

Part Two

SURVIVING, LIVING, CONSTRUCTING

2. Refugee

The Rescue Operation “Arlon”

The tenth of May 1940 marked the end of the so-called “Funny War,” “la Drôle de guerre,” which started with the invasion of Poland by Germany in September 1939. France and England had declared war but did not make it. In Europe, the real hostilities began only after May 10, 1940, the day Hitler had chosen to attack France. To general surprise he did not launch a frontal attack across the border against the Maginot Line, which he circumvented by invading Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

As mentioned before, your family had been warned through the telephone call by a friend of your father.

Indeed, we had had the telephone installed in our apartment. Owning a telephone was at that time rather a luxury but essential for emergencies. The call reached us at five in the morning of the tenth of May 1940. A few minutes later we received a call from the son-in-law of my father’s boss, owner of the furniture store. They did not live far from our apartment. He said: “Get ready in twenty minutes. I’ll come and fetch you. If you are not

in the street at that time, I shall drive on. I am a French officer and therefore in danger if I fall into the hands of the Germans.”

From that moment on we realized that we had to leave in haste, not even washing ourselves, hardly taking any clothes, tossing some in whatever luggage at hand. When my mother woke me up, my only thought was that I wouldn't have to pass my today's exam in mathematics. For an adolescent only half-awake, the invasion of Luxembourg by the Germans triggered a first reflex: “So, I don't have to go to school today!” But this reflex was quickly dissipated by the dramatic moments we had to experience. Very soon, the whole family was gathered on the sidewalk. My uncle David still had his nightshirt under his suit, but in his hands he did not carry a valise, only a prayer book. My father was very nervous. He called on us to be quicker and quicker because he did not want to miss the car which came to fetch us. Suddenly he cried: “The money!” He ran upstairs to take out of the wall safe an envelope with money allowing us to survive for several months. As a matter of fact we all believed that our stay in Arlon would be very short. The car arrived. There were four people already in there and the five of us managed to find a place as well. Some were sitting on the knees of others. Neighbors came out to the street wishing us good luck. But there were also neighbors of German origin, who threatened us with their fists and wished us to go to hell.

To avoid this, operation Arlon had just started!

Indeed. In the car everybody was silent. The son-in-law was driving. He was very nervous for the reason I explained earlier. At the Luxembourg-Belgium border, in Steinfort, there was a roadblock of soldiers. The son-in-law exclaimed: “Merde, les Allemands!” *Shit, the Germans!* A young soldier pointed his gun to us while eating a sandwich. Another one shouted: “Back, back, you cannot go further!” At that moment my father kept his composure. You

know, he was courageous in real danger and full of anxiety in imagined danger. He said calmly: "Mr. Officer, we only have the intention to have a cup of coffee in the next village." The soldier, after a short hesitation, let us pass, shouting: "Quick, quick!" The car pursued its path, some of us laughing nervously at the way my father fooled a German soldier and then my aunt Clementine suddenly said, addressing herself both at my father and the owner of the furniture store: "Bravo, Gentlemen. Bravo for your strategic thinking, which led us to the present situation."

Obviously we could not even reach Arlon, which was already occupied by the Germans. So we took another direction and soon we realized that the car with nine people on board would break down before long. So the five of us climbed out and we were alone on the road. It was indeed a pitiful sight. Long columns of refugees started to form themselves on the road: cars, bicycles, as well as mostly carriages drawn by horses. We walked and walked and walked. My father was physically exhausted. He was rather ill at that time and so suddenly he said: "Please, you are younger, pursue the road. I shall return and somehow cope with it."

This of course was out of question for all of us; either we shall perish together or we shall survive together. It was an unwritten law of commitment in my family. That's why some called us the five fingers of the hand. Uncle David and I supported my father and from time to time a carriage drawn by horses took us along for only a few kilometers. Finally, in the late afternoon we arrived in the town of Virton. Completely exhausted, we found rooms in a small hotel. We just learned that the Grand Duchess, her family, and the Luxembourg government had succeeded in escaping the Germans, and that they had passed through Virton a few hours earlier. That was the only good news of the day. That night, lying on a mattress on the floor, I realized to what extent this situation was dramatic and dangerous. In the middle of the night the owner of the hotel

woke us up and said: “The Germans are approaching!” So, we left in the dark and on foot we pursued our road, soon reaching the border of France.

Erring on the roads of France

What were your plans at that moment?

Totally exhausted, our immediate target was to reach Montmedy and then Charlesville, where we hoped to catch a train to Paris. In Paris, far from the frontline, we would feel ourselves secure, hoping for some respite and even an end of our ordeal. On the road the refugee columns became longer and longer; most of the time we were walking. I shall never forget the hospitality of the French army in Ecouviers, a small fort of the Maginot line, where the soldiers served us a hot meal, the first since we had left Luxembourg.

In Charleville we caught a train full of people and it took us twelve hours instead of three to reach Paris. The train was attacked by the “Stukas,” the fighter planes of the German Luftwaffe. When attacked, the train stopped on the tracks. People were jumping out of the train, crouching in ditches along the railway tracks. Two women were pulling their coat or their sweater over their heads, hoping that this would protect them.

Arriving in Paris, one main objective was reached: you were still alive and you felt yourself secure, at least temporarily. The news from the front line was not very good. The French army had tried unsuccessfully to retain and even to drive back the German army, which succeeded in breaking through the French defense line in Sedan on the fourteenth of May. It was the “Blitzkrieg,” or in English, the Lightning War.

In Paris, my father succeeded in contacting a cousin who had taken refuge in Marseille. The cousin’s advice was to leave Paris

as soon as possible and to go to the west, to Brittany. A train took us the following day to Le Pouliguen, a village on the Atlantic coast. The cousin also told us that living there was less expensive than in Paris. He was right. When we arrived in Le Pouliguen, it was the first time that I saw the ocean. I was deeply moved. We found a small flat in a Britannic house called “Ker Suzanne,” belonging to two old ladies who still wore the Britannic attire, “la coiffe bretonne.”

We had practically no clothes, no sufficient underwear to change ourselves. Our cousin in Marseille sent us a wooden case with clothes dating from the previous century. The fishermen of Le Pouliguen were amazed and amused at the sight of us. My mother wore with elegance a long dark gown of the nineteenth century. After several days we were accepted by the inhabitants of the village. We even succeeded in becoming an exotic feature of the landscape. We regained hope and thought that we could stay there until the end of the war.

After three weeks, however, we had to leave again. The British expeditionary force which had come to France to reinforce the French army, embarked in order to escape annihilation, as all the French lines of defense had broken down. This was the famous operation “Dunkerque” when the British, including many civilians in ships and boats, succeeded in rescuing and bringing home their army from France. The British, once in their homeland, did not just take a rest but they continued the battle until the Nazis were vanquished. Under the leadership of Winston Churchill, this was Britain’s finest hour. An hour which lasted four years. Hitler thought that he could find a compromise solution with Britain. That’s why he sent his deputy, Rudolf Hess, on a mission to England, which of course failed as Hess was promptly imprisoned after parachuting on British territory. That was Hitler’s first big mistake and the second one was that he thought he could bring the British to their knees. He completely misunderstood the spirit of the British nation, which

would never bow to a tyrant. Since that moment and throughout my life, I maintain a feeling of great admiration for Britain, whose language and whose culture, whose writers, poets, and scientists had contributed and continue to contribute significantly to the cultural heritage of humanity.

As far as we were concerned, we felt that in France we were secure nowhere. I literally implored my father to undertake the first formalities in order to obtain an entrance visa for the United States. After some hesitation, because he still kept the hope that we could manage to stay in France, he agreed and we went to the American consulate in Nantes in Brittany to fill out the forms called at that time “first papers.” Experience showed us that there were many other papers to be filled out and steps to be undertaken until we succeeded in entering the United States. We decided to reach by any means and as soon as possible the south of France near Marseille or the French Spanish border, possible exits out of France before embarking for the U.S.A. After a few weeks of peregrinations on the roads of France we finally arrived in Montpellier in the “département de l’Hérault,” where an office of the Luxembourg Red Cross was established. We stayed there until May 1942, when we succeeded in boarding a ship called the *Maréchal Lyautey* in Marseille, direction Casablanca.

Montpellier or “The symphony in black”

Please, not too fast . . . First, your decision to leave Brittany for Montpellier proved to be right again . . .

Actually, it saved our lives. Soon after we had left Brittany in haste, an armistice was signed between Germany and France, splitting France into two parts: the North, including Brittany and of course Paris, was occupied by the Germans, whereas a smaller part in the South, including Montpellier, the so-called

“non-occupied zone,” was placed under the authority of the French Vichy Regime of Maréchal Pétain.

. . . and second, according to what you mentioned just before, you spent quite some time in Montpellier.

In my memory, I identify Montpellier of that time with the black color and therefore I used to refer to this period of my life as a “symphony in black.”

First because the grapes giving birth to the mellow wine of the Hérault, are black. In autumn, after the harvest, the wine growers poured the grapes into huge barrels and crunched them, while dancing barefoot in the barrels. Black also were the eyes of the women, beautiful women with fiery looks. The elderly women wore black clothes, as in many parts of southern Europe, particularly on the Greek Islands. Last but not least, bleak or black was also our future. We were penetrated by uncertainty and anxiety. We didn't know whether we could ever escape, whether we would succeed in reaching the shores of America.

Could you amplify this? After all, you were in the non-occupied zone of France.

You know, the Vichy Regime had no authority at all. It was completely under the orders of the Germans. It was a fiction and Pétain, in my view, was not a tottering old man but rather quite lucid. He felt at ease with the authoritarian regime of the Nazis, because in his personal ideology, he belonged to the nationalistic right in the French political spectrum. His great enemy was communism and, to a certain extent, the Jews, whom he considered quite dangerous for the French nation. He extolled the virtues of the family and the fatherland (“Travail, Famille, Patrie”). In his view, the Jews were cosmopolitans, migrants, merchants. He did not go as far as his prime minister, Laval, who resolutely collab-

orated with the Nazis, ordering the deportation first of the foreign Jews, then also of the French Jews to the transit camps in France or rather the extermination camps in Eastern Europe.

So for you and your family, it continued to be a matter of survival.

Yes, survival in the sense of not being deported but also survival on a day-to-day basis, because food was scarce. I would not go so far as saying that there was an immediate risk of dying of hunger. But being deprived of a minimum of calories causes a general weakness of your condition, in particular of your immune system. We were feeding ourselves, yes; I say feeding, not eating like humans but feeding like animals on strange unknown vegetables like “rutabagas” and “topinambours.” At present, “topinambours” are served in two or three star restaurants as noble vegetables of the “haute cuisine.” We also flatly refused to eat a sausage made of blood, called in that part of France, “sanquet.” For Jews it was an abomination but for other human beings it was a “délicatesse.” From time to time we received from a kind cousin of my father who was a refugee in the Dordogne, an agricultural part of the south of France, a package of carrots.

That was a feast we reserved for Saturdays, the Jewish Shabbat, for which we also saved the meager weekly ration of meat. I myself lost quite a bit of weight at that time and according to what my parents and friends told me, I turned out to be a rather handsome young man. But it did not last long. In the United States the wholesome food consisted, as far as my tastes were concerned, to a large extent of pastry with whipped cream and lots of ice cream. This diet brought me rather quickly back to my normal physical condition.

What about your studies in Montpellier?

They were erratic, sporadic. Of course I did not risk registration at the French high school. So without any registration, I followed

the courses on French civilization at the University of Montpellier. Furthermore, I was literally wallowing with delight in German and French literature. I swallowed novels in those languages like the “fin gourmet” swallows oysters, which by the way I don’t like at all. I also followed courses in English literature and particularly in literary English, given free of charge to the children of refugees by a professor of Oxford who had retired to Montpellier. I am always indebted to this man who introduced me to and familiarized me with the beauty of the English language. Later, when I arrived in New York, people said “Oh, this young man is speaking the King’s English.” I must say they did not understand me very well and I did not understand them at all. In Montpellier, where we were staying for about a year and a half, we lived—I would not call it an apartment—in two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a tiny living-room. The toilet was downstairs in the backyard. These lodgings were in a small old house in a suburb of Montpellier quite near the slaughter house. Across the street there was a family living in two rooms and in the kitchen they kept a goat. Our landlord was a couple, rather nice people, who had never seen Jews before. They considered us like strange beings from outer space. Our three furnished rooms were formerly occupied by an old aunt who had left Montpellier. One day the landlord told us that their aunt would return and that we had to leave. This was dramatic for us. We did not immediately find a furnished apartment cheap enough in view of our limited financial resources.

Finally we moved to another place quite distant from where we had been staying. The place was even worse. Just one detail but an important one: the facilities were in the kitchen and the kitchen was a small closet separated by a thin wooden wall from one of the two bedrooms. After a few days—we were in a very dismal, if not a desperate condition—we heard a strange noise on our doorstep. Our former landlord had a dog, a cocker spaniel, which became very attached to us, spending more time with us

than with his owners. A whining, peeping sound reached our ears. It was Ketty, the cocker spaniel, who had detected us, who had followed us and found us. We brought him back to the owner, who took us back because apparently the dog would have died if we had stayed away. I still don't know where they put up the old aunt, but all this worked out for us very well and we stayed there until we left for Marseille, the first stopover on our journey to the U.S.A.

