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AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF REFORM JUDAISM AS CONCEIVED

BY THE EARLY GERMAN-JEWISH PHILOSOPHERS

by

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DIGEST

The subject of this thesis is the nature of Reform Judaism as conceived by the early German reformers. It is the purpose of this investigation to uncover the underlying principles of change that they utilized in their movement out of, and away from, traditional Judaism. From these principles, the nature of Reform Judaism should be derived.

The first step in this project is a definition of traditional Judaism. The key to this phase of the study is the concept of verbal revelation. It is this concept that provides the authority for the basic premises of what is now called Orthodoxy. These premises are irrefutable due to their origin in revelation. The principle of rabbinic authority as being the sole possessor today of true religious opinion is also derived from revelation.

In order to have a meaningful understanding of the work of the reformers, it was necessary to investigate the nature of the secular intellectual environment of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The work of the supernatural rationalists, Kant, and Hegel appear to have had the greatest influence upon the reformers.

Moses Mendelssohn is a landmark in modern Jewish intellectual history. Mendelssohn attempted to develop a metaphysical system based upon reason. He felt that reason, which he never defines, was the appropriate method for the scientific investigation of Judaism necessary for a Jewish metaphysics. However, his was a non-critical rationalism that could accept the validity of a verbal revelation. On the basis of this revelation, which could not be subjected to the test of reason, he maintained the validity of the ceremonial laws.

Next, there follows the epistemology and metaphysics of the reformers. Men like Steinheim, Holdheim, Geiger, and Zunz provide the material for exposition. In their works, there can be discerned the evidence of change in the conception of Judaism. The scientific method used to study Judaism changes from rationalism to empiricism to phenomenism. It is apparent in every case that these men were reluctant to formulate those principles of change which motivated them. Wherever possible, they took refuge in vague terms of a subjective nature. They spoke of reason, for example, but never clinically defined what was meant by that term.

One of their biggest problems was revelation. For undisclosed reasons they found it necessary to maintain a concept of revelation as close as possible in substance to that of tradition. Allied with this is their failure to adequately deal with the subject of God. It is in this realm that the weaknesses of the new Judaism they posited are so glaringly revealed.

The early reformers were unable to provide the formulation of the theoretical foundations of Reform Judaism. However, they did provide it with its basic principle, which is implied but never expressed explicitly, of radical freedom. Secondly, they are primarily responsible for the beginning of the process of the scientific investigation of Judaism.

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INTRODUCTION

Time and again, the problem of who is a Jew arises and stirs up a minor controversy. Orthodox Jews maintain that a child born of a Jewish mother is the basic criterion for being a natural born Jew. Others may become Jews through a specific process of conversion. Those who offer differing criteria for being counted a Jew do so on the basis of their definition of Judaism. These definitions can be predicated upon either social, political, cultural, or even religious terms depending upon the vested interest of the individual doing the defining.

If there is no consensus as to who is a Jew, then it follows that there is no consensus as to what is Judaism. Judaism has been defined as a race, a nation, a religion, a philosophy, and even a civilization. In the same vein, just as there is no agreement among Jews as to what is Judaism, there is no agreement among its adherents as to what is Reform Judaism.

Depending upon the bias of the individual, Reform Judaism has been defined as a watered-down version of Orthodox Judaism, a social movement, pristine prophetic Judaism, philosophically respectable Judaism, the natural fulfillment of evolutionary Judaism, and so on ad infinitum. There is no authoritarian definition of Reform Judaism. This being true, then it is evident that the nature of Reform Judaism is such that it allows for its adherents the freedom of thought.

It is the purpose of this thesis to seek out the nature of Reform Judaism by investigating the works of its early spokesmen. Their attempts to justify their positions through their epistemological and

Chapter 2: I

THE METAPHYSICAL

metaphysical systems, through their concepts of Deity and of Judaism,

constitute the subject of this work. If a vacuum. Whether a movement is the natural fulfillment of an earlier one, or a reaction to another one, it is dependent upon its predecessors for its terminology, its origins, and even its purposes. Reform Judaism is no exception. Because it uses the word Judaism in its name, it cannot be properly understood without an understanding of historically traditional Judaism.

Historically traditional Judaism is a very old and is the religious system to which the majority of Jews subscribed prior to the advent of Reform Judaism. It is known today as Orthodox Judaism, or rabbinic and/or traditional Judaism. Prior to the nineteenth century, it lacked a systematic theology which is characteristic of the other Western religions.¹ The principal belief of rabbinic Judaism was that it was in fact the direct revelation of the Deity to Moses, to Aaron, and to the people of Israel, that is found in the Bible. This revelation contained a series of earlier and minor revelations which were subsequently expounded. In this revelation the will of the Deity was made known. The commandments that he expected the Jews, and Muslims, to follow were proclaimed. In this revelation, and in others made to Moses and Aaron and Aaron were revealed.²

The verbal revelation took two forms, the law written law, or Torah, and the other the oral law. It is the oral law, and the claim that it was spoken by the Deity to Moses and Aaron. This gave the rabbis their authority to lay down true law. The people of the people witnessing God revealing himself was a very important part of the revelation.

Chapter I

IN THE BEGINNING

Movements do not arise out of a vacuum. Whether a movement is the natural fulfillment of an earlier one, or a reaction to another one, it is dependent upon its predecessors for its terminology, its origins, and even its purposes. Reform Judaism is no exception. Because it uses the word Judaism in its name, it cannot be properly appreciated without an understanding of historically traditional Judaism.

Historically traditional Judaism is understood to be the religious system to which the majority of Jews subscribed prior to the advent of Reform Judaism. It is known today as Orthodox Judaism, or rabbinic and/or pharasaic Judaism. Prior to the nineteenth century, it lacked a systematic theology that is characteristic of the other western religions.¹ The principal belief of rabbinic Judaism was that there was in fact the direct revelation of the Deity, at Sinai, to Moses, and to the Children of Israel, that is found in Exodus. This revelation climaxed a series of earlier and minor revelations which their ancestors experienced. In this revelation the will of the Deity was told to man. The commandments that he expected the Jews, and mankind, to follow were proclaimed. In this revelation, and in others made to Moses, the Torah and Talmud were revealed.²

The verbal revelation took two forms, one the written law, or Torah, and the other the oral law. It is the oral law, and the claim that it was spoken by the Deity to Moses at Sinai, that gave the rabbis their authority to lay down true opinion. The Exodus account of the people witnessing God revealing himself was accepted as empirical evidence, and

served as the foundation for the monolithic structure of rabbinic Judaism. With such objective evidence the contradictions and discrepancies of the Bible could be easily dismissed as being in reality non-existent. They were, in fact, only the result of finite man's finite intelligence. Those who have religious truth possess the ability to properly understand and interpret God's word. The religious truth was given to Moses in the form of the oral law which he passed on to Joshua, and so on down the line until it was passed on to the men of the Great Assembly (Pirke Aboth 1:1). The rabbis claimed to be the last part of this chain of authority.

The entire bulk of the writings of the Jews covering a period of two thousand years was taught as being the work of one God, and expressing one, single religious structure. What was not directly and verbally revealed by God at Sinai was given to man through the vehicle of prophecy, a less noble form of revelation, but just as authoritative.

