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A C O M P A R I S O N O F T H E T H E O L O G I E S O F

I S A A C M . W I S E

A N D

K A U F M A N N K O H L E R

b y

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This paper will concern itself with the theologies of the foremost leaders of American Reform Judaism in the last century, Isaac M. Wise and Kaufmann Kohler. Both men labored with ideas transplanted from Europe through them and attempted to give them a place on the American scene; both recognized the need for change and for organization which had already taken place in Europe. Neither was native to America; Wise came from a small city in Bohemia not too distant from the place of his birth; our knowledge of his early life and education is extremely meager, but upon arriving in this country he immediately began to make a name for himself in the struggle for the organization of American Jewry. He began the call for unity as early as 1848 utilizing The Occident of Isaac Leeser and later The Asmonean to express his views; although this attempt failed, Wise did not surrender his dream, but issued a second call which led to a conference in 1855; this was done shortly after his moving to Cincinnati and founding the weekly paper, The Israelite. After this meeting the great differences between the Orthodox and Reform elements became apparent; further efforts toward unity centered around the Reform group and enjoyed success in 1873 with the founding of The Union of American Hebrew Congregations; only two years later another dream of Wise was realized through the establishment of a college for higher Jewish studies, the Hebrew Union

College. At this time Wise sought to unite American Jewry once more by attempting to build the college to serve all Jewish elements; this failed, but an even closer unity in the Reform group was brought about through the annual rabbinical conferences which began in the following year. Although the goal of real union was not reached, a modicum of it was attained through the large circulation of his Israelite as well as through the wide spread acceptance of his prayer book. Wise was a compromiser and as such faced much opposition and bitter criticism from both the traditional and the radical elements of American Jewry; he took a liberal position in religious, economic as well as political affairs, but he was never to express himself as a radical as is well illustrated by his attitude toward the abolition of slavery in contrast to that of the radical reformer David Einhorn. His position as a recognized leader of a large segment of American Jews allowed him to participate in several Jewish problems of national importance as the infamous Grant Order, the mistreatment of American Jewish citizens in Switzerland, etc.<sup>1</sup> History recognizes Wise as the first great leader of liberal American Judaism, as the founder of all of its major organizations, and thus as the guide for Jewish life on the American scene in the nineteenth century.

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1. Marcus, J. R., The Americanization of Isaac Mayer Wise, Cincinnati, 1932, p. 20.

Kaufmann Kohler also came from the seat of the Reform movement, from Germany, where he had received his Jewish as well as his University education. He came to America with an excellent introduction from Dr. Geiger to Dr. Einhorn; he soon found a pulpit here and also married Einhorn's daughter. In 1879 he succeeded Einhorn in his large New York congregation; this led to his famous controversy with Kohut in which Kohler delivered the series of addresses entitled "Backward or Forward," which attracted much attention on both sides. A decisive answer to Kohut was given by Kohler through the Pittsburgh Platform in that year. This great platform, almost entirely the work of Kohler, clearly proved the dominance of the radical element. This soon led to a Reform orientation of the Hebrew Union College as well as to the adoption of a Union Prayer Book based largely upon Einhorn's Olat Tamid rather than on Wise's Minhag America. Although Wise remained the physical leader of the group and inspite of the fact that graduate rabbis loyal to him were slowly filling Eastern radical Reform pulpits, it was now dominated by the radical wing under Kohler. Kohler was a more scholarly person than Wise as is clearly shown by his excellent doctoral dissertation on Der Sagen Jacobs which exhibits bold use of Biblical criticism as well as much secular knowledge; this was to enable him to erect a spiritual foundation for the organizations founded

by Wise. In his early youth he was much influenced by the thought of S. R. Hirsch; later Professor Mueller of Munich<sup>2.</sup> led him from his Orthodox beliefs through his studies of Arabic. "During his spiritual crisis, while wrestling with himself and with his ancestral traditions, he was profoundly affected by the mythological and ethnological views of Professor Steinthal. Under the inspiration of this master, he wrote his doctoral dissertation ..." <sup>3.</sup> After this time the influence of the radical Reformer Samuel Holdheim became dominant, although in his later years he drifted toward a more conservative position. He intended to devote himself to scholarship, but upon not finding this to his liking entered the active rabbinate.

The background of the two figures, which differed in such a large measure, their temperaments, the place of their settlement in the United States, and the time in which they arrived on the American scene may account in part for their theological differences and for the success of each in his area; Kohler was only able to build a firm theology which was to become accepted by the American Reform movement because he did not need to struggle with the problems of organization and unity to the same extent as Wise who laid a firm foundation in these matters.

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2. Kohler, K., Personal Reminiscences of My Early Life, Cincinnati, 1918, p. 8.

3. Cohon, S. S., Dr. Kaufmann Kohler, Theologian of Reform, Cincinnati, 1943, p. 7.

The theology of Isaac M. Wise shows that his goal was that of uniting all American Jewry; upon seeing that this was not easily attainable he concentrated his powers on unifying the liberal Jews of America. It is for this reason that a spirit of compromise reigns supreme in his thought and writings; he became willing to allow the basic thought of other men to form the theology of Reform Judaism if it increased the strength of his organizations. Therefore one may characterize American Reform Judaism at the turn of the century as being composed of the organizations of Isaac M. Wise and of the thought of Kohler and Einhorn. Wise's spirit of compromise is further shown by his comparatively soft answers to some of the bitter attacks launched against him; he could however reply in kind.<sup>4</sup> Kohler on the other hand possessed a sharp pen and tongue and did not hesitate to use them; one might almost say that Kohler had few kind words for Wise until the latter's death; then it became his duty as successor in the office of President of the Hebrew Union College to deliver annual eulogies for his former bitter opponent. Perhaps the rancor had disappeared, as Kohler clearly saw that he had been victorious in every battle of ideas and had been able to make these the basis for Reform Judaism through the organization of Wise.

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4. Marcus, J. R., The Americanization of Isaac Mayer Wise, p. 19.

This paper will attempt to compare the theological views of these two leaders by presenting their thoughts on specific matters and immediately drawing a comparison rather than proceeding to present two complete thought systems and omitting comparison until the conclusion of the paper. As Isaac M. Wise changed his point of view rather often, it will at times be difficult to determine his true beliefs; Kohler's attitudes remained the same through most of his life with the exception of minor variations on unimportant issues. Kohler's theology may be summarized in his famous Pittsburgh Platform which will be mentioned several times in the paper; his principle work, Jewish Theology, may almost be regarded as a commentary to the Platform as it adds but little which is completely new or unexpressed in that famous document with the exception of historical materials.

Both men agree in the basic outlook which was a heritage of their century; both faced the world with an infinite optimism which can be summed up in a statement by Wise on the occasion of his eightieth birthday: "Within twenty five years all the world will have accepted Reform Judaism;"<sup>5.</sup> while Kohler looked forward to "infinite progress in every direction."<sup>6.</sup> This optimism allowed them to struggle so successfully for that goal which we would not even dream of

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5. Morgenstern, J., A Survey of the Achievements of Reform Judaism, Cincinnati, 1924, p. 1.

6. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, MacMillan, New York, 1918, p. 491.

bringing to fruition.

The thesis upon which they built the structure of Reform Judaism was a belief that Judaism had changed in ages past and might therefore legitimately be altered in the present age; they were of course in complete disagreement as to how far reaching these changes might be. Kohler incorporated the theory of evolution into his system of theology and stated, "The principles of evolution offer to us the key to reread the past so as to enable us to see its continuity in the present, no matter what changes altered conditions have brought about... the recognition of the fact that both Mosaism and Pharisaism have been borrowing and adopting forms of religious practice from their surroundings in the shaping and reshaping of the religious life of the Jewish people, entitles us to pursue the same method of remodelling present Judaism in order to revitalize and quicken its forces."<sup>7</sup> This is the point of departure for all of Kohler's theological writings; he recognized the spirit of evolution in all times of the past and so was willing to apply its principles without reservation to the present. Wise also saw the validity of change in modern Judaism as based upon changes in previous eras, but he did not state the issue with the same boldness as Kohler, nor was he willing to go as far in drawing conclusions for the present

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7. Kohler, K., The Origin and Function of Ceremonies in Judaism, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Cincinnati, 1907, p. 19.

from them as will be shown in a later part of this essay; he did not accept the theory of evolution as a basis for his thought.<sup>8.</sup>

The differences in the approach to the problems which confronted them is already shown by the totally different manner in which they define Judaism; these short statements not only contrast their ideas, but also their styles of writing; the distinctions remain characteristic throughout their works. Kohler clearly and succinctly states that "Judaism is nothing less than a message concerning the ONE AND HOLY GOD and ONE, UNDIVIDED HUMANITY, with a world uniting MESSIANIC GOAL, a message intrusted by divine revelation to the Jewish people."<sup>9.</sup> In vivid contrast, Wise's statement rests upon ambiguities, "Judaism is the complex of Israel's religious sentiments ratiocinated to conceptions in harmony with its Jehovistic God-cognition."<sup>10.</sup> Whatever meaning this definition may have had for its own age, it can certainly express nothing to us, while that of Kohler is still used by many in our time.

When we attempt to discover the basis of all theological thought, their ideas of God, we are at once faced with the difficulty of Wise's contradictions. This inconsistency is

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8. Tarshish, A., The Rise of American Judaism, A History of Jewish Life from 1848 to 1894, Thesis, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, 1938, p. 162.

9. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 8.

10. Wise, I. M., An Introduction to the Theology of Judaism, Delivered at the World Congress of Religions, Cincinnati, 1894, p. 6.

clearly demonstrated through one of the most heated and noisy controversies of the seventies of the last century, "the personal God controversy," which admirers and biographers of Wise tried to forget or negate,<sup>11.</sup> but the original sources, the periodicals of the time testify to the intensity and reality of the controversy as well as to the confusion of Wise's thought on the subject. The Jewish Times quotes Wise: "The idea of a personal God, accepted in theology as a technical term, is not Jewish at all. The God of the Bible is the Jehova, i. e. the Infinite, and Absolute, the Substance, and Essence of all that is, was, and will be. This Cause of all Causes, this Supreme Love, Justice, and Holiness universal can not be thought or even imagined as personal."<sup>12.</sup> No statement of a philosophical, abstract God could be clearer than this one; it is furthermore confirmed as a basic part of Wise's thought in his book entitled The Cosmic God whose very title indicates this type of God idea. In its introduction Wise further states, "Reviewing the sciences in connection with the main points of the problem, adhering strictly to the law of causality and the method of induction, I believe to have reached a definite conception of the universe, and the God of the universe... . The universe, with the exception of matter,

11. Phillipson, D., Grossmann, L., Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise, Robert Clark Co., Cincinnati, 1900, p. 74.

12. Wise, I. M., The Jewish Times, 1871, vol. 3, no., 16, p. 247.

which is a very small fraction thereof, appearing to me synonymous with Deity, so that the present volume is in the main a new evidence of Deity. I have called it the Cosmic God, in whom and by whom there is a cosmos and no chaos."<sup>13.</sup>

This would definitely show that Wise believed in a non-personal God; a God whose existence could be derived from philosophical thought rather than through a psychological experience.

He himself was willing to admit that he took a philosophical stand point and had to face much bitter opposition from his colleagues for this reason.<sup>14.</sup>

Yet he also believed in a vastly different type of God, a very personal Being who revealed himself through speech to certain men; "I feel compelled to think that either God spoke through the mouth of Moses, or nature's productive energy was exhausted in the great mind of that one man, who comprehended the entire household of God on this earth, and opened its mysterious avenues to the gaze of men."<sup>15.</sup>

Here we have a complete contradiction to the previous statements. Furthermore, it would not be possible to characterize a philosophical deity with the attribute love, nor could one ascribe miracles to this deity who is completely removed from the world in which

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13. Wise, I. M., Cosmic God, Office of the American Israelite and Deborah, Cincinnati, 1876, p. 6.

14. May, Isaac Mayer Wise, The Founder of American Judaism, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1916, p. 181.

15. Wise, I. M., Moses, The Man and Statesman, Bloch and Co., Cincinnati, 1883, p. 28.

16.  
man lives.

Kohler did not accept such an impersonal God, nor did he believe the God of the Bible to be an abstraction as his reply to the statement of Wise in The Jewish Times well shows: "The God of the Patriarchs is not an abstraction ... it is the God revealed from the inner moral nature of man, the God recognized through our own personality and comprehended by our mind. Certainly that God who appeared so clearly to Moses could not be a mere abstraction."<sup>17.</sup>

He would proceed even further and deny that the philosophical existence of God has any true religious value; "for the religious consciousness, God is not to be demonstrated by argument, but is a fact of inner and outer experience."<sup>18.</sup> This idea is concisely stated in Robinson's thesis: "Using the historical approach from which he almost departs, Kohler shows how the contact of Judaism with Greek philosophy made necessary the adoption of the philosophical proofs for the existence of God. He discusses the cosmological, theological, and ontological proofs and shows how they are all invalidated by Imanuel Kant who demonstrates that all of the metaphysical arguments have no basis. Kohler seems

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16. Wise, I. M., Introduction to the Theology of Judaism, p. 20.  
Wise, I. M., History of the Israelitish Nation, Vol. I, J. Munsell, Albany, N. Y., 1854, p. 66.  
17. Kohler, K., The Jewish Times, 1871, vol. 3, no. 27, p. 419.  
18. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 53.

to accept Kant's thesis that the consciousness of our moral obligation, of our duty, implicitly requires a moral order and postulates the existence of God. God appeals to the heart before he appeals to the mind."<sup>19.</sup> This would clearly prove Kohler to be much more familiar with philosophical thought than Wise; the latter made no more of the issue and did not write a philosophical rebuttal. Kohler was an extreme optimist thinking that mankind was well nigh perfectible through its own efforts, but inspite of this he was unwilling to utilize this thought as the basis for his religious philosophy, for his proof of the existence of God. It is with this in mind that he states: "Reason can, and should serve the teachings of Revelation as a corrective, to purify the intuitive truths again and again, to deepen it in order to intellectualize it; but never can reason become the source of truth,"<sup>20.</sup> Kohler would bring the Deity in contact with human beings, he would make It a part of the world, not an abstraction far removed from it; he did not however stray to the opposite extreme and characterize God with too human attributes; such views were sternly rejected by him; "still the thinkers of Judaism have ever labored to divest the Deity of every vestige of sensousness, of likeness to man, in fact, of every limitation to action or free will. Every conception which merges

19. Robinson, M. A., The God Idea in American Reform Judaism, Thesis, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, 1952, p. 51.

20. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 53.

God into the world or identifies Him with it and thus makes Him subject to necessity is incompatible with the Jewish idea of God."<sup>21.</sup> "Altogether we must guard against applying our human type of knowledge to God."<sup>22.</sup> Kohler also rejected all types of humanism, so for example writing, "H. G. Well's The Invisible King is likewise a God in the making, man-made, not the Maker and Ruler of man."<sup>23.</sup>

As the two men differ so radically on their basic concept of God, they must likewise differ in the attributes which they assign to the deity. Wise would stress the attribute of love, although this attitude is none too clear in several instances; in his book, The Essence of Judaism, a strong emphasis is placed upon justice.<sup>24.</sup> Yet the eminent founder of organized Reform Judaism involves himself in further difficulties by stating that he believes in an impersonal deity who is characterized by the attributes of "Supreme Love, Justice, and Holiness universal,"<sup>25.</sup> showing no preference to any of them. Yet in the same paper he is quoted in the following manner regarding Yom Kippur: "Sin is to be punished not forgiven. That there is not to be found a single passage in Scripture to the effect that sins are to

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21. Ibid., p. 81.

22. Ibid., p. 95.

23. Ibid., p. 71.

24. Wise, I. M., The Essence of Judaism, Bloch and Co., Cincinnati, 1883, p. 63.

25. Wise, I. M., The Jewish Times, 1871, vol. 3, no. 16, p. 247.

be forgiven. That the idea of reconciliation in the Talmud dates only from the Pauline period and is antagonistic to the spirit of Judaism."<sup>26.</sup> He attempted to extricate himself from the misunderstandings caused by this statement in his Israelite,<sup>27.</sup> but unfortunately did so in a rather unclear manner. There remains to us a statement made in Chicago some twenty years later which would speak of a God who is "the Supreme Goodness (?), the ray heshed, 'Supreme Grace', love is the attribute of his nature."<sup>28.</sup> Wise did not clarify his point of view at any other occasion. This God with the attributes thus assigned to him leaves Wise with an attitude toward prayer which is rather much<sup>29.</sup> one of awe than anything else.

Kohler approaches the problem from a systematic point of view; he would divide the attributes of God into two groups, the metaphysical ones and those derived from man's moral nature, thus making a distinction between the imminent and transcendental attributes of God.<sup>30.</sup> Among the former he stressed justice rather than mercy as a prime characteristic of the Jewish God idea. "The highest principle of ethics in Judaism, the cardinal point in the government of the world is not love, but JUSTICE."<sup>31.</sup> Kohler repeatedly stressed this fact and devoted

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26. Wise, I. M., The Jewish Times, 1871, vol. 3, no. 16, p. 249.  
27. Wise, I. M., The Israelite, 1871, August 11.  
29. Wise, I. M., Cosmic God, p. 163.  
28. Wise, I. M., Theology of Judaism, p. 20.  
30. Robinson, M. A., Thesis, p. 62.  
31. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 120.

a considerable amount of time to developing it and demonstrating it to be an essential part of the spirit of Judaism. In spite of his emphasis on justice, Kohler's attitude toward prayer is a much more effective one than that of Wise, though there is a clash with the ideas expressed above. Kohler would reject Wise's thoughts concerning the efficacy of the Day of Atonement as they would leave it without any value; he would emphasize that "searching reason may deny the effect of prayer upon the psychic, mental, and moral shaping of man, or it may declare the prayer as such to be pious self-deception. The religious sentiment finds in prayer the rise of the soul toward unification with God in the sacred moments of her earthly course. This is not deception. Through prayer, man, soaring up in devotion to God receives from Him the power to dare Fate and Sin, and to overcome suffering and death."<sup>32.</sup> This is a concept of prayer which stands outside the influence of modern social sciences and so can still be used by a believing Jew as a basis for his prayer and meditation. On the other attributes of God both men agree with the traditional point of view, ascribing to Him the attributes generally assigned by the great thinkers and philosophers of the Middle Ages.<sup>33.</sup>

In conjunction with the thoughts concerning God it is

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32. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 204.

33. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, pp. 82 - 146.

Wise, I. M., Judaism: Its Doctrines and Duties, Office of the Israelite, Cincinnati, 1872, pp. 12 - 18.

These two references give the desired information in the most concise form, but numerous other writings could be mentioned.

necessary to discuss their ideas on revelation and evolution as all these matters are intimately connected and must be investigated to gain an insight into their total thought system. Here, unfortunately, Wise strikes an even more absurd figure, especially when one remembers that his ideas concerning the deity were extremely liberal, perhaps even radical; consequently his thoughts concerning prayer were similarly radical, but in regard to evolution and revelation we find him an arch-conservative. Kohler remains rather consistent with his previously expressed points of view. Both men agree on the idea of revelation from heaven, as Kohler stated at the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference: "I confess I am an evolutionist, but I believe in revelation, and I am bold enough to say that Torah min hashomayim, which is revelation, must always remain one of the foundation stones of Judaism."<sup>34</sup> The two men only differed in their historical conception of revelation; Wise limited revelation to the great event at Sinai whose supreme value and authority never diminishes. "All divine revelation is contained in principle in the Sinaitic revelation."<sup>35</sup> Falk shows the dilemma which now exists for Wise as a progressive Judaism is impossible with revelation limited to an event in the ancient past, but

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<sup>34</sup>. Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference, Central Conference of American Rabbis (in honor of the 80th anniversary of the birth of Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler), 1923, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup>. Wise, I. M., Judaism and Christianity, Bloch and Co., Cincinnati, 1883, p. 21.

Wise met this problem skillfully by stating that "the principle is eternal and referable to the Sinaiic revelation, while the law as such is transitory."<sup>36.</sup> To I. M. Wise this revelation is to be accepted completely as described in the Bible; all the events which surround it are to be accepted literally as there is so much proof for such an acceptance. "No other revelation is supported by similar pillars of testimony, none rests upon as solid a historical evidence, none can boast upon that argumentum a consensu gentils, if he reasons correctly, and the strict adherent to the all-sufficiency of human reason could only come to the conclusion, if any revelation is true, the Sinaiic revelation must be."<sup>37.</sup> "A whole nation saw and heard the Sinaiic revelation . . . . The reader of those chapters of Scripture is forced to declare the whole as a piece of invention or accept it as a fact, no middle ground is possible. No sane man can prove it an invention."<sup>38.</sup> This attitude also led Wise to accept Maimonide's view on prophecy which gives Moses the supreme place among the Jewish prophets.<sup>39.</sup> The other miracles mentioned in the Bible are as valid and real to Wise as the revelation on Sinai; though he states in his History of the Israelitisch Nation that miracles belong purely to the field.