Marseille: a Scottish shower and men with a big heart

Thinking back to our stay in Marseille, the so-called Scottish shower comes to my mind. At least in my part of the world, the Scottish shower is known as changing from hot to cold and then again to hot and then again to cold and so on. In our case, "hot" meant: now the U.S. consulate has a visa ready for us. "Cold": there is another complication, another problem to be solved. Indeed, from the time we registered for the first papers at the U.S. consulate in Nantes at the end of May 1940 and after having accomplished all the required formalities, in particular after having obtained from our family in the United States the financial guarantee for the five of us, we still hadn't got the visa in early 1942. You must realize the context: we were in the non-occupied zone and there still was, at least until Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941, a U.S. diplomatic representation in Vichy. If my recollections are correct, Admiral Leahy was the U.S. Ambassador to the Vichy government. But of course after the United States entered the war following the attack in Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Ambassador had been recalled to Washington, but current affairs like the issuance of immigration visas were still accomplished in Marseille, where there was a U.S. consulate.

The U.S. consulate represented the gate to heaven for us, heaven in both definitions of safe harbor but also of paradise. My

father and I went, I don't know how many times, from Montpellier to Marseille, waiting in long lines of refugees in front of the U.S. consulate. The queues extended to the sidewalk. The U.S. consulate at that time was located—and this is really quite an astonishing symbol—in a street called “Rue du Paradis,” *Paradise Street*. These lines, composed of potential immigrants to the United States, proved to be an easy prey for the French police under the Vichy regime, which could pick out and arrest a number of Jewish immigrants deporting them to French concentration camps, which were the transit for the extermination camps in Germany and Poland.

Of course, the German occupiers were extremely pleased by the way the police under the orders of Vichy performed their tasks. I remember there was a French policeman in civilian clothes who approached my father and asked for his passport. My father didn't show it. The name of Israel, which is our name, would have been a marvelous occasion to arrest us, both my father and myself. So he said that we lost our passport and that we were Luxembourg refugees living temporarily in the south of France before we could return to our country. He also added that in his family, France was always considered as the symbol of freedom and democracy. He explained it to the French policeman in a manner and with a voice, which was really reminiscent of the best theater actors, such as Michel Simon. He added also that his mother—and this was a real fact—died prematurely from a heart attack during the First World War, because she was afraid at one time that France would lose the war. There were tears in his eyes and the eyes of the French policeman were also humid. Result: once more we escaped the worst.

The waiting period for the delivery of the U.S. immigration visa became longer and longer. A new, rather complicated “quota system” was instituted, based on the birthplace and not on the nationality of the potential immigrant, and as a consequence my father, his sister, and me were on the Luxembourg quota list,

while my mother and her brother were on the German or Polish list, because they were born in a village which was German before the First World War and Polish after that war. We wrote to the former chief rabbi of Luxembourg, Dr. Serebrenick, who was quite an outstanding man full of dynamism, courage, and dedication to help others. He gave proof of his indomitable courage by personally confronting the infamous Adolf Eichmann, whom he visited in Berlin in order to get an exit visa for members of the Jewish community, who had stayed with him in Luxembourg. That was, I believe, in the year 1941. Eichmann, who was the bookkeeper of the Holocaust, was largely responsible for the murder of millions of Jews. He shouted at Dr. Serebrenick, while sitting in a luxurious office in Berlin: "Jude, stehen bleiben!" *Jew, stop at the door!* Rabbi Serebrenick did not stop but walked down and Eichmann was flabbergasted. He never saw a Jew like that or he never thought that Jews could be like that. Finally Rabbi Serebrenick succeeded in receiving the authorization and hundreds of Jews, thanks to him, were rescued because they could leave Luxembourg under Nazi occupation.

Serebrenick was already established in New York when our letters reached him. He traveled to Washington and at the Immigration department he asked the officer, which one of the two quotas was still open, the German or the Polish? The officer answered the German and then Serebrenick took out of his pocket a document, which was signed under oath, evidencing that Feuerstein, the village where my mother and uncle were born, was German. By the way, if the answer would have been Polish, Rabbi Serebrenick would have pulled out of his pocket another document confirming that Feuerstein was, at the date of the birth of my mother and uncle, Polish and not German.

One can say that a remarkable person like Serebrenick saved your life, since in France your chance of survival would have been very weak.

Absolutely, particularly since the occupation of the so-called free zone by the German army in late 1942. Some Jews survived in occupied France because they were hidden by friendly and very courageous Frenchmen. But the risk was great. If we had stayed, we would probably have perished.

Let me give you another example of what I call the Scottish shower in Marseille. In early May 1942, after almost two long years of anguish and waiting, the immigration visas were delivered to the five of us. Not like today, a stamp on the passport, but a beautiful document on parchment with a red ribbon and the U.S. seal with the American eagle. I can hardly describe the relief and joy we felt, when each of us had this document firmly in his hand, giving us a free passage to the land of the free and the brave.

So we left Montpellier to Marseille several days before May 10, 1942, the day on which we should embark on the French ship, the *Maréchal Lyautey*, for Casablanca. We were staying in a drab cheap hotel in a small side street, very uncomfortable but that was quite unimportant. We counted the hours until the tenth of May 1942.

There was just one more formality to be fulfilled to complete our passport: an exit visa out of France. Normally this would pose no problem once the immigration visa to the U.S.A. was obtained. And then we received a cold, I would say an icy shower. My father, who took our passports to the French relevant authority, had a big smile when entering the office of the competent authority and a few minutes later he came out, his face ashen, crestfallen. Indeed, according to a new order by the German occupier, male nationals of allied nations aged between eighteen and fifty, could not leave France anymore. This concerned me: born on the fifth of May 1924, I had just reached the age of eighteen. Of course, there was no question of separating us or making an amputation of one finger from the hand of the five fingers, as Rabbi Serebrenick called us. But in really dangerous

situations my father always showed calm and great resolve. He immediately called his friend, René Blum, a former Luxembourg Minister of Justice who was on the black list of the Nazis and in exile with us in the south of France. René Blum immediately got in touch with the official representative of Luxembourg to the Vichy regime. I think his name was Mr. Funck. The latter went without the slightest delay to see the Interior Minister of the Vichy regime. Both devised a solution. They said that Luxembourg, indeed, had been incorporated into the German Reich. Therefore the prohibition to leave France did not apply to Luxembourgers. One day, before the departure of the ship in Marseille, the five of us received the exit visas; the icy shower became warm again.

The unknown heroes of Gibraltar

You eventually embarked in Marseille on May 10, 1942. Exactly two years after the invasion of Luxembourg by the Germans and the beginning of your peregrination.

That's correct, but on that particular day, we unexpectedly had another cold shower. A German military commission came on board and scrutinized the list of all passengers. Some of them were compelled to leave the ship. Fortunately we could stay and finally we left the harbor and reached the open sea.

Our ship, the *Maréchal Lyautey*, was escorted by two destroyers. We soon reached the Straits of Gibraltar, occupied by the British Army. Suddenly, quite a number of young men, French sailors on our ship, jumped into the sea swimming to the shores of Gibraltar. The two destroyers were pointing their cannons to these courageous soldiers, who went on swimming, ignoring what probably was just a symbolic threat. These sturdy and gallant young Frenchmen who joined the Resistance movement or the Free French forces of General de Gaulle, were representative of

the real France, the France fighting for liberty and human rights. But perhaps they remained unknown, perhaps they perished in battles or got well-deserved decorations after the Liberation. Whatever, they remained in my memory as what I would call the unknown heroes. They chose a life of danger rather than the comfort to stay at home under the domination of the Nazis. These young men and I had in common that we were of the same age and confronted with the same enemy. And that's where the comparison stops. They were voluntarily fighting the Nazis while I was a pre-designed victim of our common foe. If this had not been the case, would I have been a volunteer in the Resistance movement? I don't know. But fundamentally, it is a question of the context which determines the position one takes later.

Basically, contexts determine events in history. But contexts change, they evolve, and that is why comparisons with the past are basically wrong, because history is a dynamic and constantly changing process.

From Casablanca to the shores of liberty

Let us come back to earth, or rather to the sea. After having crossed the Straits of Gibraltar, I suppose that the shores of Casablanca were soon appearing on the horizon.

It depends what you understand by soon. It took us two or three days and then we arrived in Casablanca. Getting ashore at that time meant for non-French Jewish refugees passing through a number of controls until we had free passage to the buses waiting outside the harbor, not to take us to Casablanca but to one of its suburbs, Ain Sebah, situated on the fringes of what appeared to me to be the desert. During our three weeks stay in Ain Sebah, we only got once a permit to go to Casablanca, a town of which I only have a dim recollection but which I really discovered through the Hollywood classic *Casablanca*, with its

unforgettable cast of actors: Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Peter Lorre, Claude Rains, Walter Slezak, and many other gifted actors. I have seen that movie picture ten if not twenty times in the United States and later in Luxembourg.

Our three week stay in Ain Sebah was not at all romantic. We all were lodged—about three hundred refugees, men, women, and children—in a large drab room and slept on straw mattresses.

As mentioned before, I had become eighteen years old just five days before our departure from Marseille. In Ain Sebah I smoked my first cigarettes and I also shaved for the first time; not a beard, only some fluffy hair.

This operation took place in the courtyard of our refugee camp, where there was a huge basin with running water, more precisely tepid water, which definitely could not qualify as drinking water. The hygienic conditions there were—and this is an understatement—rather poor. If my recollections are correct, the whole camp had just two toilets, one for men, and one for women.

My father, like quite a number of elderly people, caught some kind of tropic fever there. Fortunately there was a very kind and competent medical doctor among the refugees who treated the sick people. To my father and to those who caught the same illness, he administered quinine. At that time there were neither antibiotics nor penicillin. My father's fever did not go down and we all were deadly afraid that he would not be allowed to board the ship. The day we embarked in the harbor of Casablanca on the *Serpa Pinto*, a Portuguese ship destined for New York, we covered my father with blankets, because he was shivering. But descending from the bus, he took the blankets off his shoulders and walked upright in firm steps aboard the ship. Once we arrived on the lower deck, he nearly fainted in my arms.

Our ship was crammed with passengers. Many slept on deck like myself. My father couldn't and he was put up in a large room

practically without any air, where the luggage was normally stored. Yet he survived like many others. How, I don't know. It was some kind of a miracle.

We crossed the ocean in three weeks. In normal circumstances, it would have taken eight days. We stopped at the Canary Islands and later in Hamilton, Bermuda, where a strict passenger control was undertaken in order to detect possible German spies. Both British and American secret service police interrogated every passenger. For me that was quite a fascinating experience and it awoke in my mind stories of spies and criminals.

The ocean was literally infested with German submarines, threatening to sink our ship, if the captain did not agree to put the Jewish passengers in life boats, which would have been easy for the Nazis to sink. Of course, the captain refused. He was a proud Portuguese. But this trip to New York was the next to last the *Serpa Pinto* undertook until the end of the war.

We all knew that we were confronting grave dangers daily, but we did not mind. We had escaped the hell of occupied Europe and the threat to be deported to death camps in Germany or Eastern Europe. Aboard the ship nothing special happened. There was not even a storm. The monotony was broken either through games like tennis or chess or through gossip, which dealt with the usual topic: adultery. Those who indulged in this kind of exercise appeared to me gloating in glee. They were usually elderly and physically unattractive women and men. I reflected on the sources and motives of gossip and came to the conclusion that the fundamental causes of gossip were usually found in some sort of a frustration by those who start it. The same is true as far as the spreading of rumors is concerned.

The monotony was also broken by a happy event. It was the birth of a child, a girl, aboard the ship. This girl, whose parents were Luxembourgers, was called "Serpa" in honor of the name of the ship which took us to the safe heaven of the United States.

The nearer we came to our destination, the more the risks of being sunk by Nazi submarines diminished. What was our feeling as we approached the shores of America? It was a feeling of joy, of gratitude, of fulfillment, and a silent prayer. Finally, first in a dim haze and then clearer and clearer the famous New York skyline appeared. In a split second, in a flash crossing our mind, we realized the deep meaning of America. It is the greatest of all values: "Freedom! Freedom!" Like all the refugees who preceded us and those who will follow us, we all understood that this was the nation where the future of mankind is shaped.

3. Factory Worker

Blue-collar worker

After the understandably deep emotion you felt upon your arrival in the United States, the realities of the day-to-day life—in particular finding a job and generating the necessary resources in order to make a living—imposed themselves. How did you and your family cope with this in a country with a lot of question marks for you?

Before giving an answer to this question, let me just tell you that not so long ago, an American born, bred, and sired in that country and who, like many Americans, is fascinated by Europe and particularly by France, said to me: “You know Edmond, you are idealizing America. You see it through the rosy glasses of the young man who in the forties lived in New York. Your judgment is based on the remarkable record of a great president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who not only made an alliance with Winston Churchill and then with Stalin in order to vanquish Hitler, but who, in the early thirties, put into place in the United States a new social system, the New Deal, which to a large extent not only brought relief to those who were in a desperate situation,

who were hungry and ill, but which also introduced a number of economic reforms pulling the United States out one of the deepest economic depressions ever experienced by that young nation.” My friend went on to say: “Today it is different. There is a lot of poverty and social injustice; a lot of expenses are made in order to wage wars, which are unnecessary. Taxes are cut to benefit a minority of very wealthy people instead of being raised and applied primarily to this privileged segment of the population. So the America of the twenty-first century should not be compared to the America which you experienced during the last World War.”

