At first, and to introduce my response to Chief Rabbi Sirat, I shall mention the verse, which we will read this Shabbat, in all our synagogues; Leviticus 19, 33, [Parashat] Keydoshim:

When an alien resides with you in your land you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you: you shall love the alien as yourself for you were aliens in his land of Egypt. I am the Lord, your God.”

*Ani Hashem Elohehem* is interpreted by Rashi of Troyes, *Elokēha We-Elokaw Anil*, “I am your God, and his God. I find this verse (and its interpretation) very symbolic in supporting the theme of universality in the concept of Election in Israel as it was just taught by Rabbi Sirat. Every day, before saying the *Shema Israēl* (Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one,” Deuteronomy 6:4-5), the believer says: “With abounding love, has Thou loved us, O Lord our God, with great and exceeding pity hast thou pitied us. Thou hast chosen us from all peoples and tongues…”

Despite a tragic history that seems to contradict this affirmation, and despite the anguish and sometimes, the agony, the believer acknowledges the presence of God’s love for His chosen people. This love, which does not guard against cruelty or distress, is the one which allows us to pass through with the memory of the promise, the everlasting and living word, alive and transcending this suffering. This is a promise that was given to the Jewish people on the condition that each Jew will transmit it to his or her children, and to all who received God’s
promise, to be also greeted as in Isaiah 56, 28: "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, "I will gather others to them, besides those already gathered." This is precisely what a Jew says, when he is called to bless the Torah, with this formula: "Blessed art thou O Lord our God, king of the universe, who hast chosen us from all peoples, and hast given us thy law." The secret of our language is linked with a blessing and a reading, which include the nations. For the God who has chosen us and who commands us at that moment to read the Torah, His Torah, is also the king of the universe. This is a universe and humanity which lives in it that cannot be denied or ignored when a Jew is reading the Torah scroll, because he is bearing his humanity in his prayer whether he likes it or not.

Despite its tragic history, especially in the 20th century, the Jewish people, heirs of Abraham, can not forget the promise that was given to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make you great, so that you will be a blessing and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Of course, as Franz Rosenzweig pointed out in Star of Redemption:

As a man who is created in the image of God, Jewish man as he faces his God, is a veritable repository of contradictions. As the beloved of God, as Israel, he knows that God has elected him and may well forget that he is not alone with God, that God knows others whom he himself may or may not know, that to Egypt and Assyria God says: "my people." He knows he is loved—so why concern himself with the world! In his blissful togetherness—alone—with God, he may consider himself man, and man alone, and look up in surprise when the world tries to remind him that not every man harbors the same certainty of being God's child as he himself. Yet, no one knows better that being dear to God is only this beginning, and that man remains unredeemed so long as nothing but this beginning has been realized. (p. 307)

Notice the double character of God's call to Abraham (Genesis 17): "Go for yourself (Lekh leihe) your country and your birth place and your father's house to the land that I will show you." The divine call (as Rashi pointed out in his commentary), to go for yourself, for your spiri-
tual benefit, makes sense only if it is altogether a singular and a universal call. That is why it is immediately written: “And I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you and I will make your name great and you will be a blessing...and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.” There is no alternative. One has no choice between the blessing of one’s people (the singular call) and the blessing of the families of the earth “(mispahot ha’adamah).” The one and the other in this promise must come together. As the Sefer Hassidim say, “All the prayers and all the blessings in the Jewish liturgy are formulated in the plural form.” How could he who prays express himself in the singular? How could a faithful Jew dare to say, “Blessed are thou O Lord, my God, king of the universe who hast chosen me?” (Sefer Hassidim, 839). The Lord “who has chosen us” implies an unchallengeable solidarity at the heart of prayer as in everyday life.

True prayer, says Rabbi Hayyim Volozhinin in his Nefesh ha’ Hayim cited by Emmanuel Levinas in his essay, “Prayer Without Demand” (Etudes Philosophiques, 1984, n. 38), is never for oneself, never for one’s needs, and Rabbi Hayyim states this explicitly. Instituted as it was by the men of the chief synagogue to replace the daily sacrifice made in the now destroyed or far-off temple, how could it contain any human demands? For were those daily sacrifices at the temple not burnt offerings, or holocausts? How could any individual allude to egoistic needs in his prayer and so compromise the pure dis-interestedness of the holocaust?

Or as Levinas wrote in another essay “Substitution:"

The for-itself self signifies self-consciousness: the for-all, responsibility for the others; support of the universe. This responsibility for others therefore, comes to be for man the meaning of his own self-identity. His self (son moi) is not originally for itself (pour soi)—through the will of God it is “for others.” In this way, man becomes, in turn, the lenefesh hayya—the soul of the world, as if God’s creative word had been entrusted to him to dispose of as he liked, to let it ring out, or to interrupt it...Responsibility for the others, this way of answering without a prior commitment, is human fraternity itself, and it is prior to freedom...The face of the other in proximity, which is more than representation, is an un-representable trace, the way of the infinite...the non-interchange-
able par excellence, the I, the unique one, substitutes itself for others. Nothing is a game.