The characteristic beliefs that are derived from revelation are:

1. One God alone exists, who is omnipotent, eternal, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.
2. God is the sole creator and conserver of the universe.
3. God in his omniscience is aware of man, and in his omnibenevolence exerts providence over human affairs.
4. The revelation of Pentateuch and Talmud to Moses is infallible. This revelation perfectly and forever expresses the will of God. No new revelation will occur or has occurred that alters this expression of God's will.
5. Inasmuch as this infallible revelation is the primary constituent of Orthodox Judaism, Orthodoxy is the only true religion.

and the modern training of the best secular universities. They took on the challenge against rabbinic Judaism on behalf of the older

6. The Creator is alone worthy of worship; and man, as creature, must obey his will.
7. God rewards those who observe his commandments, and punishes those who do not.
8. There is an ideal end to history, the Messianic era, which will be ushered in by a Messiah. At this time men will be judged by God for their good deeds and their sins.
9. There is an after-life, consisting in the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul.³

To be sure, the acceptance of these beliefs by the Jews over the centuries was not done out of blind faith. The faith of the Jews was one of faith with evidence.⁴ The objective evidence which they accepted came in either of three forms, miracles, fulfilled prophecy, or the empirically verified revelation at Sinai.⁵

The challenge presented by the emancipation of the Jews by the time of the dawn of the nineteenth century and the rise of Reform Judaism placed rabbinic Judaism on the defensive. The traditionalists banned the works of the reformers, organized competing groups and institutions, and called upon the civil government for help in stemming the tide of the reformers. All of these attempts were merely buttressing efforts designed to preserve the status quo. Soon, however, it became apparent that unless the new order of the modern age, in which the Jew found himself catapulted into, was reckoned with, rabbinic Judaism was destined for oblivion. It is at this time that Orthodoxy found itself infused with new blood, with younger men who had received both the traditional education of the heder, or yeshiva, and the modern training of the best secular universities. They took on the challenge against rabbinic Judaism on behalf of the older

rabbis, and they came up with what Mordecai Kaplan aptly calls Neo-Orthodoxy.⁶

One of the more outstanding members of this group is the famous Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. It is his book, The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel, with other of his writings, that best serves as an exposition of Neo-Orthodoxy, hereinafter to be referred to simply as Orthodoxy.

Hirsch begins his apologia by attacking the then prevalent notion that man's salvation is the attainment of happiness and self-perfection. There is an inherent trend of life with which man must not come in conflict. Rather, he must try to find the true purpose of his existence. A Jew does this by acknowledging God's authorship of this trend and accepting the destiny of Israel as his own.⁷

As regards God, Hirsch does not feel that it is even wise to speculate about him, since all that needs to be known is found in the Torah revealed by God.⁸ The study of nature that enables man to see forces at work, and the laws which govern them, which is in fact science, helps man to comprehend the will of the Deity that is manifest in nature.

It is this will of God which not only created the world, but is also responsible for its preservation. The balance that exists between the various parts of God's creation is due to his infinite justice. All of this is found in the Torah.⁹

Therefore, it is evident that the truths about the universe, and its order, are not the result of reason. The specific nature of the universe may be derived from science; but the inner meaning of these

specifics can only be found by the study of Torah. It is by this study of Torah that man learns of the real truths of God, and of his relationship to the world.

The destiny of man is determined by this relationship of God to the world.¹⁰ All the objects and forces of the universe are the instruments of carrying out God's will or to bear witness to his nature as revealed in the Torah.¹¹ Every deed of man that really fulfills his human potential is a deed in which he selflessly serves God.¹²

From this concept of the true destiny of man there can be derived a standard of what constitutes goodness. "The only criterion of excellence is conformity with the divine will. That is good which conforms with the disposition fixed for it by the wisdom of God."¹³

According to Hirsch, it is Judaism which alone sets man in a superior position to the other creatures of the world. This is accomplished by the fact that God chose to make his will articulated by revelation which was given to man. He told man what he wants him to do, and then gave him freedom to obey or not. This articulated will of God is solely the work of God, and provides the only criteria as to what is true.¹⁴

It is the duty of the Jew to cultivate the articulated will of God, the Torah. This is done not only by study of it, but by practice, too. The study of Torah ought to lead man to more devout observance of the mitsvot, which in turn ought to lead man to a higher level of morality. Furthermore, the commandments ought to be followed whether or not one understands their deeper meaning. The mitzvot were designed to foster

the traits of justice and love, and to further moral growth.

It is Hirsch's contention that when the Jew forsakes the Torah, he in truth accomplishes the very opposite of his purpose in forsaking the Torah.¹⁵ The Torah will do more for the Jew in the development of esthetic values, which will be of a loftier value, than will the cultivation of the arts and sciences. His logic is most compelling and eloquent in the summation he offers in the plea¹⁶ on behalf of the study and practice of Torah. It is a rational argument on the behalf of a non-rational creed which states that the Torah is the divine code of the ages set up by the eternal God.

There is a change in the status of Israel as the chosen people in the system of Neo-Orthodoxy. The Jews were chosen not because of inherent superiority as a race, but, simply for the reason that God needed a whole nation for the purposes of spreading Torah through the world and they were handy. Israel is ~~only~~ the instrument of spreading God's word. Israel is holy only in that it follows the teachings of the Torah, and is an example that any people may do the same and become a holy nation. In fact, the Neo-Orthodox, cognizant of the temper of their times, bend over backwards to avoid making Israel claim the status that rabbinic Judaism maintained for it. Hirsch claimed that Israel had been a nation even before it had a land, and remained a nation long after it had lost the land. The problems of nationhood only served as a hindrance in the carrying out of Israel's mission; therefore, God took care of Israel's material needs so that it could fulfill the divine will.¹⁷

The mission of Israel is to be witness to the nations that by obedience to the law of God, man may achieve the firmest stability and most permanent security for his existence. This is to be done by Israel setting an example and fulfilling the will of God. For carrying out this mission, it is necessary for Israel to maintain itself apart from the other peoples. It must keep itself isolated and preoccupied in its mission until the rest of humanity accepts these true teachings, and purifies and refines itself by them. Then mankind will turn to God and acknowledge him the sole creator and ruler of the world; Israel's mission will have been accomplished and the need for isolation will no longer exist.¹⁸ This isolation is one of racial purity which forbids inter-marriage, but not social segregation.

A secondary feature of this concept of peoplehood is apparent in the attitude towards the land. The attitude of the Orthodox is that the dispersion of the Jews among the nations of the world came about not because of their sins, but because the land was an obstacle in Israel's labors to fulfill its mission. Thus, the loss of the land removed the Jews from being engrossed in the pursuit of worldly aims; thereby giving them a true sense of values removed from materialism. Also, the attacks against the Jews and their religion gave them the chance for really true acts of heroism.

Finally, there is the reaction of the Orthodox to the emancipation of the Jews. It was both a blessing and a trial. It was a blessing because now that Jews were being accepted as citizens, or at least being tolerated,

they could truly accomplish their mission. For if they would follow the dictates of the will of God, then the non-Jews, seeing the nobility of the Jewish way of life and the type of person it produces, could only succumb to its beneficent influences, acknowledge the one and only God, and accept his will. It is a trial since it is easy to consider emancipation as the end of the mission of Judaism and its people. This it most certainly was not!

