israeli pioneer spirit he so admired.

Far from denying the rights of the Jews to have a State in the Land of Israel, and while acknowledging that the Jewish state emerged as a response to a monstrous injustice—the ravages of the Holocaust and World War II—Gauthier’s claim was simply that “war is useless if it does not lead to a more just state of things than the one against which the parties are struggling.”[[95]](#footnote-95)

The way the close relationship between Gauthier and Kibbutz Ginosar came to an end sheds light on Gauthier’s change of heart regarding the State of Israel. In an interview I conducted with Atallah Mansour, a Christian Arab journalist who was very close to Gauthier in his years in Nazareth, he told me the story of Gauthier’s departure from Israel, a story which is not related in any of Gauthier’s writings. According to this testimony, a few days after the end of the Six-Day War, Gauthier published an article in the North American press (since the article was rejected by the Israeli censorship) denouncing the abuses he had witnessed perpetrated by the victorious Israeli soldiers upon the civilian Arab population of several villages. The members of Kibbutz Ginosar felt deeply betrayed. They posted the article on the kibbutz billboard, marked with a big sign reading “our friend.” Gauthier no longer felt welcome there. A few days later he would leave the country with no personal belongings, never to return.[[96]](#footnote-96) He crossed over to Jordan and spent the next few years working among the poor population and the refugees there. From the Jordanian side of the border he began to see Israel in a completely different light.

The most telling example of what I see as a radical religious as well as political transformation is a lecture he gave at the “First World Conference of Christians for Palestine,” in Beirut in May 1970, and which he likely reproduced in Europe later (a copy of this lecture was sent from Belgium to Kibbutz Ginosar by a member of the Histadrut in October 1970). Far from the feelings of friendship and admiration Gauthier expressed in the books he published before 1967—some of which have been cited in this paper—this lecture shows a completely hostile approach to the State of Israel, its authorities and even the kibbutzim. One intimation of this change of heart can be seen in the way he retold the story of the abovementioned visit of the Israeli authorities, who had come to Gauthier seeking advice regarding the humanitarian situation of the Israeli Arab population. As previously stated, this encounter was described in Gauthier’s diary as extremely friendly, despite Gauthier’s gently questioning the priorities of the State of Israel when it came to protecting Jews above anyone else.[[97]](#footnote-97) Yet, in a lecture given thirteen years after the event, Gauthier would tell his audience a very different version of the answer he had given in that meeting to the Israeli authorities:

“You act exactly like Hitler, you apply the same methods, except that you have changed the algebraic sign. Where Hitler put the minus sign, an imperative to destroy all Jews, you in turn put the plus sign, an imperative to save all Jews. But it is the product of the same basic racism: whether it’s all Jews or no one but the Jews.”[[98]](#footnote-98)

Later in the lecture, Gauthier would even allude to a resemblance between the Israeli troops and the Nazi soldiers.[[99]](#footnote-99)

The Histadrut was treated in much the same way. In 1966, only a year before the war, in his attempts to enlighten the Catholic world about the State of Israel in the abovementioned entry for the Catholic Encyclopedia, Gauthier wrote: “The government and the workers’ union (Histadrut) make great efforts to build friendships with all people, especially with young nations, and willingly and generously lend them technical and social assistance.”[[100]](#footnote-100) Four years later, however, in front of an anti-Israeli audience, the Histadrut would be presented as an imperialistic entity “which became a Zionist instrument of the Jewish workers to conquer the labor market and eliminate the Arab workforce,”[[101]](#footnote-101) and which used their relations with the new Arab neighbors only as propaganda to appease international public opinion.[[102]](#footnote-102)

Finally, even the kibbutzim, which, as we have seen, had elicited so much admiration from Gauthier in the past, were not spared from his contempt. This is how Gauthier recalls the invitation that Kibbutz Ginosar extended to him and his companions to come and spend a period of time in the Kibbutz:

We were happy to live in a kibbutz. This communitarian way of life appeared to us like the manifest ideal both of the Gospel and of Socialism: everyone working according to their possibilities and receiving according to their necessities. There are no poor since everything is common property. *It took us time to discover that the realization of this ideal relies on injustice and is linked to Capitalism*.[[103]](#footnote-103)

Gauthier continues explaining that, when wealthy Jews purchased the land upon which the kibbutz was established from Arab landowners hailing from Egypt and Lebanon, there had been Palestinian peasants cultivating it who were then left without the means to make a living. This situation provoked a rivalry between the Jewish settlers and the villagers, until one night the members of the kibbutz decided to attack and destroy the Arab village, expelling the inhabitants and bombing their houses. “That is why,” he says, “while working in the kibbutz fields, we came upon the ruins of a village. The establishment of the kibbutz came at the expense of a ruined Palestinian village, first dispossessed from its lands by Zionist money, and then razed to the ground by Israeli force.”[[104]](#footnote-104) This was the fate, Gauthier continues, of over a million Palestinians terrorized by the Israeli forces and made to flee their homes to become refuges.[[105]](#footnote-105)

The identification of Zionism with Capitalism and imperialism, absent from Gauthier’s writings prior to 1967 (except for a brief mention of the Jewish lifestyle in the city of Tel Aviv),[[106]](#footnote-106) converted for him the whole geopolitical conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, into a class war: the poor and oppressed against the imperialist rich. This is what, according to him, happened in the Six-Day War: “In this context, the Six-Day War of 1967 appeared to us as one battle in a global world of the exploited peoples against the rich nations, in this case, of the Arab people against Israel and the USA.”[[107]](#footnote-107)

While an explicit explanation of Gauthier’s political shift is lacking from his writings, I want to suggest two possible directions: the first a religious disappointment with himself and with the Jewish people for having failed to fulfil the messianic role he had assigned to both: to himself as a bridge of peace between conflicting peoples, and to the new Israeli state as a model of a just society that would serve as an example to the Christian world. However, after witnessing the post-war events, including the manifestations of hybris of the winning side toward the most vulnerable Arab population, Gauthier felt he could no longer serve as the “neutral” mediator willing to spread the social message of the ‘model society’ that in his eyes ceased to be so.

And second, the political choice of positioning himself in the left side of the political map. For that, he should stand in the line with many Catholic intellectuals which following the Six-Days-War, began to identify Israel with the outpost of Capitalist imperialism. In this revolutionary spirit of the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, being anti-Israeli became part of the anti-establishment agenda, of those who stand with the masses and the oppressed third world. [[108]](#footnote-108) Consequently, a wave of pro-Palestinian literature appeared in the French Christian intellectual landscape. This was the case of the widespread French weekly journal *Témoignage chréttien*, together with the monthly *Lettre*, and the Protestant *Christianisme social*, which led since 1968 the anti-Zionist combat and the line of solidarity with the Palestinians.[[109]](#footnote-109) This positioning was also the choice of the Latin American liberation theologians from the 1970s and until recent years.[[110]](#footnote-110)

1. Conclusion

None of the sources referring to the figure of Paul Gauthier tell us a word about the diverse and complex life he had in his years in Israel. They do not explain that the poor Arab population of Nazareth was only half of what nurtured the theology Gauthier developed in Israel and spread at Vatican II. The other half, not less significant for him, was the Israeli society, the personal relations he established with contemporary Jews, the kibbutz, and the thought of Aaron David Gordon, with the help of which Gauthier would find the words for the articulation of his theology of work, so present at the Council and in the future liberation theology.