The Yom Kippur liturgy also illustrates that when the faithful ask for God's mercy for an impressive list of faults, which could not be committed by only one person, this is a prayer which links individuals with others. As the Talmud says, “For all transgressions in the Torah he alone is punished, but here he and the whole world” (Shebuot 30b). And for all transgression of the Lo Torah is not the whole world punished? So, it is written: “And, they shall stumble one upon another (Lev. 26:57) one because of the iniquity of the other: this teaches us that all Israel are sureties one for another because it was in their power to prevent the sin and they did not prevent it.”

The concept of election is true only if the so-called election linked between God and man, links him to a people; and, beyond that to humanity. Such an election is a call to universality. This question has been raised also by Christianity which understands the promises of its proper election as reflected in Matthew 11:27 when Jesus says: “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” As Franz Rosenzweig has noted, this is a duality in God that is incomprehensible to Jews, albeit Christian life rests precisely on it. Thus, Christians dares to enter the presence of the Father only by means of the Son; they believe they can reach the Father only through the Son. If the Son were not a human he would avail nothing to the Christian. He cannot imagine that God himself, the Holy God, could so condescend to him as he demands, except by becoming human himself.

And so, in the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart who has made him known”(1:18) and later, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (8:12). No one can forget that the expression “light for the nations,” “[Or la goyim?]” was understood by Jews as the inner sense of the election as in Isaiah 42:6 – 49:6 where the prophet describes the vocation of the chosen: “I am Hashem. I have called you with righteousness. I will strengthen your hand. I will protect you. I will set you for a covenant to the people, for a light to the nations” (Ve'ateneh'a
livrith-ām le ʿor goyim) and (49:6): “I will make you a light for the nation so that my salvation may extend to the ends of the earth.”

Here the reaction of the Jewish people through the nations is explicit. It is a mission linked to universality. But, by saying that this prophecy of Isaiah does not concern the Jewish people but Jews and Jesus alone, does not John modify radically the concept of election? Does this not make it incomprehensible for Jews, this Christian interpretation? And, this interpretation is not more radical in terms of exclusiveness than the so-called exclusiveness election, as it is taught in the Jewish tradition, the “pomme de discorde,” the stumbling block, quoted by Chief Rabbi Sirat, which is believed to have separated our two faiths? How can we not conclude that this sort of universality which is promised to those who recognize God through the Son is in the hands of pagans and not of the family of Abraham as it is said in Matthew 22:14: “For many are called but few are chosen?” This belief cannot be ignored by Jews. As the Jewish philosopher Catherine Chalier affirms, we cannot be apathetic to the fact that the Christians consider that they have received the renewal of the covenant through the Son.

Aware of what seems to be here the risk of the deification of man and humanization of God, we may nevertheless, be attentive to the fact that it is by and through Abraham that God—as if Abraham was himself a mediator—gave his promise to humanity, as it is said in Genesis 12:3: “We (Ni Vreḥ’u bch’ a kol Mispakhot ha Adama) and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” Perhaps, says Catherine Chalier, it is in that way that the Christian concept of election through the Son can be “heard” by the Jews, that is from the perspective of the promise that was made to Abraham. Here Jesus could be seen by Jews as the heir of Abraham by and through whom the pagans can reach the One who spoke to their ancestors, and speaks to them.

This mediation is of course, is very difficult concerning the questions which may then be asked. Why should the law be kept at a distance from the pagans as the price of this mediation? Why should the mediator be greeted as the Messiah? Why did this mediation become so hard as to provoke such hate against the people who gave birth to the mediator? Without doubt, we face here a difficult task, but this is the skeleton of a possible new way of thinking for Jews and Christians in their understanding of the role of Jesus as a mediator, and for Christians who also make the effort to understand what it means for the Jewish people to be chosen, in order to affirm with Franz Rosenzweig, “Before
God then, Jew and Christian both labor at the same task, He cannot dispense with either” (Star of Redemption, p. 415). Also, to which sort of talk are we called together with our Muslim brothers and sisters? Let us say with Abraham Heschel:

It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another: to share insight and learning; to cooperate in academic ventures on the highest scholarly level; and what is even more important, to search in the wilderness for well-springs of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love and care of man. What is urgently needed are ways of helping one another in the terrible predicament of here and now by the courage to believe that the world of the Lord endures forever as well as here and now, to cooperate in trying to bring about a resurrection of sensitivity, a revival of conscience; to keep alive the divine sparks in our souls, to nurture openness to the spirit of the Psalms, reverence for the words of the prophets and faithfulness to the Living God.”

That is, dear friends, our universalism. In the cave that represents the resting place of the patriarchs and our mothers, the Talmud also lays Adam and Eve to rest: it is for the whole humanity that we should all work together!