I most definitely do not agree with this judgment because in this reasoning, a very important factor is missing. This factor, rather, this value shaping the policy and destiny of the United States whatever the Administration in power, is “freedom.” Freedom to fight for, freedom to be preserved, freedom to be nurtured, particularly in a world where the planet earth seems to shrink in its spatial dimension because of instant communications.

Well, what you just said gives me food for thought, which I have to digest. But just for the sake of the description of your first experiences in the United States, would you kindly agree to revert to my first question: How did you and your family cope with all the problems of daily existence?

Of course philosophical reflections did not permeate the mind of a young man looking for a job. But I had a feeling of freedom and this feeling proved to be a source of energy driving me to meet the challenges of our daily existence.

We realized very quickly that we could not count on others, but had to count first and foremost on ourselves. I was resolved to shun as soon as possible the help we received from institutions or from individuals and to take our destiny in our own hands. This is the American way. It is easier to be said than to be done,

and in particular for Europeans completely unprepared for a new type of society.

Right after our arrival we found lodgings and food free of charge thanks to a Jewish institution called "Hias," which was located in downtown Manhattan. The location was certainly not West End Avenue or Westchester County, the residential areas reserved to the wealthy. But we had a roof over our head, a bed to sleep in and food to still our hunger. We shared our sleeping quarters with other refugees where, of course, men and women were separated. For breakfast, lunch, and dinner, we stood in line. I must confess that the food was quite wholesome, and compared to what we had to eat during the war in France, it was of excellent quality even if not "haute cuisine." Perhaps it was too substantial, increasing the cholesterol rate above the normal level. But who at that time cared about this?

What bothered me and also my parents, uncle, and aunt, was the fact that we depended on others. Therefore I quickly looked for a job. I made several attempts. The first was in a factory where, I think, they recycled zippers. I started at 8:00 A.M. At 4:00 P.M. the foreman came up and told me: "You are certainly not mechanically inclined, we can't keep you. So you can pass at the cashier and we shall pay you five dollars for the day." My parents, uncle, and aunt were waiting downstairs. I didn't want to discourage them and when they anxiously asked me how I managed, I said: "Well, I don't like this factory, and therefore I quit."

A second attempt was at a soap powder factory in Hoboken, New Jersey. Here I must open a small paragraph. While in France I was studying at a Jewish training school called ORT. This school started in Russia following the pogroms against the Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century. ORT fanned out in many countries and in some of them this school is still active, particularly in Israel. Anyhow, I studied courses in chemistry and in soap manufacturing there. I still have in my attic the chemical composition of the soap of Marseille.

I presented myself to the company that was hiring. I told them about my studies of soap manufacturing. The man behind the desk nodded his head, and told me that he could make a try with me, starting the following day. When I arrived I thought that they would bring me to a laboratory. Indeed, during the whole preceding night, I had been looking up my notes of soap manufacturing. The next morning at the factory, I was directed to a large hall where workers were filling bags with white soap powder. I was given several of these bags. I had to take the powder with a shovel out of a large container and put it in the bags. I remember that in the evening my nose was irritated and my eyes were red. But the next day and the following days I went on. After a few weeks, I couldn't stand it anymore physically and I quit. I believe that since then I suffer from irritation, sinus trouble, which developed into some kind of chronic allergy.

A week later, I started in another factory. It was located in downtown Manhattan. I had to polish special bullets for machine guns. This was done manually by putting some oily paste on the nozzles of the bullets and then polishing them on special machines. Of course the paste splashed into my eyes. I put on protection. The other workers called our activity "wobbling." So I became a Wobbler. Our work did not require special skills or physical effort. The wages were low, at a strict minimum. Still, I would have stayed on, but two weeks after I was hired the factory went broke.

Thanks to the good advice and intervention of a close friend, I got another job at a small factory, a machine shop, located in Newark, New Jersey. I was completely unqualified for this type of work, but I escaped being fired on the spot because there was a need for manpower. I suffered quite a number of minor injuries in the course of my work, which fortunately did not cause me serious harm. There was, however, one accident where a burning steel splinter entered my eyes and, thanks to God and to an excellent ophthalmologist, I kept my eyesight and was able to resume

my work several days after this accident. Each day, one of the owners of the factory walked through the aisles where the machines were installed. He looked over the shoulder of the workers and when he was nearing me I became very nervous, I trembled, and of course was even clumsier than usually. The negative remarks he made in a grumbling voice on my performance sunk directly into my sub-consciousness, because instinctively I did not want to become aware of them. Anyhow, I resisted staunchly all the physical and mental pains I had to endure and went on working in that factory, sometimes sixty hours a week until October 1945, when we had the opportunity to return home to Luxembourg.

Let me add a few memories concerning my contacts with my friend, to whom I owed a job which lasted for more than three years. When we arrived in New York, he was the only one who, the day after our arrival, looked us up at our temporary quarters at the Hias on Lafayette Street. I shall never forget that right from the start he offered to give to my father a power of attorney over his bank account in case we needed some money. Of course my father did not make use of this facility, but it was a very rare gesture of generosity. My friend had two jobs, one in the factory to which he recommended me and a second one as a busboy in a cafeteria. Soon he was drafted into the army and after the war he stayed in it, making a career in the contingent stationed in Germany. He now holds the rank of General.

America: a chosen land, a land unknown

Well, you expanded and elaborated quite a bit on America, its fundamental principles as well as your experiences as a factory worker. I think it would be interesting if you could evoke as well your social life in the United States, your contacts with Americans, in particular with your relatives and friends. After all, the existence of man does not consist only of work.

Indeed, let me illustrate this out of my recollections by a few pictures or flashbacks.

First, our experience with regard to the apartments we rented. The first one we found thanks to an ad in a newspaper. We contacted a man by phone—God bless his soul, he was a good man with a heart, wide and generous. Let me call him Mr. C. He said: “Well, have a look at the apartment.” We did not know Manhattan and most definitely ignored that in the early forties West End Avenue was one of the more elegant, residential sectors of New York. We went there and of course the apartment was beyond our expectations. We asked for the rent and he said: “How much can you pay?” We indicated a rather modest but realistic amount, realistic with regard to our means. Then he looked at us with humid eyes and said: “Poor refugees from Europe. I will let this apartment to you for that price.” We were elated and the next day we moved in with our few belongings. I must say, we were very happy there and the thought of returning there in the evening compensated for the many deceptions and aggravations I suffered while looking for a job.

After three or four weeks we received a letter from a lawyer by registered mail. It was couched in the legalistic language, yet not menacing or aggressive. It stated that Mr. C. was not entitled to let this apartment to us, because he was only the janitor and his job consisted in relaying the phone calls of those who were interested to rent the apartment to the law office which represented the owner. It went on, mentioning that we could stay if we paid an amount consistent with the space, the furniture, and the location of the apartment. The amount proved to be about five times the one on which the janitor had arranged with us. My father went to see the lawyer, but of course he was not successful. The lawyer said that he would waive any legal proceedings if we left the apartment within a week.

Very much upset, we told this story to the janitor, who said: “Yes, that’s the way life is here in America. You are constantly

confronted with challenges and to be successful, you need also a bit of luck. Now the luck is that I have another apartment to show to you in a beautiful section of Manhattan, even higher up. It's on Broadway, 125th Street." He had a car and drove us to the apartment. Of course it was not comparable to the one on West End Avenue, but the price was in the range of our financial means. In the description of this flat, Mr. C. was dithyrambic. He said: "It's a jewel. You are in the heart of Manhattan. Could you imagine Broadway, 125th Street? That is higher up Manhattan than the former one on the 60th Street!" He forgot to tell us that the standing of the residential sector of Manhattan did not depend on the level or street number where they were located. Thus 125th Street and Broadway had a much lower status than, for instance, 60th Street. But what could we do? In the evening we packed our clothes into our few pieces of luggage and moved to this new apartment.

Very soon we noted a rumbling noise about every five minutes. We looked out of the window and saw that across the street there was a bridge; the subway train drove from the underground to an elevated bridge and then alongside a few blocks including the one where our apartment building was located. To cut a long story short, in view of our situation we somehow adjusted to the noise. We had no other choice.

About a month later, after we returned from our Sunday afternoon walk in the Bronx Zoo, we found our apartment in a dreadful state. Somebody had broken into our flat. Our clothes were ripped and were lying on the floor. The burglars, obviously mad because they did not find any valuables, gave vent to their anger and deception by tearing apart the few clothes we had. We immediately called the police. A cop, tall, with blue steely eyes, came after two hours. He looked at the havoc and then with a blank stare said to us: "These were not burglars. Probably a bunch of kids or youngsters, who wanted to show you that you are not tolerated in this section of the town. This section is mainly

inhabited by Irish. Why don't you move to the Jewish section? That's the advice I give you," and then he departed, a shining Colt dangling on his hips.

We were puzzled, desperate, I would even say, aghast. The next day we went to the "Hias" institution to gather information. We finally learned a lesson: the separation between the various ethnic groups composing the population of New York is deemed to be necessary. The cultural walls dating back to the past have maintained themselves throughout the generations, but beyond these invisible walls all ethnic communities are solidly bound together by their solidarity as American citizens. So, if in different parts of Manhattan they cultivate their traditions and languages of origin, in the end they share common values.

A suitable apartment was shown to us and we rented it. Its location was on West 106th Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenue. This was very convenient to us, as our apartment was walking distance from the synagogue called Ramath Orah, which was founded around 1941 by refugees mainly from Luxembourg. Its chief rabbi was Dr. Robert Serebrenick, whom I mentioned before.

A few minutes ago you appeared to me to be idealizing America a little bit. Does the day-to-day reality as described by you through your own experiences not deny this idealistic description?

Not at all. Like a portrait of Rembrandt, life is made of light and shadow, but in America light prevails. It is freedom for everyone.

It should be stressed that during the period I spent in the United States, this country was at war. America was engaged on two fronts, in the Pacific and in Europe. At home, men aged from eighteen years on were drafted in the army. Military service was compulsory. Also refugees who did not have American nationality were drafted. I appeared several times before the draft board, but got a deferment because I had to support my family.

In the U.S. homeland families were worried and many were in grief, because they lost their loved ones.

In the present time there is a tendency to forget the sacrifices the United States made for the preservation of democracy and freedom worldwide. We should not forget that so many cemeteries in Europe and in the Pacific region are covered with white crosses and stars of David. Unfortunately Alzheimer's disease does not only affect individuals. There is also a kind of political Alzheimer's disease which affects nations and political leaders.

A feeling of solidarity bound all Americans, whatever their ethnic background, their color, or their creed. There were numerous girls who became pen pals of the soldiers abroad. Entertainers such as Bob Hope and Bing Crosby and many others brought the smell and taste of home, a warming sense of humor, to those who were risking their lives day and night in foxholes, on battlefields, on ships, and planes for the preservation of freedom and for the liberation of those who were oppressed, like my countrymen in Luxembourg. For instance, there were scenes of wild joy, of overwhelming enthusiasm in the streets of Paris and all the towns and villages when they were liberated by the U.S. army. But this enthusiasm unfortunately was dampened very quickly through politics.

In the United States we closely followed the development on the battlefields. At that time a feeling of deep friendship grew between the peoples of the United States and of the Soviet Union. Women's organizations under the guidance and leadership of the wife of the President Roosevelt, Eleanor, were knitting woollies for the Soviet soldiers, who confronted the German armies in the coldest of all winters. We all followed on the radio with anxiety and hope the outcome on the battlefields in the Soviet Union. Soviet military leaders like Marshall Zhukov or General Timochenko were heroes for us. Here again, after Yalta things changed, politics took over, and what might have been an opportunity to create a real enduring peace between East and

West was soon shattered by so-called national interests. The Cold War between East and West broke out and lasted for nearly half a century.

After Stalingrad, the winds most definitely turned in favor of the Allies. At that time the Luxembourg government in exile opened an embassy in Moscow. The first Ambassador was our friend René Blum, Minister of Justice before the war in Luxembourg. He looked up my father and also spoke to me asking us whether I could come with him as his personal assistant to Moscow. The condition of course was that I had to learn the Russian language in a very short period of time. He presented me a textbook and I registered in evening courses at a specialized school in New York. This was a dream; it lasted several weeks, and then I gave up. I was too tired to follow intensive evening courses after my work at the factory. But the real reason was that I didn't want to leave for Moscow and to abandon my family, in particular my sick father, in New York.

Let me further give you a flashback on the contacts with our relatives and some friends of the Jewish community. To our relatives we owe an eternal debt of gratitude for allowing us to come to the United States. They saved our lives, they saved us from being deported and probably gassed by the Nazis, which is certainly worse than being killed by a bullet.

We saw our relatives from time to time. They were very nice to us, but they had their own life and that's what we did not understand right away. We thought that they had to be more at our disposal. We adjusted gradually, sometimes a bit painfully to our new life.

