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Debating Traditions: Reform Jewish Thought from 1945 to 1967

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Digest

After the Second World War, the Reform Jewish movement in America witnessed an upsurge in theological debate, discussion and controversy. By 1967, most of the theological battle lines had been drawn, and Zionism began to attract much of the focus that theology had once generated. Yet, the period between the end of the war and 1967 is one of rich theological debate and creativity, and its achievements continue to reverberate in the Reform movement today.

During this period, some rabbis sought to synthesize the liberalism of early Reform with new philosophical schools and insights. Others focused on incorporating the thinking of Mordecai Kaplan and of religious naturalism into Reform. Some younger rabbis, influenced by prominent Christian theologians and by the works of European Jewish theologians like Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, urged a greater openness to tradition and a questioning of the optimistic liberalism that had characterized Reform's earlier thinkers. This thesis examines each of these trends by looking at their primary proponents: Levi Olan, Roland Gittelsohn and Eugene Borowitz.

Chapter one focuses on the social, cultural, intellectual and theological contexts in which these scholar-rabbis thought and wrote. In particular, it looks at postwar American Jewry and the evolution of Reform Jewish thought in America. The following three chapters examine each thinker. They begin with a biographical sketch, which is followed by an unpacking and analysis of the major elements of each of their theologies. To preserve continuity throughout the essay, each chapter concludes with an examination of the

thinker's understanding of the role and activity of God, of revelation, of Jewish chosenness, and of the purpose and authority of Jewish law. The conclusion reflects on their legacies for the contemporary Reform movement and on the state of Reform Jewish thought today.

Table of Contents

	Introduction	1
1	The Evolution of American Jewry and Reform Judaism	6
2	Levi Olan and Religious Liberalism	50
3	Roland Gittelsohn and Religious Naturalism	92
4	Eugene Borowitz and Covenant Theology	135
	Conclusion	191
	Bibliography	203

Introduction

The period following the Second World War saw several developments in American Reform Judaism. As Michael Meyer points out, "The generation after World War II witnessed American Reform Judaism's greatest expansion in numbers and in programs. It saw a new theological ferment within its ranks, unprecedented social activism, a yet fuller appreciation of tradition, and the first appearance of women in positions of spiritual leadership."[1] The postwar theological ferment followed a reorientation of Reform Jewish thought during the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, many Reform rabbis had moved away from the "Classical Reform Judaism" of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, embracing more Jewish observances and a greater sense of Jewish peoplehood. This reorientation led to the passage of the Columbus Platform –or Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism, as it was officially called—in 1937. The 1950s and 1960s saw a continuation of this trend toward greater traditionalism. It was also a time for theological debate within the Reform movement, with some rabbis lauding and providing new means for justifying this trend, and others questioning it and urging a reaffirmation of the classical liberalism of early American Reform.

This thesis is about three significant participants in this debate: Levi Olan, Roland Gittelsohn and Eugene Borowitz. In the chapters that follow, we will examine their lives and religious philosophies, and situate them within the theological debates that characterized the Reform movement between 1945 and 1967. Both the thinkers we are

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[1] Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 353.

considering and the dates to which we are restricting this study were carefully chosen. Olan, Gittelsohn, and Borowitz represent three distinct schools of Reform Jewish thought. Olan was a liberal, Gittelsohn a naturalist, and Borowitz a Covenant Theologian.[2] Each was also a significant figure in the Reform movement on an institutional level. Both Olan and Gittelsohn served as Presidents of the CCAR, and Borowitz is a long-time professor at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. They were also prolific writers, leaving many sources for review and examination. While some of the sources consulted will pre- and post-date this period, I will focus on the currents of thought that engaged Reform rabbis during this time. As I noted above, the post-war era was a time of theological ferment among American Jewry. I am choosing 1967 as an endpoint because it marks a shift in emphasis that began during the mid-to-late 1960s in which theological debate in the Reform movement was eclipsed by an emphasis on Zionism and political activism.[3]

Before explaining the order and subjects of the chapters, I will clarify some of the terminology used throughout. In this thesis, the phrase "Jewish theology" refers not only to thinking about God. It refers to the framework through which one analyzes the meaning and purpose of Judaism, and what one sees as core Jewish beliefs. Thus, the phrase "Jewish theology" is used interchangeably with "Jewish religious philosophy" and "approach to Judaism." The chapters on particular thinkers will focus on each of their interests and writings. In order to preserve continuity among the chapters, we will also examine each thinker's approach to the role and activity of God, the definition of

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[2] I capitalize "Covenant Theology" and "Covenant Theologian" when referring to the specific school of thought associated with Borowitz and several of his colleagues.
[3] See Meyer, *Response to Modernity*. 348, 367-368.

revelation, the concept of Jews as God's chosen people, and the authority of Jewish law. I chose these four issues because they have been seen and addressed as core matters of Jewish belief in the modern era.

Chapter one discusses two primary historical contexts in which postwar Reform Jewish thought emerged. These are the trajectory of American Reform Jewish thought, beginning with the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, and the theological ferment of postwar America. In this chapter, I discuss the waning influence of liberal theology among Christian thinkers and the consequent popularity of theologians like Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, who helped shape the interests of postwar Jewish thinkers. I also discuss the particular influences of American culture that shaped the postwar generation of Jewish thinkers, including the rise of what some sociologists call the "Third Generation" of American Jewry. In examining the history of Reform Jewish thought in America, we will seek to understand the theologians, such as Kaufmann Kohler and Samuel Cohon, to whose ideas postwar Reform thinkers may have been responding.

Chapter two focuses on the life and theology of Rabbi Levi Olan. I begin with Olan because his theology is the closest to the liberalism of early twentieth-century Reform Judaism. The chapter on Olan is followed by a chapter on Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn. I chose to follow Olan with Gittelsohn because they were part of the same generation of Reform rabbis, and their theologies display several similarities. Yet, Gittelsohn identified with Mordecai Kaplan and Reconstructionism, and this school of thought began to develop in the 1920s and 1930s, following the rise of religious liberalism in the

nineteenth century. In other words, the roots of Olan's thinking are in the nineteenth century, whereas Gittelsohn's are found primarily in the 1920s and 1930s. The final chapter focuses on the life and thought of Eugene Borowitz. I conclude with Borowitz not only because he is the only living subject of this study, but also because his theology is the one that has exerted the greatest influence on contemporary Reform Jewish thought.

This thesis is about the theologies of three leading Reform rabbis and thinkers. It is not a study of the struggle to define a Reform Jewish theology. Although I chose these thinkers because their writings helped shape Reform Jewish self-understanding in postwar America, the primary emphasis is on the individual thinkers, not the meaning and theology of Reform Judaism. This thesis is also a study in intellectual history, not philosophy. Most of the thesis seeks to unpack the arguments of each thinker and the influence upon him. Although I will note some of the criticisms proffered against each of them by other Reform rabbis, I will not offer an original critique of each thinker. Rather, for the sake of completion, I will offer brief criticisms of each of them, reflecting my reading of other Reform rabbis and theologians. In the conclusion, I will reflect on their legacies for American Jewry and the current state of Reform Jewish thought.

I chose to write my thesis on these particular figures because two of them have received no secondary study. Despite their significant writings and influence as pulpit rabbis, neither Levi Olan nor Roland Gittelsohn has received scholarly attention. Borowitz has been the subject of some secondary work, though most of it has focused on his post-1967

writings. Thus, in writing this thesis, I hope to add something new to the history of the American rabbinate and of Reform Jewish thought in the twentieth century.

Chapter One: The Evolution of American Jewry and Reform Judaism

This chapter examines two broad historical contexts that help explain the emergence and direction of Reform Jewish thought in postwar America. The first context is the American Jewish theological ferment in the wake of World War Two, and the second is prewar Reform Jewish theology. By examining each of these contexts, we will gain a better understanding of the social, political and religious forces that contributed to the development of postwar Reform theology. We examine these contexts in this sequence because knowing the situation of American Jewry and theology in the mid-twentieth century can help us appreciate the challenges Reform Jewish thinkers faced. This sequence also moves from the broad to the specific, beginning with the challenges of twentieth-century American cultural and religious life and moving to the historical and contemporaneous responses of American Reform Jewish thinkers.

Christian Influences on Postwar American Jewish Thought

In his comprehensive *Religious History of the American People*, Sidney Ahlstrom points out that in the decade and a half following the end of World War Two, "American religious communities of nearly every type were favored... by an increase of commitment and a remarkable popular desire for institutional participation. This popular resurgence of piety was a major subject of discussion in newspapers, popular magazines,

and learned journals."[1] Other expressions of this religious resurgence included the addition of "under God" to the American pledge of allegiance in 1954 and the growth of the Christian evangelical movement throughout the 1950s. The resurgence was not limited, Ahlstrom notes, to institutional affiliation and popular fervor. It included "a theological revival which was in fact a continuation of the Neo-orthodox impulse."[2] In his more recent history of American religion, Martin Marty echoes Ahlstrom's observations. The revival of interest in theology in the postwar period was sparked by those whom Marty calls the "countermodernists," since they challenged some of the views, such as the inevitably of progress and the importance of rationalism, associated with modernism.[3] What Ahlstrom calls the "Neo-orthodox impulse" was the increasing popularity and mainstream influence of conservative Christian theologians, including Karl Barth and Emil Brunner in Europe and Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr in America. Although differing in their emphases, a prominent theme of neo-orthodoxy was the refusal to reduce Christianity to social ethics or accommodate it to liberal ideology. Neo-orthodox Christian theologians gained much attention in America during the 1930s, questioning the optimistic view of human nature and historical progress that they contended had dominated the Protestant churches in America. Their influence spread, reaching the pinnacle of liberal Christianity, the Riverside Church in New York City, whose noted pastor, Harry Emerson Fosdick, accepted many of the neo-orthodox theologians' criticisms of American Christianity and called in 1935 for a return to a God-

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[1] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 952. Ahlstrom capitalizes "Neo-orthodoxy." Another author, Jonathan Sarna, does not. I will follow Sarna and not capitalize it except when quoting directly from Ahlstrom.
[2] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 953.
[3] Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume 3: Under God We Trust, 1941-1960* (Chicago: University of Press, 1999), 14.

centered faith that did not constantly seek to accommodate middle class norms and values.[4]

In order to appreciate the influence of neo-orthodox Christian thought on postwar American Reform, we will look at three of its major characteristics. They are its attack on what Ahlstrom calls the "prevailing assumptions of liberalism," its application of selected aspects of existentialist philosophy, and its ecumenical bent. The "prevailing assumptions of liberalism" were primarily the belief in human perfectibility and inevitable historical progress.[5] Drawing frequently from the writings of Soren Kierkegaard and making reference to the destruction of the two world wars, influential Christian theologians attacked these assumptions as bourgeois and naïve. Perhaps America's most famous representative of Christian neo-orthodoxy, Reinhold Niebuhr, exerted a major influence both before and after World War Two with his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. It argued that the power of evil and of irrational motivations in human life had been underestimated by liberal religious thinkers, and that organized groups were virtually incapable of altruistic conduct.[6] Sydney Ahlstrom describes *Moral Man and Immoral Society* as "probably the most disruptive religio-ethical bombshell of domestic construction to be dropped during the entire interwar period."[7] Martin Marty notes that Niebuhr was the dominant voice of American Christian theology until Paul

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[4] See Robert Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 52-53.
[5] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 944.
[6] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).
[7] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 941.

Tillich gained significant attention in the 1940s and 1950s.[8] Rabbi Milton Steinberg credited Niebuhr with teaching post-war Jewish theologians "what our fathers knew and we have refused to credit, a hard grim truth concerning the place of evil in man and society."[9] Although neo-orthodoxy gained prominence in Christian circles during the 1930s, its impact among Jewish thinkers became evident in the 1940s. Reasons for this delay include the predominance of liberalism among the American Jews of the era and the focus in the 1930s on practical activities of fighting antisemitism abroad.[10] In addition, as Martin Marty notes and as we will see later, the postwar writings of Will Herberg garnered significant attention and challenged the prevailing assumptions of American Jewish liberalism.[11]

While Niebuhr served as the primary spokesman for Christian neo-orthodoxy, the Christian thinker most closely associated with existentialism was Paul Tillich. Before discussing Tillich, it will be helpful to give some background on existentialism, both generally and as it was applied to religion. We will examine several particular thinkers' notions of existentialism in this chapter, but this brief background should help us better understand their intellectual context. Existentialism is not as much a philosophy as it is a methodology. Often associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, and Jean Paul Sartre, existentialism implies the rejection of any absolute system of

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[8] Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume 2: The Noise of Conflict, 1919-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 345.
[9] Milton Steinberg, "The Outlook of Reinhold Niebuhr," *The Reconstructionist* Vol. 11, No. 15 (December 14, 1945), 15.
[10] For speculation on why neo-orthodoxy did not begin to make serious inroads in the American Jewish community until the 1940s, see Lou Silberman, "Concerning Jewish Theology in North America: Some Notes on a Decade," *American Jewish Yearbook* 70 (1969): 37-58; and Bernard Martin, "Reform Jewish Theology Today," in Bernard Martin, ed., *Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 180-214.
[11] Marty turns to Herberg frequently in his discussion of postwar American Judaism.

determining truth. Truth is determined through the choices and commitments one makes in one's life. It is not externally imposed. Christian and Jewish thinkers drew from existentialist writings, but not in a uniform or clear way. It seems that what many thinkers drew from existentialism was its questioning of rationalism and the sense of despair expressed by many of its leading proponents. As Emil Fackenheim put it, "Religious existentialism attacks the idea of unqualified human self-sufficiency.... It seeks to show that when pushed to radical extremes (but only when so pushed) that idea suffers internal collapse."[12] Religious existentialists objected to the predominance of rationalism and liberalism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century liberal Jewish thought. This sense of challenging the theological status quo, along with the emphasis on making theology speak to human rather than abstract philosophical concerns, united those who described themselves or were frequently considered by others to be existentialist Christian and Jewish thinkers.