The emancipation was but another step in the divine plan of the history of the world. It was a step closer to the end, to the future messianic era promised by the prophets; in fact, it was significant in that it made it easier to attain the goal of the mission. However, Hirsch cautions to keep the emancipation in proper perspective since man is prohibited to commit the sin of trying actively to accelerate the coming of the end.²⁰

The answer of the Neo-Orthodox to the challenge of the new age is bold. It is a counterattack that gives no quarter to its challengers. It assumes that it is right on the basis of its conception of the Torah being the directly revealed word of God. This authority is divine and infallible. On this point they are adamant and there is no room, nor need, for questioning. In the polemic against the Hamburg Temple prayer-book, Rabbi Jacob of Lissa states that the first element of religion rests on a foundation of faith,

"faith in the truth of all that which our forefathers transmitted to us since ancient days. Hence, we call positive religion 'Faith.' In divine matters we cannot rely on our reason, for

human reason is subject to error. Reason may be an aid to, an instrument of, the tradition of our forefathers, which may illuminate laws and customs which the ancients handed down to us. One may rely on reason only to the extent that it is congruous with law and tradition."²¹

The Neo-Orthodox did not consider themselves anti-rationalists, they even upheld the need for reason; but reason that does not invade the area of the fundamental truths of religion which are of a supernatural origin beyond the reaches of the human mind to apprehend. In fact, a man like Samuel David Luzzatto was firmly convinced that a rationalist can accept a revealed religion without compromising his position. "I consider a rationalist one who, in these times, defends the non-obligatory nature of the ceremonial laws and still accepts the laws of the Sabbath, of unleavened bread, and so on."²² Furthermore, he maintains, "In Judaism, which does not command the belief in religious truths but rather the assumption of certain rules of life, the term rationalism does not exactly describe unbelief, since anyone can still be a faithful Israelite, despite the admission that in his judgement he follows only the demands of his reason."²³

As mild as this may seem, the basic point is that, still and all, one must accept the Torah as the verbal revelation of God. Luzzatto would not disagree with Hirsch who says that "all of the constituent parts of Judaism were regarded by the rabbis as basic; because Judaism does not know thirteen or three basic religious principles, since every commandment and every interdiction is a basic religious principle and the denial of even one of the 613 commandments and interdictions is a denial of Judaism as a whole."²⁴

Chapter II

NEW WAYS

Having set the background of Reform Judaism in terms of its Jewish origins, we now turn to investigate the other conditions which gave impetus to the rise of Reform Judaism. As was noted in the previous chapter, the systemization of the theology of Orthodox Judaism is an accomplishment of the nineteenth century. It came into being because of the challenge of the new age or spirit. Thus, what is known today as Orthodox Judaism owes its existence to the new thought of the modern age. This impetus of a new age is also responsible for Reform Judaism, a very different religion than Orthodoxy. Therefore, we shall proceed to investigate the nature and causes of this new spirit.

The Middle Ages came to an end intellectually with the advent of what might be called two revolutions. They are the Copernican theory of the universe; and the new physics of Descartes in which nature is viewed as a great, harmonious, and mathematically ordered machine. Out of these two revolutions came a scientific method. Nature is now able to be interpreted through the use of mathematics. Descartes took algebra, and on the basis of his analytical geometry, was able to effect its correspondence with the realm of space, the real world. For Descartes, space, or extension, became the fundamental reality in the world, motion the source of all change, and mathematics the only relation between its parts.²⁵

The Copernican theory removed man from the position of being the center of the universe and the reason for its existence. It also provided a basis for the theory of the infinity of the universe. The work of

Descartes gave the universe mathematical order and law. But above all, it is through Descartes that the new age received an adequate scientific method that is used even today.

The foundation was set by the work of these two men. But just as important are the refinements and adjustments made by those who followed. Galileo, Giordano Bruno, and Spinoza improved the new theories; and Isaac Newton and John Locke systematized them, and setting the stage for their being the foundation of the dawning Age of Enlightenment.

Newton effectively united the Copernican and Cartesian revolutions into one great physical synthesis; he finally drew up, in complete mathematical form, the mechanical view of nature which is the foundation of modern day science. Locke utilized the method of the new science to systematize the universal ideas of his day and gave us the science of human nature.

It is out of this scientific revolution that man received not only a faith in nature, but also a faith in reason. For out of the scientific method, and its successful application, came the faith in the authority of reason as a guarantee of the truth. This reason was of a geometrical nature; it was based upon basic axioms which are intuitively known, and have absolute certainty.

The new science, and its method, at first, did not disagree with the medievalists on their ideal of a great body of knowledge that was universal, deductive, and infallible; they just changed its type from Aristotelian syllogistic logic to Euclidean geometric propositions.

This created an impossible problem of getting the mind outside of itself into

Experiment was a part of this method; but it was thought that all experience would soon be exhausted and be proven as absolute truth, and then their science would be complete and infallible.

But the new method opened a veritable Pandora's box that brought up new problems. It soon became evident that experimental verification was necessary as part of the method. This brought into being a new method, the experimental scientific method. Observation and experiment are the key steps in this method. During the eighteenth century, it was popular only among those employed in the physical sciences; the social scientists, with the notable exception of Hume, primarily utilized the deductive method. The experimental method brought a new ideal of science that was in opposition to the popular mathematical rationalism. This new ideal was called empiricism in the eighteenth century. It later was adapted by Kant into phenomenalism, and is the precursor of today's positivism.

The early hopes of the new scientists that they would find a total body of knowledge, a great logical system, never came to fruition. They did find knowledge, but it was of a fragmentary type. It took them a long time to realize that the certain knowledge that they could arrive at was dependent upon their limitations as human beings. Descartes proposed that the certainty of science lay within mathematical axioms. Locke proved that such axioms did not exist in the real world; instead, first principles must come from the observations of the facts of experience. He further stated that such experience was not physical but mental. This created an impossible problem of getting the mind outside of itself into

the real world, a world that is physical and mathematical. Locke could not solve the problem and left us with only possible chances of attaining probable knowledge.

The logical conclusion of the problem was finally formulated by Kant at the end of the Enlightenment. His contribution is phenomenalism; the conclusion that objects and events are only pictures and not real things. In the meantime, during the eighteenth century, empiricism remained dominant and the validity of real things was based upon experience.

The empiricists were basically critics of the old order. They took it upon themselves to strip away the outmoded and objectionable by using their method to discover the natural history of the origin and growth of ideas in the minds of men. But when it came to the point where substitutes for the old were needed, they could only resort to the rationalistic method which they had previously forsaken. They could destroy revealed religion by the empirical method, but they could replace it only with a rational theology.

It was Hume who became the great empiricist of the eighteenth century. He felt that there was no valid knowledge unless an antecedent sense impression was discoverable. The final outcome of this line of thinking is that man can explain nothing; he can only observe and depict.

However, in the world-machine of Newton, this empiricism was unable to exert any change. Nature and reason still reigned supreme. Nature was regarded as being thoroughly rational; therefore, what was

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A RATIONAL SYNTHESIS

rational was identified with that which was natural. Man's task, then, was to discover in every field what was natural and reasonable, and discard the rest. Thus men looked for universals in human affairs, just as science had laws that were general and uniform. It was the universal which was the original, and what God had intended it to be, whether it is religion, politics, or the world. as Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and others felt that as men they had certain natural rights which absolute monarchs, the Church, and the landed nobility had usurped. It was inevitable that these institutions had to go.