Sidney, a cousin of my father who had granted the five of us the financial guarantee, had a niece who lived with her mother and grandmother on Lincoln Avenue in Brooklyn. They invited us from time to time on Friday evenings for the "Shabbat dinner." Hortense was a bright young woman who worked as secretary for her uncle Sydney. She was a pen pal of a young soldier

who fought the war in the Pacific and whom she married after the war. At these dinners, my father, who along with quite an array of other illnesses, was also a diabetic, had to eat a special bread called gluten bread. That's why Hortense and her mother called him "Gluten Gustav." They were warm-hearted and naive, and the nickname they gave to my father was a special brand of a sense of humor which took us quite a bit of time to digest.

Did you have a girl friend in those days? I can hardly imagine that you spent your time only between the factory and the family.

I must say that most of my leisure time, I spent with my family. Sometimes I went out alone, encouraged by my mother. I met and sometimes dated girls at the Jewish community of Ramath Orah. However, I felt particularly attracted by two girls who worked with me at the factory. One was of Polish origin and the other one had Greek parents. The latter was beautiful and sexy. One day at the Christmas party offered by the factory owner to the workers, things became wild and dangerous between several factions of workers, all fighting for the favors of these two girls. Knives were pulled out of pockets. I ran away and since then my relationship with these two attractive girls was essentially platonic.

I was and still am a dreamer. Behind my lathe, I was dreaming of our return to Luxembourg, of a quiet and studious life as a white-collar worker, preferably as a well-protected employee in the governmental or municipal administration.

But the main part of my dreams was devoted to philosophy. I was intellectually groping my way through the hazy maze of philosophical theories that my father, even in his state of physical illness, continued patiently and passionately to explain to me. Working my way through all this and trying to shape my own philosophy was an ongoing process which lasts until today.

“Next year in Luxembourg”

If I had to ask you to summarize in a few words your experiences, I mean your life in the United States, what would you say?

I would say two words: “gratitude” and “hope.” Gratitude towards a nation, which is based on the fundamental principle of freedom. Freedom of choice being the main, if not the essential source of energy, allowing everyone to go on living and to meet the many challenges for a successful life. And for us, Luxembourg refugees, the hope, thanks to America, to return to our country. A prayer the Jews recited several times on Passover is: “The next year, in Jerusalem.” We, in America, were praying: “The next year, in Luxembourg.”

Speaking about Luxembourg, do you recall among your encounters in the Luxembourg section of the congregation in New York some instances which left a specific imprint in your memory?

Yes. They are linked to the visits paid to us and the gatherings made for us by members of the Luxembourg government in exile or other exiled Luxembourg officials. Their presence cemented the links binding us to our country. From time to time we had a party where the Luxembourg national dish, the “gekachte Kéis,” *cooked cheese*, was the main, if not the only course of the dinner. The cooked cheese was salted by so many tears which poured out of our eyes. We also cried with emotion and pride when the New York newspapers, one morning in 1942, headlined on the front pages: “First general strike by the smallest allied nation, Luxembourg.”

But it was only in 1945 that we were able to return to our homeland. To be precise, in October 1945, on a Norwegian Cargo ship called *Ida Backe*, where the stewards let us have their cabins, a testimony of solidarity to refugees returning to their

homeland. After crossing the ocean, this time not infested by Nazi submarines, we arrived in Antwerp, which was to a large extent destroyed by the V-1 and V-2 rockets, which Hitler asked his specialist, Wernher von Braun, to develop as the ultimate weapon. After the war the American Space Agency hired Wernher von Braun, who devised rockets for interplanetary missions. In Antwerp a train took us first to Brussels, where we did not stay for more than one day, and then to Luxembourg.

What were your feelings on that train, particularly when approaching Luxembourg?

Mainly a mixed feeling made of bliss and uncertainty. It was similar to the one we had on the *Serpa Pinto* when we were nearing the shores of America. But the source of our feelings this time was different. Approaching America, it meant for us freedom and a land unknown. Approaching Luxembourg, the source of our feeling was happiness to be back home after five long and eventful years, as well as uncertainty about how we would be received by our compatriots. In what condition would we find our house and all that rightfully belonged to us, and how would we organize our life to make a new start?

Leaving the train, we were not crying, because our emotions were pent up, locked in our mind and soul, unable to find an outlet by tears. We were struck by the fact that Luxembourg City did not look much different from the one we left. A taxi took us to our house, which was occupied by a former tenant and by some families, which the Luxembourg authorities had temporarily installed there. The attics were unoccupied, so that we could establish ourselves there, in the house which we owned. And this persisted for several weeks until the temporary tenants had found other lodgings. In the neighborhood people showed us a lot of sympathy. Was this sincere or not? It was difficult to say. The cellar of our house was full of dust and dirt, but the worst

of the dirt was the Nazi propaganda literature which the Germans could not dust away as they had to leave Luxembourg City hastily at the liberation by the U.S. army. During the war, our house was confiscated by the Nazi occupiers and one of the sections of VDB, the “Volksdeutsche Bewegung,” was installed there.

Walking in the streets of Luxembourg City, more specifically walking in the suburbs, I met often long columns of people who looked depressed and who did cleaning work. They were obviously prisoners and were pointed out to us as collaborators. Some people self-righteously pounded their breast and said in a loud and resounding voice: “These are Nazis, traitors. If I had to make the decision, I would have shot them.” Later we were told that those who were the most outspoken in their aggressiveness were perhaps themselves not so irreproachable. They turned out to be staunch supporters of the Allies after the battle of Stalingrad and when the first tanks of General Patton were nearing Luxembourg. I myself could not develop any feeling of hatred against those branded as great criminals to the public eye. As a matter of fact, I felt neither hatred nor pity. I don’t know what I felt, but I believe that some of them should have been brought to court, not just herded like sheep and compelled to do forced labor without any trial. But it is unjust of me to pass a judgment on this, because during the Nazi occupation in Luxembourg, I was in France, then safely in the United States until the end of the war.

Another picture, very vivid in my memory, is the empty square, where the Synagogue of Luxembourg stood before it was destroyed by the Nazis. Until its reconstruction on another spot, a religious Jewish service was first held at a place which became the “Théâtre des Capucins” and then on the ground floor of a one-story building which later became the Trading Floor of the Luxembourg Stock Exchange, until it was torn down to make a place for a supermarket.

Weren't you shocked at the thought that a place of prayer became a trading floor of the Stock Exchange and then a supermarket?

For me any place can be a place of prayer and meditation; a sanctuary is a place where people are not killed, a place of peace and justice. That's a very important thought for me, in particular in our time, in the twenty-first century, when people commit crimes for the sake of keeping sanctuaries untouched. God, the ultimate Reality, is everywhere and not bound to any specific place or building.

Coming back to your personal life, what were your first efforts to reinsert yourself into the society?

I first tried to resume my studies after an absence of nearly four years. I had to prepare myself to pass the "baccalauréat," the final high school examination. I had several months at my disposal, and then I passed it thanks to a program which was created for those who had to leave their country because of their religion or those who were drafted into the Nazi army. I passed it successfully, in particular because my teachers gave me good marks on my essays written in French and in English relating our experiences in France and in the United States. They were very tolerant regarding mathematics, chemistry, and physics. Anyhow, I got the "baccalauréat," which opened to me the doors of the universities in neighboring countries.

But as we know, you did you not pursue your studies. Can you explain why?

First of all, I did not want to leave my family. After the war the links which united us were stronger than ever before. But that was not the main reason. In all honesty, I really did not want to go to the university. Was it out of laziness, was it because I was

afraid? Who really knows after so many years? The fact is that I am an autodidact. Not by accident, but by nature. And so, I looked for a job.

And your family, your father and uncle?

My uncle resumed his activities as a traveling salesman in textiles. My father, who was diminished, not intellectually but physically, could not resume his professional activities. He gave counsel and advice, and helped, thanks to his numerous contacts in the government, not only our family but a number of refugees who survived the war.

He passed away in 1949. In the evening before his death he asked me for the book written by the German philosopher Leibniz and read, though he had strong physical suffering, the part of the theory of Leibniz on the "Monads." He was fascinated all his life by this theory in particular and peacefully he passed away. I had the distinct feeling, even conviction, that at last he succeeded in finding the way to reconcile philosophy based on science with faith.

In the evening after his burial my mother recalled to me a story of my childhood.

When I was a little child, my parents, uncle, and aunt liked to go out on Saturday evenings from time to time to a place where they could find some amusement. At that time there was no baby-sitting facility, except for the very wealthy. So, alternatively one of the couples stayed at home with me. One evening, I was perhaps six or seven years old, it was my mother and father's turn to go out. I don't remember how, but I succeeded in escaping the vigilance of my uncle and aunt and running to a dance hall called the "Majestic" where I knew that my mother and father would spend the evening. It was a very popular place, where the Luxembourgers spent an amusing evening dancing to the tunes of tangos and Vienna waltzes. Breathless, I ran up the

stairs to the first floor and to my greatest dismay I saw my mother dancing with a man who was not my father, while my father was dancing with a woman who was a stranger. A burning thought flashed through my mind: that was the end of everything. My parents would separate. They would divorce and leave me alone. Yes, I had the egoistic feeling of every child whose parents are about to divorce: "What will happen to me?"

I cried and shouted with a loud and shrill voice. The music stopped. The dancers froze on the spot. Nobody knew what exactly happened. My mother was the first to react. She saw me, ran to me, asked what happened and in a crying and whining voice, I explained to her the reason for my affliction. She started to laugh and explained that my father and she just went out with a couple of friends and each one was dancing with the partner of the other and that was it. Nothing was changed, not in the slightest manner, in the relationship between my father and herself.

After having recalled this incident, my mother said: "You see, Edi, destiny has finally separated us. This could have happened earlier. God was kind to us and so we survived many trials, many dangers and in spite of the poor state of health of your father, we were able to stay together until today. The moments we spend with those who are close to us are counted. They are precious. When God takes, we must accept. On the other hand, when God gives, we must not hesitate to grasp the opportunity, knowing that the countdown has started already."

This thought, on the evening after the burial of my father, left a deep imprint on my way of thinking, on my way of living. And keeping this in mind, I developed a passion of life, which I call in this book: "In love with life."

4. An International Banker in Luxembourg

Fifty years of banking

You told me that when you were a lathe turner in Newark, New Jersey, you were dreaming to become, once back in Luxembourg, a white-collar worker, preferably an employee in a governmental or municipal administration, socially well-protected. As a child and young man you wanted to become a teacher. Finally you became a banker in Luxembourg, a surprising U-turn. How did this happen and how did you cope with it?

I entered the banking profession more by necessity than inclination. When I was looking for a job after the war, my father was making some contacts. First, in a state-controlled social insurance institution where they were looking for young men to pursue a quiet and perhaps, at the end, a financially rewarding career. But I did not succeed in getting the job; I was told that I was overqualified. That was a nice way to put it; probably they meant underqualified. Anyhow, I did not get the job. Then my father took an appointment with one of the leading people of a bank in Luxembourg—by the way, not the bank where I pursued

my career. He was told: “Your son deserves to make a successful career. He cannot do that if he does not have a university diploma. Therefore I strongly advise you to have your son pursue studies, and once he has completed them and received a diploma, for instance in economics, come back and hopefully I will then have an opening for him.” This advice might not have been so bad, but anyhow neither my father nor I followed this recommendation. So, pursuing his contacts, my father spoke to one of the directors of Banque Internationale à Luxembourg. This man, Joseph Leydenbach, later became president of the bank. He is counted among the builders of Luxembourg’s economy and banking in the postwar era. At the same time he was a writer and a poet, as well as a cello player, a man of many talents. He granted me an interview. He was very kind and asked me whether I had any experience in banking. I said no. And then he asked me if I spoke fluent English and I said yes. A few days later, he hired me. And that’s how my professional career started.

At that time banking in Luxembourg was purely national, to a certain extent parochial. So were the mentalities, except for a few, like Joseph Leydenbach, who was very international in his outlook, highly cultured, open-minded. Joseph Leydenbach left a lasting imprint on the Banque Internationale à Luxembourg. Through his personal example he showed that an executive in a bank or in another institution does not need to be a specialist in his field. He must be creative, forward looking, intuitive, and this was certainly the case with this outstanding personality.

Could you explain how the banking activity in general and your own activity in particular were performed at that time, in the late forties?

I really do not intend to dwell too long on this part of banking. Perhaps giving a brief overview of my own activities in the late forties and early fifties would be the best illustration how in the “Banque Internationale à Luxembourg” and similar banks business

in Luxembourg was conducted. I happened to be in contact with customers very early, not just making current operations, but trying to give them to the best of my knowledge—or rather by intuition—some advice on how they should invest. Why do I say out of intuition? Because at the beginning my knowledge was very fragmentary. At that time, one did not rely so much on charts and on figures.

My first promotion after the first few years was to be allowed go to the teller where we served customers for investment operations, except those who were very important and who had access to a manager in a private office. Among my customers I want to single out one category, retired people, particularly widows. They took a liking to me. And some of these very nice ladies took quite a bit of my time. In the beginning I did not mind; later on it got on my nerves, but I could not show it.