Existentialism entered into Paul Tillich's thinking in his describing a "breakdown in meaning" for human beings in the twentieth century. Individuals, he argued, were increasingly losing their subjective self in the conforming pressures of collective society.[13] One does not have to be an existentialist to make this argument, and it differs from the concerns of the first existentialist religious thinker, Soren Kierkegaard, who focused on the inadequacy of a creed to capture the religious truth that was found in the life of an individual. Yet, for Tillich, it was part of his understanding of Christianity that,

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[12] Emil Fackenheim, "Judaism, Christianity and Reinhold Niebuhr: A Response to Levi Olan," *Judaism* (Winter 1956) 317.

[13] See, for example, Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (London: Collins, 1952) pp. 41-113. The book was a originally a series of lectures delivered at Yale University, and it advocates an existentialist focus for modern Christianity.

as we will see, he called existentialist, and it was a response to the religious liberalism of the early twentieth-century American church. Indeed, Tillich pinned much of the blame for the breakdown in human meaning on the church's middle-class orientation and on the growing estrangement of human beings from the natural world and from one another that resulted from economic materialism and the growing mechanization of society. Seeing the Protestant Reformation as an earlier attempt to "re-emphasize the Existentialist point of view," Tillich urged human beings to "take the anxiety [of meaninglessness] into the courage to be as oneself."[14] He integrated this message and the concerns to which it was a response into Christianity by interpreting the resurrection of Jesus as his conquering of existentialist estrangement, as an act of healing that overcame the break between God and humanity, and human beings and themselves.[15] Will Herberg was primarily a student of Niebuhr, but one can see the influence of Tillich in his criticism of the materialist focus of modern society, which, he argued, had "eaten deep into the soul of modern man."[16] Like Tillich, Jewish existentialist thinkers decried the feeling of despair and estrangement from oneself and the world that they saw as endemic in postwar America.

The final trait of Christian theology significant in evaluating postwar Jewish theology is the ecumenical scope of its leading figures. This ecumenicism is evident, as Ahlstrom points out, in the varied denominations of Kierkegaard's American translators. They included "Lutherans, Anglo-Catholic Episcopalians, and Quakers."[17] Neo-orthodox criticisms focusing on assumptions about the perfectibility of humanity and inevitability

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[14] Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, 131, 138.
[15] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 96.
[16] Will Herberg, "Prophetic Faith in an Age of Crisis" *Judaism*, Vol. 1 (July 1952), 196.
[17] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 944.

of historical progress were shared by members of several Christian denominations. Their books and articles tended to address issues, such as the problems of historicism and church complacency, that transcended the doctrine of any one denomination. This ecumenical scope helped neo-orthodoxy make "deep inroads" into American religious life and spur "an overall revival of interest in theology."[18] The Jewish theological ferment also displayed an ecumenical character, with Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox rabbis and scholars gathering together for theological discussions and contributing to journals like *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* (1952) and *Commentary* (1945). Although our focus will be on Reform theologians, we will see that many of the questions they addressed transcended denominational and doctrinal boundaries.

Jewish Factors in the Theological Ferment

A second factor giving rise to American Jewish theological ferment was the emergence after the Second World War of the "third generation" of American Jewry. The third generation generally refers to those American Jews born in the mid-to-late 1920s who began their professional careers in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Arnold Eisen has argued that one could mark the beginning of the rise of the third generation with the "communal celebration and reflection occasioned by the tercentenary of Jewish settlement in America in 1954. American Jewry found itself amazed at its survival and success, yet worried that its distinctiveness might not survive the temptations of

[18] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 946.

America."[19] In addition to questioning the same "prevailing assumptions of liberalism" as their Christian neo-orthodox counterparts did in the 1930s, the third generation of American Jewry was shaped by particularly Jewish phenomena. By the 1950s, American Jews had "made it," with their share of the American middle class growing and their presence in America's top universities and businesses increasing as well. Several scholars, including Eisen and Jonathan Sarna, point to the title and argument of Will Herberg's book on American religious life, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, as confirmation of Judaism's status as a mainstream American religion. Not only did this book contend that Judaism was one of the tripartite of mainstream American religions, but it also suggested that the third generation American Jews saw Judaism primarily as a religion similar to Catholicism or Protestantism.

This view differed from that of Mordecai Kaplan, the representative thinker of the American Jewry's second generation, who described Judaism as a religious civilization and emphasized the religious significance of cultural pursuits and Jewish nationalism. Although he wrote about revelation, God, and chosenness, Kaplan was more of a sociologist than a theologian, describing and validating the views of the second generation of American Jews and seeking (in most cases) pragmatic rather than ideological solutions to questions of Jewish belief. His naturalist approach to religion, however, increasingly became one strand among many rather than the dominant view of postwar American Jewry. Describing the many voices that challenged Kaplan and his brand of second generation American Judaism, Jonathan Sarna has written, "All of these

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[19] Arnold M. Eisen, *The Chosen People in America: A Study in Jewish Religious Ideology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 128.

thinkers felt the impact of neo-orthodox currents in Protestantism, best represented in America by Reinhold Niebubr, and they rebelled against the belief in naturalism (God as experienced in nature) and human perfectibility that Mordecai Kaplan and earlier Reform Jewish thinkers had taught."[20] By seeking to reaffirm traditional Jewish beliefs, third generation American Jews like Herberg were both responding to and seeking to alter the religious status quo.

A third factor stimulating the theological ferment in American Jewry was the arrival in America of prominent and productive European-trained theologians. They included Leo Baeck, Emil Fackenheim, Jakob Petuchowski and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Publishing in recently-founded journals like *Judaism* and *Commentary*, these thinkers began to raise new questions and helped shape the theological agendas of Reform and Conservative Judaism.[21] Fackenheim and Heschel, in particular, became "spiritual mentors" to emerging theologians in their respective movements, with Heschel replacing Kaplan as the dominant influence on rabbinical students at the Jewish Theological Seminary. In addition, the writings of earlier European theologians became increasingly accessible in the 1950s. According to Robert Goldy, the thinking of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber was scarcely known in North America before 1945.[22] In 1953, Schocken published Nahum Glatzer's *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, drawing attention to the life and teachings of the thinker whom Milton Himmelfarb would describe in 1966 as the

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[20] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 281.
[21] We will examine their influence within the Reform movement in subsequent chapters. Emil Fackenheim will be discussed later in this chapter. For a discussion of the way Reform and Conservative rabbis saw Fackenheim and Heschel, see Robert Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 25-26.
[22] Goldy, *Emergence of Jewish Theology*, 29.

"single greatest influence" on American Jewish thought.[23] In 1955, the University of Chicago Press published Maurice Friedman's *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, and Will Herberg edited a collection of Martin Buber's writings that appeared in 1956.[24] By the early 1960s, Buber and Rosenzweig were exerting a significant influence on American Jewish thought. Part of Rosenzweig's appeal, as evident in the collection of essays edited by Reform rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, was that he had come to Judaism from the portals of Christianity, and was a model for those who were "rediscovering Judaism" after disillusionment with the secular world.[25]

A fourth factor in the Jewish theological ferment was the development of theological training at American rabbinical seminaries. According to Robert Goldy, neither the Jewish Theological Seminary nor Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary maintained a department of theology or offered regular courses in the field before 1945.[26] At HUC, Samuel Cohon had inherited Kaufmann Kohler's chair in Jewish theology in 1923, and his thinking helped shape the Reform movement during the 1920 and 1930s.[27] Michael Meyer describes him as "a crucial figure in the transition from classical to present day Reform Judaism."[28] Despite Cohon's academic title and contributions, he had to prove his subject's relevance. As he wrote, "Proposals were

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[23] Nahum Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken, 1953); Milton Himmelfarb, "Introduction" to *The Condition of Jewish Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 2. *The Condition of Jewish Belief* is a reprint of the symposium entitled the "State of Jewish Belief," that was published in *Commentary* magazine in August of that year. The symposium will be discussed later in this chapter.

[24] Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955). The book was reissued in 1960 by the more popular Harper and Brothers publishing company.

[25] Arnold J. Wolf, ed., *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965).

[26] Goldy, *Reemergence of Jewish Theology*, 8-9.

[27] We will be looking more closely at Samuel Cohon later in this chapter.

[28] Michael A. Meyer, "A Centennial History" in *Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, edited by Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), 95.

urged to alter [theology's] name to something more euphonious and less committed to theistic presuppositions. It therefore became increasingly necessary...to justify the place of theology in the curriculum of a rabbinical seminary."[29] Even though both Leo Baeck and Abraham Joshua Heschel taught at HUC in the 1940s, neither offered courses in theology. Heschel taught medieval philosophy and Baeck taught midrash.

The lack of interest and occasional hostility toward the teaching of theology at rabbinical seminaries may have been a reflection of a dismissive attitude toward the subject within the American Jewish community. Practical issues of communal welfare and fighting antisemitism made theology seem like a luxury, and its divisive character made it susceptible to avoidance. Eugene Borowitz points to these two factors as decisive in leading American rabbis to give it little attention. For rabbis, he wrote, theology "smacked of 'pie in the sky' and was viewed with the traditional skepticism towards preoccupation with hidden things when there was so much to be done with what had already been revealed." If a coherent theology were to arise, these rabbis feared that the "next step would be to seek conformity to it, to force it upon others and thus destroy that productive pluralism, that creative intellectual dialectic which has been so precious a Jewish heritage."[30] Borowitz's latter claim hints at another reason that theology may have been largely dismissed by American Jewry. Many Jewish scholars and laypeople saw theology as "not Jewish," as a feature of Christianity rather than Judaism. Moshe Davis

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[29] Samuel S. Cohon, *Day Book of Service at the Altar as Lived by Samuel S. Cohon, 1888-1959* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Press, 1978), 130.

[30] Eugene Borowitz, "Reform Judaism's Fresh Awareness of Religious Problems: Theological Conference—Cincinnati 1950," *Commentary* 9 (June 1950, 571. This essay is also reprinted in Eugene Borowitz, *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002), pp. 7-16.

describes this viewpoint, writing that "the Jews (with notable exceptions) did not, historically, concentrate on systematic theological thought in their literature," since "traditionally, Jewish ideas had been derived from the study of the classical texts and were expressed through commentaries on these texts."[31] According to this understanding, Jewish theology does not warrant designation as a separate discipline and department since it is derives from the study of traditional rabbinic literature. Each of these factors—the focus on seemingly more urgent issues of communal welfare, its potentially divisive character, and an indifference justified by a particular understanding of Judaism—contributed to the marginalization of theology among American Jews in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Founding of *Commentary*

As noted earlier, American Jewry displayed a renewed interest in theology during the late 1940s and the 1950s. The following three chapters will each focus on a significant figure in the theological ferment within the Reform movement at the time. At this point, however, we will survey and discuss four theologians from the three major American Jewish denominations who were visible and productive participants in American Jewish intellectual debates. We are introducing them now to highlight some of the arguments and concerns that shaped the theological milieu of postwar American Judaism. One of them, Emil Fackenheim, was active in the Reform movement, but was not a leader on the institutional level, as were Olan and Gittelsohn, and was not a leading professor at its

[31] Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1963), 283-284.

seminar, as was Borowitz. We will discuss these thinkers in two groups of two, using a significant event in postwar American Jewish intellectual life as a springboard for discussing the figures in each group. The events and thinkers chosen are by no means exhaustive, though I have tried to highlight thinkers whose writings addressed questions and themes significant to Olan, Gittelsohn and Borowitz. The two events occurred at opposite ends of our time period: 1945 and 1966. The first event is the founding of *Commentary* magazine in 1945, and through it we will survey the thinking and significance of Will Herberg and Milton Steinberg. The second event is the symposium on Jewish belief published in *Commentary* in 1966, and it will serve as our lens for examining the ideas and influence of Emil Fackenheim and Joseph Soloveitchik.

The first event in our survey is the founding of *Commentary* magazine in 1945. Published by the American Jewish Committee, *Commentary* attracted the writings of Jewish intellectuals and became, as one historian puts it, "the premier post-war journal of Jewish affairs attracting a readership far wider than the Jewish community of origin."[32] *Commentary* published many articles on Jewish theology that reflected the tensions between second and third generation American Jews and among the various thinkers of the third generation themselves. Although many of its contributors were marginally involved in organized Jewish life, *Commentary* attracted some budding theologians who would help shape the post-war Jewish thought, including Will Herberg and Milton Steinberg.

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[32] Nathan Abrams, "America is home: Commentary Magazine and the refocusing of the community of memory, 1945-1960" *Jewish Culture and History* Vol. 3, No. 1 (2000), 46.

Herberg published several provocative essays in *Commentary* during the 1940s. These constituted his first theological statements, and foreshadowed his central arguments in *Judaism and Modern Man*, which was published in 1951.[33] Herberg followed *Judaism and Modern Man* with *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* in 1955.[34] For Herberg, theologians had the task of inspiring and guiding individual Jews of the third generation, who were tarnished by war and weary of trusting the "modern man," whose "every achievement...has been transformed before his eyes into a demonic force of destruction."[35] Like Rosenzweig, Herberg was a kind of *ba'al teshuvah*, though he discovered Judaism not at the portals of the church but out of disillusionment with Marxism. Although his latter book is primarily a work of sociology, both of them attacked the modern Jew's absolute faith in human self-sufficiency and autonomy.