The French Revolution was the natural result of the ferment that had been started by the science of human nature. It was this revolt of the middle class that for the first time gave entire Jewish communities citizenship and equality, even if, in most cases, for only a short period of time. However, even before the revolution, the Jew was beginning to see hope of an amelioration of his inferior position in European life.

It is not necessary to review the history of the Jews in medieval Europe. It is well known that the position of the Jew was untenable. The Jew lived a cautious and persecuted life, often in dire poverty. The Fourth Lateran Council made the Jew a pariah, cutting him out of Christian Europe at least socially if not physically.

To be sure, the Jew did not have many champions at the beginning of the new age. Men like Voltaire and Goethe, rational men, could not shake off the old prejudices when it came to the Jews. Yet, there were men like Montesquieu, Lessing, and Schlegel who considered the Jew human

Chapter III

A RATIONAL SYNTHESIS

As the new science and its method permeated the area of human affairs it began to wreak havoc with the old conceptions concerning the status of man politically, socially, and economically. A spirit of equality and liberalism hovered over Europe. A rising middle class saw within the writings of such men as Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and others that as men they had certain natural rights which absolute monarchs, the Church, and the landed nobility had usurped. It was inevitable that these institutions had to go.

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beings and, therefore, entitled to the rights naturally belonging to men.

Mendelssohn lived in Germany of the eighteenth century, a time when the Jews were becoming versed in the new learning that was being denied to their people as a whole. It is here that the seeds of Reform Judaism were being sown. Although Mendelssohn would never have considered himself a Reform Jew, it is his work that is in some ways responsible for the new movement.

Moses Mendelssohn was indeed a child of the Enlightenment.

His knowledge of Jewish studies had breadth and depth. Beyond the usual Jewish education of tradition, he had an understanding and respect for those philosophers like Maimonides who were gingerly kept out of reach by the rabbis. Combined with his Jewish knowledge was his acquisition of non-Jewish knowledge. He was an outstanding man of German letters. He knew the theology, philosophy, science, and literature of the Christian world to the extent that Christians acknowledged him an expert. He lived in Berlin under a protected status which allowed him beyond the confines of the ghetto. He traveled in the great literary circles of his day. The leading intellectuals sought him either as a colleague or a worthy debating opponent. Mendelssohn's rationalism, he was still able to

Among the most notable of Mendelssohn's friends was the great author, playwright, and philosopher, Gotthold Lessing. It was Mendelssohn whom Lessing immortalized in his famous play, Nathan The Wise. It was in this play that Lessing proposed his idea of the same universal truths existing in all religions regardless of their form. And it was in this play that for the first time a Jew appeared as a hero, and one who was

just as human as any other man.

Mendelssohn lived in the Germany of the eighteenth century, a Germany that was infused with the spirit of the Enlightenment. He was a rationalist who accepted as true those universals that might be arrived at through deduction. That he was a thorough-going rationalist is evident by his criterion of proof that universals be proved and demonstrated "through human power to think."²⁶

As a rationalist, he, too, accepted the existence of a body of knowledge that was absolute and infallible, and deductive. Through reason man may arrive at the eternal or universal truth. For Mendelssohn this truth was static, reason was static; and there could be no progress²⁷ which would involve having various degrees of truth.

Mendelssohn's concept of God was somewhat similar to the God of the natural religionists. God is not mysterious; his attributes are qualitatively the same as those of men. God's relationship to man is found by human reason: God desires that man should be happy. Judaism, unlike Christianity, therefore, allows that salvation is at hand for all the righteous, and not just for a limited few.

For all of Mendelssohn's rationalism, he was still able to maintain that a rational God could bestow a special revelation to a small nation at Sinai. He was actually a non-critical rationalist. In his attempt to unite Judaism with the Enlightenment, he tried to prove that Christianity and Judaism can live in harmony since the latter was also a natural religion with a special revelation of law. Yet, implicit in

their potential to be good. Furthermore, as a rationalist, it was con-

his high regard for this revelation over the Christian one is his feeling of the superiority of Judaism.²⁸

Because of this revelation Mendelssohn felt that the ceremonial laws were binding upon the Jews.²⁹ There was no reason for reason in dealing with revelation since the eternal truths revealed were "not dogmas, nor redemptive truths, nor universal propositions demonstrable by human reason."³⁰ Exactly what they are was never made clear by Mendelssohn.

Mendelssohn's place in history is both unusual and typical. It is unusual in that it is a landmark in Jewish history. For the first time in the modern age a Jew synthesized, no matter how superficially, Judaism with the spirit of the times. It is typical in that Mendelssohn was behind the times with his faith in reason. At the same time that he was proclaiming his ideas, the rest of the world was undergoing a reaction to the method he was using. As Mendelssohn sang the praises of reason, Kant was preparing its death blow. But this was not unusual for the Jew to become acquainted with a secular school of philosophy long after it had been discredited. As we shall soon see, during the nineteenth century the Jew became quite enamored with reason and the deductive scientific method while others had succumbed to phenomenism.

Moses Mendelssohn could only be considered a true child of the Enlightenment. He completely accepted the package of truths that the Age of Reason posited. He sincerely believed that the purpose of human existence is for man to be happy, which is the natural condition of men who realize their potential to be good. Furthermore, as a rationalist, it was con-

ceivable for him to believe that there can be a supernatural body of absolute truths which cannot be arrived at through the method of deductive reason. "These tenets and precepts have been revealed to them by Moses in a wonderful, supernatural way."³¹ This non-critical method of reason is not out of consonance with the Enlightenment.

In England, rationalists like Locke, John Tillotson, and Samuel Clarke maintained a belief in revelation, which they felt was not inconsistent with natural religion, so long as it was itself rational and in accordance with natural morality. Revelation must also have the evidence of prophecy and miracles.³² As such revelation makes natural religion clearer and more effective without altering it.³³ This idea kept their definition of natural religion³⁴ from becoming outright Deism. It was the same concept of revelation that rescued Mendelssohn from the ranks of Deism. It was developed by Huet and refined into the dialectic by Hegel.

Mendelssohn's synthesis of Judaism and science was a noble venture. Yet, for all the integrity of the man and his mission, the foundation for a Jewish natural religion turned out to be one of sand. And it was on the unstable foundation of a non-critical scientific method that the early reformers of Judaism chose to build their new structure. As the members of the Berlin Jewish Temple, said, "By it (reason) we are led, by its experience all that is glorious and divine in this life and surpasses the all of the future; reason it is which rules the peoples and the world, which leads us dignity, esteem, and strength."³⁵ This is a poem to reason, but not the reason of Mendelssohn. There is the element of evolution or progress in Kant's reason that was absent of in

Chapter IV

KNOWLEDGE

Heinrich Heine, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, sums up the faith of the reformers in a simple statement: "The esoteric purpose of the Verein (Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden) was none other than a reconciliation of historical Judaism with the modern progress science which, one supposed, in the course of time would gain world domination."³⁵

In the vast body of literature that contains the prolific writings of the reformers, there is a sharp division between their methods. The earliest men were rationalists of the Enlightenment; the later ones, who formed the groups of the Wissenschaften, were influenced by the romantic reaction to the Enlightenment. For them, the philosophy of history centered around the Volksgeist, the particular spirit of a nation, that was developed by Herder and refined into the dialectic by Hegel. If Mendelssohn could not understand the idea of progressive rationalism espoused by Lessing, the later reformers could not accept the static nature of the Judaism of Mendelssohn.