Once I had a rather unusual but also interesting and somewhat disturbing experience. One of the female customers who sometimes were standing in line before my teller told me: “Well, I want to make a special investment and people around here do not need to listen to what I say. Why don’t you have a cup of coffee or tea at my home?” I went to her home with my briefcase. Her husband, a tall, good looking man in the early sixties received me with a blank stare in his eyes. He said: “Oh, you are Edmond Israel and you want to see my wife. Just a second, I will call her.” And then in the beautiful villa this couple owned, he went upstairs and called his wife who came down. She was flustered: “Well, that’s kind of you, Mr. Israel, that you take your spare time for my little problem. Before we get into finance, could you tell me a little bit about yourself? You know, I trust you and I think the advice you gave me the other day was quite good. But I want to know more about the people with whom I deal.” “Well,” I thought to myself, “be careful.” I gave her a brief summary of my life in particular as a refugee in France and in the United States. Then right away I came back to the object of my

visit, that is investing in stocks. In the meantime she apologized. It was a summer evening, rather hot. She changed her gown into a rather flimsy one with a generous décolleté.

Dutifully I took out the list of securities, stocks, and bonds I was recommending at that time. She bent over me. She had a rather strong perfume which I did not find pleasant and I coughed. Still today I am allergic to certain types of perfume. She noticed that her approach was not successful, but did not say a word. I knew that I had to be careful. It was a real balancing act on a razor's edge. These people were influential. So finally in a loud voice, so that her husband could hear me on the first floor, I described the bonds—their maturity, their interest rate, their yield—as well as the stocks. At that time I already particularly favored triple-A (AAA) American equities. After having taken another sip of coffee, I looked at my watch and said: "I am terribly sorry, but I have to look up another customer." I just wanted to make her understand that I was not making an exception for her. She had a smile on her face. It was ironic, kind and resigned at the same time. I think she realized that I was too young and probably naïve and inexperienced with women. We remained on good terms and from time to time, she came to the teller and asked my advice, but that was all and I felt relieved.

OK, but now I would like to hear more about the techniques in banking. How was the securities back office handled, for example? At that time there was no computer, nothing automatic.

Indeed, in the Securities department where I had my desk, a man, who had been at the bank much longer than I, was in charge of securities bookkeeping. He was physically strong, which was important because he had to carry huge heavy ledgers where all the transactions were recorded. In a beautiful handwriting, he couched artfully in blue ink the transactions on the white paper of the securities ledgers. Besides calligraphy he also had the

gift to be an excellent trumpet player in a suburban band of Luxembourg. He also knew how to tell jokes in a flowery and somewhat poetic language which made us laugh. When the head of department entered the room, the laughing stopped abruptly, and we all bent over the files on our desk.

At that time the female employees were mostly doing secretarial work on typewriters. Professionally they were on the lower end of the hierarchical ladder. They had to wear long, ugly linen shirts at work, mainly in dark grey or black. One of the female employees was an exception, because she succeeded to become the secretary of the General Manager and later of the Chairman of the board. She also had the task to supervise the attire of the female employees. She was a spinster, severe with those under her authority, and quite efficient in the exercise of her duties. We, the male employees, had fantasies from time to time, imagining sexy underwear under the long and drab shirts of the girls.

Perhaps the time has come now where we could talk about the process which led the banks in Luxembourg to develop international activities.

I suggest we come back to this when I shall evoke the origin and the present state of banking and financial activities in Luxembourg. To conclude the part describing my banking career, I would say that as soon as the conditions for international activities arose in Luxembourg, my position at Banque Internationale took a U-turn. I mounted the hierarchical ladder quickly and progressively. In the span of ten to fifteen years, I became department head, manager, general manager, as well as a member of the executive board of our bank. My career and the development of the international financial activities in Luxembourg were very much interwoven. This was by chance and by necessity, because there were not so many colleagues who had a good command of English. I was entrusted with the negotiations regarding the administrative functions of the first Eurobond issue. My direct

involvement in this process, which was fascinating, led me to think less of philosophy and to be rather implicated in the construction of a segment of Luxembourg's economy, which over years and decades proved to be sustainable and essential for my country. Indeed Luxembourg now has and I believe will also have in the future, the benefit of international financial activities by far beyond the size of the country. But now I am anticipating my forthcoming developments.

Luxembourg's financial center, a passion to construct

• Origins

You are associated by many in and out of Luxembourg with its financial center. You have been one of the promoters, actors as well as privileged witnesses of this quite astounding occurrence. This was from the early sixties until your partial retirement in the mid-nineties, a fascinating period during which the technological revolution took place as well as a stupendous growth of banking in Luxembourg.

Don't be afraid. I won't cite too many figures, nor shall I enter into many technical details. This is the job of historians and specialists, and I do not count myself in this category. As I am an autodidact, I shall stick to my guns and try to give a more general overview of the origins and various phases which led to the emergence and progressive expansion and growth of international banking in Luxembourg. At the beginning, we were considered by many in and outside of Luxembourg as dreamers, utopians, not to be taken seriously. It was an attitude of benign neglect as well as compassionate indulgence. In the course of time this attitude changed. Why it changed is reflected in my present narrative.

The financial center of Luxembourg has not fallen from heaven like manna in the desert. Luxembourg was far from being a desert

as far as the legal and operational infrastructure for international banking activities was concerned. Our ancestors already had the vision of international financial operation in their minds when creating the Luxembourg Stock Exchange in 1929. It could not be viable in a country as small as Luxembourg. So listing of foreign securities and cross-border transactions were already anticipated, but could not become reality until after the last World War and more specifically until the emergence of the Eurobond market in the early sixties.

• Birth

Luxembourg's banking center has a history and a potential. Luxembourg had to find the context in order to realize its potential. This context was the Eurobond market, which emerged in the early sixties, due to the creativity of international bankers, such as Siegmund Warburg in London. They realized that the time had come when transactions and investments would take place across borders, calling for an efficient infrastructure in instant communications. So is it the technological revolution which brought about this market? No. The emergence of the market is essentially due to the creativity of some outstanding bankers. Yet the market could only evolve as technology allowed transactions to be conducted on a large scale transnationally and even transcontinentally.

In Luxembourg we offered several interesting conditions, particularly for the listing on our stock exchange, as well as the safekeeping of securities and a number of other functions in this context. Like many innovations, the Eurobond market met a heavy dose of skepticism. That's what I call old thinking. We Luxembourgers are usually not skeptical. So, we were ready to engage ourselves in a new line of activities—I would not even call it a venture. We are prudent and cautious people. We leave venturous activities to others.

During the postwar era a number of profound changes took place in Luxembourg. We had to rebuild our country, at least partially, and also adapt our economy to the conditions of that time. Mentalities changed progressively, perhaps not at a fast pace, but profoundly. Luxembourg became international. Luxembourg also became European through the implementation in our country of the first European institution, the European Coal and Steel Authority. We were among the six founding member countries. We also benefitted from a stable social climate which, as history tells us, was not the case in some of the neighboring countries. The moment had arrived when the vision of our forefathers to become international in banking and finance could be fulfilled. Let me recall that in 1929, legislation was enacted in Luxembourg permitting the creation and functioning of international holding companies. The holding company proved to be an important instrument for the conduct of certain financial operations. Of course this legislation had to be adapted to a changing environment. It should be stressed that the principle of transparency and the avoidance of the use of holding companies for purposes not consistent with the legal requirements in our country as well in the countries of the promoters were priorities for the changes in the legislation of holding companies.

Furthermore, the Luxembourg Stock Exchange was also founded in 1929, which could fulfill the role imagined by the founders only much later, thanks to the Eurobond market. Here again, as far as our banking center is concerned, the principle—or should I call it a law of nature—“Nothing is permanent but change” applies. The bedrock, an appropriate legal and administrative framework, existed already but had of course to be adapted. That was the Luxembourg environment when the attention of the initiators and promoters of the first phase of international capital market operations, the Eurobond market, was drawn to Luxembourg.

Nineteen-sixty-three proved to be the turning point from domestic to transnational and even transcontinental banking. In a general manner the Eurobond is an instrument of financing and investment not necessarily denominated in the currency of the issuer. It is also placed both with private and institutional investors on a number of transborder market places. In the early sixties, skeptics considered these issues as being somehow homeless. They were considered orphans. Because of the requirements for institutional investors to buy and to hold only securities listed on an official market, the necessity arose to turn to a stock exchange. After many explorations and investigations, the Luxembourg Stock Exchange proved to offer the best conditions, and so the first Eurobond issue, Autostrade, was listed on our Exchange. This marked the start of an evolution leading Luxembourg to become an international banking and financial center recognized and even coveted by other important centers in and outside of Europe. Just two figures: in 1963, about 150 securities were listed on the Luxembourg Stock Exchange. At the end of 2004, the number of listed securities, of which Eurobonds and shares of investment funds constitute the bulk, exceeds the staggering figure of 33,000.

Some call the Eurobond market a saga. If this saga was presented as a movie, the first act could be situated in New York, the second in London and the third simultaneously in Luxembourg as well as on a number of other market places.

Why the first act in New York?

Because after the war, the main issuing activity of bonds denominated in U.S. dollars took place in New York. Foreign borrowers for long term financing turned to New York and the bonds were mainly placed in the U.S.A. But in the wake of recurrent deficits of balance of payments in the United States, a feature which appears to be permanent in that country, the U.S. administration

of President John F. Kennedy introduced a tax, the well known “interest equalization tax,” which the American investors had to pay on the interest paid out on bonds in U.S. dollars issued by foreign entities. That’s the end of the first act.

The second one took place in London. Astute and creative bankers like Siegmund Warburg perceived that this was now the right moment to shift this activity from New York to London and the European continent. Of course, Siegmund Warburg had already thought for quite some time that the dormant short-term placed U.S. dollars originating from the U.S. Marshall Plan were waiting for an opportunity, like the Eurobonds, assuring a higher return. A technological infrastructure for transborder and transcontinental transactions existed in the limbs, but of course was not as sophisticated as we know it nowadays, thanks to the evolutionary process of science and technology, moving everything at a constantly faster pace. Siegmund Warburg and his associates visited a number of potential European borrowers and finally raised an interest in Italy. And that’s how the Autostrade issue was realized. Siegmund Warburg, both a dreamer and a realist, was convinced that he could not conclude such an operation alone. The syndicate must also include banks outside of London. Thus the managing syndicate of the \$15,000,000 Autostrade bond issue, 5.5%, 1963-1978, was composed of S.G. Warburg/London, Amro Bank/Netherlands, Deutsche Bank/Germany, Bank of Brussels/Belgium, Lazard Frères/France, and Banca Commerciale/Italy. No trumpets were blown at the birth of the Eurobond market and yet, this first Eurobond issue heralded a new era in banking and finance.

The curtain falls again. *Third act.*

After the official listing of the Autostrade bonds on the Luxembourg Stock Exchange, new actors—Luxembourgers—appear on the stage. They were mostly unknown outside of the banking world. Among those actors, I count myself among the least known at that time. I treaded cautiously on unknown

ground and was testing uncharted waters, which were particularly dangerous as I don't know how to swim. At the beginning it was only a matter for me of negotiating the procedures to list these bonds on our Exchange. But the whole structure of this issue with a management syndicate, an underwriting, and also a selling group was not well known in our center. As a matter of fact, it took me quite some time to understand all its implications. Some of my superiors asked me: "What does that mean, underwriting group?" I said in French: "Syndicat de Garantie." That raised some eyebrows: "You never told us, Mr. Israel, that our bank must guarantee this issue. You should have done that." I did not panic, but was on the verge of it. Soon I learned that it only meant to guarantee the placement of the bonds, which was anyhow practically assured. I was given a second chance, not only to stay in the bank but also in this field of international activities.

Thinking back to these pioneering times, I must say that I had a double function in the role I assumed both with gusto and anxiety. I had to explain in Luxembourg the structure and the mechanics of financial operations, which I slowly and only progressively started to understand myself. Abroad, and particularly in London, I had to explain Luxembourg, which was easier for me. As main arguments I mentioned not only the multicultural environment as well as a stable social climate, but also the fact that we were experimenting in Luxembourg with some sorts of international instruments, for instance units of account, in which bonds placed on more than one market were denominated and listed on our exchange. In order to increase the chances for the Luxembourg Stock Exchange to be selected for the listing of Eurobonds, I stressed the international expertise and skills already prevalent at that time in Luxembourg. I don't want to overrate my role in this, because I believe that to a certain extent the minds in favor of Luxembourg were already made up. The broker to the issue was Strauss Turnbull. The main partner, Julius Strauss, was, like Siegmund Warburg, a German banker of

Jewish faith. Both left Germany because of the threat from the Nazis and established themselves in London, where they became very successful.

In the third act, the curtain doesn't come down because the play or movie continues until today. Perhaps it could be compared to an unachieved symphony having no end, but many composers from generation to generation.

- **Growth**

You have developed until now one type of operations, Eurobonds. There are many other activities which in the course of time have emerged and represent a substantial part of Luxembourg's financial and banking activities. Could you elaborate on this?