Liberalism, Herberg argued, had endowed human beings with a false optimism and faith in inevitable progress, and had conceived of God as serving man by leading him to material prosperity and "peace of mind."[36] America had further robbed Judaism of its sense of uniqueness, making Jews define their faith and practices on the basis of American norms and values. Herberg argued for a theology that went beyond the limits of reason and returned to the traditional concerns of Judaism, namely divine revelation and the sense of having been chosen by God for a particular ~~density~~ destiny of universal and eternal significance. Drawing heavily from Reinhold Niebuhr, Kierkegaard and Barth, he

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[33] Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Young, 1951).
[34] Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1955).
[35] Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man*, 6.
[36] Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1960 Anchor Books Revised Edition), 267-269. Herberg's use of the phrase "peace of mind" may be an implicit reference to Reform rabbi Joshua Liebman's best-selling book, *Peace of Mind*.

argued that the otherness of and absolute subjectivity of God was "the irreducible affirmation of biblical faith," and an exclusive reliance on human reason could not lead one to this affirmation. Therefore, he argued, existentialism is the "only approach adequate to the task of making the biblical faith speak out to the man of our time."[37] As one can see, Herberg's interpretation and use of existentialism differs greatly from that of Tillich. Tillich did not display Herberg's disdain for human reason or his conception of divine revelation. Herberg's existentialism also differs significantly from that of Eugene Borowitz, whom we examine in chapter four. What united them, and hence, what constituted the commonality of several mid-twentieth century thinkers associated with religious existentialism, was their challenging of the optimism and faith in human progress of liberalism.

Herberg was an engaging and witty writer as well as a popular and charismatic lecturer, and his books and essays garnered much attention within rabbinic and Jewish intellectual circles. Among the many to read Herberg's articles in *Commentary* and to comment on them was Milton Steinberg, the rabbi of the Conservative Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City. Steinberg's reaction to Herberg was positive, seeing him as an "original and creative mind." Yet, Steinberg was also cautious, perhaps wondering whether Herberg was one of the many writers that *Commentary* published who, according to Steinberg, evaluated Judaism primarily through the lens of Kierkegaard and Christian

[37] Milton Steinberg, "Theological Problems of the Hour," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America*. Vol. 13 (1949), 427.

neo-orthodoxy.[38] Steinberg's increasingly warm relationship with Herberg during the late 1940s led to a rethinking of aspects of his theology.

Steinberg, in the words of Arnold Eisen, was "one of the finest minds of his generation of rabbis."[39] Throughout most of his career, Steinberg identified with Mordecai Kaplan's conception of Judaism as a civilization and religion as a component of this civilization. Steinberg differed from Kaplan in that he embraced a theistic worldview, arguing that Kaplan's reduction of God to a sum of forces robs individuals of the emotional comfort of a personal God and presents the danger of making God a function of "time and space, of nation and creed."[40] Steinberg struggled to balance reason and feeling in his theology, defending the legitimacy of mystical experiences and intuitions as ways of knowing God, but insisting that such pathways required reason to confirm them. Herberg's condemnation of rationalism as a false idol and call for a focus on the individual's needs and experiences as a basis for a return to traditional Jewish beliefs and practices highlighted and deepened the tension between reason and feeling for Steinberg, and led him to call for greater theological study and output to address it. In a session before the Rabbinical Assembly in which both he and Herberg presented papers Steinberg proclaimed that

> a need exists, a great and crying need, for just that analytical exposition of the Jewish religious outlook to which this exhortation [Herberg's call for a new Jewish theology] summons us. Failing it, Judaism...will be less capable of eliciting the loyalty and dedication of better Jewish minds and hearts, which in consequence will depart from it into a religious wasteland, if indeed they do not

[38] Simon Noveck, *Milton Steinberg: Portrait of a Rabbi* (New York: Ktav, 1978), 217-218, 236.
[39] Eisen, *The Chosen People*, 30.
[40] Milton Steinberg, "New Currents in Religious Thought," included in Cohen, ed., *Anatomy of Faith*, 262.

> make their way into those Christian communities which do furnish the required spiritual nutriment.[41]

Through his popular books and articles, Steinberg drew attention to the quest for fashioning a post-war Jewish theology that incorporated the ideas and insights of both Kaplan and Herberg.[42]

"The Condition of Jewish Belief"

Both the rationalists and existentialists were among the contributors to the 1966 *Commentary* symposium entitled "The Condition of Jewish Belief." The symposium began when the editors of *Commentary* mailed a list of five questions to 55 prominent rabbis and theologians. The questions sought their understanding of revelation, their thoughts on the notion of Jews as a chosen people, their responses to the "God is dead" idea that was gaining popularity among Christian theologians, their views on the validity of other religions, and whether they saw commitment to Judaism as mandating particular political loyalties. [43] The participants included Reform, Conservative and Orthodox rabbis and scholars. They also included Jewish rationalists, represented most prominently by Mordecai Kaplan, and existentialists, represented most notably by Eugene Borowitz. They included classical Reform Jews, like Maurice Eisendrath, and early followers of the Lubavitch Rebbe Menachem Schneerson, like Zalman Schachter. Yet, we will look at two figures cited frequently by non-Orthodox theologians of the era. They shared some

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[41] Milton Steinberg, "The Theological Issues of the Hour," included in Cohen, ed., *Anatomy of Faith*, 208.
[42] We will look more closely Steinberg in chapter three.
[43] The entire text of the questions, along with the responses and Milton Himmelfarb's introduction to the symposium are included in *The Condition of Jewish Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1966). The book was also reprinted by Jason Aronson in 1995.

existentialist views, yet differed according to their own commitments and philosophical bents. Of the two, only one of them participated in the *Commentary* symposium. Yet, their influence was evident in the thinking of others, and the questions addressed in the symposium reflect some of their central concerns.

The first thinker we will examine is Emil Fackenheim. Ordained at the liberal *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin in 1939, Emil Fackenheim escaped from Germany to Canada, where he earned a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Toronto. Although he would become renowned after 1967 for the centrality he gave the Holocaust in fashioning a modern Jewish identity, Emil Fackenheim focused much of his early theological writing on the confrontation between secular and traditional modes of thought, and on the meaning of revelation. Through his writings and erudition, he influenced and inspired many non-Orthodox rabbis during the 1950s and 1960s. He published several articles in the newly-established CCAR Journal throughout the 1950s, and he gave a keynote address at the 1950 Reform Institute on Theology at HUC in Cincinnati. Fackenheim argued that liberal Jewish thought in America was dominated by secular assumptions. It conceived of God as limited by the natural world and took reason as its starting point for thinking about God. This way of thinking was irreconcilable with Jewish tradition because a supernatural God capable of revealing divine laws and truths to humanity was the starting point of Judaism. Fackenheim saw Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionist philosophy as emblematic of basing Judaism on secular liberal

foundations, and his criticisms drew affirmation and calls for a rethinking of Reform Judaism by several rabbis, including Steven Schwarzschild and Eugene Borowitz.[44]

A key component of Fackenheim's criticism of American Jewish liberalism was an indictment of its avoidance of the issue of revelation. Liberal Jewish thinkers had avoided it, he argued, by likening it to inspiration or speaking of it as an ongoing process of progressive religious insight. In an article published in *Commentary* in 1951 entitled "Can There Be Judaism Without Revelation," Fackenheim argued that the preservation of Jewish faith stood or fell with "the revelation at Sinai, [or] at least with the possibility of revelation in principle."[45] Revelation entailed belief in a supernatural God who entered human history at a particular time and place to reveal himself to a particular people. Revelation could not be affirmed through reason, and therefore, reason had to be disqualified as the preeminent standard for judging Jewish faith. Revelation marked the point at which philosophy and theology parted ways. Theology need not abandon philosophy—the two can work together harmoniously, as in the case of Maimonides—but, in contrast to philosophy, it looks to divine revelation and not reason as its ultimate authority. The task of the modern liberal Jewish theologian is to perform an act of intellectual *teshuvah*, affirming one's faith as one's starting point while allowing oneself to reflect critically on the traditional beliefs and practices of Judaism.

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[44] For Schwartzchild's appreciation and criticism of Fackenheim, see Steven Schwarzschild, "The Role and Limits of Reason in Contemporary Jewish Theology," *CCARY* 73 (1963), 211-212. Fackenheim's influence on Borowitz will be discussed in chapter four.

[45] Emil Fackenheim, "Can There Be Judaism Without Revelation," *Commentary* 12:6 (December 1951).

Fackenheim can be called an existentialist thinker for a couple of reasons. First, as we have seen, he was an ardent critic of American religious liberalism. Second, he argued that each individual's faith was both subjective and a result of struggle with and affirmation of life as an alternative to meaninglessness. As Arnold Eisen puts it, "Fackenheim argues that we are somewhat, but never entirely, free of both nature and history; the human situation is one of struggle to make a self from that which nature gives us and history demands of us."[46]

Fackenheim was a looming presence in the Reform theological debates of the 1950s and 1960s. Not only did he express compelling ideas, but he thought self-consciously about the relationship between theology and philosophy and struggled with the tension between affirming traditional doctrines like revelation and living a Jewish life not bound by halakhah. He differed from the next figure we will examine, Joseph Soloveitchik, in that he did not see halakhah as central to Jewish theology. Yet, Fackenheim also differed from the dominant non-Orthodox thinker of twentieth century America, Mordecai Kaplan, in that he did not subject or seek to adapt Jewish doctrine to secular philosophical categories of judgment. Like Herberg, he criticized American Jewry's adaptation and incorporation of American norms and values into Judaism. He also called, as Herberg did, for greater attention to the importance of revelation in modern Judaism. He did not, however, share Herberg's pessimism and dark view of reason.[47]

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[46] Eisen, *The Chosen People*, 153.
[47] See Emil Fackenheim's review of *Judaism and Modern Man*, by Will Herberg. *Judaism* Vol. 1, (April 1952), 172-176.

Like Fackenheim and Herberg, Joseph Soloveitchik was a harsh critic of liberal Jewish thought in America. He shared Fackenheim's view that liberal Judaism had banished the Jewish God from its understanding of Jewish life. In contrast to Fackeneheim, who chided American Jews for their flattening Jewish conceptions of revelation and God, Soloveitchik criticized liberal American Jewry's lack of obedience to Jewish law. Liberal Judaism, he wrote, banished God by "setting aside a place for Him in a palace [temple]" rather than living by his laws.[48] Soloveitchik was not one of the respondents in the *Commentary* symposium, but at least four of the eleven Orthodox respondents--Norman Lamm, Emanuel Rackman, M.D. Tendler, and Walter Wurzberger, all of whom are still living—see him as a major influence. One of them, Emanuel Rackman, was among the first writers to bring Soloveitchik's thought to public attention.[49]

Soloveitchik saw halakhah as the definitive basis for Jewish theology. Two of his books include a derivative form of the word in its title: *The Halakhic Man* and *The Halakhic Mind*.[50] I call halakhah the "definitive basis" for Soloveitchik's understanding of Jewish theology because he analyzes issues like the meaning of covenant, chosenness, and God through reflection on the nature of halakhah and on the Jew who lives by halakhah. For example, Soloveitchik argues that Jews are distinct from other people on the basis of two covenants: the covenants of fate and of destiny. The former is rooted in a shared history and a sense of mutual responsibility. This covenant began with God freeing the Israelites

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[48] Quoted in Eisen, *The Chosen People*, 103.
[49] See Emanuel Rackman, "Orthodox Judaism Moves with the Times," *Commentary* 13 (June 1952), pp. 545-550.
[50] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, Translated by Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1983); and *The Halakhic Mind: An Essay on Jewish Tradition and Modern Thought* (New York: Seth Press, 1986).

from Egypt. The second covenant consists of adherence to halakhah and the maintenance of a distinct way of life. This covenant began with the revelation of Torah at Mount Sinai. Only by upholding this second covenant can Jews achieve redemption and thereby fulfill the potentiality of their existence.[51] By presenting these two conceptions of covenant and differentiating them on the basis of adherence to halakhah, Soloveitchik is situating halakhah as the focal point in his understanding of Jewish history, of revelation, and of redemption. The centrality of halakhah gave his theology coherence, yet it also made it difficult for non-Orthodox colleagues to accept.

What did draw many non-Orthodox thinkers to Soloveitchik was a sense of the compatibility between his theology and existentialism. The compatibility is evident on two levels. First, Soloveitchik's writings focus on the individual. *The Halakhic Man* and another one of his widely-read works, an essay entitled *The Lonely Man of Faith*, dwell on internal conflicts and individual obligations.[52] Each of them uses language familiar to existentialists who sought to create a life of meaning in a world that did not have meaning inherent in it. As Soloveitchik described the journey of the halakhic man, "Out of the contradictions and antimonies there emerges a radiant, holy personality whose soul has been purified in the furnace of struggle and opposition and redeemed in the fires of the torments of spiritual disharmony."[53] Second, Soloveitchik's approach to Judaism was ahistorical. The halakhah was eternal, and through its study and practice one gained

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[51] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, ""Kol dodi dofek, It is the Voice of my Beloved that Knocketh." *Theological and Halakhic Reflections on the Holocaust.* Edited by Bernhard H. Rosenberg. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992 251-117. (Translated of a Hebrew address given in 1956); Jonathan Sacks offers a summary and analysis of Soloveitchik's understanding of the two covenants in Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant: Jewish Thought After the Holocaust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) pp. 136-141.
[52] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition* Vol. 7 (Summer 1965) pp. 5-67.
[53] Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 4.

access to an entire conceptual world. The halakhic man transcends time and space. As Soloveitchik writes, he "embraces the entire company of the sages of the *masorah*... He walks alongside Maimonides, listens to R. Akiva, senses the presence of Abaye and Rava."[54]An ahistorical approach appealed to existentialist theologians. As Robert Goldy points out, "Existentialism developed in conscious opposition to Hegelian and other schools of historicism that reduced God to an evolving process in history.... Jewish existentialists have therefore often been ahistorical or even antihistorical in outlook. Rosenzweig, for example, regarded the Jewish people as transhistorical, existing outside world history."[55] Non-Orthodox Jews may have also been attracted to Soloveitchik on account of the breadth of his intellectual background. He was both a member of a famous halakhic dynasty and recipient of a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin, where he wrote his dissertation on Hermann Cohen. Eugene Borowitz helped bring his ideas to greater public attention in a 1966 article, and another prominent Reform rabbi and thinker, Arnold Jacob Wolf, expressed a fascination shared by many in the Reform rabbinate when he wrote, "Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik seems to me more and more obviously the teacher of the time. How paradoxical that this doggedly orthodox, European-born Talmudist should speak more clearly to our needs than the most sophisticated modernists from all the great universities of the West."[56]

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[54] Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 120.
[55] Goldy, *Emergence of Jewish Theology*, 85.
[56] Arnold Jacob Wolf, *Sh'ma*, September 9, 1975, quoted in Pinchas Peli, ed., *On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1984), 7. The Borowitz articles to which I refer is Eugene Borowitz, "The Typological Theology of Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchik," *Judaism* 15:2 (Spring, 1966), 203-10.