Yet, even the members of the Wissenschaften claimed that they were, above all, rationalists. Leopold Zunz, in a sermon delivered to the members of the Berlin Reform Temple, said, "By it (reason) we are men, by it we experience all that is glorious and divine in this life and surmise the bliss of the future; reason it is which rules the peoples and the world, which lends us dignity, esteem, and strength."³⁶ This is a paean to reason, but not the reason of Mendelssohn. There is the element of evolution or progress in Zunz's reason that was unheard of in

the ideology of the Enlightenment.

The early reformers were closer in spirit to the natural religionists like Locke, Tillotson, and Clarke. These men agreed that religion is not an instinctive need and activity of the human soul, but essentially a science like physics, that is, a system of rational propositions given from without and to be tested as any other propositions are tested, by the evidence of human reason. Its only method of arriving at the truths that must be believed is the same kind of reason that one employs in accepting a law of physics, a political principle, principle, or a financial investment.³⁷ Laws and principles are immutable and a religion that is basically a science like physics is not progressive. Religions may become corrupt due to the accumulations of the centuries, but their true natures do not evolve. This was the thought of the early reformers.

The Hungarian rabbi, Aaron Chorin, who lived during the period of the Enlightenment and into the Romantic period, sums up the spirit of the early reformers. "May these young men never become rabbinic Karaites who exalt the rigid letter above all, and neither may they become worse than Karaites (who after all deify only the letter of the divine Torah) and become like those rabbis who ascribe divine authority even to ordinances written by men and hold on to them literally, pedantically, and without change, and think them above all criticism."³⁸ In his defence of the reformers, Chorin is in fact stating that it is mandatory for the corpus called Judaism to be submitted to scientific investigation. However, the aside concerning the practices of the Karaites suggests that

he too favors the non-critical method that exempts the revelation from criticism. theologians to search for the true scientific foundations

He is a rationalist who approves of the method of the new science being used in the area of religion. "The genuine spirit of Jewish religiosity has integrity only when the soul is free of fetters and does not impose upon our conscience any oppressive restraint."³⁹ He regards Judaism as a natural religion which is presently obscured by the superstition and ignorance of later rabbinic authority. Yet even the rabbis, the Tannaim and Amoraim, knew the truth of his position. "The principle of the Talmud remains as firm as ever: 'Even though one academy commands and the other one releases, still both teach the words of the living God (Gittin 4).'"⁴⁰ in and in line with natural religion. "And what

The purpose of religion, especially Judaism, is to promote the happiness of man, to make him virtuous. The ceremonial law is natural as it promotes natural morality.⁴¹ It is therefore necessary for the Jew to submit Judaism to the scientific method and to deduce the universal truths that are inherent that will revitalize the dormant, and obscure, natural state of man. Joseph Hahn only states the faith of the reformers.

The Geiger-Tiktin affair of the 1840's marked a radical change in the nature of the inquiry of the reformers. Prior to this period, investigation of Judaism on a scientific level was inspired by academic desires, a seemingly mild mannered inquiry. This notorious and bitter affair wrought changes in the manner of the reformers. Bernhard Wechsler, rabbi of Oldenburg, writing in defence of Geiger, sets the new spirit of reform. "Jewish theology is not merely compatible with scientific treatment and free investigation, it demands them as absolutely necessary."⁴²

Wechsler maintains that it is in the best interest of Judaism for gifted theologians to search for the free scientific foundations in their discipline. The mass of available data must be collected and sifted honestly with truth being the sole goal, "even if they find in our talmudic many gaps and some aberrations."⁴³ The findings of these investigations, as part of the scientific method, must be published; and these results must be defended.⁴⁴

The optimism of the rationalist is found in Wechsler when he responds to the accusation that the results of such investigations will be harbingers of the demise of Judaism. He is positive of the presence of universal truths within the foundation of Judaism. The principles of Judaism are certain and in line with natural religion. "And what are the results until now? As far as I know, not one single fundamental teaching of Judaism has ever been remotely challenged; not one voice has been raised to quarrel with principles."⁴⁵ The reformers are now on the offensive and there can be no rapprochement between them and the traditionalists. They now have a method and a cause or purpose. Joseph Kahn ably states the faith of the reformers. "We newer rabbis do not pride ourselves, like Tiktin and company, and claim to be the sole upholders of Judaism. That be far from us. We are free from such arrogance. We desire the good and we rally to its strengthening and progress with all our might."⁴⁶ It is to this faith in goodness that the newer rabbis dedicate their scientific study of Judaism.

This brings up the problem of who may be allowed to pursue such studies. It is known that in the past the rabbis, without the benefit

of an Index, were able to exercise influence over what the people might read and study. During the Tannaitic period, the study of "Greek Wisdom" was reserved for those scholars who had achieved the complacency and maturity of middle age. Similarly, the heretical work of Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, did not have the universal approval of the rabbis for the perusal of it by the common man. In this same vein, Zacharias Frankel, the founder of Conservatism, felt that the scientific study of Judaism, and the promulgation of the principles found, should be restricted to the rabbis. Samuel Hirsch took issue with Frankel. "We feel that laymen, too, must reflect and ponder on matters of his religion. His priest does not have to offer him ready results, purporting to be the dogmas of his church, which he is obliged to adopt under the threat of forfeiting his salvation; but rather, he may and should share the path the rabbi takes in his search for Eternal Truth."⁴⁷

The faith in goodness and in man is summed up by the Jewish rationalist of Italy, Isaac Samuel Reggio. In correspondence with Luzzatto, he states the rationalist's faith in man which the reformers had adopted. "In actuality, however, man is endowed with free will and can, though perhaps not without effort, overcome these obstacles, break the influence of bad habits, conquer his own passions, and rid himself of prejudiced notions. He can follow the directives of his own sound reason; he can take a dispassionate view of himself, of his intellectual and moral abilities; he can obtain clear ideas of his spiritual faculties, his rights and responsibilities -- in short he can meet the demands of a charitable,

Creator and arrange his life in accordance with his high destiny."⁴⁸

Just as rationalism and empiricism as methods of obtaining certain knowledge were discredited in the general philosophical world, so, too, did they come under criticism among the Jewish reformers. Kant, who wrote his Critique of Pure Reason during the latter period of Mendelssohn's life, and Hegel exerted the main influence over the Jews' approach to science.

Kant gave them the phenomenalist method of science and Hegel gave them the dialectic. The most important thing for Hegel is the growth of man's spirit. This is a process of thinking that involves continual revision and abandonment of the old. The world is thus such a process of thinking.⁴⁹ "Being, the world, the totality of all things, the absolute -- this is in essence a great process of Becoming."⁵⁰ To exist means to be always growing and, therefore, always rejecting some of the old and combining it in new forms. For Hegel, whatever is is right; but this only means that everything that exists is a necessary moment in the advance to something further. It is incumbent upon man to examine every institution, discover the particular ideal it embodies, and carry it forward in accordance with the necessary laws or its growth.

In the journal, Der Bibel'sche Orient, in 1821, an anonymous author, (thought to be the man who later became the Orthodox Chief Rabbi of Hamburg, Isaac Bernays, the teacher of Samson Raphael Hirsch),⁵¹ states that "all true religion can manifest itself as a reforming process."⁵² This is the view that the new group of reformers took. Inspired by Hegel,

they see Judaism as the evolution of ideas which leads men to achieve ultimate goodness. A significant change, however, is that these men take a new stance in regard to tradition. They use it as an object to be coldly studied.