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36. Ibid., p. 22.  
37. Ibid., p. 35.  
38. Ibid., p. 33.  
39. Ibid., p. 18.

of religion and have no place in strict history as "miracles can be wrought by God only."<sup>40.</sup>

Kohler's outlook on all of these matters is quite different; he does not believe in the notion that Judaism was founded by Moses nor even that the principles of the religion were firmly established at this time, thereby leaving little room for progress among later generations. "Neither is Judaism the creation of a single person, either prophet, or a man with divine claims. It points back to the patriarchs as its first source of revelation. It speaks not of the God of Moses, of Amos and Isaiah, but of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob thereby declaring the Jewish genius to be the creator of its own religious ideas. It is, therefore, incorrect to speak of Mosaism."<sup>41.</sup> He further clarifies his position as he states that "the election of Israel cannot be regarded as a single divine act, concluded at one moment of revelation, or even during the Biblical period."<sup>42.</sup> Such a statement would allow a concept of a continuously developing and progressing Judaism, one which adapts itself to every age, contrary to the view of Wise which is quite traditional in its nature.

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40. Wise, I. M., History of the Israelitish Nation, vol. I, p. 16 (Introduction).

41. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 27.

42. Ibid., p. 325.

See also Kohler, K., Der Segen Jacob, Julius Benzian, Berlin, 1867, p. 6 (Introduction).

It can be seen that both believed in a progressive philosophy of history although Wise to a much lesser degree than Kohler. This attitude toward change in religion is paralleled by Wise's thoughts on evolution in science. He rejects Darwin's theory: "From the moral point of view the Darwinian hypothesis on the descent of man is the most pernicious that could be possibly advanced, not only because it robs man of his dignity and the consciousness of pre-eminence, which is the coffin to all virtue, but chiefly because it presents all nature as a battle-ground, a perpetual warfare of each against all in the combat for existence, and represents the victors as those worthy of existence, and the vanquished ripe for destruction. It appears to me that Darwinism is tolerated in Europe, because it props the aristocracy."<sup>43.</sup> The sentiments here expressed are certainly lofty ones and place the author among the most thoughtful of the opponents of this much debated theory. Wise was willing to accept evolution interpreted in a slightly different way, an evolution in the moral capabilities of man; "the first man was gifted with moral and intellectual faculties, which however were undeveloped. Darwin succeeded in making monkeys out of men, but failed in making men out of monkeys."<sup>44.</sup>

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<sup>43.</sup> Wise, I. M., The Cosmic God, p. 50.

<sup>44.</sup> Wilens, Isaac Mayer Wise, (in chapter on Evolution), quoted by Tarshish, A., Thesis, p. 162, (This essay is in private possession.)

Kohler on the other hand not only accepted the discoveries of modern science, but expected them to be valuable allies to the cause of religion. "For the theologian and student of religion today the center of gravity of religion is to be sought in psychology and anthropology. In all his upward strivings ... man ... can only behold the hem of God's garment; he seeks God above him because he feels Him within himself."<sup>45.</sup> Science would only clarify the weakness of man's position in the universe as well as to quite clearly show him the limitations of his knowledge. Here again one may see the influence of Kohler's thought on later generations while Wise can only be remembered as one of the skillful opponents of the Theory of Evolution.

Wise's views on evolution and religion, his acceptance of literal revelation and miracles in history had a great influence on his outlook toward Biblical criticism. Throughout his life he remained one of its most ardent enemies; he frankly believed in the inspiration of the Bible in its present form as well as in the incorruptibility of tradition. "Not only the manuscripts, but also the pronunciation and accentuation of each syllable of the Holy Writ were preserved intact, alike in all ages and in all parts of the world, as is evident from the ancient manuscripts extant, and especially from

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45. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 204.

the still more ancient commentaries and the united testimonies of the Karaites and the Christians of the first centuries. There exists no solid ground on which to base any doubt in the authenticity of the Holy Writ."<sup>46.</sup> Wise felt himself obliged to repeatedly defend the book both in regard to its inspiration and in regard to its greatness;<sup>47.</sup> he felt the constant threat of the critics and wished to fend them off. He would further distinguish between the Torah and the Prophets along the lines of traditional Judaism. "All the prophets have received the substance of their message from Mount Sinai. They have not added an iota to the Torah, nor have they taken anything from it."<sup>48.</sup> On the following page he limited the essence of Judaism even further to the Decalogue which he believed to be "the Torah, in letter and spirit, the eternal law and doctrine, the exclusive and adequate source of theology and ethics, the only intelligible categorical imperative."<sup>49.</sup> The views held by him were extremely conservative and did not differ materially from those held by Orthodox rabbis.

Kohler held very liberal views concerning Biblical cri-

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46. Wise, I. M., Prosaos to Holy Writ, R. Clarke and Co., Cincinnati, 1891, p. 193. See also p. 43.

47. Wise, I. M., Judaism and Christianity, p. 10.

48. Wise, I. M., "The Law," Hebrew Review, 1880, p. 12-31

49. Ibid., p. 133.

ticism, nevertheless he expressed the sound opinion that this was not a matter to be discussed from the pulpit.

"Right here again arises the difficulty caused by the wide diversity between the standpoint to be taken by the preacher and that of the scholar. The scholar in his search for truth cannot, and should not, be satisfied with half truths, . . . . But these very facts as well as Biblical criticism in general do not belong to the pulpit. The function of the pulpit is to strengthen faith, not to unsettle it."<sup>50.</sup> Kohler was quite willing to subject the Bible to the most scrutinizing investigation of modern thought, although he did not state which theories of Biblical criticism he followed. This outlook ultimately allowed Biblical criticism to flourish at the Hebrew Union College and permitted a Biblical critic and an archeologist to become presidents of the institution which had been founded by Wise. Kohler felt that Judaism "can no more afford to ignore the established results of modern linguistic, ethnological, and historical research of Biblical criticism and comparative religion, than it can the undisputed facts of natural science."<sup>51.</sup> Yet we may obtain some idea as to the extent which Kohler himself progressed along these lines of thought by noting a chronology prepared by him for the

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50. Kohler, K., A Living Faith, (Edit. Cohon, S. S.), Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1948, p. 142.

51. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 4.