These four thinkers addressed central issues in postwar Jewish thought. Clearly, the meaning of revelation, the compatibility between Judaism and existential philosophy, the strengths and weaknesses of liberalism, and the status of halakhah evoked reflection and debate among postwar American Jews. Many historians who write about this era emphasize the growth in the number of synagogues and affiliated members. Yet, as we have seen, this period also saw a growth in the number of journals on Jewish life and thought and a greater breath and depth of theological interest within the three American Jewish denominations. By reviewing the theologies of these four thinkers, we gain a better understanding of the theological context in which Olan, Gittelsohn and Borowitz wrote. We see that they were part of a larger debate among American Jewish thinkers on the several issues, including viability of religious liberalism, the importance of Jewish law, and the meaning of revelation.

The Reform Jewish Context

We continue with an examination of the history of Reform Jewish thought in America. Rabbis Olan, Gittelsohn and Borowitz not only thought and wrote in the context of twentieth-century America. They also followed a long line of Reform Jewish thinkers who wrote on God, the meaning of revelation, the concept of Jewish chosenness, and the authority of Jewish law. Our survey of prewar Reform Jewish thought in America is divided into an overview of late nineteenth-century American Reform Judaism, a comparison of the theologies of Kaufmann Kohler and Emil G. Hirsch, and a concluding overview of the state of Reform Jewish thought in the late 1930s.

Robert Goldy titled his book on post-World-War-Two American Jewish theology *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America.* A more accurate title would have been "The Reemergence of Jewish Theology in America." The late nineteenth century saw a flurry of discussion and debate over issues of Jewish doctrine and practice, and within the nascent Reform movement, certain theological positions would result in defining the movement for half a century and help create the Conservative and Ethical Culture movements. Although shades of difference existed among its leaders, the key concepts of nineteenth-century Reform were reason, progress, and ethical monotheism. The significance of reason reflected the influence of the European Enlightenment on the Reformers. Enlightenment thinkers criticized religious dogmas, and emphasized the ability of human beings to arrive at knowledge of the world and corresponding beliefs about its origins and purpose. The Reformers' embrace of reason as a criterion in developing a proper understanding of Judaism is evident in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform of Reform Judaism, whose sixth plank begins, "We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason."[57] As these words illustrate, reason and progress were linked in the minds of the Reformers.

Progress was also a tenet of many European Enlightenment thinkers, and it described the belief that human knowledge of the world was improving and that through greater knowledge and understanding, human beings could increasingly improve their well-

[57] Throughout the rest of chapter, I will be quoting extensively from the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform and the 1937 Columbus Platform. Each of them can be found online at the www.ccarnet.org, under Platforms, and in the appendix to Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 387-391. From this point forward, quotations from the platforms will not be footnoted.

being. Progress went hand-in-hand with new forms of government, including the rise of the nation-state and political centralization. For the Reformers, Judaism progressed through interaction with surrounding cultures, and human knowledge of Judaism improved through new methods and assumptions of studying the tradition, notably *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The notion of progress was also applied to traditional Jewish doctrine, including belief in the arrival of a messiah. The Reformers replaced the traditional view of the messiah with the concept of a messianic age. Their faith in progress and vision of the messianic age are evident in the fifth plank of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, "We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men."

Jews would play a role in moving the world toward establishing this kingdom by exemplifying and spreading the tenets of ethical monotheism. Ethical monotheism is the phrase often used by the Reformers in defining the essence of Judaism. It suggests that Jews serve the one universal God through ethical endeavor, and that Judaism is distinguished from other religions through its more refined conception of God. As the first plank of Pittsburgh Platform states, "We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended amid continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race." According to the Reformers, a commitment to ethical

monotheism in the modern world entailed serving as custodians of this message and exemplifying it by working with those of other faiths and nations for the common good. This task was not hindered by exile from the land of Israel, but enhanced by it. Indeed, some of the early Reformers argued that the Jews' dispersion around the world was part of God's goal of bring the message of ethical monotheism to the world. This task was especially well-suited for American Jews who lacked the constraints of the ghetto and who lived among a people that, as Kaufmann Kohler put it, "adopted the very principles of justice and human dignity proclaimed by Israel's lawgivers and prophets, and made them the foundation stones of their commonwealth."[58]

Kohler and Hirsch

We have thus far examined some of central tenets of late nineteenth century "classical" Reform Judaism. We turn now to the views of Kaufmann Kohler and Emil G. Hirsch, two of its leading thinkers and most prominent voices, on God, revelation, chosenness, and the authority of Jewish law. For decades, as Michael Meyer points out, "their thinking, expressed especially in sermons, articles and lectures, was reflected with minor variations by lesser lights in pulpits throughout the United States."[59] Although their thinking converges on many questions, they differ on several important issues, including the role of God, the meaning of revelation, and significance of Jewish tradition. Their similarities and differences resemble, in several respects, the theological agreements and disagreements between mid-nineteenth-century German Reformers Abraham Geiger and

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[58] Kaufmann Kohler, "American Judaism," in *Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing Co., 1916), 198.
[59] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 270-271.

Samuel Holdheim. Kohler, like Geiger, emphasized the historical continuity between the Judaism of the past and reforms in the present, whereas Hirsch, like Holdheim, emphasized the sharp break between the Judaism of the past and, in a phrase he occasionally used, the "Reformed Judaism" of the present.[60] The way they addressed issues like God, revelation, chosenness, and the place of traditional Jewish practices in Reform will help us see ways Reform thinkers in the second half of the twentieth century drew from and reinterpreted their thinking.

Kohler understood God as rooted in the natural world and as the source of the moral order that inheres in it. He did not argue, as some of the twentieth century religious naturalists did, that moral values were derived from the divinely-constructed natural order. Rather, he contended that the two were of one piece, writing, "Our entire modern mode of thinking demands the complete recognition of the empire of law throughout the universe, manifesting the all-permeating will of God. The whole cosmic order is one miracle."[61] Knowledge of God led human beings to proper behavior, and this behavior testified to God's reality. In discussing God, Kohler used rabbinic imagery, such as God as law-giver, and biblical concepts, such as *yirath elohim* "fear of God." Yet he constantly sought to provide new understandings of these images and concepts consistent with reason and ethical monotheism. God the lawgiver, for example, is the source of the eternal moral law, and fear of God is an incentive for moral behavior.[62] Kohler's reflections on God are also permeated by history, as he frequently seeks to catalogue the

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[60] See Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 275.
[61] Kaufmann Kohler, "Miracles," in Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1965), 221.
[62] See Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1968 edition), 21.

views of rabbis and scholars, seeking to work out, as he puts it, "the entire content of the Jewish faith from a modern viewpoint, which must include historical, critical, and psychological research, as well as the study of comparative religion."[63] The scholarship provides the basis and rationale for the necessary reinterpretation. As he writes, "If Judaism is to retain its prominent position among the powers of thought, and to be clearly understood by the modern world, it must again reshape its religious truths in harmony with the dominant ideas of the age."[64] Kohler's use of the traditional God language and imagery is not surprising, since he sought in his scholarship to determine their varied meanings over time and to draw from the philosophies of the modern world in understanding them anew. Using the traditional language signaled both his self-conscious continuity with the Jewish past and his understanding of the task of the Jewish theologian.

Hirsch did not write or preach about God as much as did Kohler. What he did say suggests that he had a naturalist view of God similar to that of Mordecai Kaplan. Hirsch frequently quoted the English writer and literary critic Matthew Arnold, who saw God as "that power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness."[65] Like Kaplan, Hirsch saw God as an impersonal force, and he focused not on describing the nature and activity of God, but on urging just human behavior as a response to God's demands. This emphasis is evident in a sermon included in his most well-known collection, *My Religion*, "The God of Israel cannot be served by prayer, by sacrifices, by Sabbath observances, by new

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[63] Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 27.
[64] Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 27.
[65] See Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 275; see also Bernard Martin, "The Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," *American Jewish Archives* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1952), 73.

moon and festal rite. They are secondary; they are, if any, of little moment. But the God of Israel demands respect for the humanity of the lowliest and the least in the social order."[66] For Hirsch, what one believed about God was secondary to one's actions.

Hirsch's and Kohler's differing evaluations of the significance of a proper conception of God are illustrated in their contrasting attitudes toward Felix Adler. Adler, the son of prominent Reform rabbi Samuel Adler, trained for the rabbinate, but abandoned Judaism in order to create a universalist, non-sectarian group that emphasized morality and ethics. Calling his group "Ethical Culture," Adler criticized Reform Judaism for maintaining its theism and sense of Jewish particularity, arguing that it did not meet the needs and insights of the modern era. Adler used many of the Reformers' arguments against them, arguing, for example, that if religion progresses, then the Reformers could not claim that their understanding of God was the highest conception, and that progress in this era demanded abandoning particular religious commitments for a universal moral fellowship.[67] Kohler denounced Adler in strong language, describing him as one who abandoned God and belief in immortality and proclaimed himself "moral governor of human society *in place of the great King of the world.*"[68] In 1878, Kohler refused to permit Felix Adler to speak at his synagogue, Temple Sinai of Chicago, when a group of young men associated with the synagogue invited him to deliver an address.

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[66] Emil G. Hirsch, "The God of Israel," in *My Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), 308. The volume does not indicate the year in which the sermon was delivered.
[67] See Benny Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1979), 22.
[68] Kaufmann Kohler, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 22, 1978; quoted in Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture*, 155.

In contrast, Emil G. Hirsch maintained a friendship with Adler, corresponding with him and emphasizing their shared beliefs. In one letter, he said, "I believe the gulf between your position and mine is neither wide nor deep."[69] Hirsch lauded Adler's focus on ethics, yet he contended that they fell within the sphere of Reform Judaism. As Hirsch wrote, "We have found no cogent reason to abandon our fellowship within the historical synagogue on the plea that the ethical ambition is...cramped, or obscured, or limited by certain creedal postulates. These postulates are involved in the very warp and woof of the ethical conception of the universe and human life."[70] One gets the sense from these words that Hirsch might have abandoned Reform Judaism if he saw its conception of God as hindering ethical progress and behavior. Even though Adler believed it did, he and Hirsch found commonality in seeing ethics as central to a proper conception of the universe.

Kohler and Hirsch both denied the belief that God revealed the written Torah and oral law to Moses at Mount Sinai. Both shared a belief in religious progress, agreeing with the language of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform that the "modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age, and at times clothing its conception of Divine Providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narratives." Kohler, however, emphasized the "gradual evolution of the God idea," writing that the "divine revelation in Israel was by no means a single act, but a process of development ,

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[69] Emil G. Hirsch, Unpublished typescript of letter to Felix Adler, June 6, 1918; quoted in Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture*, 225.
[70] Emil G. Hirsch, Unpublished typescript of letter to Felix Adler, June 6, 1918; quoted in Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture*, 225.

and its various stages correspond to the degrees of culture of the people."[71] What is gradually revealed through different forms in various ages is God's unity and will. Revelation is vouchsafed to Israel because the life of Israel illustrates the working out of God's will. As he writes, "Judaism...beholds in the working out of the world's salvation through Israel's life and thought, simply the process of divine life working in human forms and channels, in full consonance with reason and history."[72] Kohler seemed to equate revelation with spiritual evolution, the notion that human consciousness of God evolves over time through interactions with different peoples and contexts. Although the principle of gradual spiritual evolution recurs in Kohler's writings, his approach to supernaturalism varies. As Joseph Blau has pointed out, Kohler, at times, sees divine revelation as "progressive," forming the "great historical sequence in the history of Israel." At other times, however, Kohler advocates a transhistorical view of revelation, arguing, for example, that "modern science...can pass no opinion as to whether or not the entire work of creation was accomplished by the free act of a Creator. Revelation alone can speak with unfaltering accents..."[73] Although viewing revelation as an unfolding phenomenon, Kohler seems not to have disavowed some point of supernatural origin.