With the greatest pleasure. Shakespeare said "All the world's a stage." I think that banking and finance on our globe is a formidable stage. The actors are numerous. They are reflections of humanity. Some are creative and have the highest regard of good conduct, of ethics. Others crave to make more and more money. In their greed, they do not shrink from activities which do not fit in the mold of a legal and regulatory framework. They are scoundrels. You find them in all wakes of human activity. Over the years on this stage of global banking appeared and continue to appear a number of more and more sophisticated operations and products.

In Luxembourg, the Eurobond sector was progressively joined by international credits as well as investment funds linked to private banking. In all these areas, Luxembourg has proven to be strong and effective in administrative and distributing functions, perhaps less as far as the set up of operations and the creation of new products are concerned. The same applies to the intellectual side, in portfolio management. For a number of years I have said and written that this is a very promising segment where

we could compete successfully because we have the experience and also, what I consider even more important, an international outlook and a cautious way in handling other people's money. We are not venture minded and I think that most of the people who entrust to the bank part or even all of their assets to be managed are more conservative than quick profit-minded. Of course I am generalizing here, but I think that if we leave the risky part of that business to others who probably have more experience and know-how in this than we, there is no harm. It's certainly better than to be inactive in this promising sector of intellectual portfolio management.

As far as international credits are concerned, Luxembourg was selected by foreign banks particularly because in Luxembourg the banks did not have the obligation to deposit part of their assets interest-free with a Central Bank. I think there are also quite a number of other reasons which pleaded in this sector for Luxembourg, but I don't want to go into these details, at least not in the context of this book.

Another reason for the fast and even surprising growth of banking in Luxembourg was that it became fashionable for foreign banks to have an operational base in Luxembourg, even for such banks which in their head office had not yet engaged in global banking or international credits. Some of them closed the doors of their branches or subsidiaries in Luxembourg within a rather short span of time. During the period from 1960 to 1996, the number of banks established in Luxembourg rose from 17 to 221 and the number of employees in the banks from 1,300 to over 20,000.

At the time of my writing this English version of my book *La Vie, passionnément*, the number of banks has slightly declined. This phenomenon is due mainly to the mergers of some banking groups having an impact on the branches and subsidiaries in Luxembourg. On the other side, a number of activities have broadened in scope and also many others have appeared. For

instance, the so-called structured products have considerably widened the array of investment instruments since the late nineties. This is a most interesting and promising development. So all in all, the activities of the Luxembourg banking and financial center are both on solid ground as well as expanding.

Could you now evoke what your role has been in this impressive sector of the Luxembourg economy and even beyond the borders of Luxembourg?

I am not particularly fond of stressing and highlighting what some consider as a crucial role by myself in the evolution and growth of international banking of Luxembourg. So let me rather describe some of my activities in this field. I do not want to repeat myself, therefore I won't come back to the birth of the Eurobond market, but it really was a motor driving me to go on describing and explaining to many bankers abroad the conditions and facilities Luxembourg offers in this context. I did this through the medium of publications in specialized magazines and reviews, but mainly on the occasion of meetings with other bankers as well as when I was invited to deliver presentations in international conferences. Colloquia and workshops in international banking started to become increasingly frequent during the early sixties. By now we experience an explosion of such events, and I am wondering to what extent attendance will not slacken, unless the topics are new and point to the future.

So through these activities I gradually became the unappointed ambassador for our banking center. The tasks I voluntarily assumed were difficult but also challenging and exciting. In my speeches I tried to focus on some catch-phrases. I remember that in front of a gathering of Asian bankers, I coined the phrase "Banks are people." It was very well received and in the midst of my presentation, there was applause. Sometime later I heard this phrase quite a number of times being pronounced by

others. Were they copying me? I don't know. As a matter of fact, I don't believe so. I think ideas crop up spontaneously when the context for such reflections arises.

On the lighter side, let me just mention two events. My trips often took me to London. Ties of friendship developed with quite a number of bankers. One of the builders of the international capital market, a London banker of German origin once invited me and my first wife, Raymonde, for a cup of tea in one of the most exclusive hotels in London. Suddenly, Raymonde, in a frightened voice, said: "A mouse. She just ran over my feet." Our host, not even raising his eyebrows, just said: "Absolutely impossible here." Then his wife who also attended the tea said: "Well, Raymonde is right. I saw the mouse, running to the other side of this room." Our banking friend reacted by saying: "I can't believe it." We finished our tea. Our host looked at his wristwatch: "Really, I am sorry I have to leave now." He called the waiter, paid the bill, and gave him his visiting card while asking him to pass it on to the manager. He would appreciate it if the latter called one of these days.

The cultural background and upbringing in the childhood leaves a deep imprint on all of us. My friend of German origin did not take this rather amusing event lightly. His inborn sense of duty induced him to report it to the management of the hotel. If my friend would have been born, bred, and sired in Her Majesty's country, he would probably have reacted with a flip-pant remark somehow downplaying the whole event.

Another event took place, I think, in the seventies. There was one of the numerous meetings in Luxembourg of a European Institution, probably in charge of agriculture. On this occasion the media were present, including those from the United States. One afternoon I got a call from an American journalist of a world famous magazine. He said "Could I pay you a visit? Could you grant me an interview? I want to know more about banking in Luxembourg." I said, "Who gave you my name?" and he

answered by giving the name of one of my friends at the U.S. Embassy in Luxembourg who, from time to time, was a sort of public relations man on my behalf. So the journalist and I made an appointment. He started by saying: "International banking and finance or economy are in general not my field. They are not my specialty. I usually cover political events, but I was at the European Center and the meeting lasted until the late hours of the night and nothing came out of it. So I don't know what to report and what to write about this meeting where for a reason, which I still don't know, my editor thought decisions would be made having an impact on agriculture in the United States as well. But, as I said, nothing came out of it. So I went to the U.S. Embassy and somebody told me—and that was my friend—that I should see you, that you have an open mind, that you lived in the United States during the war. Perhaps it would be interesting to hear from you about the human touch of banking and finance in Luxembourg."

I braced myself for questions I was not sure I could answer. But still I tried to make the best out of it, explaining at length and as clearly as I could what the Eurobond market meant for international banking, its origin and its implications, and so on and so on. He listened silently to what I said, but I did not perceive in his eyes a very great interest. He went on: "What is of interest to the readers of my column is the human aspect of banking in Luxembourg. You told me about the activities. So far so good. But could you tell me what kind of bankers you are in Luxembourg? Could you tell me whether they are young or old, whether they are of Luxembourg or foreign origin? I would also like to know a little bit more about the Luxembourg environment. How about night life? What type of night clubs do you have? And more particularly, what about restaurants? Are some of them listed in the Michelin Guide, with one or two stars?"

I was a bit hesitant before replying. Then I said: "Luxembourgers are an open-minded society. Therefore there are quite a

number of foreign nationals working here.” About night life, I didn’t say very much for two reasons. First, I am neither an expert in this field, nor a regular visitor of the Luxembourg red-light district to which my wife would certainly not have given me the green light. On the other hand, I knew quite a lot about the restaurants in Luxembourg. I described the food, the specialties, and the atmosphere of a number of them. Relative to its size, Luxembourg harbors more restaurants of excellent quality than other cities. I concluded my comments by the phrase: “In Luxembourg, the bankers eat too much!”

A few weeks had elapsed after this interview. Then one day I found in my mail a copy of the magazine where the interview appeared. It was entitled: “Edmond Israel, a Luxembourg banker says: In Luxembourg, the bankers eat too much!”

I read this with slight misgivings. I thought to myself: “Is that all he retained from all the explanations I gave to him?” I also had an uneasy feeling: “How would some bankers from abroad react to this? Could this be detrimental to our center?” On the contrary. Beyond what I expected, this phrase attracted bankers to Luxembourg. Many called me, asked me about the environment in Luxembourg and if there is a good quality of living. The remark on the eating habits of the bankers in Luxembourg proved to be quite a hit. We were considered by many as what P.G. Wodehouse called “Good Trenchermen.”

• **Cedel/Clearstream**

Somebody once told me, Edmond Israel has no children but he has Cedel. It appears that in the minds of people you are identified with that company which still operates out of Luxembourg with personnel of roughly 1,200 people but under the new name “Clearstream.”

I am certainly not the father of Cedel. If you want to use that image, I would say that Cedel at least has two fathers: myself and

the managing director of a large bank in Luxembourg with whom I had a chat one day in 1968 on the occasion of a business lunch. With my friend and colleague I periodically spoke about banking in Luxembourg, its possibilities, its future. On that specific day, we exchanged views again and we found that there is a great risk that activities linked to Eurobonds and other international financial instruments in general could slip away from Luxembourg finding other places, for instance Brussels. This would be the case if we would not rationalize the clearing and settlement of such transactions. The way this was handled since 1963 in Luxembourg was not only old-fashioned, but out of tune with the rapid growth of bond issues and secondary market transactions in these issues. The buyer had to settle by cash and then the transfer of the underlying securities took place by physical transport of these securities from one bank to another. It was a good business for package paper and cardboard boxes.

Let me recall here a rather amusing but also revealing story. When I made a presentation to the representatives of the Bankers Association composed of top managers, I suggested timidly that perhaps the time had come when we should wake up and find technical solutions in line with what the market demands as far as clearing and settlement is concerned. The top executives around the tables had different reactions. Some looked bored. It was clear to me how they thought: "This is just a technician's talk. Why did we invite him? He is a technical man. He should stick to his guns. We establish the strategy and we don't want to lose our time and be bothered by recommendations of a man who is not on our level in his bank." Others were a bit amused by the passion with which I developed my proposal. I overheard one of them whispering in the ear of his neighbor: "Well, I hope he's just as passionate when he returns home to his wife tonight." A participant at the meeting came up with a suggestion. He said: "We must buy a number of armored trucks, and the capacity of shipping the bonds from one place to another will have substantially increased."

Yes, that was the state of mind at that time. I do not want to criticize them. If today I would sit at a meeting, be on their level, and hear younger colleagues speaking of technological and intellectual innovations which appear on the market and which are just mind-boggling, I might very well think like them. Very often reactions are due to different kinds of mindsets linked to age or to old thinking.

I nearly forgot to tell you that in Brussels a new system for clearing and settlement had been set up by an American bank. The name of this system was and still is Euroclear. So, we not only had to act but to act fast. Quickly we founded a syndicate of study composed of a number of banks in and out of Luxembourg to draw up with the assistance of a well-known consultancy firm in Luxembourg a blueprint for a modern, up-to-date clearing and settlement system functioning electronically by computer.

To cut a long story short, we founded the company Cedel on September, 28, 1970, and the partner banks originated not only from Luxembourg but also from many countries in Europe, Asia, and even from the United States. Large banking groups were among the shareholders.

And how was this initiative received by the financial institutions active in the Eurobond market?

At the beginning with a lot of skepticism, even—and I repeat myself—with benign neglect and indulgent compassion. Who were we in Luxembourg to try to compete on the world market with institutions like Morgan Guaranty, which at that time operated Euroclear? The challenge was inspiring and the fight was quite tough. But we were supported by large banks which didn't want to leave this chunk of business to one of their major competitors, who would benefit from a monopoly in this field.

After the foundation of Cedel, I was elected chairman of its board, composed of over forty banks. During twenty years I was a non-executive chairman. So I did not take part in the day-to-day management. In principle the chairman was elected for a three-year term and the chairmanship should have been exercised on a rotating basis, but somehow this did not work out and the large banking groups preferred someone from a small country like Luxembourg to be at the helm of this institution. By the way, this is also often the case in politics, where Luxembourg acts as an intermediary and also conciliator in the world of economic and political competition.

So you consider yourself to have had a role similar to a statesman, a political leader?

Far from that, and if I give that impression by what I said, then I am sorry. Cedel is an international institution serving the market. Its influence and power do not go beyond that. After twenty years, I took the firm and irrevocable decision to resign after having found a top banker to succeed me who was retiring from his position as one of the leading executive directors of one of the largest banks in the United States.

Have you not any anecdotes to tell, amusing moments you have experienced?

Of course, quite a number. Some of them I don't remember in detail. Let me just evoke one rather funny event, which perhaps illustrates best to what extent during the first years of Cedel's existence it was quite unknown, except in the profession, and there again mostly in the sectors of the banks and brokerage houses dealing in international securities.

In a major capital of a European country, I chaired a press conference to describe Cedel to specialized newspapers and magazines. We sent out an ample number of invitations. Around

me were sitting the members of the Executive committee composed of eleven banks and we were just waiting for the invitees. They were, let us say, drifting in. I started to welcome the representatives of roughly five to six newspapers and magazines. Among them there was a charming young woman. She was very attractive. Then we came to the questions. There were not too many. The last one came from the young female reporter. She said: "Well, Mr. Chairman, Cedel stands for what? I heard that you are in the ladies' fashion business, because I am representing a fashion magazine. I am surprised that this economic sector 'ladies' fashion' has developed in your country as a business on an international scope." I was taken aback by this question. When I saw the wide-open eyes of my colleagues, a smile came to my face and I said: "Miss, I thank you for this question. I shall speak to my wife. Perhaps it would not be a bad idea to start such a business in Luxembourg. For the time being, our business is clearing and settlement of international securities. Should you one day like to hear more about that, I am at your disposal."