Abraham Kohn prepares the way for Wissenschaften by his analysis of tradition as being in evolution. "We are truly in accord with the nature of rabbinism, and because of this, Sadduceeism died and was buried, for it held fast to the dead letter and only looked backwards. In the Talmud, the opinions and interpretations of older teachers were set aside and nullified by their successors; in fact, the Talmud is nothing but a constant development of a clash of opposing opinions."⁵³

In the first issue of the journal of Zunz's group, Immanuel Wolf states the purposes of Wissenschaft des Judenthums. "Judaism, based on its own inner principle and embodied, on the one hand, in a comprehensive literature, and, on the other, in the life of a large number of human beings, both can be, and needs to be treated scientifically."⁵⁴

What is known about this inner principle? Why science? "It is manifest everywhere that the fundamental principle of Judaism is again in a state of ferment, striving to assume a shape in harmony with the spirit of the times... But in accordance with the age, this development can only take place through the medium of science. For the scientific attitude is the characteristic of our time. And if one day a bond is to join the whole of humanity, then it is the bond of science, the bond of pure reason, the bond of truth."⁵⁵

What is the method of the "Science of Judaism"? "The aim will be to depict Judaism, first from a historical standpoint, as it has gradually developed and taken shape; and then philosophically, according to its inner essence and idea. The textual knowledge of the literature must precede both methods of study. Thus we have, first, the textual study of Judaism; second, a history of Judaism; third, a philosophy of Judaism."⁵⁶

The inner principle that Wolf speaks of is the same as the independent, original, and creative reason which exists outside of the totality of all phenomena and yet is the supreme and self sufficient ground of it.⁵⁷ Human knowledge begins with percepts, proceeds to concepts, and ends with Ideas. It has a priori sources of knowledge with respect to all three elements.

In the spirit of the objectivity of the Wissenschaft, Zunz writes, "Here we are setting up the whole of Jewish literature in its fullest compass as an object of research, without worrying whether the total contents should be or can be also a norm for our own judgments."⁵⁸ This is the ideal procedure for a scientific method.

A subsidiary purpose for scientific Jewish research according to Zunz was to find a basis for reform. He hoped that they would be able "to know and distinguish the old which is still of use, the antiquated which has become pernicious, and the new which is desirable."⁵⁹ The question arises as to what is meant by "old," "new," and "antiquated?" In effect, it hints to the fact that Zunz was not as detached from the object of his scientific research as he seemed to be.

Zunz was a philologist and scientist. He had a respect for the literature of the historical periods preceding his. He felt that within these literary works of past ages there were many kernels of truth that were obscured, and even sometimes obliterated, by meaningless emotion and prejudice. He hoped to be able to bring respectability back to works like the Zohar, Talmud, and aggadic literature. The new which he speaks of was the work of his contemporaries that might be incorporated into Judaism. However, he never alludes to a relationship between the old and new because of evolutionary development.

Beyond journals and books, Zunz desired that all Jews learn of the work of Jewish science and understand its findings. For this he turned to what he called "the time-honored Jewish institution, the sermon," as the means for the education and instruction of the Jew.⁶⁰

Until now the scientific attack on Judaism by the reformers was concentrated on rabbinic literature and the Oral Law. As such, the fundamental source of revelation, the Bible, was not trifled with. Abraham Geiger sets the basis for the science of biblical criticism by Jews. His basic premise is that "there must be a program of scientific investigation into the historical origin of forms and institutions and the necessity of their relinquishment or change if no longer productive of religious edification."⁶¹ This is his justification for reform of any kind. Although it is not specifically directed towards criticism of the Bible, it provides him with the right for his next step.

"It is the wonderful distinction of Jewish history that it reaches such a depth, such a degree, that in spite of all which we can and will change; it lies

from the dimmest antiquity into our immediate present. We are driven by more than mere curiosity to search out its secret of becoming. Our desire is justified by the very process of growth which discovers that in the growth of the seed the essential development of later centuries is anticipated."⁶² It is not mere caprice that guides him to propose the critical study of the Bible; it is incumbent upon him as a scientist and a Jew.

The study of the Bible must be done scientifically. "The treatment of the Bible as part of the science of Judaism must be subject to all laws which may be termed the science of history."⁶³ Sources must be investigated as to their authenticity as well as their reliability and genuineness. It must also be determined whether they are obscured for tendentious purposes. In the case of the latter, the biased covering must be removed. Furthermore, there is no room for dogmatic presuppositions to interfere with the methods of scientific criticism.

Needless to say, the reaction against these reformers, too, was great in scope and passionately violent. The reformers were not only inquiring, they were also changing the old order on the basis of their findings. And on them was placed the responsibility for another phenomenon of the new age. Emancipation and the reign of reason coupled with the obstinacy of the intellectually impoverished champions of tradition was promoting the lack of religiosity and widespread assimilation. In answer to these charges, the philosopher-psychologist, layman, Moritz Lazarus, said, "Therefore, the reason (for lack of religiosity in Judaism) lies much, much deeper than in rituals, which we can and will change; it lies

in the spirit of the time itself."⁶⁴

The ferment caused by the new age with its scientific methods in the realm of Judaism and Jewish knowledge produced a new faith quite different than the one that existed at the dawn of the eighteenth century. Although it would be more than fifty years later before this fact would be acknowledged, the basic principles were set as tenets of the epistemology of the new faith in 1871, in Augsburg, Germany.

1. Since the earliest period of its history, Judaism has passed through different phases of development. A new, highly important turning point in its history is now at hand. The spirit of true knowledge of God and of pure ethics more and more fills the consciousness of humanity in government, art, and science. Judaism cheerfully recognizes in this the approach of its own ideals which have illuminated its historical march.

3. Judaism from the very earliest period of its history, has laid special stress upon knowledge, and has demanded at all times the agreement, equally, between thought, feeling, and deed. To do this, it goes to work courageously and fearlessly in order to set that regeneration in motion. While fully appreciating and venerating the past, Judaism strives, in accord with earnest scientific research, to set aside what is obsolete and antiquated, so that it unfolds itself in the spirit of the new age.

5. The Synod makes no other pretensions and demands for its resolutions than those which the power of truth, of sacred earnestness, and of firm convictions bestow upon it. It is, however, well aware of the fact that this power, the only one which ought to exercise an influence in the realm of religion, is overwhelming, irresistible, and is bound to conquer in the end, in spite of all impediments and difficulties.

6. The Synod, while striving to yield to the requirements of the age, is convinced that in doing so it works for the preservation of Judaism. In this manner it is at one with the spirit of Judaism in its entire historical evolution, at one with all its coreligionists, no matter to which party they may belong. Thus it hopes to labor in the cause of harmony, not for the next moment and not by a

denial of its convictions, but by the spirit of truth which, according to the principles of our ancient teachers is the fundamental condition of peace.⁶⁵

...the ancient teachers... was to provide a divine sanction for...
...therefore it was a compelling motive...
...Kantian religion provides such a sanction and...
...National religion consists of three propositions: first...
...he demands virtuous living on the part of man in...
...there is a future life in which he will re-...
...these promises man, by...
...the advantages of living a...
...order his life to attain a reward...
...this was self-interest for...
...the supernatural religion added...
...a religion that was argued to be perfectly...
...national.