Hirsch's understanding of revelation was, characteristically, less nuanced and more direct. He rejected the idea of a supernatural communication and opposed use of the phrase "divine revelation." After Kohler read his paper containing a draft of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform before the assembled rabbis who eventually passed a modified

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[71] Kaufmann Kohler, "The Need for Higher Criticism," in Plaut, ed., *The Growth of Reform Judaism*, 227; and Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 36.
[72] Kaufmann Kohler, "The Spiritual Forces of Judaism," *CCARY*, Vol. 4 (1894), 140.
[73] See Joseph Blau, "Introduction," in Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, xxx; Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 36, 147.

version of it, Hirsch objected to the appearance of the phrase "divine revelation" in the second paragraph of Kohler's draft. He said, "I would not use the word, for it stands for an idea which I do not hold. I do not believe in revelation, if thereby is meant what is generally supposed to have occurred at Sinai."[74] It was not only the idea of a supernatural giving of the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai that led Hirsch to object to the phrase "divine revelation." Hirsch also saw the word "revelation" as implying that Judaism had certain required beliefs about God—dogmas—and he argued that Judaism never has been a religion of dogmas. Judaism, he argued, is primarily about ethical behavior, not belief, and revelation carries with it the idea that certain beliefs are divinely ordained. Furthermore, the idea of miraculous divine intervention in the world is a Christian one, he contended, whereas the mishnaic idea of *torah min ha-shamayim* is no more than an affirmation of religious humility, the idea that "every truth comes from heaven," which a pious individual evokes so as not to "claim all the credit for himself, but avow that it is God who made him find it."[75] Whereas Hirsch objected to "divine revelation," he did not reject the word "revelation." He linked it with the prophetic spirit, the impulse for righteousness and justice inherent in every Jew. Like Kohler, he also had a notion of spiritual evolution, of a gradual growth and refinement in human understanding of God. As Bernard Martin points out, "Revelation, for Hirsch, is synonymous with reason. Its instrument is human genius. With the procession of the suns, there is progress in religious thought, for men of genius arise and discover new insights."[76] Hirsch emphasized the human side of spiritual evolution, referring to God as ultimately unknowable but human

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[74] Emil Hirsch in "Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference," reprinted in Walter Jacob, ed., *The Changing World of Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect* (Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Congregation, 1985), 109.
[75] Emil G. Hirsch, "Is Revelation a Jewish Concept," in Plaut, ed., *The Growth of Reform*, 206-207.
[76] Martin, *Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch*, 75.

action as the sign of divine knowledge. Kohler placed a greater emphasis on God-consciousness as a sign of spiritual evolution, and, at times, assigned God a role in generating this consciousness.[77]

Both Kohler and Hirsch interpreted Jewish chosenness in terms of the mission of Israel. God chose the people of Israel to teach its superior conception of God and bear the message of ethical monotheism to the world. "The real purpose of the election and mission of Israel," Kohler wrote, "was announced by the great prophet of the Exile when he called Israel the 'servant of the Lord,'...in order that he may declare the praise of God among the peoples, and be a harbinger of light and a bond of union among the nations, the witness of God, the proclaimer of his truth and righteousness throughout the world."[78] Although he said the Reformers had stood by this mission in the world, as other Jews clung to the "Oriental garb and tribalism of the Ghetto," he contended the mission of Israel was part of Judaism throughout its entire history.[79] The mission idea was not an accommodation to the modern world. It was part and parcel of Judaism whose opportunity for realization was enhanced by the enlightenment and emancipation of modernity.

Hirsch shared Kohler's understanding of divine election as implying a Jewish mission to exemplify and teach the truths of ethical monotheism. Like Kohler, he saw the mission ideal as central to the Jewish understanding of God and of revelation as well. Unlike Kohler, however, he foresaw this mission ending in complete absorption of all peoples

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[77] See, for example, Kaufmann Kohler, "The Spiritual Forces of Judaism," CCARY Vol. 4/5 (1895), 140.
[78] Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 324-325.
[79] Kohler, "The Spiritual Forces of Judaism," 134.

and religions, including Jews, into a universal humanity. Kohler envisioned a universal redemption, but he did not, like Hirsch, explicitly discuss the disappearance of Israel. Hirsch did, however, as evidenced in his conclusion to an address on the philosophy of Reform Judaism, where he referred to that time, when the "last minute of the twelfth hour shall have run its measured pace," and "Israel will descend to sink his identity into the warmer life of a new-born all-embracing humanity."[80] Hirsch saw Judaism as a means toward the achievement of this end of religious and international unity. The mission of Israel to work toward this time was that "which binds the latest future, the youngest present to the most distant past. It gives unity to Jewish literature, to Jewish history. It gives direction to Jewish thought and Jewish idealism."[81] For Hirsch, the Jewish ethical mission was the historical and religious essence of Judaism. It linked Jews to their past and future, and to God.

Although neither assigned divine authority to halacha, Hirsch and Kohler displayed varying attitudes toward Jewish ritual and traditional observances. Kohler's approach to traditional practices changed during his lifetime. In the 1870s, for example, when he was rabbi of Temple Sinai of Chicago, he instituted the Sunday morning service, gradually abandoning the Sabbath morning service. By 1894, however, he was a severe critic of this practice, calling it a "patricide." "It may crowd a temple to overflowing, but it will never satisfy any but the intellectual aristocrat who lacks pious reverence for the past. It destroys or undermines the Sabbath, but fails to build up a Judaism loyal to ancient

[80] Hirsch, "The Philosophy of the Reform Movement," 112.
[81] Hirsch, "The Philosophy of the Reform Movement," 106-107.

institutions."[82] The Kohler of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform and the Kohler of his several addresses before the CCAR in the 1890s express different attitudes toward Jewish tradition. The former, as we have seen, focused on the "God-idea" of Judaism and chose to "accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization." The latter admonished other reformers who "while laying all the stress on prophetical ethics...overlooked the fact that without a positive religion, without fear of God and His law, and without a great aim and object of life as motive-power and incentive to righteousness, ethics is nothing but fine phraseology."[83] Kohler acknowledged that the institutions of the Sabbath and the Jewish festivals were "pre-Mosaic" yet he called them "powerful fashioners and educators of Jewish home-life," and he urged a renewed focus on the emotional side of Jewish practices rather than the destructive logic of rational approaches to tradition.[84] Even while describing Judaism as primarily a means of instilling ethical norms, Kohler called for new forms and symbols to elevate home and public observances of the Sabbath and holidays.

Hirsch echoed Kohler's call for new and meaningful forms and symbols, but he attached little importance to them. His opposition to halakhah was adamant. Biblical criticism, he argued, had proven that practices like circumcision and the dietary laws were "non-Jewish rites," which, he argued, were used "to convey the essentially Jewish thought of sanctification and righteousness."[85] Judaism was never focused on law, he contended, but

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[82] Kaufmann Kohler, "Is Reform Judaism Destructive or Constructive," *CCCARY* Vol. 3/4 (1894), 112.
[83] Kohler, "The Spiritual Forces of Judaism," 142.
[84] Kohler, "The Spiritual Forces of Judaism," 139.
[85] Hirsch, "The Philosophy of the Reform Movement," 104.

"now, as in the prophetic, in the wisdom books of the Bible...as in the Talmud, in the Haggadah, it is morality and humanity" which characterized Jewish practice and self-understanding.[86] Perhaps in response to Kohler's call for cultivating the emotional power of ritual, Hirsch conceded that "emotions have their functions in the economy of man individual or social, yet, Judaism must oppose whatever leads to mysticism. If the emotions supply us with the power that propels, reason still must guide..."[87] Hirsch feared that forms and symbols would distract Jews from their principal mission and prevent them from working with non-Jews on this mission. Like Samuel Holdeim, he saw Jews as entrusted with "the keepership of the best treasures of humanity," and Jews' ultimate responsibility was to learn, teach and proclaim the universalist message with which God had entrusted them.[88] This message was to permeate every aspect of the Jew's life. "The distinction between sacred and secular is not Jewish," he argued.[89] The rabbi's goal is to bring Judaism's message to as many people as possible—Jews and non-Jews—so that they can work together and act on that message in their lives. Thus, more important than observing the Sabbath on its traditional day is proclaiming Judaism's message at a time when more people can listen and appreciate it.[90] Forms and symbols were necessary so that proper ideas could "bring their influence to bear upon the will and sentiments of men," yet they are only "crutches" in "weak moments of halting hesitation."[91] They are not obligations but reminders. According to Hirsch, the only obligation of the Jew is to remain a Jew, a custodian of the purest understanding of God,

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 105.
[88] Ibid., 106.
[89] Ibid., 109.
[90] Ibid., 107-109.
[91] Ibid., 105.

and exemplify that understanding by fulfilling one's historic destiny and working to bring about the messianic age of universal harmony.

Both Kohler and Hirsch influenced the theology and practices of the Reform movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From his pulpit and an array of civic work in Chicago, Hirsch stood at the forefront of Reform's embrace of social justice as a central tenet of the movement. His ideas and example influenced the humanistic strain of Reform Judaism in the 1930s and 1940s, as represented by figures like HUC Professor Abraham Cronbach and Rabbi Barnett Brickner.[92] Humanists within the Reform movement virtually identified God with human goodness and saw social improvement as a religious imperative. As president of the Hebrew Union College from 1903 to 1921, Kohler oversaw the training of Reform rabbis and exerted influence through his books and articles. Given his institutional role within the movement, Kohler may have built a longer-lasting legacy. With his calls in the 1890s for greater emotionalism in ritual and Sabbath and holiday observances, he also anticipated the direction some of the movement's rabbis and leading thinkers would take in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Evolution of Reform Jewish Thought

To conclude this chapter, we will briefly look at the evolution of Reform Jewish thought during the first half of the twentieth century, as illustrated in the differences between 1885 Pittsburgh Platform and the 1937 Columbus Platform, and in thinking of the

[92] See Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 317.

primary author of the 1937 platform, Professor Samuel Cohon. The respective structures and styles of the 1885 and 1937 platforms illustrate some of the changes in Reform Jewish thought during this time. The 1885 platform is a list of eight principles without subheadings. One can discern a kind of top-down structure, with the first paragraph addressing God, the second discussing the Bible and the next two focused on Jewish law and practice. The next three paragraphs deal with messianism, the Jewish mission, and immortality, while the final paragraph is a call for social justice. Yet, there is no formal organization or rubrics that link this document to Jewish texts of the past. As Isaac Mayer Wise described it, the 1885 Pittsburgh functions like a "Declaration of Independence," laying out core principles that distinguish Reform Judaism from other movements, notably Ethical Culture and Orthodoxy.[93] The language is also revealing. The tone is confident and forward-looking, the paragraphs are concise, and certain words fail to occur. The phrase "God-idea" is used twice, whereas the word "God" appears once. The word "Torah" does not appear in the document, replaced by "Holy Scriptures," "Bible," and "Mosaic legislation."

In contrast, the 1937 Columbus Platform is organized with headings and subheadings, beginning with "Judaism and Its Foundations," and included under this heading are the traditional categories of Jewish theology: God, Torah, and Israel. The phrase "God-idea" does not appear, but "God" and "the living God" do. Whereas the 1885 Platform described Judaism's "God-idea" as "the central religious truth for the human race," the 1937 Platform designated "the doctrine of the One, living God, who rules the world through law and love" as "the heart of Judaism and its chief contribution to religion." The

[93] Quoted in Walter Jacob, "Introduction," to Walter Jacob ed., *The Changing World of Reform Judaism*, 1.

1937 Platform also uses the word "Torah," calling it "a depository of permanent spiritual ideals" and "the dynamic source of the life of Israel." This shift in language in describing God and Torah illustrates the 1937 Platform's use of a more traditional idiom and theology.

In addition to structure and style, the 1937 Platform differs from the 1885 one in its conception of Judaism and the Jewish people. The 1937 Platform defined Judaism as "the historical religious experience of the Jewish people." It noted that "we recognize in the group-loyalty of Jews who have become estranged form our religious tradition a bond which still unites them with us," though "we maintain that it is by its religion and for its religion that the Jewish people has lived." The legitimacy granted to Zionism in 1937 dovetailed with this conception of Judaism. The importance of historical continuity is affirmed in its describing Palestine as "the land hallowed by memories and hopes." Peoplehood with religion at its center is affirmed in the platform's recognizing "the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its [Palestine's] upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life." This understanding of Judaism differs markedly from the one enunciated in 1885, which said, "we consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor a restoration of any of the laws concerning a Jewish state." This definition is included in the same paragraph as the one that envisions in the modern era "the approaching of the realization of Israel's great hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men." An

understanding of Judaism as a religion dovetailed with the early Reformers' conception of the times in which they lived, their universalist view of the messianic age, and with the role they saw Jews as playing in working toward that age.

Writing amidst the rise of the Nazis in Germany and the growth of the Zionist movement, the authors and editors of the 1937 Platform placed a greater emphasis on Jewish peoplehood and history, connecting the maintenance of peoplehood with the Jewish mission. Like the 1885 Platform, the 1937 one links the Jewish mission with the achievement of a universalist messianic age. The 1937 platform, however, links the messianic age with Israel's "historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of God..." The word "historic," absent from the 1885 notion of Judaism, recognizes the role of history in making the Jews into a people and the connection between Israel's history and its religious mission. Indeed, the prior sentence in this paragraph contended that "throughout the ages it has been Israel's mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every form of paganism and materialism." Israel's unique religious message and task, what the 1885 Platform calls "its mission as the priest of the one God," is linked by the 1937 Platform to its history as a people, its role "throughout the ages." Arnold Eisen suggests that Reform rabbis in the 1930s were less willing than their 1880s counterparts to assign a unique religious genius to the Jews, and therefore, they sought to base the notion of Jews' religious mission in their Jewish self-understanding throughout history, and to use the idea of a Jewish mission as a justification for Jewish survival. By linking Israel's "historic" task with achievement of the messianic age, the 1937 Platform suggests that Israel's role in working toward this era

is tied up with its survival as a people. Thus, the 1937 Platform historicizes the concept of the Jewish mission, linking with the survival and maintenance of Judaism as "the historical religious experience of the Jewish people."