Gauthier had arrived in Israel driven by the religious fervor of *De imitatione Christi*. As such, while identifying with the poor Arab workers,[[111]](#footnote-111) he was also religiously moved by the new Jewish society. As Attalah Mansour told me with a sarcastic smile: “he was an enthusiastic Zionist ‘Jew’, albeit a liberal one.”[[112]](#footnote-112) The “Gordonian” spirit he had absorbed in the kibbutzim and in the young state led him to affirm that “Christians have the right to see in the return of the State of Israel the historical facts that could become ‘the premises of Redemption.’”[[113]](#footnote-113)

However, after the Six-Day War, deeply disappointed with his incapacity to fulfill the messianic role he had set for himself—that of serving as a bridge of respect and understanding between Jews and Arabs—he experienced a radical religious transformation, which led him to put aside his universalistic approach and adhere instead to a worldly political position of clear “good” and “evil” actors. Still today, more than fifty years after these events, the elder members of Kibbutz Ginosar, who knew Gauthier personally, refuse to talk about him.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church dedicated considerable efforts to coming to terms with the contemporary Jewish people and the creation of the State of Israel. Some scholars would claim this to be an unsolved issue in Catholic theology to this day. For Paul Gauthier, theological reconciliation of the question of the Jews and the State of Israel was not a theoretical issue, but an everyday reality. The story of Paul Gauthier in Israel, not only sheds light on an unknown chapter in the history of Jewish and Christian modern political theology but may also contribute a new perspective on interreligious dialogue in politically conflicted zones in general and in contemporary Israel in particular.

1. # Paul Gauthier*, “Consolez mon peuple”: Le Concile et L’Eglise des Pauvres* (Paris : Les Editions du Cerf, 1965), 277-281.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. José Legorreta, “Identidad y Cambio en la Iglesia Latinoamericana,” in *El Pacto de las Catacumbas: la misión de los pobres en la Iglesia*, ed. Xabier Pikaza and Jose Antunes da Silva (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2015), 253–274. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Juan Eduardo bonnin, *\*Discurso Político y Discurso Religioso En América Latina, Leyendo Los Borradores de Medellín (1968)* (Buenos Aires: Santiago Arcos Editor, 2013), 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 129-162. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Enrique Dussel, *Hacia Los Orígenes de Occidente. Meditaciones Semitas* (Mexico: Kanankil Editorial, 2012), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Enrique Dussel, *Itinerario de Un Militante, Historia de La Teología de La Liberación* (Buenos Aires: Docencia, 2018), 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 29. All the translations from Spanish, French, Hebrew and Portuguese in this paper are mine, S.K.L [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Enrique Dussel, “En Búsqueda Del Sentido (Origen y Desarrollo de Una Filosofía de La Liberación),” *Anthropos* 180 (1998): 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bonnin, *Discurso Político y Discurso Religioso En América Latina,* 153-. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Boff Clodovis, “ A Originalidade Histórica de Medellín,” *Convergência* 317 (1998): 568–75, http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/relat/203p.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation,* trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973), xxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Hilary Raguer, “Primera Fisonomía de La Asamblea,” in *Historia Del Concilio Vaticano Segundo II, La formación de la conciencia conciliar, El primer período y la primera intersesión,* trans. José María Hernandez Blanco, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2002), 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rohan Curnow, “Stirrings of the Preferential Option for the Poor at Vatican II : The Work of the ‘ Group of the Church of the Poor ,’” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 89, no. 4 (2012): 423. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Norman Tanner, “La Iglesia En El Mundo (Ecclesia Ad Extra),” in *Historia Del Concilio Vaticano, II, Vol. IV, La Iglesia Como Comunión, El Tercer Período y La Tercera Intersesón (Septiembre 1964-Septiembre 1965), Trad. Constantino Ruíz-Garrido*, ed. Algerigo Giuseppe (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2007), 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Alberigo Giuseppe, “Grandes Resultados. Sombras de Incertidumbre.,” in *Historia Del Concilio Vaticano, II, Vol. IV, La Iglesia Como Comunión, El Tercer Período y La Tercera Intersesón (Septiembre 1964-Septiembre 1965), Trad. Constantino Ruíz-Garrido*, ed. Alberigo Giuseppe (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2007), 561. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Curnow, “Stirrings of the Preferential Option for the Poor at Vatican II : The Work of the ‘ Group of the Church of the Poor ,’” 432; Gauthier*, “Consolez mon people,”* 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Pierre Sauvage Les latino-américains dans le groupe « Jésus, l’Eglise et les pauvres » durant le Concile Vatican II », in : *Vatican II et l’Amérique latine*, ed. Henri Derroitte, Cahiers Internationaux de Théologie Pratique Série « Acte » n°10 (2016), 36-37, 77.