The arguments for the existence of God in the eighteenth century were twofold: one from the necessity of a first cause, and the other from design. The world was a machine, or the proverbial watch, which was made by an external architect--the necessity of a first cause. After God started the machine running, all he had to do was guarantee that it operated on a moral basis, that it would be permeated by a moral order that would reward and punish in the afterlife--from design. The observance of the world and its order was sufficient grounds

Chapter V

THE SPOKEN WORD

The rationalists believed that the primary purpose of submitting religion to the scientific methods was to provide a divine sanction for a satisfactory human morality, therefore providing a compelling motive for the doing of good. Natural religion provides such a sanction and such a motive. Natural religion consists of three propositions: there is an omnipotent God, he demands virtuous living on the part of man in obedience to his will, and there is a future life in which he will reward the virtuous and punish the wicked. Given these premises man, by using his rational powers, may deduce the advantages of living a righteous life, and will rationally order his life to attain a reward in the afterlife. For the Deists this was sufficient incentive for morality. As was discussed before⁶⁶ the supernatural rationalists added revelation as a supplement; a revelation that was argued to be perfectly rational.

The arguments for the existence of God in the static world of the eighteenth century were twofold: one from the necessity of a first cause, and the other from design. The world was a machine, or the proverbial watch, which was made by an external architect--the necessity of a first cause. After God started the machine running, all he had to do was guarantee that it operated on a moral basis, that it would be permeated by a moral order that would reward and punish in the afterlife--from design. The observance of the world and its order was sufficient grounds

person or that one of the God of Judaism. . . Actually, the proofs for God's

for such reasoning.

Hume and Holbach argued forcefully against the validity of the metaphysics of the rationalists and destroyed their proofs for the existence of God. Kant tried to save the day by proving that reason and science were valid only within a certain field, and that beyond this field faith, or as Kant called it practical reason, could establish the tenets of natural religion, God, and immortality.

The main characteristic of religion in the nineteenth century is the reliance upon faith. Since we cannot know the real thing-in-itself, we also cannot transcend the limitations of human experience and know the object which rational theology is concerned with. In truth, science does not, nor is it able to, include everything within its scope. Therefore, for practical reasons we are free to believe or not believe that there is a God, that there is a moral order in the universe, and so on. The rule of thumb is that whenever science can neither prove nor disprove, we are justified in having faith.⁶⁷

Kant gave the nineteenth century metaphysicians the license to believe whatever they wanted to believe. One could even disavow the scientific method, although he would be called an agnostic, and propose a road to reality within the maze of irrational faith and intuition.

The reformers were basically supernatural rationalists. There is a striking paucity of writings by them concerning the subject of Deity. There are often statements made concerning the acceptance by this person or that one of the God of Judaism. Actually, the proofs for God's

existence, as well as conceptions concerning his nature beyond that he is the source of good and morality, are notably lacking. Being rationalists or empiricists it is assumed that they subscribed to the belief in the God of natural religion.

Almost all of the reformers, with a few notable exceptions, did have a concept of revelation. It was this concept that took them out of the realm of pure Deism. Mendelssohn never gave up his belief in the revelation effected through Moses. In the journal, Sulamith, an anonymous author quoted another unknown: "Religion is in the beginning the teaching of God--hence the high name Doctor of Divinity--but in the end it is the blessing of God. This teaching, therefore, is unchangeable, just as the exalted all-inclusive term indicates."⁶⁸ Earlier, in the same journal, Joseph Wolf said that "religion is the essential intellectual and moral need of a cultured man."⁶⁹ Another Wolf, Immanuel, said that Judaism is not the religion of the Jews, but an inner religious idea which constitutes its essence.⁷⁰

The meaninglessness of the above statements concerning religion as an essence is perhaps responsible for removing reason from revelation. As posited by Saul Ascher after the death of Mendelssohn, "Revelation overcomes the difficulty of our reason in apprehending ultimate truths."⁷¹

In his book, Judaism and its History, Abraham Geiger makes revelation an integral part of Judaism. "Judaism has grown from the people of revelation."⁷² Further on he elucidates, "Judaism is such a religion of alleged advantage found in the a priori systems did nothing more than

revelation; it has grown from such visions of the Divine, and has connected into a whole all that it did behold; Judaism is a religion of truth, because the view into the nature of things is infallible, discovering as it does the unchangeable and everlasting: this is its everlasting essence."⁷³ Again, this is only a statement full of platitudes. But we do find the following: "If this be so, we may speak of a close contact between the individual spirits by the power that fills everything, so that they could break through their confining limits; it is--let us not hesitate to pronounce the word--revelation, and this, too, as it was manifested in the whole people."⁷⁴

In the last statement, Geiger is actually equating revelation with an innate religious genius which came to the spirit of the Jew from the Supreme Spirit, possibly through some form of emanation. He seems to find within the Jew some sort of native energy that enables him to apprehend God. This revelation indicates the point of contact between human reason and the Fundamental Source of all things. The active role that man plays in revelation is regarded as being in step with tradition.⁷⁵

The work of Solomon L. Steinheim, a physician, in the problem of revelation is mystical and anti-rational. Revelation for him is "the subservience of the mind to a superior reason by way of free resolve, and effectual insight into the truth of the dogma of revelation."⁷⁶ The dogma of revelation is "something from nothing."⁷⁷

The attempts of men like Mendelssohn to give revelation the alleged advantages found in the a priori systems did nothing more than

rob revelation of God's communication of his so-called eternal truths. Revelation, according to Steinheim, turned into a mere justification of the mode of worship as sterile as that of the Christians.⁷⁸

Steinheim's anti-rationalism is evident in the following: "We have here (the Genesis dogma of world creation) the first actual protest which we may call revelation. However, as much as this new doctrine offends against the old, natural theory of inherited reason, it follows that it must also be in agreement with that same ancient intuitive freedom of the very same reason, when it shifts from the area of knowledge to that of action, from the realm of a succession of cause and events into the circle of the ethical man whose actions are freely completed and executed."⁷⁹

The mystical element in Steinheim's concept is a form of peoplehood, "A spiritual trait grows and thrives in every Jew. He gets it with his mother's milk... Thus arose the phenomenon of a people who disregarded and defied the destruction of all those factors which ordinarily are necessary to hold a people together. It was the power of God's revelation which was a spiritual seal, which produced a sharp difference of mentality, an indelible disparity of mind in the highest concepts of God, freedom, and creation.

"In conclusion I repeat: the nation-forming and preserving element of Judaism is revelation... In this manner each individual member of this people is part of the holy covenant only as a religious person."⁸⁰

In Frankfort, in 1842, a group of laymen formed the Verein der Reformfreunde. This group, radical in nature, stated that their faith

was in the belief in the capacity of Judaism for development.⁸¹ In their platform, they formulate one of their basic principles that is at variance with other concepts of revelation. "We recognize the possibility of unlimited progress in Mosaism."⁸² In effect, they are saying that the source of Judaism is not divine revelation, which by its very nature is perfect and therefore unprogressive; rather it is the reasoning spirit as it was manifest in Moses. Reason is the origin of all religious truths.