The rise of Nazi power in Germany, the growth of Zionism, and the large number of Jews of Eastern European origins who had joined Reform synagogues all contributed to the theological shifts evident in 1937 Platform. These shifts also reflected the thinking of Samuel Cohon, the chief author of the platform and a professor of theology at HUC. Writing in 1967, Michael Meyer called him "perhaps the central theological figure in Reform Judaism during the last forty years."[94] As noted above, reason was a principal category for judging the legitimacy of religious beliefs and practices for many of the early Reformers. "Mysticism" and "mystical" were words of derision. While Cohon affirmed the significance of reason in Judaism, he sought to balance its theological weight with emotion and mysticism. He argued that Reform had focused too much on the mind and too little on the heart in its theology and practices. The importance of the emotional aspect of Judaism is evident in Cohon's interest in prayer, which was totally absent in 1885 and is discussed extensively in the 1937 Platform. "To deepen the spiritual life of our people," the 1937 platform contends, "we must cultivate the traditional habit of communion with God through prayer in both home and synagog."

Cohon's conception of God fit with the balance he urged between reason and emotion. He conceived of a God both cosmic and personal, transcendent and immanent. As the 1937 platform states, "we worship Him [God] as the Lord of the universe and as our

[94] Michael A. Meyer, "Samuel S. Cohon: Reformer of Reform Judaism," *Judaism* Vol. 15 (1966), 319.

merciful Father." Revelation, he contended, is "a progressive process whereby the Creator's activity, thought, and purpose are disclosed to spiritually gifted souls."[95] This understanding of revelation is similar to that of Kaufmann Kohler and the 1885 platform, yet it lacks the sense of a superior religious truth in Judaism that Kohler and the platform affirmed. This difference is reflected in 1937 platform, which does not echo 1885's view that Judaism presents "the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers..."

Cohon also had a more positive approach to Jewish law and observance than did the early Reformers. Jewish law, according to Cohon, had a significant role to play in contemporary Reform Judaism. "Hagadah," he wrote, "must be completed by Halachah."[96] Traditional customs and observances could provide guidance for liberal Jews and concrete ways to make Judaism "a way of life." [97] Cohon was concerned that a lack of traditional observances was preventing the "spiritual elevation" that Kohler feared had been obstructed by "Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress." He argued that without a source of authority religion is shapeless and without much influence. Yet, consistent with his penchant for balance in matters of belief, Cohon urged Reform Jews to weigh both tradition and their present circumstances in deciding on matters of Jewish observance. As the 1937 Platform states, "Each age has the obligation to adapt the teachings of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism." Perhaps Cohon's most significant contribution was restoring a sense of

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[95] Samuel S. Cohon, *Jewish Theology: A Historical and Systematic Interpretation of Judaism and its Foundations* ed. J. H. Prakke and H. M. G. Prakke (Assen, The Netherlands: Royal Vangorcum, 1971), 141. This volume is a collection of Cohon's essays.
[96] Quoted in Meyer, "Reformer of Reform Judaism," 324.
[97] *Judaism: A Way of Life* is the title of one of Cohon's books.

particularism to Reform Jewish theology. By emphasizing the importance of prayer and peoplehood, he focused on specifically Jewish expressions of religious thought. Whereas the 1885 Platform bristles with the thinking Kant and Hegel, the 1937 Platform speaks the language of Jewish tradition, even as it draws from the thinking of the early Reformers.

Cohon's emphasis on the particulars of Judaism reflected the direction of many Reform rabbis of the 1930s and 1940s. In his history of the Reform movement, Michael Meyer entitled his chapter on the interwar years in America "Reorientation," noting that "the interwar period did witness a progressive diminution of differences between Reform Jews and their coreligionists. The rapprochement appeared most clearly in the broadening conception of Jewish identity, the progressive reappropriation of traditions, and the turn toward Zion."[98] Despite its reorientation, Reform Judaism continued to display the influence of Kohler and Hirsch, with its progressive understanding of revelation and commitment to social justice as a Jewish imperative. The Reform movement entered the postwar world as a more theologically diverse movement than it had ever been, with some calling for a turn to halakhah, others urging religious humanism, some seeking to create a specifically Reform set of customs and practices, others seeking an updated affirmation of the Prophetic Judaism of Geiger and Kohler, some seeking to apply the religious ideology of Mordecai Kaplan to Reform, and others seeking to apply the insights of existential philosophy to Jewish thought and practice. The last three schools of thought will be examined in detail in the following chapters.

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[98] Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 298.

Chapter Two: Levi Olan and Religious Liberalism

In the decades following the second World War, American Jewry devoted much attention to theological issues. As we saw in the previous chapter, the neo-orthodox school of Christianity, represented primarily by Reinhold Niebuhr, exerted a major influence on Jewish thinkers of the time, as did the Christian existentialistism of Paul Tillich. Some religious thinkers, however, saw this trend as reactionary, abandoning the liberalism and progress of the modern era. One of them, Rabbi Levi Olan, stands out as the chief Reform champion of liberalism in the mid-twentieth century. Olan sought to reshape and reaffirm core liberal values that he saw as central to Reform Judaism and to any religion that would thrive in the modern world. His writings, influential congregation in Dallas, and leadership roles in the CCAR helped him become one of Reform Judaism's foremost theologians of the time.

This chapter begins with a brief biography of Olan and continues with an examination of two primary motifs in his writings: liberalism and prophetic Judaism. While examining his thinking, I will also attempt to place Olan's writings, especially those published in the CCAR Yearbooks and CCAR-published books, in the polemical contexts from which they emerged. After establishing Olan's concepts of prophetic Judaism and liberalism, I will introduce process theology, one of the intellectual movements that shaped Olan's worldview. I introduce process theology at this point in the chapter because it gives context to and helps us understand Olan's views on the theological issues we examine in the next section. In that section, in order both to provide a basis of comparison between

Olan and the other thinkers in our study, and to show the ways in which Olan's liberalism and prophetic faith affected his approach to traditional Jewish theological issues, we will examine Olan's views on God, revelation, Jewish chosenness, and the role of law and tradition in Reform Judaism. I will conclude the chapter with a brief critique of elements of Olan's theology.

Biography

Levi Olan was born Levi Olanovksy on March 22, 1903, in a town near Kiev in the Russian Ukraine. At age three he immigrated with his parents to the United States, where his father followed the suggestions of an immigration officer and shortened the family name to Olan.[1] Olan grew up in a Jewishly observant, Yiddish-speaking household in Rochester, New York. His father was a peddler and eventually opened a clothing store, but the family was financially strained. Among the many reasons Olan chose to attend Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati was the availability of free tuition and scholarships for room and board.[2] Two of Olan's closest boyhood friends, Sidney Regner and Milton Steinberg, also entered the rabbinate. Regner preceded Olan at HUC, while Steinberg studied at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary. Like other HUC students, Olan enrolled simultaneously at the University of Cincinnati and HUC in 1923, and he completed his coursework for both institutions in 1929. According to Elizabeth Olan Hirsch, his daughter, Olan's time at HUC profoundly influenced his manner, his

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[1] Gerry Cristol, *A Light on the Prairie: Temple Emanu-El of Dallas, 1872-1997* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University, 1998), 154. Cristol, the archivist of Temple Emanu-El of Dallas, based her biographical information on interviews with Levi Olan and members of his family.

[2] Unpublished interview of Levi Olan by Gerry Cristol: July 22, 1974. The transcript of the interview is in the archives of Temple Emanu-El in Dallas and was given to the author by Ms. Cristol.

self-understanding as a Jew, and his commitment to the Reform movement and America. His earlier Orthodox practices and beliefs lost their meaning and power, and he developed a great interest in theology and modern philosophy. Olan remained grateful for the teaching and opportunities afforded to him at HUC throughout his life.[3] In 1929, he accepted the pulpit of Temple Emanu-El in Worcester, Massachusetts. One of its great draws, according to Olan Hirsch, was its proximity to Harvard University, where Olan studied and listened to lectures every Wednesday.

In 1948 Olan was recruited to Congregation Emanu-El in Dallas, where he succeeded David Levkowitz. Olan, whose sense of humor was praised by his daughter and several former congregants, quipped in a letter to Rabbi George Zepin at the UAHC that "For good or for ill, I am headed to the oil wells of Texas. Whether I can make those wells speak Hebrew is the big problem."[4] At the time, Congregation Emanu-El was the only Reform synagogue in Dallas and counted 800 member households.[5] In Dallas, Olan also became an adjunct professor at Perkins Theological Seminary, spending many hours in his library office there. Among the many programs he began at Temple Emanu-El was a series of book reviews, which drew several hundred people each month. He chose books on the basis of their "significance for our times," and one frequent participant described them as "intellectual feasts that usually addressed modern philosophical questions."[6] In 1949 Olan also began delivering weekly "radio sermons" on a Dallas radio station. The sermons covered a variety of issues, including politics, philosophy, psychology, art and

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[3] Interview by the author with Elizabeth Olan Hirsch, daughter of Levi Olan, by telephone: March 5, 2005.
[4] Olan to George Zepin; August 30, 1948; Olan papers, 22/2, American Jewish Archives (AJA).
[5] Unpublished interview of Olan with Mrs. Morton Sanger, August 5, 1972. Sent to the author by Gerry Cristol, archivist at Temple Emanu-El of Dallas.
[6] Cristol, *Light on the Prairie*, 183.

interfaith relations. Though addressed to a popular, mostly Christian audience, they drew widely from Jewish texts.[7] Olan also became well-known for his liberal political views, including his early support of civil rights legislation and opposition to the Vietnam War. In the 1960s in Dallas, he was frequently called the "conscience of the city," and a *Fortune Magazine* article entitled "How Business Failed Dallas" noted that "Dallas churches, for all their affluence, have been criticized by some for being singularly unrealistic about the urgent problems of the city. Accordingly, the most powerful religious voice in the area is undoubtedly that of Levi Olan, rabbi of Temple Emanu-El."[8] Olan was appointed to the Board of Regents of the University of Texas in 1963, and he remained a central figure in Dallas religious life until his retirement from the Emanu-El pulpit in 1970. During his retirement, he continued to write essays for the *CCAR Journal* and *Judaism*, and he died in 1985.

During his rabbinate, Olan also was an active and significant figure within the Reform Jewish movement. He delivered his first CCAR address in 1942 (On the Nature of Man), and also gave papers in 1957 (Judaism and Modern Theology), 1963 (New Resources for a Liberal Faith), the conference lecture in 1965, and the presidential addresses in 1968 and 1969. He received many requests for copies of sermons and articles, and his sermons were occasionally read aloud at Sabbath services at small synagogues without a rabbi.[9] Three of his theological essays were also reprinted in anthologies on Reform Jewish

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[7] A relatively small number of these radio sermons were compiled in Levi Olan, *Maturity in an Immature World* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1984). The complete texts of many more are included in the Olan papers in the AJA.

[8] Quoted in Cristol, *Light on the Prairie*, 197.

[9] See letter from William Zale to Olan; March 18, 1960; Olan papers 22/3, AJA.

thought.[10] Beginning in 1953, he chaired a CCAR Committee on Theology. The group would listen to papers presented by various members. In 1965 Olan convened and moderated a theology kallah following the CCAR conference in Cincinnati. In 1967, he became President of the CCAR. According to his daughter, Olan was particularly close with many rabbis, especially those in large pulpits and in the leadership of the CCAR during the 1950s and 1960s. Even those rabbis, such as William Braude and Roland Gittelsohn, with whom he sparred over theology, remained his personal friends.[11]

Despite his array of public activity, Olan occasionally said that he wished he could have devoted his career to academic research and teaching.[12] After his retirement from Temple Emanu-El, he continued to teach at the Perkins Theological Seminary in Dallas. When reading his essays and speeches, one encounters a wide array of thinkers, and Olan rarely addressed an issue like civil rights or Darwinism without giving historical background, intellectual and social contexts, and the views of other thinkers and writers. Occasionally this tendency to contextualize overwhelms Olan's focus on the topic at hand. In an article on Mordecai Kaplan's influence on Reform Judaism, for example, Olan devotes all but the last few sentences of the article to depicting Kaplan as an intellectual product of Hegel, William James, and John Dewey.[13] This style was not limited to articles or public lectures. It characterized his sermons as well. He cautioned rabbis against too much

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[10] These anthologies are *Reform Judaism, Essays by Hebrew Union College Alumni* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1949), 28-56; Joseph L. Blau, ed., *Reform Judaism: a historical perspective; essays from the Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973) 87-103 (Olan's essay in this book is a reprint of his address, "New Resources for a Liberal Faith," delivered before the CCAR in 1963.); and Bernard Martin, ed., *Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 21-38.

[11] Braude, for example, contributed an essay to the *Festschrift* in honor of Olan. Jack Bemporad, ed., *A Rational Faith: Essays in Honor of Rabbi Levi A. Olan* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977).

[12] Author's interview with Elizabeth Olan Hirsch.

[13] Levi Olan, "Mordecai Kaplan's Influence Upon Reform Judaism," *CCAR Journal* (June 1956), 24-25.

brevity, writing that "Great preachers are not great because they are brief—they are great because they say, 'Thus saith the Lord' and God is not to be confined to a time schedule." A rabbi, he argued, had to be conversant with the cultural and intellectual trends of the day or risk becoming irrelevant.[14]

The Prophetic Faith

Like many of the early Reformers, Olan adopted and adapted some elements of the Prophetic teachings of the Bible, and he set them forth a series of principles he called the "Prophetic faith." What Olan called "prophetic faith" and "prophetic Judaism" was not the Judaism of the prophets, but a Reform Jewish adaptation of some elements of Prophetic teachings. Drawing from his sermons and essays, we will seek to define and examine those teachings.[15] We will examine the way in which Olan's conception of prophetic Judaism shaped his theology before discussing his notion of liberalism because he saw prophetic Judaism as the foundation of liberalism. Not only did the prophets precede the beginning of liberalism (as Olan understood the term) in the nineteenth century, but they outlined the principles and goals by which liberals sought to abide and to achieve.