    https://www.pastoralis.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/actes/CITP\_Actes\_10\_Vatican\_II\_Amer\_lat\_2013.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Marta Diana, *Buscando El Reino, La Opción Por Los Pobres de Los Argentinos Qie Siguieron Al Concilio Vativano II* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2013), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bonnin, *Discurso Político y Discurso Religioso En América Latina,* 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Joan Planellas Barnosell, “Los artífices del Pacto. Origen, evolución y crepúsculo del grupo llamado ‘Iglesia de los pobres,’” in *El Pacto de las Catacumbas: la misión de los pobres en la Iglesia*, ed. Xabier Pikaza and Jose Antunes da Silva (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 2015), 85. See also: Giuseppe Alberigo, ed., *Historia Del Concilio Vaticano Segundo,* trans. José María Hernandez Blanco (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2002), 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Paul Gauthier, "Jesus, l'Eglise et les pauvres" in: *Les Pauvres, Jésus et L´Église* (Paris: Éditions Univesitaires, 1963), 89, my remark. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. On the activities of Father Loew and the Mission de Marseille see, Émile Poulat, *Naissance des prêtres-ouvriers* (Paris: Casterman, 1965), 415–443. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Desmond O’Grady, *Eat from God’s Hands: Paul Gauthier and the Church of the Poor* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Shraga Har-Gil, “Aba Paul MiNatzeret” [“אבא פול מנצרת,” Father Paul from Nazareth], *Davar* [*דבר,* Word], December 26, 1958. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Gauthier, "Jesus, l'Eglise et les pauvres", 84–85. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Yair Baumel, *A Blue and White Shadow, The Israeli Establishment’s policy and Actions among its Arab Citizens: The Formative Years: 1958-1968,* [צל כחול לבן, מדיניות הממסד הישראלי ופעולותיו בקרב האזרחים הערבים, השנים המעצבות: 1958 – 1968] (Hebrew), (Haifa: Pardes, 2007), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Gauthier, *Les pauvres, Jésus et l´église*, 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. «  Poalei Natzeret neebakim leMeniat Raab Mimishpahoteiem, » [פועלי נצרת נאבקים למניעת חרפת רעב ממשפחותיהם, Nazareth Workers are Struggling to prevent hunger from their families »], *Kol Haam*, October 5, 1958, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Paul Gauthier, *Les mains que voici: journal de Nazareth* (Paris: Édition Universitaires, 1964), 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. David Sitton, “Plitim Aravim BeIsrael Ovrim LeShikunei Keva” [“פליטים ערבים בישראל עוברים לשיכוני קבע,” Arab Refugees in Israel Move to Permanent Housing], *HaBoker*, April 29, 1959. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici,* 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. O’Grady, *Eat from God’s Hands,* 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Paul Gauthier, “L’État d’Israël,” in [*Catholicisme hier, aujourd'hui, demain : encyclopédie*, (ed. Gérard Jacquemet](https://haifa-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=972HAI_MAIN_ALMA2176278770002791&context=L&vid=HAU&lang=iw_IL&search_scope=books_and_more&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=default_tab&query=any,contains,990001027590402791) , vol. 6, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1966), 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See, for example, Gauthier, *Les Mains que voici*, 131; O’Grady, *Eat from God’s Hands,* 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Sitton, “Plitim Aravim.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Charles de Foucauld, *Oeuvres spirituelles: anthologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1958), 664. As quoted in Gisbert Greshake, “The Spiritual Charism of Nazareth,” *Communion* 31 (Spring 2004), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Gauthier, *Les Mains mains que voici,* p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid.,36. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Yoel Dar, “Komer Bone Shikunim LaPlitim” [“כומר בונה שיכונים לפליטים,” A Priest Builds Housing for Refugees], *Davar*, July 5, 1966. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Har-Gil, “Aba Paul MiNatzeret.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Tuvia Carmel, “Ha’av Gauthier Meargen Ezra LeNitzrachei Haolam—MiMeono BeNatzeret,” [“האב גוטייה מארגן עזרה לנצרכי העולם—ממעונו בנצרת,” Father Gauthier Organises Help for the World’s Needy—from his Home in Nazareth], *Ma’ariv*, May 22, 1967. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., 30–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid., 34–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., 50, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici,* 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Baumel, *A Blue and White Shadow,* 30-33; Uzi Benziman and Atallah Masour, *Daiarei Mishne דיירי משנה]-Subtenants[*,(Jerusalem: Keter, 1992), 103-114. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Paul Gauthier, “L’athéisme de masse” (recorded lecture at the Second Vatican Council, Second Vatican Council Archive, Leuven: Maurits Sabbe Library, KU Leuven, 28.9.1965). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Gauthier, *Les pauvres, Jésus et l´église,* 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid.*,* *Les Mains que voici*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Paul Gauthier*, “Consolez mon people,”* 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Paul Gauthier, *Les pauvres, Jésus et l´église,* 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. “Bracha Ishit Meha’Apifior Nimsera LeKibbutz Ginosar” [“ברכה אישית מהאפיפיור נמסרה לקיבוץ גינוסר,” A Personal Greeting from the Pope Delivered to Kibbutz Ginosar], *Davar*, June 29, 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici*, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid., 83–84. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid., 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. In opposition to his highly favorable opinion on the *kibbutzniks*, Gauthier had a very low esteem towards the Jewish citizens of Tel Aviv, which he called “bastion of capitalism,” and “pathetic in Christian eyes”, explicitly rejecting any willingness of evangelizing them. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici,* 79-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Zeev Sternhell, *Binian Uma O Tikun Chevra?* *Leumiut VeSozialism BeTnuat HaAvoda HaIsraelit* [*בניין אומה או תיקון חברה? לאומיות וסוציאליזם בתנועת העבודה* הישראלית, Nation Building or Social Reform? Nationalism and Socialism in the Israeli Labor Movement] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1995), 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid., 26–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Aaron David Gordon, “HaKhalom UPitrono” [“החלום ופתרונו,” The Dream and its Solution] (originally published in 1909], in *HaUma VehaAvoda* [*האומה והעבודה,* The Nation and the Work] (Tel Aviv: HaSifria HaTzionit, 1955), 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid., 86. For an analysis of Gordon’s approach to nature, and its connection to the national renaissance, see: Yehoyada Amir, *Prophecy and Halakha: Towards Non-Orthodox Religious Praxis in (Eretz) Israel* (Working Paper Series, New York: The Tikva Center at New York University School of Law, 2012), 28–38; Eilon Shamir, *For the Sake of Life: The Art of Living According to Aharon David Gordon* (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2018)(Hebrew); Einat Ramon, *A New Life, Religion, Motherhood and Supreme Love in the Works of Aharon David Gordon* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2007)(Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Gordon, “HaKhalom UPitrono,” 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Gordon, “Avodatenu Me’ata” [“עבודתנו מעטה,” Our Work is Meager] (originally published in 1918), in *HaUma VehaAvoda* [*האומה והעבודה,* The Nation and the Work] (Tel Aviv: HaSifria HaTzionit, 1955), 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Paul Gauthier, *Les mains que voici,* 134–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid.*,* 77–82. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ibid., 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Aaron David Gordon, “Ir’urim VeHegyonot” [“ערעורים והגיונות,” Ruminations and Reasonings], in *Kitvei A. D. Gordon* [*כתבי א. ד. גורדון*, The Writings of A. D. Gordon] (vol. 5, Tel Aviv: Hapoel Hatzair, 1929), 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici,* 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Gordon, “Ha’avoda” [“העבודה,” The Work] (originally published in 1911), in *HaUma VehaAvoda*, (*האומה והעבודה,* The Nation and the Work] (Tel Aviv: HaSifria HaTzionit, 1955), 94–95. On the resemblance between Gordon’s idea of work and the Hassidic concept of *Avoda BeGashmiyut* (Worldly Toil), see Abraham Shapira, *Or Hachaim Be“Yom Ktanot”* [*אור החיים ב"יום קטנות",* The Light of Life in “Yom Ktanot”] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved 1996), 240–246. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Gauthier, *Les pauvres, Jésus et l´église*, 34–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Muki Tzur (ed.). *At Einech Bodeda BaMarom: Mikhtavim MeA. D. Gordon VeElav* [*את אינך בודדה במרום: מכתבים מא. ד. גורדון ואליו,* You Are Not Alone Up There: Letters to and from A. D. Gordon] (Tel Aviv : HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1998), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Gauthier, “L’État d’Israël,” 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ibid., 209–210. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Gauthier*, “Consolez mon peuple,” 257-258.*Nevertheless, the Israeli press informed that the Pope’s pilgrimage, the first taken by a Pope in the history of the Church, would take place thanks to Gauthier’s initiative. Adda Luzzani, “Haapifior Ialun Laila Echad Ba’ir Ha’atika, Hacardenaalim Bea veTesta Ilavu Elav Bemasao,” [האפיפיור ילון לילה אחד בעיר העתיקה, הקרדנלים באה וטסטה יילוו במסעו The Pope will spend one night in the Old City, Cardenals Bea and Testa will join him on his journey], *Maariv*, December 6, 1963. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Claude Soetens, “El compromiso ecuménico de la Iglesia Católica,” in *Historia Del Concilio Vaticano Segundo II,* 292-295*;* Livia Rokach, *The Catholic Church and the Question of Palestine* (London: Saqi Books, 1987), 68–69. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Marie-Thérèse Lazcare, « Le journal de Sœur Marie-Thérèse » in “Jérusalem et le sang des pauvres, 5–8 Juin 1967,” special issue *Cahier du Témoignane chrétien,* no. 47 (1967), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Paul Gauthier, “Jérusalem, capital de l’Humanité,” in “Jérusalem et le sang des pauvres, 5–8 Juin 1967,” special issue *Cahier du Témoignane chrétien,* no. 47 (1967), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Rokach, *The Catholic Church and the Question of Palestine*, 71–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Gauthier, “Jérusalem, capital de l’Humanité,” 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Atallah Mansour (Israeli-Arab journalist and author), in discussion with the author, May 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici,* 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Paul Gauthier, *Les exigences de la foi chrétienne devant le problème palestinien* : *intervention a la première conférence mondiale des chrétiens pour la Palestine du Père Paul Gauthier à Beyrouth, le 9 mai 1970*, (Geneva: Groupe d’Étude sur le Moyen-Orient, 1970), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ibid., 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Paul Gauthier, “L’État d’Israël,” 208–209. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Gauthier, *Les exigences de la foi chrétienne devant le problème palestinien*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ibid., 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid., 7. My emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Ibid., 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Gauthier, *Les mains que voici,* 79*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Gauthier, *Les exigences de la foi chrétienne devant le problème palestinien*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Martine Severgrade, *Israël vu pars les catholiques francais (1945-1994)*, (Paris: Karthala, 2014), 143-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. See among many others: Enrique Dussel, “Lo político en Levinas: hacia una filosofía política crítica,” *Signos filosóficos*, no. 9 (January–July, 2003), 130–131. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. See, among others, Enrique Dussel, “En Búsqueda del Sentido (Origen y desarrollo de una Filosofía de la Liberación),” *Anthropos* 180 (1998), 17; Martine Sevegrand, *Israël vu pars les catholiques français (1945–1994)* (Paris: Karthala, 2014), 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Atallah Mansour (Israeli-Arab journalist and author), in discussion with the author, May 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Paul Gauthier, [*Catholicisme hier, aujourd'hui, demain*,](https://haifa-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=972HAI_MAIN_ALMA2176278770002791&context=L&vid=HAU&lang=iw_IL&search_scope=books_and_more&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=default_tab&query=any,contains,990001027590402791) 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)