American Jews Annual; here he traced the creation to 3760 B. C. ✓  
according to "modern inquiry."<sup>52.</sup> One must however remember  
that in another table a few years earlier he began Jewish  
history with Moses, dating him around 1800 B. C.<sup>53.</sup> His dis-  
agreement with Wise is by no means limited to this alone, but  
is even more violent in regard to the Pentateuch and its  
place in Judaism. "It is NOT MOSAIC JUDAISM, whose entire  
sacrificial, judicial, and social system our present world,  
Jewish or non-Jewish, has outlived long ago, but PROPHEPIC  
JUDAISM, whose sap and marrow will feed and quicken the  
highest civilization of mankind for all centuries to come,  
upon which we Jews stand today."<sup>54.</sup> This was the point of  
view ultimately accepted by American Reform Judaism and is  
the spirit in which it still strives to think and act.

How does each one of them treat the inconsistencies of  
the Bible? Wise finds them to be no real problem; "if the  
expounder of the Bible teaches doctrines incompatible with  
the laws of nature which are the works of One Eternal God, or  
to the experience of History, which is the realized will of  
the same benign Providence, I am bound to reject them in order  
not to be forced to doubt the authenticity of the Bible, or  
to suppose that Infinite Wisdom contradicts itself in the

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<sup>52.</sup> Kohler, K., "Chronology of Events of Interest to Jews,"  
American Jews Annual, L. Wise Co. Cincinnati, 1884, p. 57.

<sup>53.</sup> Kohler, K., Chronological Table of Jewish History,  
Trow, New York, 1881, p. 1.

<sup>54.</sup> Kohler, K., Judaism and Reform, A Reply to Leo N. Levy  
of Galveston, New York, 1895, p. 42.

Bible, nature, history."<sup>55.</sup> So we find that Wise would have no part whatsoever in Biblical criticism regardless of whether it was presented through a Jew, as Graetz, or through a Christian, as Wellhausen. Kohler utilized the contradictions to prove the dire need for criticism and further investigation. "I maintain that only this liberal view of the Bible offers the broad and solid foundation to that religion of humanity of which Reform Judaism is the exponent. The Bible is holy, NOT BECAUSE IT IS INSPIRED, BUT BECAUSE AND IN SO FAR AS IT DOES STILL, INSPIRE."<sup>56.</sup> This would then remove all the negative aspects of Biblical criticism as injurious to Judaism and would leave Judaism ready to meet any conclusions of modern scientific research. The actual text of the Bible was not regarded as magically holy by Kohler;<sup>57.</sup> only the spirit emanating from it remained of vital importance. He believed that the Jew had a clear choice in harmonizing the inconsistencies which the Bible presented to him; "you must either use the key of Talmudic hermeneutics or the method of modern research."<sup>58.</sup> To Kohler, in contrast to Wise, the latter was the infinitely preferable method to be used; throughout his career as a rabbi and as President of the

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55. May, B. M., Isaac Mayer Wise, p. 114.

56. Kohler, K., Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses, Ark Publishing Co., Cincinnati, 1916, p. 179.

57. Philinson, "Kaufmann Kohler as Reformer," Studies in Jewish Literature, Georg. Reimer, Berlin, 1913, p. 6.

58. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 38.

Hebrew Union College he heartily favored independent critical investigation of all textual problems.<sup>59.</sup>

The opinions expressed toward Biblical literature were re-echoed in the attitudes toward Talmudic and rabbinic writings. The preceding paragraph has shown us that Kohler preferred the modern critical methods to those of the Talmud; this was the attitude generally accepted by all reformers in Germany as well as in America; it has been clearly stated in many platforms and declarations in both countries. In them it is also pointed out that the ritual law and the civil law which compose such a great part of rabbinic works are no longer binding upon the modern Jew; such is the attitude expressed by the Pittsburgh Platform in the formation of which Kohler played such a great part. Wise's attitude toward the Talmud illustrates his strong desire to compromise and his basic indifference toward this matter; a progressive change in his outlook would be praiseworthy, but the change took the path of vacillation according to convenience; in the final analysis the conservative outlook stood victorious, although toward the very end of his life it became somewhat modified. The boldest statement accepting the Talmud came from him during the Cleveland Conference of 1855; at this time he signed a declaration which stated that the "Talmud

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59. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 46.

contains the traditional, legal, and logical exposition of the Biblical laws which must be expounded and practiced according to the comments of the Talmud." <sup>60.</sup> This pronouncement on the part of a reformer met with the most vigorous opposition from the Eastern reform leaders, under the leadership of David Einhorn; Kohler was later to become a member of this group, not only through spiritual, but also through family relationship. When Wise became aware of the storm of protest which he had aroused he attempted to modify his position by explaining his stand on the Talmud as in no way denying Reform, because "the Talmud amends Biblical laws, had rescinded Biblical laws, had made new laws." <sup>61.</sup> He wanted to rebuild Judaism in America on progressive lines, but following traditional patterns wherever possible, which he believed to be so in almost every case. It is interesting to note that his biographers once again attempt to remove their idol from the dilemma into which he had placed himself. Thus Philipson states that "the Bible is an inviolable source for Jewish doctrine and the Talmud is a tradition on the lines of it . . . . A revision of this tradition <sup>is</sup> necessitated by the changed environment, but it must be taken with reverence and on the ground of its own logic. There is in this nothing we

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60. The Occident, 1855, vol. 13, no. 8, p. 407.

61. Wise, I. M., Reminiscences, (edit. Philipson, D.), Leo Wise and Co., Cincinnati, 1901, p. 321.

could not now-a-days assent to."<sup>62.</sup> Even after Wise had attempted to show the Eastern reformers that his agreement to the statement made at this conference was not to be taken literally, he reverted to this point of view, expressing it in a clearer form in an address in 1875: "The Talmud of the nineteenth century can claim no higher authority than the Talmud of the fifth century. Biblical criticism is no more than the Talmud of this century; scientifically it does not stand as high as the old Talmud which had its fixed laws of hermeneutics; it is still in its philological state. Kuenen, Wellhausen, Renan, Ewald, or Smith are no more reliable authorities than the Jochanas, Gamaliels, Jehudas, or Rabbina and Ashi. This Torah is authentic, truthful, perfect, or your Judaism is a farce also before the judgement seat of reason."<sup>63.</sup> Nevertheless this same man approved the Pittsburgh Platform and even made the statement that "American rabbis, the author included, having declared in various conferences the authority of the Talmud abrogates, it could only be consulted as a historical record, to show how the ancient expounder of the Law understood this or that passage of the Bible."<sup>64.</sup>

These were the thoughts concerning God and His revela-

<sup>62.</sup> Philipson, D., Grossmann, L., Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise, p. 72.

<sup>63.</sup> Wise, I. M., Address at the Opening of H. U. C., Cincinnati, 1900.