Olan saw its theism, its belief in a moral law and its endowing of humanity with free will, as the central characteristics of prophetic Judaism. The prophets, Olan contended, believed in a deity active in the universe. As he wrote, "Human existence is more than

[14] Levi Olan, "Called to Preach," *CCAR Journal* (January 1960), 3.
[15] Olan may have used the phrase "prophetic faith" because he frequently spoke a largely non-Jewish radio audience.

matter which returns to the dust. In a universe characterized by mind, law, and purpose, the unfulfilled must be fulfilled. The Hebrew prophets placed this faith in ultimate victory at the very center of Judaism. The promises of God do come to pass 'in the end of days.'.... To believe this is to give depth to man's hope in life."[16] Olan's notion of an active deity will be further explored in a later section of this chapter. At this point, however, we will discuss some of the implications of his notion of an active deity, focusing specifically on the way it differs from a naturalistic approach to God. As we do so, we will see some of the central differences between Olan and the subject of the next chapter, Roland Gittelsohn.

In 1964, Gittelsohn delivered a paper at the CCAR convention entitled "No Retreat from Reason." Olan was one of the respondents. Evaluating this response can help us understand where Olan, who is often grouped with Gittelsohn as a Reform religious naturalist, differed from him.[17] Gittelsohn, as we explore closely in chapter three, was a religious naturalist, seeing God as strictly within the natural world.[18] He argued for the precedence of fact over faith in describing God. Olan argued that Gittelsohn's theology was too dogmatic and not normatively Jewish. "The wholly immanentist position," he wrote, "is outside of the Biblical tradition and of the normative Jewish view. This does not invalidate it as a position, but let us not claim for it the mantle of Judaism."[19] Olan argued that liberalism could be seen, via the prophets, as part of normative Jewish

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[16] Olan, *Judaism and Immortality* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1971), 58.
[17] In his book, *Jewish Philosophers*, Steven Katz writes that "Levi Olan and Roland Gittelsohn...have tried to pursue extreme Jewish rationalism based on science, nature and logic." Steven Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (New York: Bloch, 1975), 254.
[18] Roland Gittelsohn, "No Retreat from Reason," *CCARYB*, Vol. 74 (1964), 191-203.
[19] Levi Olan, "Comments," *CCARY*, Vol. 74 (1964), 206.

tradition, but an absolute naturalism could not. This absoluteness in Gittelsohn's naturalism especially bothered Olan. By setting up fact and faith as opposites and suggesting that fact was the proper way to truth, Gittelsohn, according to Olan, created a false dichotomy and ignored the centrality of experience to reasoned faith. "Faith and reason," writes Olan, "are not mutually exclusive. They are different approaches to truth. Reason and science disclose one aspect of reality, experience reveals another."[20] In this regard, Olan contended that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is as "true" as Einstein's theory of relativity. Olan does not explain what he means when he says that a symphony is "true." He may be suggesting that logic is not the only standard for uncovering truths about the universe.[21] "The rational truth alone may reveal God who is a force in nature, or a logical syllogism," Olan writes, but experience discloses "the God whom we need for worship and commitment."[22] For Olan, naturalism could not adequately describe the God of the universe because it limited itself to observable facts. Only if we understood God as transcending nature could we account for the ultimate truth of experiences generated by art, by music, or by feelings like love.[23]

Theism's most significant advantage over naturalism was its endowing of humanity with greater dignity. At first glance, this advantage seems paradoxical. Religious naturalism and humanism are often linked together, since a world without a transcendent God might logically give ultimate authority and power to human beings. Yet, according to Olan, "the

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[20] Olan, "Comments," 205.
[21] Olan, "Comments," 205.
[22] Olan, "Comments," 206.
[23] Throughout this chapter, I will refer to Olan's "theism." Despite its vagueness, it was the term that Olan used to describe his own approach to God and it seems meant to indicate difference between his theology and naturalism.

implications of this God-centered view of the universe are clear. Man is a significant being who reflects in miniature the rational, free, creative nature of God.... The consequences of the secularist view of the universe are equally apparent. It describes it as a concatenation of atoms without a purpose or goal. The natural law itself is senseless having no intelligible objective or recognizable direction."[24] Since it presented a universe without a purpose, pure naturalism left the universe inhospitable to the potentials and ideals of humanity. It encouraged conflict because it posited no higher motive for human cooperation than expediency, which could be quickly forgotten or trumped. It belittled the human mind because, as Olan pointed out, "the naturalist God requires another God to explain the world itself," and it undermined humans' experiencing of the world because human beings feel a sense of commonality explained only by a universal God.[25] As Olan wrote, "Thus it is that the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God is not a whim or a caprice of men lost in subjectivity. It is rooted in the very essence of being itself."[26] Theism, not naturalism, was the most humanistic and rational basis for Jewish theology.

A second attribute of the prophetic faith, and one that is a corollary to its theism, is the existence and centrality of a universal moral law. "The prophetic faith," he writes, "rests upon the foundation of law, asserting that God as Creator created a world of order, a cosmos, not a chaos. There is a physical law and a moral law, both of which men must

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[24] Levi Olan, "Report of the President," CCARYB, Vol. 79 (1969), 5.
[25] Olan, "Comments," 207. God." God "implanted this moral
[26] Olan, "Report of the President" (1969), 5. Although though Olan's thinking here resembles that of Hermann Cohen, he does not quote or refer to him in any of his writings.

obey if they would survive."[27] To define the moral law, Olan often turned to a verse from the prophet Micah, "What does God require of thee? Only this: to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."[28] God "implanted the moral law in the center of the nature so that it may radiate to the circumference."[29] In other words, God created the world in a way that was hospitable to the innate human striving for justice, mercy, and dignity. God relied on human being to radiate this moral law throughout the universe, to carry it "to the circumference." As we will see in our discussion of revelation, God's teachings are a guide for living by the moral law.

It is significant to note that Olan contended that "men must obey" the moral law "if they would survive." Obedience to the moral law is a choice. The prophetic faith eschews any determinism, as Olan pointed out in addressing God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the book of Exodus. As he wrote, "If the doctrine of determinism is valid, then the prophetic biblical faith is invalid. Despite the problem of Pharaoh's hardened heart, the prophets placed the moral life at the center of their beliefs.... Running through the Biblical prophecies is the world 'choose'.... The prophetic faith of the Bible consistently abides by the belief that man is free to choose between good and evil."[30] The moral law operates only if human beings choose to abide by it. Indeed, the moral law limits God's power in that God cannot interfere with humanity's freedom to accept or reject it. Human fate is ultimately in human hands.

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[27] Levi Olan "An Answer to War," a radio sermon, Nov. 18, 1956, Olan Papers, 22/7, AJA, p. 2.
[28] Micah 6:8.
[29] Olan, "Report of the President," (1969), 4.
[30] Levi Olan, "Are We Free To Choose," a radio sermon, January 24, 1965, Olan Papers, 22/7, AJA, p. 2.

Olan saw this anti-deterministic view of human destiny as Judaism's distinguishing characteristic. As he writes, "Any type of determinism or fatalism in the moral realm is alien to Judaism, and leaves very little room for science, ethical ideals, or ideas. It is in this endowment with the capacity to choose his destiny that man, as Judaism conceived him, stands in contrast to the Paulinian man waiting in a crisis for a supernatural act of grace."[31] While Christianity viewed man as tainted by an original sin and contended that redemption is possible only through supernatural grace, Judaism held that human beings had an evil impulse that could be overcome through obedience to the moral law. Olan saw evil as a possibility, not an inevitable reality. To see sin as inevitable would betray humanity's freedom. As we will see in our later discussion of Olan's understanding of revelation, this way of thinking is very much like that of nineteenth-century Reform thinker Samuel Hirsch.

This sanctification of free moral choice not only distinguished Judaism from other religions, Olan argued, but it also was the foundation of modern western civilization. Olan traces a line of development between the prophets and the Enlightenment, linking the prophetic emphasis on human responsibility to modernity's recognition of the power of science to alter life, and the prophetic affirmation of the moral law to modernity's universalist ethos. "The Hebrew tradition with its concept of man as a unified personality, free from the taint of original sin but endowed with impulses toward evil and good and given a free choice between them, forms the clay of all the liberal and hopeful movements of the Western world. This doctrine of man was set by the prophets in a time

[31] Levi Olan, "On the Nature of Man," *CCARY* Vol. 58 (1948), 263.

frame that is infinite."[32] According to Olan, the Prophetic "doctrine of man" was best represented in the twentieth century in the philosophy of liberalism, to which we now turn.

Liberalism

A frequent issue to which Olan devoted much detail and scholarship in unpacking and showing its various influences is liberalism. Almost all of his addresses before the CCAR contain an extended discussion of it. Its significance in shaping his thinking, and his tendency to discuss it, is evident in a 1970 essay, in which he wrote that "A review of my writings and lectures during the almost half century in which they occurred discloses the intriguing statistic that my most common title was 'The Faith of an Untired Liberal.'"[33] For many in the Reform movement, Olan was the voice of religious liberalism, and he sought to define its message for the second half of the twentieth century.

We will divide Olan's conception of liberalism into three core tenets: intellectual freedom, reason and progress. The three are dependent on one another, but we will examine each principle individually in order to get a sense of Olan's interests and emphases, and to unpack his particular understanding of liberalism. Olan's most extensive discussion of liberalism occurs in an essay he wrote for a festschrift published in his honor in 1977. This essay echoes many of the views Olan expressed in a 1962

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[32] Olan, "On the Nature of Man," 265.
[33] Levi Olan, "A Preliminary Summing Up," in Bemporad, ed., *A Rational Faith*, 185.

paper delivered at the CCAR convention entitled "New Resources for a Liberal Faith."[34] In defining liberalism, Olan highlighted the first principle we will examine, intellectual freedom. Liberalism, he writes, "is an attitude of mind which favors freedom instead of authority. In this case it is a philosophy whose distinction is its rejection of a closed system of thought fenced in by fixed, unchanging dogma."[35] For Olan, unchanging dogma and liberalism are at odds. His definition seems to identify dogma with authority and rejection of it with freedom. The question of whether Judaism has any dogmas has been a significant question in modern Jewish thought since the time of Moses Mendelssohn, and Olan, like Mendelssohn, comes down squarely on the negative side. Judaism has never been based on dogmas, and the tenets of liberalism themselves are an integral part of Judaism, not an accommodation to modernity. "The idea of freedom, the benevolent conception of man's nature, and the faith in progress," Olan writes, "were not novel to Judaism. Indeed, these pillars of the liberal faith were part of Jewish thought long before they received formulation at the hands of moderns."[36]

With its rejection of dogma and corresponding intellectual freedom, liberalism entailed a particular way of learning about and evaluating the universe. While rooted in Judaism, it was also shaped by the ideas of the European Enlightenment. Descartes, Olan argued, "introduced a new methodology of knowledge which constituted a radical break with the past. The door was opened for a critical examination of supernatural revelation as the

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[34] Levi Olan, "New Resources for a Liberal Faith," *CCARY*, Vol. 72, 1962, pp. 231-244. This essay was also included in Bernard Martin, ed., *Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought*, 21-38. In referencing this essay, I will refer to the page numbers in the Martin volume.
[35] Olan, "A Preliminary Summing Up," 188.
[36] Levi Olan, "Rethinking the Liberal Faith," in *Reform Judaism, Essays by Alumni of the Hebrew Union College*, 49-50.

source for truth. After Descartes, Galileo and Newton set in motion the scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."[37] This scientific revolution, which held that the world operated according to universal and observable laws, replaced dogma with natural law. Not only did social, economic and political institutions have to conform to this new worldview, but theology had to evolve as well, responding to Freud, Darwin and others. Olan frequently quoted the proverb "In all thy ways know Him," seeing it as an affirmation that one should investigate the world and draw greater knowledge of God from all discoveries about the universe.[38]

Olan's affirmation of intellectual freedom was the basis for an understanding of the universe receptive to human beings' desire and ability to improve their lives. "The universe has room for his [man's] highest imagination, and he has the capacity to choose his direction and invent the means of reaching nearer to his destination."[39] The most potent resource for reaching one's destination, and the new source of authority and guidance in a universe without dogma, was reason. Contra Freud, Olan held that man was ultimately guided by conscious reason. As he wrote, "Impulse and desire play an important role in conduct, but they do not provide the principle of organization. Only reason can provide that, and imperfect a tool as it is, it is the only tool we have to guide us."[40] The centrality of reason in Olan's theology and in the way others characterized his thinking is evident in the title of the festschrift in his honor, *A Rational Faith.* In philosophy, reason usually refers to the process of using logic and weighing evidence to

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[37] Olan, "A Preliminary Summing Up," 189-190
[38] See, for example, Olan, "New Resources," 37.
[39] Olan, "New Resources," 36.
[40] Olan, "New Resources," 34.

answer a question or reach a conclusion. Reason is central to a rational worldview, which is a way of interpreting facts and experiences and integrating them into a meaningful whole or construct.[41] For strict rationalists, "reason is a source of knowledge in itself, superior to and independent of sense perception."[42] Olan, however, like many process thinkers (whom we will examine later in this chapter), saw reason and experience as complementary tools in the search for truth. Reason could not be separated from one's experiencing—sensory and intuitive—of the world. As Whitehead put it, "Rationalism never shakes off its status as an experimental adventure."[43]

Like the early Reformers, Olan saw human beings as inherently rational, and by upholding reason as its central standard for truth and faith, Judaism became a more philosophically and morally acceptable religion in the world.[44] While contending that Judaism had always upheld the authority of reason in formulating religious beliefs, he also argued that reason gained greater theological credibility in the modern world because of its universality. Modern science and philosophy had shown that all human beings had the power to reason, and a religion that upheld reasonable truths would thrive in the modern world. Discussing the European Enlightenment, Olan lauded its discovery that human beings are "endowed by nature or by God with a faculty to test all evidence for its rationality. Since reason was common to all men, it was seen as the uniting element in

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[41] For a discussion of the meaning of reason in philosophy and religion, see William Kaufman, *The Evolving God in Jewish Process Theology* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1997), 10-11.
[42] Kaufman, *Evolving God*, 10.
[43] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected edition, edited by Griffin and Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1979), 9.
[44] For a discussions of the acceptability of reason in the modern world, see Olan, "Rethinking the Liberal Faith," 34-36.

mankind which would lead to human brotherhood."[45] A religion based on reason was less particularistic and more consistent with the intellectual climate of the modern world. Reason also made Judaism open to innovation and new discoveries. It allowed for evolution in religious beliefs. He acknowledged that the prophets believed in a supernatural God active in and determining the fate of the universe, and that they derived this belief from their reasonable observation of the world. He argued, however, that their conclusions are open for reinterpretation. Indeed, the prophets themselves reinterpreted the covenant between God and Israel "and re-interpreted it as changing historical situations demanded."[46] Reason is eternal, but its conclusions are not.