A clear and definitive statement of the above idea came in 1848, from the Genossenschaft fur Reform im Judenthum, founded in Berlin, in 1844, by Sigismund Stern. In the revised edition of their prayerbook, the Association used the introduction to declare their principal points of view upon which the revision was based. "Revelation to us is the divine illumination of the spirit of our fathers which does not exceed the natural limits of human ability and which is, therefore, capable of continued development. Consequently, when our sacred texts speak of a revelation which many of our fathers received in the course of accordance with our religious convictions, as a living expression of subjective faith. This feeling, filled with the power of inner truth, invested our fathers with a sense of blessing, but as for us, we must deny its objective factuality."⁸³

The idea of a progressive revelation was most certainly influenced by Hegelianism. We find this thought expressed by two later reformers, both of whom migrated to America. Kaufmann Kohler, a student of Samson Raphael Hirsch, wrote in his book, Jewish Theology, "The divine revelation in Israel was by no means a single act, but a process of development, and

its various stages correspond to the degrees of culture of the people."⁸⁴

In his first sermon delivered in America, David Einhorn began, "Above all, Judaism must be thoroughly Jewish--based on divine revelation."⁸⁵

What is the nature of this revelation? "Who has revealed himself to man in his marvelous works, but chiefly in man himself..."⁸⁶

It is significant that among the reformers there was not a single man who dared say that Sinai never happened. It was only in the anonymity of group statements that such ideas could be expressed until Reform Judaism was transplanted in America.

Chapter VI

BY WHOSE AUTHORITY

"So long as there is no authority to sanction the whole thing, nothing of consequence will happen. Everybody is his own reformer and makes himself silly. Until the Talmud is overthrown nothing can be done."⁸⁷ So wrote Isaak Markus Jost in 1819, in a letter to a friend. The most important obstacle in the way of the reformers was the authority that traditional Judaism gave to the rabbis.⁸⁸ The symbol of this authority was the Talmud.

Yet, in their desire to overthrow the Talmud, many of the reformers felt as Jost did; there must be some authority to sanction their work. In his work, Shulhan Arukh, Michael Creizenach said that the Talmud could be used as a means for interpretation of the ritual commandments which men felt to be binding upon them. He also said, "We regard those portions of the Talmud which do not elucidate the Mosaic laws as merely humanly instituted decrees. ...we gladly avail ourselves of anything that appeals to our reasoning."⁸⁹ Creizenach accepted the validity of revelation which influenced his view of the Talmud. His method was non-critical. His concept of the authority of the Talmud was neither fish nor fowl.

It took a non-German, Joshua Heschel Schorr, to start the process of completely discrediting the divine origins of the Talmud. "Looking at the sources of the so-called oral teachings which are accessible to us and which are meant to constitute a supplement to the Mosaic law, any expert who examines them without prejudice will have to realize that their expression and wording is merely the work of earthborn humans, and,

a Hegelian like Hegel, the liberal reform Jews were the product of the Geist of his own day: the age of the Talmud could never have seen as

therefore subject to error."⁹⁰

Samuel Holdheim took the above principle as his guide and then proceeded to destroy rabbinic authority. The three theses of his book, Ueber die Autonomie der Rabbinen und das Prinzip der jüdischen Ehe, are:

1. The law of the state supersedes Mosaic-talmudic legislation; therefore the rabbi is no longer a judge, only the religious sphere is his.
2. Jews and Judaism must, because of their truer interests, demand the absolute separation of the religious and political elements.
3. Marriage according to Judaism is a purely civil contract.⁹¹

Holdheim felt that Talmud was of value for other purposes. It was a good source for history and the development of ideas. "The Talmud speaks with the ideology of its own time, and for that time it was right. I speak from the higher ideology of my time, and for this age I am right."⁹² The Geist that Hegel felt influenced each period of history found its champion in Holdheim. The ceremonial law was necessary for the age of the Talmud, and of the Bible, but as the pagans come to accept monotheism, "the law sinks into complete insignificance."⁹³

Holdheim also attacked the apologists for the Talmud. "Dr. Herzfeld cannot be excused of a certain weakness namely, propounding liberal reform ideas as being founded in the Talmud, a view which he shares with many other honored rabbis. This view must in any case be rejected because it is untrue; Reform must avoid as much as possible to press the banner of progress into the rigid hands of the Talmud."⁹⁴ To a Hegelian like Holdheim, the liberal reform ideas were the product of the Geist of his own day; the age of the Talmud could never have been as

noble as his age.

Another attack on rabbinical authority came from the conservative, Frankel. "It is the pride of Judaism that no individual and no class can arrogate to itself any authority, but that all decisions must flow organically from principles and receive their validity only from them."⁹⁵ This idea is, however, contradicted by statements made later in the work which called for the reformers to vote on principles that will be binding upon the people.

There is a schizophrenia evident in the reformers' ideas concerning the Talmud. They can never fully break away from some form of talmudic authority, even Holdheim felt some sort of time-restricted authority in the Talmud. Much of their problem was caused by their retention of cloudy views concerning revelation. As long as there was some form of belief in a verbal revelation there had to be some form of recognition of rabbinic authority.

The failure of the early reformers is due to their preoccupation with ritual reforms, their inconsistencies in using the scientific method, their lack of cohesive organization, and the reactionary political climate of the nineteenth century. The first two reasons are most responsible for the flaws in their ideology, or for their lack of a theology. Inconsistency in their metaphysical systems is glaringly revealed upon observation. Standards for the scientific method which they utilized are often not given and those which are dateable, at times, appear to be contradictory criteria. The most disappointing feature about the works

REMARKS

It is a common belief among many people that Reform Judaism in Europe was a failure. The very fact that the practices of the European congregations today are similar to the practices of the Conservative synagogues in the United States is considered to be sufficient evidence of the failure. It is a misconception of the nature of Reform Judaism that prompts these feelings. It is true to some extent that Reform did fail, but the benefits of its initial success far outweighs its particular failure in terms of ritual and membership strength.

American Reform Judaism has taken the best of European Reform as the basis for its movement. They have taken the fundamental principle of Reform, which is never expressed but is evident by implication, of radical freedom, and have made it the sole guide for their growth and development. A second legacy from the early reformers is Jewish scholarship. The usage of the scientific method by Jews on Judaism is the main preoccupation of thinking Reform Jews today.

The failure of the early reformers is due to their preoccupation with ritual reforms, their inconsistencies in using the scientific method, their lack of cohesive organization, and the reactionary political climate of the mid-nineteenth century. The first two reasons are most responsible for the flaws in their theology, or for their lack of a theology. Inconsistency in their metaphysical systems is glaringly revealed upon observation. Standards for the scientific method which they utilized are often not given; and those which are detectable, at times, appear to be contradictory criteria. The most disappointing feature about the works

these men is their frequent failure to justify conclusions to which they come.

Another disappointment, although not a defect but just as defeating, is their failure to follow their arguments through to their logical conclusions. However, when viewed in proper perspective, one can appreciate the revolutionary and radical nature of what they were saying. And if one has any doubts as to the degree of their radicalism, then one has only to read the vituperative, almost obscene, reaction of the opposition.

Therefore, in spite of the many flaws and disappointments, the works of the early reformers are of utmost importance to modern day Reform Judaism for its guiding principles and for beginning the process of scientific investigation of Judaism. Without them there would be no reform in Judaism, and possibly no meaningful Judaism.

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