This was just an episode on the lighter side of our activity. This activity grew considerably from year to year in parallel with the growth of the international capital market. As I said before, Clearstream clears at present more than 90 million transactions a year and holds in custody securities of about 8 trillion or 8,000 billion U.S. dollars. Clearstream is now wholly owned by Deutsche Börse AG, but its head office and operational headquarter are in Luxembourg. It has subsidiaries in London, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Dubai, and of course a major operational center in Frankfurt.

Are you concerned that the decision center is not in Luxembourg or exercised by Luxembourg as a majority?

I am a realist. I do not think that this is possible any more. By the way, multinational companies or multinational banks also

become more and more international as far as their shareholder-ship is concerned. In the last resort, it boils down to one major challenge: offering top quality of services. If this challenge is met, it will be the key for success and even for continued success. We just have to be better and also in advance of others, to be among the top players in the league. This is the best guarantee for the future, also applied to our international banking center, where for more than forty years quite a number of promising activities have developed and matured.

This reflection leads to the some thoughts on the Luxembourg financial center in the future.

The role of banking in a fast-changing environment: Risks and opportunities for the future

Could you discuss your vision in this regard?

Yes, in a few moments. Let me however first, in order to conclude the part dealing with the origin and the development of the international banking center in Luxembourg, evoke the memory of a great personality on the political scene, Pierre Werner. He passed away in 2002 and undoubtedly has played a major role on the political and economic scene of Luxembourg in the postwar era. Luxembourg owes Pierre Werner an eternal debt of gratitude. Not only on the European scene has he laid down the groundwork of the European currency, the Euro. Furthermore, on the technological side, he had been the initiator and the promoter of the satellite company of S.E.S. ASTRA of worldwide scope, and last but certainly not least, he has been the father of the International banking and financial center. He had the vision of developing such an activity in Luxembourg since the end of the war. He transformed this vision into reality, first as finance minister and then as prime minister, establishing systematically and patiently a legal and regulatory framework

coupled with a number of initiatives to foster this promising activity in Luxembourg. So, he's very often called the "father" of our international banking center. But Pierre Werner was a very modest man, a great man, and he always refused this title. He preferred by far to highlight and stress the merits and constructive role of others while remaining a little bit in the shadow, which was not really a shadow, because his personality was literally flooded in light, a light of a brilliant intellect, vast culture, deep religious feeling, and so many other talents in one single person. I had the privilege to know personally Pierre Werner very well, his beloved wife, and his children. For me, as for so many others in my country and also in other European countries, Pierre Werner will be and will remain a shining example.

Let's now turn to the future. How do you view the perspective for the sustainability of international banking in Luxembourg?

To stay or to remain with my metaphor, the curtain is still up and it must never come down, at least not in a foreseeable future. So, what do we have to do? The major trump in the stack of our cards is the fact that banking in Luxembourg has matured over the years and decades. I think this is very important and must be seriously considered. Otherwise, we become weak, because we are not sure of ourselves. Let me be very clear about that. To be sure does not mean to tout to the outer world that we are the best and the brightest. Such a language would be utterly wrong. It would be worse than wrong, it would be ridiculous. To be sure of oneself means sometimes to be soft spoken, to underrate things. To be, let me mention him again, like Pierre Werner. This was not the case when Luxembourg started as a banking center. We had to use a different language, but that was forty years ago. Facts must speak for themselves, and therefore we have to be factual when we speak to others, when we make conferences or participate in workshops.

Let me spell out some facts. First of all, the so-called “Feira Agreement.” I think it was one of the most important steps and decisions initiated by our prime minister Jean-Claude Juncker and his close colleagues and collaborators, in order precisely not just to retain the banking secrecy, but also to assure to a large extent the sustainability of our banking center. It was an agreement which now is binding not only for the member countries of the European Union, but also *inter alia* for Switzerland. It provides a reasonable taxation of income, but also for the preservation of the confidentiality of bank accounts held in some countries like Luxembourg by residents and non-residents.

Then, there is a constant and rapid change in the types of activities exercised by the banks. We certainly must never think that we can or should do everything. In Luxembourg, most of the banks, mainly the larger ones, are of the universal type; in principle they are offering a wide spectrum of services. Yet their core activities are linked to private banking, and in its fold, the production and sale of a variety of instruments, such as investment funds, a sector in which Luxembourg plays an increasing role. Intellectual asset management in a variety of forms will be a very promising activity in the future. If Luxembourg engages itself in this direction, I think that this will constitute a major component of an increasing and rewarding activity in our specializations.

We must always strive to be better than others. Luxembourg already runs an International Banking School where many students and future bank managers, not only from Luxembourg but also from other countries, take courses. I think the Luxembourg banks, as well as the private sector in general, must engage themselves in an active cooperation with the University of Luxembourg and with institutions closely linked to it. Such cooperation must cover extensive research for the production of new instruments and the development of activities in specific areas. Thus Luxembourg will be a breeding ground of new types of operations, services, and products.

As we are multi-cultural and multi-lingual, this might help to give us a head start with regard to others. Finally, we must avoid equating quality of life with a comfortable mentality leading to complacency. Nothing is granted for ever and sustainability in success calls for constant efforts and innovation. We should never forget that man has to construct his future and not to submit passively to future trends and evolutions.

As Gorbachev said, “Life condemns those who are late.” I would however like to add that “Life sometimes condemns those who are too early.” To strike a balance between these two approaches will be our main challenge for tomorrow.

The heart and the mind

• Raymonde and Renée

After evoking your professional life both in the United States as a factory worker and then as a banker after your return to Luxembourg, what were the main events of your private life?

In 1949 my father passed away and in the following years the hand of five fingers had been successively amputated by another three fingers. My uncle David passed away in 1959, his wife, my aunt Clemy, died in 1961, and in 1963 I lost my mother. This was the shadow in my life. The light appeared with Raymonde, whom I married in 1958.

Raymonde had a light in her look. There was constant sunshine in her eyes. Her whole personality was radiant. She liked to laugh and when she looked at you, you just felt good, you felt a different person, and whatever worries you might have at that moment, they were dispelled. The French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas once wrote in one of his remarkable books that “God is in the eyes of the other.” That’s exactly what you felt in the presence of Raymonde. As mentioned before, we

married in 1958. That was rather late in my life. I was thirty-five years old. If it had not been for the exhortations of my mother, I probably would have remained a bachelor. I would have been lonely and in life there is hardly anything as tough as loneliness.

Raymonde was a very generous person. She was born in Alsace (France), where people have their feet firmly on the ground. They are realists, like the Luxembourgers by the way, and have a great sense of humor and a poetic vein. Like her father, to whom she felt very close, Raymonde was very fond of the Alsatian tales spiced with a particular sense of humor. When she laughed, her beautiful dark eyes were fiery, and at the same time smiling and gentle. She could never hurt a fly, certainly not a human being. To a certain extent, she was a bit introverted and her eyes succeeded in piercing the invisible but very solid armor of her personality. Like probably most women, if not all of them, she had a secret garden where she tenderly tended a flower. Her favorite flower was the forget-me-not, the “myosotis.”

Raymonde was an excellent mathematician. She studied chemistry at the University of Strasbourg and worked there in a laboratory. After our marriage she gave up her profession. Perhaps at the beginning I did not realize what a sacrifice this was for her. When my uncle David passed away, she helped my aunt Clementine by visiting textile stores as a traveling saleswoman, doing this for several months until the demise of my aunt.

Contrary to me, a loner, Raymonde was very sociable and thanks to her we made quite a number of friends. In her presence people just felt good.

Raymonde was very sensitive and like many sensitive people, she was hurt in her life quite a number of times. She never showed it, but her soul was covered with bruises, the “bleus à l’âme” of Françoise Sagan.

In 1992 Raymonde was struck by cancer, the implacable disease which, like a Scottish shower, puts you into the darkness of despair and then again into a feeling of great hope, depending

on the results of the x-rays or scanners. We fought together, Raymonde of course in the front line, and during four years we blessed every moment God or Destiny allowed us to be together. Finally, she passed away in 1996. There were around me many members of the family and friends, but I felt her absence every moment of my life, every day and night.

A few years later I met Renée at a dinner party of common friends. Again it was a stroke of luck, which I certainly did not deserve. But does one deserve luck? Sometimes it just happens. Physically, Renée is a striking beauty, blond hair, deep green blue eyes. Like Raymonde, she is generous, warm-hearted and very, very sociable. She has numerous friends.

At the dinner where we met, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the birth of the host, I made a short speech, off the cuff. Her presence probably inspired me, and my speech left a deep impression with Renée, according to what she told me later. Before we parted from our host, I asked her spontaneously if we could meet again and just as spontaneously she answered, "Yes." We met several times and then I asked the traditional "Will you marry me?" and she answered after a few seconds of silence, "Yes." Fortunately for me I somehow pleased, if not all, but most of her friends. Their judgment concerning me was rather positive, but I think that Renée would have married me even if her friends' reactions to me would have been negative.

There is a difference of twenty-one years of age between us. In many respects, Renée and I are different. She is sporty and I do not practice any sport. She likes to have people around her and I very often feel comfortable being alone, alone with her. I have many anxieties and I show them. She also may have some, but without showing them. Yet we are firmly bound together. Our marriage is solid. It holds, contrary to the rather dire predictions of a number of our "friends." Some were gleefully waiting for the news of our separation. But this has not come and I don't think it will ever happen until the moment when the great

Separator will act. Renée is very insistent on keeping her own individuality, her own personality. After some quite lively discussions, each of us has gradually adjusted to the other. This is not an easy exercise, but once it is successful, I think this is highly commendable. In a couple of whatever age, to adjust and to adapt to the other is a necessity for the sustainability of marriage links.

Renée was very successful in business. Together with her younger sister, she managed a store, which belonged to her parents. She would indeed be successful in many other areas if the opportunity would be given to her.

On a strictly voluntary basis, after an appropriate training course, she is active in Luxembourg in the “Omega Group,” consisting of people who assist the very seriously ill. Renée is an excellent psychologist and therefore quite successfully fulfills this job, which is more a vocation than a job. She listens more than she speaks to those who are ill and therefore they all are eagerly waiting for her next visit.

On March 17, 1999, we married at the Municipality of Luxembourg. The mayor of Luxembourg, Ms. Lydie Polfer, pronounced us man and wife in the presence of our close relatives and a limited number of friends.

We wanted also a religious marriage but not with all the ado’s that surround such a ceremony in the small closely-knit Jewish community of Luxembourg. If you forget to invite somebody he will be angry, not his whole life, but perhaps for quite a number of years. My close friend Tony Cernera, president of Sacred Heart University of Fairfield, Connecticut, proposed to me to arrange a Jewish religious wedding in Fairfield with Rabbi Dr. Joseph Ehrenkranz, who has an office on the campus of Sacred Heart University. He is a conservative rabbi—or perhaps I should call him an enlightened orthodox rabbi—who has, together with Dr. Cernera, conducted interconfessional activities for decades in the United States. So the president of a

Catholic University, founded in 1963 by a bishop in Connecticut, arranged a Jewish religious marriage ceremony for his two friends from Luxembourg.

This is more than an interconfessional testimony, even more than a rare act of friendship. It is one of those manifestations giving a true meaning to marriage, a deep meaning to life. Renée and I are blessed by the friendship of Tony Cerna.

Speaking about Renée I become quickly excessive, even dithyrambic, which she doesn't like. So I confine myself to stress what it means to me to be married to her. Though I am already quite advanced in age, I learn a lot from her. After all, learning is a lifelong process. She taught me how to look at a painting. She has the gift to perceive instantly what the painter wants to express, either in figurative or abstract art. She somehow has the gut feeling for what is worthwhile or is better to be ignored. She has the same judgment in literature and music.

She likes to help others but hates to speak about it. She is never seen in the forefront and she does not like to be photographed by the media. The beauty of her soul matches her physical beauty.

I can't be anyone else than the one I am

Ego aliter quam sum esse non possum.
– Erasmus of Rotterdam

You have been raised in a very practicing religious family. But today, who are the great philosophers, theologians, or moralists who influence your thinking?

In the first place I would mention Erasmus of Rotterdam, one of the great humanists, because his vision collided with the conservative thinking of the Middle Ages. If I had to quote one of the great Jewish thinkers, it is certainly Maimonides (Moshe

Maimon), who lived in the fourteenth century. He paved the way for the future and so in his time did Erasmus of Rotterdam. Since my adolescence, I aspire to transpose in my daily life a philosophy based on ethics, which has to be enriched by enlightenment. That was precisely the essence of the thinking of Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Before we address the multiple aspects of your thinking, could you perhaps elaborate on the life of the Jewish community in Luxembourg, which was in the process of reconstructing itself after the war?

Right after the war, besides my professional work I engaged myself with great resolve and even enthusiasm in the Jewish community, where I assumed some functions of coordination in the field of cultural activities. I organized important conferences for the members of our community, featuring well-known personalities and thinkers.