<sup>64.</sup> Wise, I. M., Judaism: Its Doctrines and Duties, p. 5.

see also Wise, I. M., Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, 1890-91, C. C. A. R., p. 36.

tion which were held by the two greatest American Reform leaders of the last century; it then remains our task to discuss their interpretation of the role of Israel under the new theological doctrines. The primary step which both men took was that of renouncing the nationalistic interpretation of the chosen people concept. They retained the doctrine of a chosen people, but maintained that this did not include the notion of a homeland in which the Jew feels more native than in the land in which he happens to be born or to settle; thus they followed the traditional trend of Reform which had insisted on this interpretation since the time of the Paris Synod in which the matter was clearly stated for the first time. Kohler clarified his view long before political Zionism arose on the scene; "Israel as a nation has disappeared forever; as a peculiar people, as a race, with certain qualities of soul and mind which form the life giving conditions and root of its peculiar historical mission, it has remained and will remain as such until the time when this mission shall have been fulfilled." <sup>65.</sup> Upon the rise of political Zionism it was sternly opposed by Kohler; "Zionism is nothing more or less than the land hunger such as all the nations of the world manifest today,

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65. Kohler, K., "Did the Napoleonic Sanhedrin Allow Inter-marriage, The American Hebrew, April 6, 1894, p. 683 quoting Einhorn, D., The Jewish Times, January 6, 1870. (This is quoted as summing up Kohler's attitude.)

a desire quite natural and justifiable in the fugitive homeless Jew of Russia and Roumania. Yet what right has this movement to arrogate to itself a name as sacred and dear to the Jew of all lands and ages as is the name of Zion? This is sacrilege."<sup>66.</sup> Kohler believed the mission of Israel to be that of slowly uniting all men under the same God and under the same covenant; he was unable to see how this goal could be attained through the nationalization of Israel, though he recognized the fact that Judaism contains more than the purely religious element. "Judaism ... is neither a religious nor a national system solely, but aims to be a covenant with God uniting all peoples ... ."<sup>67.</sup> Isaac M. Wise fully agreed with Kohler on this matter; that fact is clearly stated in a rather uncomplimentary summary of Levy's: "Isaac M. Wise fulminations in his presidential address before the C. C. A. R. that year (1897) are typical. Zionism, he argued, is merely a response to anti-semitism, a reaction to the lingering discrimination and persecution of Eastern Europe, whereas Reform Judaism more profoundly and hopefully responds to the more widespread forces of kindness and hospitality."<sup>68.</sup> This attitude toward Zionism leads one to inquire in which manner they thought of the Exile; Kohler

66. Kohler, K., "The Dangers, The Fallacies, and the Falsehoods of Zionism," The Reform Advocate, April 20, 1907, p. 258.

See also Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 8.

67. Ibid., p. 322.

68. Levy, B. H., Reform Judaism in America, p. 132.

being always consistent rejects the traditional interpretation when writing of the Reform attitude in his Jewish Theology; "they have rejected the entire theory that Israel was exiled from his ancient land because of his sins, and that he is eventually to return there and restore the sacrificial cult in the Temple at Jerusalem."<sup>69.</sup> Strangely enough Wise retains the traditional point of view though this is quite incompatible with his attitude toward Zionism; he claims that "had Israel always obeyed the laws of God, its land would have become the great school of humanity. Having sinned it was dispersed among the nations, thus to carry the divine right and light to all parts of the globe."<sup>70.</sup>

Thus we find that Wise and Kohler emphasized the mission of Israel in contrast to nationalistic goals; the two men also agreed to the true meaning of this rather vague concept. Kohler traced it and its reawakening in modern times historically. "In the Middle Ages, when the historical viewpoint and the idea of human progress were both lacking, the belief in the mission of Israel was confined to the Messianic hope . . . . Modern times, however, with their awakened historical sense and their idea of progress, have again placed in the foreground the belief in the election and mission of Israel.

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69. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 330.

70. Wise, I. M., Essence of Judaism, p. 26.

The founders of Reform Judaism have cast this ancestral doctrine in a new form."<sup>71.</sup> This was the land in which the mission could best be carried out; "yet at no time and in no country has the opportunity come to the Jew to again mount the watchtower of prophecy, and in working out his mission to unfold the banner of the highest idealism for all humanity as at the present great turning point in the world history, and in America, to whom a disrupted and disjointed world looks to be reset on the firm and lasting foundations of justice."<sup>72.</sup> Yet Kohler did not feel that this concept intended the superiority of the Jews as a chosen people; "there is no distinction in favor of Israel except as it lives a higher and more god-like life;"<sup>73.</sup> only through participating in the dedication of this mission could one rightfully claim membership in the chosen people. Wise's complete agreement with the thoughts expressed by Kohler can be clearly see through one of his sermons in which he states that "as long as the human family is not united before the one eternal, infinite and absolute God, in freedom, justice, and love; as long as wrong is done in the name of justice, and love; as long as wrong is done in

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71. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 329.

72. Kohler, K., "The Mission of Israel", Studies, Addresses, and Personal Papers, Bloch and Co., New York, 1931, p.

73. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 260.

the name of justice, paganism survives in religion, truth is dreaded and thought is hampered; ... so long Israel's mission is not fulfilled."<sup>74.</sup>

Emphasizing the mission of Israel led to a rejection of the idea of a personal Messiah by Kohler.<sup>75.</sup> Wise also emphasized the Messianic times rather than the arrival of a personal Messiah; "wherever political oppression is totally removed as in the United States, the Messiah has come, and so will he come to all nations."<sup>76.</sup> In spite of this statement I feel that there is much truth in the thesis of Akselrad as he states: "While I. M. Wise usually refers to Israel as the Messiah or Messianic people, he does occasionally seem to bend over backwards, in discussing the subject to indicate his acceptance of an actual man-Messiah, if he should come."<sup>77.</sup> This is the impression gained by reading a series of articles by Wise on the subject in The Occident.<sup>78.</sup> The fact that Wise came to no clear decision on the matter can be seen in his prayer book; here the references to a personal Messiah remain. In like manner Wise rejected resurrection along with Kohler, but retained it in the Minhag America. Wise's rejection of this doctrine is a bit naive; "Wise then

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74. Wise, I. M., "The Congregation", Philipson and Grossmann, Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise, p. 385.

75. Kohler, K., "Die Prinzipien und Ziele des Reform Judenthums," Der Zeitgeist, vol. 1, p. 58.

76. Wise, I. M., The American Israelite, vol. 6.

78. Wise, I. M., "The Messiah", The Occident, vol. 7, p. 86.

states that there can be no bodily resurrection because there is no room, the number of inhabitants constantly increasing."<sup>79.</sup>

The thought of both reformers concerning the duties of man in their theologies followed the path of earlier men rather closely; here there was almost no innovation and traditional thought was closely followed. Kohler and Wise were almost in full agreement on all these matters. Both men saw man's place at the height of creation as a position not given as a free gift, but as a goal toward which man must constantly strive if he hopes to attain it; "man must strive to attain the place destined for him in the scheme of creation by the exertion of his own will and the unfolding of the powers that lie within him."<sup>80.</sup> "Self-acquired perfection" is spoken of as a goal for man by Wise.<sup>81.</sup> In the traditional manner they referred to the dual nature of man, part flesh, part spirit, which places him in the center of the universe, although it also gives way to a great deal of conflict within man himself. Yet it is this very fact which enables man to

77. Akselrad, S., Studies in the Development of Conservative and Reform Judaism in the United States, A Comparison of the View of Isaac Leeser and Isaac Mayer Wise with Respect to the Messiah and Mission of Israel, Thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1947, p. 21.

79. May, B. M., Isaac Mayer Wise, p. 117.

80. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 211.

81. Wise, I. M., Essence of Judaism, p. 9.

"lift himself into a realm of free action under higher motives."<sup>82.</sup> It is through the soul which "is God's image for it is gifted with God-like capacities,"<sup>83.</sup> that man is able to rise above the animal world. Nor may we ever forget the source of this divine element which rests in us.<sup>84.</sup> As liberal Jews a strong belief in free-will was certainly necessary; it was to be found in Kohler's complete acceptance of Maimonides' ideas on the matter. To Kohler "the freedom of the will must remain for all time a postulate of moral responsibility, and therefore of religion;"<sup>85.</sup> the concept is of equal importance to Wise.<sup>86.</sup> Both men are very clear in their explanations of their concept of sin, so as to differentiate it from the Christian one. "Sin never becomes a demonical power depriving man of his divine dignity of self-determination and condemning him to eternal damnation. It remains merely a going astray from the right path, a stumbling from which man may rise again to his heavenly height, exerting his own powers as the son of God."<sup>87.</sup> Wise also stressed this traditional interpretation in his catechisms

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82. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 217.

83. Wise, I. M., The Essence of Judaism, p. 19.

84. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 230.

85. Ibid., p. 237.

86. Wise, I. M., Essence of Judaism, p. 17.

87. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 245.

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and sermons. The concepts of repentance and prayer which the two men worked out are mentioned earlier in the essay. It is very clearly shown that the energy of both men was fully committed to a broad outline of the new Judaism, so they made little effort to redefine the tasks of the individual Jew in the modern world, leaving this for a later generation of reformers; both men published volumes and preached sermons on the subject, but they contain no new ideas which are specifically Reform in their outlook.

Those are the theories on which Kohler and Wise hoped to build an American Judaism, but they differed <sup>as</sup> violently on the methods to be used in this effort as they had done in the reconstruction of its thought. At the outset Wise was extremely optimistic and thought to unite all of American Jewry under one theology and in one organization, but he was soon disappointed in this hope. Neither man was really satisfied in having only conferences as guides to change; they desired a stronger organization with more authority, namely as synod. Wise favored this throughout his life <sup>89.</sup> while Kohler approved of it for a time, in spite of Einhorn's opposition to it in 1855, <sup>90.</sup> but then he changed his attitude toward it. This change is explained by Philipson: "Now

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88. Wise, I. M., "Letter to a Gentleman who with his Family Wishes to Embrace Judaism," Philipson and Grossman, Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise, p. 402.

89. See also Wise, I. M., Judaism: Its Doctrines and Duties, p. 21.  
90. Tarshish, A., The Rise of American Judaism, p. 209.

can Kohler be charged with inconsistency here? I think not . . . . But on the vital point at issue, it appears that Kohler has through it all held the same thought; whether he opposed or advocated a Synod, it would appear that he always has been opposed to the idea of the Synod as an authoritative ecclesiastical body invested with ecclesiastical powers to enforce its decisions; its only power was to lie in moral persuasion and the weight of authority delivered from the dignity of its personnel."<sup>91.</sup>

The practical matter in which the two men opposed each other most violently was the controversy over prayerbooks; Wise supported his Minhag America until the time of the Union Prayer Book in spite of all of its inconsistencies, while Kohler insisted upon the excellent version by David Einhorn which followed the Reform position in all of its prayers besides being infinitely superior in its translation. Kohler thought that "our liturgy must ever respond to a double demand; it must throb with the spirit of continuity with our great past, to make us feel one with our fathers of yore; and it must express clearly and fully our own views and

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90. Ryback, M., "The East-West Conflict in American Reform Judaism," American Jewish Archives, vol. 4, no. 1., 1952, p. 20.

91. Philipson, D., Kaufmann Kohler as a Reformer, p. 21.

and needs, our convictions and our hopes."<sup>92.</sup> It is in this spirit that he became one of the most bitter critics of the Minhag America, writing of it after it had been recently revised; "das Kind hat eben die Fehler und Krankheiten seiner geistesschwachen Mutter, der Ersten Clevelander Synode geerbt ... ." <sup>93.</sup> Philipson and Grossman attempt to excuse their hero in their brief biography by stating that "the prayer-book controversy, in fact has a place in the history of the organization of Jewish communities rather than in Jewish theology, for the favorite prayer-books divided the country geographically more than doctrinally."<sup>94.</sup> This is undoubtedly true, but unfortunately not to the point at issue as it does not excuse the author from writing a work so inconsistent with his theological thought. Or they attempt to remove the dilemma as due to the fact that "Wise did not express in his Minhag America a new theology, but renaissance Jewish people. The prayer-book was to give not doctrine, but life ...,"<sup>95.</sup> yet on the previous page these skillful authors had stated the very doctrines and principles which the book supposedly followed !

We find agreement in most other practical matters, which undoubtedly led to the general acceptance of these ideas by

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92. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 270.

93. Kohler, K., "Das Dahinscheiden des Minhag America und die Clevelander Todtenschau, Ein Offenes Schreiben an Herrn I. M. Wise," The Jewish Times, vol. 2, no. 22, p. 346.

See also, Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 297.

all reformers. Wise was very interested in laying a special stress on Hebrew,<sup>96.</sup> but here Kohler did not inherit his father-in-law's prejudice toward German. Both men worked for the equality of women through advocating mixed seating; Wise was the first rabbi to introduce mixed news to the American Jewish scene.<sup>97.</sup> Kohler further stressed this idea through the confirmation service.<sup>98.</sup> Both men were eager to accept proselytes and felt that such would be forthcoming in large numbers; they were quite willing to remove the obstacle of circumcision for the new aspirants to Judaism.<sup>99.</sup> They fully recognized the problem of holidays which carried little meaning for the modern Jew and attempted to revitalize them. Kohler discussed two holidays in the following manner: "I want to speak on Simhat Torah and to plead for the revival of this ancient Synagogue festival in our midst. No one who follows the trend of religious life among us with open eyes can have failed to notice that Sukkot, unless it be revitalized by some great soul-stirring idea,

94. Philinson, D., Grossmann, L., Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise, p. 63.

95. Ibid., p. 64.

96. Ryback, M., "The East-West Conflict in American Reform Judaism," p. 19.

97. May, B. M., Isaac Mayer Wise, p. 363.

98. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 472.

99. Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference . . ., p. 30.  
Central Conference of American Rabbis Year Book, C. C. A. R., Cincinnati, 1892, p. 94.

unless it has a living message to bring instead of being, what it is now, merely a memory of the past, must needs wither and dwindle away."<sup>100.</sup> Kohler did not desire the abolition of ceremonies, but their reinterpretation to fit the needs of the present time; he opposed all Romantic notions which attempted to allow the dead past to live purely out of love for the picturesque or for tradition's sake; the ceremonies had to speak to him in the language of his time.<sup>101.</sup> It is for this reason also that he did not favor the retention of the dietary laws in the modern Jewish home, but wanted to find "other methods to inculcate the spirit of holiness in the modern Jew, to render him conscious of his priestly mission, while he lives in union and fellowship with all his fellow-citizens."<sup>102.</sup> Wise stood with Kohler as well as with the majority of the Reform rabbinate in seeking solutions to these pressing problems of the time; he devoted numerous editorials in his American Israelite and in the Deborah to each of these matters, thus displaying a constant interest in the less significant problems of modern Judaism.

The question of the Sabbath and its observance faced both

100. Kohler, K., A Living Faith, (edit. Cohen, S. S.,), p. 16.

101. Central Conference of American Rabbis Year Book, C. C. A. R., Cincinnati, 1907, p. 222.

Kohler, K., The Origin and the Function of Ceremonies, Cincinnati, 1907, p. 6.

102. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 453.

men as it does the modern rabbi today. Wise solved it partially through the emphasis upon the Friday evening service which was followed by many congregations and which has proved to be a highly successful innovation.<sup>103.</sup> The other possible solution was that of shifting the day of rest and worship to the general day of rest, Sunday, which neither of the men opposed and which Kohler favored very strongly at one time. Wise could not "recommend Sunday Services; where there is no necessity for the innovation none will recommend it; where there is extraordinary power to attract, there will be no greater attendance than on Saturday. This is an irreligious age. Sunday service has been tried, it has failed in many places."<sup>104.</sup> Although Kohler's attitude changed, his final conviction on the matter was that "modern life has worked great changes in Jewish observances of the Sabbath . . . . . the conviction has become well established that the continuity with our great past must be upheld, and the general feeling is that the historical Sabbath should under no condition be entirely given up. It is inseparably connected with the election of Israel as a priest people, while the Christian 'Lord's Day' represents views and tendencies opposed to those of Judaism, whether considered in its original

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103. May, M. B., Isaac M. Wise, p. 170.

104. Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference, . . . , p. 35.

meaning or in that given it by the church . . . . Still between the Sabbath observed by the Church and the one of the Mosque stands the Jewish Sabbath in solemn grandeur and patriarchal dignity, waiting with Israel, its keeper and ally, for the day when all humanity will worship the one holy God of Abraham, and when our ancient Sabbath may truly become the Sabbath of the world."<sup>105.</sup> Marx explains Kohler's shift in point of view very well: "The key to understanding Kohler's attitude in Chicago toward the Sunday service is an understanding of Kohler's attitude toward Samuel Holdheim, the original advocate of Sunday Services. We have already noted that as the years passed Kohler became more and more dissatisfied with Holdheim's radicalism. Holdheim's radicalism in thought and custom appealed to Kohler, but later he saw that 'history has given its verdict in disfavor of such radical measures'; at the same time he rejected Hirsch and his Hegelian philosophy."<sup>106.</sup>

It remains needless to say that Kohler and Wise emphasized the unity of the Jewish people and as they spoke hopefully of proselytism did not favor intermarriage.<sup>107.</sup> Both

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105. Kohler, K., Jewish Theology, p. 458.

106. Marx, R. J., Kaufmann Kohler as Reformer, Thesis, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, 1951, p. 31.

107. Kohler, K., "Did the Napoleonic Sanhedrin Allow Intermarriage", The American Hebrew, April 6, 1894, quoting Einhorn, D., The Jewish Times, Jan 7, 1870, (This is quoted as summing up Kohler's attitude.).

Wilanski, D., Sinai to Cincinnati, Renaissance Book Co., New York, 1937; p. 156. also p. 51.

men recognized the great need for a well established system of Jewish education on all levels; their strivings eventually led to the establishment of the Hebrew Union College in whose rise and growth each man played a vital part.<sup>108.</sup> This remained as one of the primary reasons for the existence of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.<sup>for Wise.</sup>

Kohler viewed the establishment of a creed for Reform Judaism with great disfavor as he feared that this would bring about the existence of a group totally removed from the remainder of world Jewry; he also realized that this would contradict the basic liberal position of the Reform group.<sup>109.</sup> He favored a statement of basic principles as he felt that such a platform would not have the same binding character and that it would readily lend itself to change at a later time when conditions had changed; he himself became the author of the famous Pittsburgh Platform.<sup>110.</sup> Wise approved this platform and also agreed with Kohler's position on the question of a creed.<sup>111.</sup>

It may easily be seen that American Reform Judaism consists of the organizations of Isaac Mayer Wise, while its

108. Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference ..., p. 12.  
Wise, I. M., Constitution of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Cincinnati,
109. Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, 1905, p. 83.
110. Philipson, D., "Kaufmann Kohler as Reformer", Studies in Jewish Literature, p. 19.
111. Philipson, D., Grossmann, L., Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise, p. 279.

basic thought and theology stem from Kaufmann Kohler and his disciples. Wise remains the more celebrated of the two figures with some justification as his efforts at unification made the former's work possible; yet he remains highly esteemed only through the happy ignorance of his writings which have been almost completely forgotten. Wise was an able writer in the field of journalism as the success of his papers well attested, but he was not a clear thinker, nor did he possess the ability to express himself on philosophical questions. Furthermore he did not have a command of the excellent education of which Kohler was a master, his knowledge both in general matters and in the Jewish field may be questioned; one begins to doubt the latter upon reading his laudatory introduction to the universally condemned Rodkinson translation of the Talmud which testified that he had read "the translation carefully and found it correct and almost literal;"<sup>112.</sup> while Kohler was led to remark of it: "To render ... the Talmud intelligible to modern readers or students something more is required than superficial familiarity with the subject of rabbinical law... . In almost every uncommon word a degree

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112. Rodkinson, H., New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, New Talmud Publishing Co., Boston, 1896 - 1903, p. V.

of ignorance is displayed which is simply appalling. In one word the work is a disgrace to Jewish scholarship in America and it is a sin to encourage or support it." <sup>113.</sup>

Wise followed the position of the later German Reform which was much more moderate than that of America, but this form of revitalized and renewed Judaism was not destined to succeed in our land as it had across the sea. Wise, nevertheless, remains as the official symbol of Reform Judaism and as such is annually celebrated throughout the land.

Kohler remained a thinker advanced for his time in America, and so he was able to retain a firm grasp on the intellectual pattern of Reform Judaism, this hold which Wise had already lost during his life time. Our generation has tasted the fruits of the work of both of these men and remains deeply indebted to them. That which they accomplished was essential for the establishment of the Reform movement in the United States; the spirit which guided and encouraged them remains as a heritage to this and future generations so that their work may be continued and the goals of Judaism be realized.

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113. Kohler, K., "The New Talmud Translation by Rodkinson and Wise", The Reform Advocate, vol. 11, pp. 464-465.

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