In the late forties the Jews in Luxembourg, like their forefathers, lived culturally and religiously in a closed circle. They did not open up to the outside world. This happened only after the historic encounter of Pope John XXIII and the Jewish philosopher, Jules Isaac. When I was thirty-five years old, I was elected to be a member of the "Consistoire Israélite du Luxembourg," the board of trustees of the Jewish community. This was a record, because in the past only elderly people considered to be sufficiently mature became members of this entity. My first initiative consisted in inviting women to become members of the "Consistoire." My proposal met quite a lot of opposition, mainly by the diehards, who strongly believed that these functions belong exclusively to men. Some were openly hostile to such an idea, bordering for them on blasphemy. For a moment I felt like the Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza, fearing that I would be excluded from the community if not deprived of my status as a

Jew. It was a revolution. I felt in my innermost a deep satisfaction rather than mortification. Anyhow, nowadays it is considered as normal to include women in the lay management of a Jewish community. The present generation cannot even imagine that this could have been a problem some decades ago.

But let me evoke a more amusing happening.

Traditionally on our national holiday, a religious service is organized at the synagogue. On that occasion the president and the vice president of the Consistoire used to wear striped trousers with coat tails and a top hat. My financial resources at that time were rather limited and so I borrowed this attire from my uncle Max in Brussels. I looked a little bit like a Bavarian sausage because my uncle was slimmer than I. After the service the president and I, as vice president, accompanied the members of the government to the door. I overheard one of the ministers asking his colleague “A wien ass dat dann?” (“And who is this one?”). When I became President of the community, I abolished this attire which was not anymore up-to-date in the fast-evolving society.

A question of a more general nature: For centuries and centuries the Jews ask themselves questions about their real identity. There is the famous problem of the double, triple, or even more complicated multiple allegiance. Could you tell me what it is to be a Jew? What is Judaism? Is it a spiritual movement, a culture, a religion, a philosophy of life? What is it?

Frankly, I don't know too much. This question really never preoccupied me to a large extent. First of all, I never ask myself about my own identity. I am a Jew, I am a Luxembourger, I am a European, I am also an inhabitant of Planet Earth, the dimension of which appears to shrink more and more in the wake of a global network of communications. The multi-cultural identity is easier to assume by Luxembourgers than by people of other

nations, except perhaps by the Americans. So for me, this famous problem of a double or multiple allegiance does not exist or is outdated. Being multi-cultural is indeed an enrichment because it permits human beings to have a broader and a deeper view on reality.

You asked me also “What is Judaism?”

I must say that in the last resort nobody has come up yet with a complete and satisfying answer. Since the Jews live as a minority in the Diaspora, they have been the object of many persecutions and many false accusations. Yet, unwaveringly they persisted in keeping their faith and their way of life. One finds them very often on the side of those who are persecuted. The Jews rank among the first defenders of human rights and yet it is an irony of history that those for whom the Jews fought with determination and conviction sometimes turn against them. An example is the reaction towards the Jews of part of the black community in the United States.

What really gave the Jews the strength to go on, not to despair and not to convert to other religions? What explains this phenomenon of survival throughout the ages? I think it is the unshakable faith in Life of the Jews. Judaism is a culture of Life. We raise our glasses of wine to Life. I know a prayer in which in a few lines the word “Chaim” (*Life*) appears at least ten times. The Jews have a passion for Life. They love Life passionately. In French, I call it “La vie, passionnément!”

If I understand you correctly, there is no clearly established definition of the Jewish identity.

Indeed, not *stricto sensu*. In my opinion one should speak rather of the Jewish phenomenon. Judaism is one of the numerous expressions of the human phenomenon, to quote the title of one of the works of the Jesuit theologian and scientist, Teilhard de Chardin.

In what manner is the Jewish expression of the human phenomenon different from others?

Here again I cannot deliver an exhaustive answer. I can only speak of what I feel by intuition. To give an illustration of how I sense Judaism, I would like to refer to an Italian movie picture I saw many, many years ago and which left on me an unforgettable impression. It is the Fellini film, *Nights of Cabiria*. Cabiria was a girl of loose morals, a prostitute, who was constantly abused by her pimps. She had been struck, she had been tortured, she had been sold to other men, she had been raped, and yet she kept an unshakable faith in the goodness of human beings. Cabiria indeed is the archetype of a human being, who only sees the good in man though she suffers from the evil. Yet she keeps hope. In that respect there is a profound analogy between the Jews and this woman whom, if I were a Catholic, I would call a saint. The Jew never deviates from the road he pursues throughout the ages, persisting in a deep conviction that in spite of all his sufferings, he should never give up and constantly look forward to better days, hoping and believing that tomorrow will be better than today.

If I understand you correctly, this is the famous “Prinzip Hoffnung,” the Principle of Hope of the philosopher, Ernst Bloch.

Yes, but one must add another principle established by another Jewish German philosopher, Hans Jonas. It is the principle of Duty, to be followed in all instances of existence. A duty towards the other one, be it a member of one's own family, be it a neighbor, a friend or even someone unknown. One should constantly strive to help those who are in need or are treated with injustice. This is also why the authentic Jews are on the side of those who are mistreated and persecuted or who are living in the condition of an ethnic minority. The Jews throughout the ages have rarely

been rewarded for this attitude, but it is not the reward which counts, but the innermost felt necessity to perform one's own duty.

You spoke about the Jews suffering from violence, persecution, discrimination. This is undoubtedly one of the greatest tragedies of history, but nowadays the state of Israel is adopting a much more combative attitude, judged sometimes as being excessively violent.

First of all it should be stressed that the state of Israel is the realization in our time of a two-thousand-years-old dream, the dream of the return of the Jews to Sion. The state of Israel was founded after the Holocaust and many survivors of this unprecedented tragedy in the history of humanity have found refuge in Israel. Right after the proclamation of the state by the United Nations in 1948, Israel was attacked from all sides. The Arab neighbors did not accept the idea of this state. But this time, contrary to the past, the Jews decided to fight for their own rights, for their existence. One should never forget that the foundation of the state of Israel has been approved by the vast majority of the members states of the United Nations in 1948. Since then, over a span of fifty years, Israel has been in a state of semi-peace and semi-war, sometimes in a state of war. It was under a constant threat. It is true that mistakes had been made by the successive governments of Israel. Nothing is always either black or white. The grey zone usually prevails in international relations.

But on both sides the younger generation, the generation of a new century will not and cannot accept a state of permanent violence, of sometimes harsh occupation on one side and terrorist suicide attacks on the other. With regard to the relations between individuals, particularly the young, there are many encouraging signs. Encounters and workshops take place, also in Luxembourg, involving the young Palestinians and Israelis. They

want to build the future together, not based on mutual destruction but on constructive cooperation.

Let me refer to the Holocaust, to this expression of evil, which even the poet Dante or the painter Bosch could not have imagined in its dimension of unspeakable horror. You believe in God, you are a religious man. How can you reconcile the existence of God and this abysmal evil? A question which often has been asked in a rather provocative manner: "Can there be a God after Auschwitz?"

The question of evil is very difficult and complex, and has posed itself to man since he reached the so-called state of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Indeed it is a very painful question, particularly for the Jews after Auschwitz. It is true that many religious Jews have vowed after the Holocaust not to set foot in a synagogue.

Does one have an answer to this question from a religious perspective? If I try to give an answer, it will only be fragmentary and slightly limping: God has given to man freedom of choice and when man chooses the road which is not illuminated by the commandments of ethics, there is a deep rift between the Creator and the creatures. The genocide and more generally the evil may be an expression of this fracture between God and humanity.

There remains however the problem of those who are innocent.

Indeed, the millions of Jews, Gypsies, and others who died in the Nazi camps were innocent. The same is true for all the children who go on dying in our time, victims of hunger, illness, wars, and genocides. They suffer the consequences of those who have chosen the bad road, but they are not the culprits. Why does God not intervene to prevent all this?

One cannot make God responsible of our faults, of our mistakes. To quote Teilhard de Chardin freely: "We have not reached the point Omega." We are still in a state of profound

cosmic ignorance. For us, the ways of the Lord are impenetrable. This is the classic explanation of most of the religions.

I personally prefer another one: God has associated man in the process of creation, a permanent process striving towards perfection. When men deviate from the road leading to perfection by choosing the road of evil, this provokes mutual sufferings and God suffers with men.

Dialogue between all confessions and cultures

Before we approach the interconfessional dialogue, a theme which is very close to your heart, let us evoke briefly the Jewish religion. What is its essence, its fundamental principle?

Its essence is very simple and you as a Catholic will recognize it easily: “Don’t do to others what you do not want them to inflict upon you.” Two thousand years ago, one of our rabbis gave this reply to a Roman soldier, who asked him the same question. Indeed, the soldier asked for a very short and concise answer, lasting for only the time that he could stand on one leg.

This reply obviously recalls the message of Jesus.

Let us not forget that Jesus of Nazareth is born a Jew and his message “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” is enshrined in Judaism.

This similarity between the basic principles of Christianity and Judaism is an excellent prologue to conduct the dialogue between the two religions. Beyond certain theological differences, and even if some of them are important, the dialogue has an excellent basis.

Indeed the two religions are in agreement on what is essential: Love and respect of the other. If I engage myself with a lot of

determination in the interconfessional dialogue, the main reason is that I consider this dialogue indispensable for the good understanding among most human beings, in order to work for peace in our world. We all know the tragedies and the disputes which under the guise of religion have provoked fanaticism and a shock of civilizations in the past and even until today.

This dialogue took concrete forms in Luxembourg right after the war as witnessed by the creation of the Interfaith Association of Luxembourg. The dialogue with the Christian religion has allowed me to meet and to have affectionate links with outstanding persons like the Reverend Father Louis Leloir, a Benedictine monk of the Abbey Saint-Maurice in Clervaux, Luxembourg. He was a great scholar and I always admired his profound faith and his spiritual candor. I was sometimes invited to the abbey to share with the monks the fraternal Sunday meal. We all ate in silence without uttering a word. I also had the privilege to make a presentation at the cloister of the abbey on the history of the Jews in Luxembourg.

When Father Leloir was in Luxembourg City, he never failed to stay overnight in our home and, together with my late wife Raymonde, we had very profound conversations with him. It was always as if sunlight had entered our apartment, a light different from the one which comes from the sun, a light which goes straight to the heart. Father Leloir asked me often to lend him the keys of the synagogue, so that he could pray there. If asked why he went to the synagogue to pray the vespers, he answered with a kind gleam in his eyes: "I go to pray, where our Lord has prayed."

Let me also mention the active Jewish-Christian dialogue conducted for many years in the United States by Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut under the enlightened guidance of its president, Tony Cernera.

Speaking about the interconfessional dialogue between the Christian and Jewish religions, don't you think that in our days other religions, in particular Islam, should be partners of this dialogue?

Without any doubt, but I think that beyond Islam and beyond other religions, we have to include in this dialogue also scientists and philosophers, discussing the basic principles which ensure peace and good understanding between the people of our planet.

In this context I strongly believe that we have to redefine what we mean by love: love thy neighbor, love the other. Love is multidimensional. In the relations between human beings of different creeds, cultures, and colors, the essential component of love is the respect towards the other. We must strive for social justice, but also in the relations between the individuals, show the other respect, never hurt her/his sensitivity, never inflict on her/him—be it done unwillingly—a moral wound.

This type of dialogue must be conducted as a way to construct the future together, rather than to evoke constantly the injustices suffered by many in the past. We must be engaged with resolve in the construction of a new world by New Thinking. This endeavor is particularly important in our time marked by globalization and instant communications. Each one of us, whatever his position in the society, whatever his geographical location, can be and should be an ambassador of dialogue.

Let me mention here the experience of ASEE, the Asia-Europe Foundation, which I believe is a good example. Founded in 1997, it is composed of the twenty-five member countries of the European Union, the European Commission as well as thirteen Asian countries. I represent Luxembourg on the board of governors of this institution. Since the foundation of ASEE, my personal contacts with the Asian cultures have been a great enrichment for me. I particularly appreciate the tactfulness, the natural attitude “never to have the other lose face” of my Asian friends, whatever their cultures, traditions, and religions are. Face-saving is the great lesson we, Occidentals, have to learn from our contact with Asians.

By applying the basic objectives of dialogue, we have to underline more specifically the necessity to construct together

the future. We must lay the foundation of what I would call “global ethical standards.” Atheists must be included in this dialogue. I personally think that in so far as a human being is engaged in the search of a fundamental reality and its meaning, he is in essence not an atheist. It depends on what you mean by God. I believe that Albert Einstein had a different concept of God than, for instance, the chief rabbi of Jerusalem. But both were religious in their personal philosophical thinking.

Let me repeat again: I am deeply convinced that global ethics have to be accepted by all as the key for a more just, a more human, and a more peaceful world.

What you refer to appears to me to be the “Weltethos” evoked by the Christian theologian Hans Küng. Do you really think that after the dramatic events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, that our world can find a common basis for such a dialogue and mutual understanding? The relations between the Occident and Islam are very strained. Furthermore, in the relations between the Churches and the so-called atheists, there is still a feeling of deep mistrust, because of the past injustices and persecutions which still linger in the minds of many people.

Indeed it is, as my friend Jean-François Rischard would call it, “High Noon.” Time is of the essence to engage in the dialogue of the twenty-first century. In order to overcome the painful memories of the past, all of us—whether theologians, philosophers, scientists, or just people—have to be future-oriented in our thinking. We have to change our mindset. We have to build together a new world whose inexhaustible potential, not yet expressed in reality, invites us to action. This is my definition of a “New Thinking.”