A reliance on reason ultimately led to progress and improvement in human affairs. Progress was an essential component of liberalism, and according to Olan, it resulted from liberalism's embrace of both intellectual freedom and reason. As he wrote, "His [man's] escape from the misery, pain, and suffering of the present hour depends upon a better use of his natural faculties, his mind, his conscious reason, and his innate goodness. The wise and prudent use of these will help him create an earthly utopia."[47] As evidence of progress, Olan cited birth control, discoveries about the chemical basis of psychological conditions, and technological innovations that increased business productivity.[48] His belief in progress depended in large measure on a positive view of human nature. Olan expounded often on the "innate goodness" of human beings. He held that "man does not come into the world with an irremediable taint. On the contrary, his

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[45] Olan, "A Preliminary Summing Up," 190.
[46] Levi Olan, "The Prophetic Faith in a Secular Age," *Journal of Reform Judaism* (Spring 1979), 2.
[47] Olan, "Preliminary Summing Up," 191.
[48] See Olan, "Preliminary Summing Up," 196-199.

entrance is in innocence endowed with the capacity to subdue his inclinations toward evil, and ultimately to return his soul to purity."[49] While evil may be a human inclination, its existence is not preordained. Human beings, according to Olan, had a benevolent impulse that led them to work for improvements to society and their lives.[50] Even frustration and anger were signs of human goodness. The discontents and frustrations of modern writers like Beckett and Sartre were not signs of the ultimate futility of human strivings and possibility, but "loud testimony to his [man's] faith in the promises of liberalism."[51] Were progress not possible, he contended, human beings would not lament its absence. Olan's faith in progress seems to require this positive view of human nature. Without an innate concern for the welfare of others, human beings would not "commit themselves to the just and merciful deeds" necessary for improvement in the human condition. Olan chided both capitalism, for pointing to self-interest as the primary source for progress, and socialism, for subordinating the individual to an abstract social interest. As we saw, he looked to the Hebrew prophets as teachers of the linkage between individual behavior and the survival and improvement of society.

Criticisms from Other Reform Rabbis

In the previous chapter, we discussed Christian and Jewish challenges to religious liberalism in the postwar era. Within the Reform movement, two prominent critics of the liberalism of American Reform Judaism were Arnold Jacob Wolf and William Braude. Each of them wrote frequently, and in two collections of essays by Reform rabbis their

[49] Levi Olan, "On the Nature of Man," *CCARYB*, Vol. 58 (1948), 262.
[50] See Olan, "On the Nature of Man," 265.
[51] Olan, "Preliminary Summing Up," 194.

Chronicles where we find that Israel had a thousand thousandths and a hundred thousandth swordsmen and among the children of the royal seed, there were 470,000."

The King said, "I am amazed at two things. First, how did Solomon get all of that wealth? And secondly, how did those Jews decrease in numbers after they had been so numerous as you have said?"

Answered Thomas, "They used to have their wealth brought to them in the ships of Ophir every year in a miraculous way. And his father left him a great fortune which he had stolen from people and therefore Solomon did not want to build the house from it."

So the King said, "You are worthy of a great punishment because you have reviled us. For are you saying that what a king takes with his sword should be called robbery? But let your wisdom make atonement today for your sin. So what, therefore, will you say on the matter of the decrease in population which the Jews have suffered?"

So Thomas said, "They lost numbers in mighty wars, as I shall say, those who were left who came to your kingdom at that time were beset by a heavy plague because it was they who brought plague to the world. So says the Bible, God will stick you with the plague, you and not any other people. And this is when they were still in their own land. But after they left, it went over to us because of the biblical verse that says, 'Woe to the wicked one and woe to his name.'"

So the King answered, "If the person saying these words were somebody else, I would have thought that he had eaten the brain of a cat. But now, [Marcus] Tullies [Cicero] was greater than you. He said that fifty years before the Jews came to Spain there was a severe plague, so great that all the gates of the great kingdom were closed,

especially Cordelia, Toledo and Seville. Even in my time I saw a great plague and a hundred of the Christians succumbed everyday. But from the Jews not one died. In the evenings, the Christians used to bring their children to the houses of Jews in order, perhaps, that they might be saved. And in the great city of Rome, and all of its surroundings, the plague lasted for three years running to the degree that people thought that God had become angry at them and wanted to kill them all. Therefore, let what is said in a shameful way about Jews be enough and don't place upon them what they are not responsible for. I was even about to say that you had spoken favorably about them at first, only to place this venom upon them at last. So let us return to our subject because still there is no natural explanation as to their downfall."

Thomas answered, "I am saying to my lord that their greatness and excellence was the very cause of their downfall. It is similar to a tree, which when its height becomes excessive, it becomes the cause of its downfall because the wind controls it excessively. The same thing is true with the Jews: the spirit of haughtiness comes over them and the sense of the enmity that is within the haughty brings them down. The prophet said concerning them, God sends them from the heavens to the earth. All of which refers to what we have already said, namely, that their rise to the heavens was the reason of their very fall because they became very proud, one against the other, until their hearts were separated from one another to a great degree. And it is known that everything in the world comes in pairs except for pride, which has no companion. But from pride came enmity between them, and from enmity came separation, and each one of them got to saying that the rulership and kingdom was most appropriate for him. And in order for

some to be able to rule against others, they brought outsiders in. And when the outsiders knew their secret feelings and how separated their hearts were from one another, the fear of the Jews was removed from them. They did not regard the Jews highly at all and they attacked them and brought them down. For this time, it was said of the Jews what the Bible said, namely that the kings of the earth did not believe that an enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem. But now the Jews could not withstand their enemies because their great numbers along with their divisiveness led to their diminution. And with every one of them turning in his own way in order to provoke his neighbor, their strength was weakened in this way and their great numbers, great like a multitude of gnats proved to be of no help or consequence to them. And regarding them in this area, the prophet said, 'All of us have strayed like sheep.'

Now the naturalists say that among living beings, there is nothing more foolish than the species of sheep. And therefore the prophet says that we have strayed like sheep. But they did not even have the good qualities of sheep who love to gather together. On the contrary, each one of them turned his own way and therefore the Bible says, 'Each one turned his own way.' As a result the struggles dragged out among Jews according to the evil of their disposition. And how wonderfully Nicholas di Lyra who knew about them commented that when the scripture says in Exodus 'you shall not cause any fire to burn in your dwelling places on the Sabbath day' it was not referring specifically to a fire literally because its prohibition was already known just like it says, 'you shall do no work on the Sabbath day.' But rather it was referring figuratively to the fire of dissension which Jews are told not to burn in their dwelling places, in accordance with the custom of

the Jew who does no other work when he is at rest."

Says the King, "You have expounded very well and that is like the case of the thief who is part of the very household he is robbing. But in the case of the Sabbath, I have a quarrel with Jesus. Why did he not command us regarding [the observance of] the Sabbath? Inasmuch as the Sabbath, is the teaching regarding the creation with which we agree with the Jewish faith. Now if you should say that on the first day Jesus entered his heavenly place, that would be all right if the Christians observed the first day with a cessation from work just like the Sabbath. But Christians' observance is only seen in their eating and taking long walks, whereas Jews observe their Sabbath with an abstinence from work and reading the law of God. And so, too, the Muslims on the sixth day read their sacred book, the Koran, and in this way they have a superiority over us."

So Thomas answered, "Christians are not obligated with cessation from work because the keeping of the Sabbath has two purposes. One is the remembrance of the creation of the world out of nothing, and the second, the remembrance that they were servants in Egypt as it is said, 'you shall remember that you were a servant.' But the Christians who did not leave Egypt, do not have the recollection that demands the cessation from work."

Said the King, "Since we have been talking about this at length let me ask you "why did Moses choose the Sabbath day and the prophet of Islam the sixth day and Jesus the first day?"

This is Thomas' answer: "Moses said that it was appropriate to give honor to the day of rest because on that day God rested. You will find God's perfection in his rest and

not in the doing of things in which it may be seen that God needs them and gets his perfection from doing these things. As the prophet of the Muslims said, a human being should be glad on the day that God completed his work. Therefore God commanded that the sixth day, on which the work of creation was completed. But Jesus chose the first day because it is appropriate to give honor to the beginning of creation so that every individual should see in God that he is first.

Now let me finish the natural reason, I shall explain that the Jews, through their own hands, brought evil upon themselves on so many different occasions. At the time of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, when Jews went to seek a lightening of their load from the son of Solomon he answered that he would make their load heavier than before. And this was not an appropriate way for him to answer them, because it is appropriate for someone who is anointed king to treat his people and servants with grace and honor because he does not know what the next day will bring. And the king is king in their name. But the Jews, also because of the wickedness of their nature and their haughtiness, immediately despised the monarchy of the house of David, because, just as they chose new gods, they chose new kings. And they took it upon themselves to take counsel to wait until a king would accede to their requests. As a result fierce battles ensued and the populace became smaller and smaller because evil destroys itself. And of what use was their cleverness of which our lord has spoken if their wisdom was to harm one another and not to strengthen their battles against an enemy. So then, the son of Nebat went to Egypt and he brought Shishak against Solomon and revealed to him the secrets of the Jews and the way in which the city of Jerusalem could easily be conquered. At the same time his people in the

city who were partisans of ben Nebat were sending letters to Shishak as to how he should proceed. When this became known to the partisans of Solomon, they started a war in the middle of the city and they killed one another to the degree that they succeeded in doing what the enemy could not accomplish.

Now your exalted father once got angry at Jews and wanted to destroy them. But a counselor said to him 'Be careful, our lord, because no king ever had an idea like this who subsequently did not fail. However, if you wish to take vengeance on the Jews, order that all of them should be brought together in a single city without any outsider in its midst, and let them set up officers over them. And you shall see that at no time will they have a common agreement and as a result, they will kill one another and your hand will not have touched them.

The second downfall: At the time of a king called Abijab, the king spoke good things to them and they answered that they no longer had any part in the House of David and wars resulted from this. And in those wars there fell 400,000-- and over that 500,000 warriors, all the nobility of Israel.

The third cause at the time of the kings of Judah who sent the king of Egypt a gift consisting of all the vessels of the House of God in order that the king of Egypt might come to his aid. This was also a reason for their downfall because they profaned the holy vessels and delivered them into the hands of strangers. The king of Egypt attacked them and smote them badly and said that the time had come for him to take vengeance on what the Jews had done to his forbears at the shores of the Reed Sea.

The fourth: At the time of the wars of the two kings, one from Judah and one

from Israel, the king of Israel made an accusation that the hands of the priests were involved. Therefore on one day they murdered 20,000 priests. The fifth: at the time of another king named Menachem who decimated the Jewish people. When King Sennacherib heard about their many factions. He attacked them with a great army. Menachem gave him a thousand talons of silver so that he should come to his military aid and he promised to be Sennacherib's servant. But he was reluctant to give him the necessary sum from his treasuries. Instead he put the burden upon the people, who were then forced to sell their children in order to provide that sum of money.

The sixth reason: at the time when Nebuzzareden attacked them, the Talmudic scholars were to write that in those battles the casualties were twice the number of those who had gone forth from Egypt, and that at that time, the Holy Temple was put to fire and 200,000 died from hunger. So it is written in the old Book of Chronicles.

The seventh: the fall of Alexandria, where during the wars over Jerusalem, many Jews came, numerous like the sands, and became were quite prosperous and built a temple. Then they began to lord it, one over the other, and one group sent an emissary to Emperor Trajen that he should attack the other. Then Emperor Trajen came and started a war inside and outside the city and 500,000 died by the sword.

Eighth: this took place at the hands of two brothers who were called Hyrcanus and Aristobulus because the younger did not want to yield the rightful rule to the elder. So Aristobulus sent a present to Pompey, the Roman general, asking him to come to his aid. The gift consisted of a golden vine, 500 golden talons in weight, along with precious stones and rubies. And then Pompey came with a great army. The two brothers compete

inside the city and Pompey on the outside and a large number of people fell, each by his brother's sword. The kingdom was left to Hyrcanus and Aristobulus was brought bound in chains to Rome.

The ninth: at the time of Herod's war, there was also a case of great divisiveness.

The tenth: the fall of the Second Temple, when Titus attacked. Then 400,000 died from famine and Titus noted their stubbornness because Titus was asking from them only that they should raise the Roman's flag on the gate of Jerusalem three times a year so that it should be seen that the Romans had control over them because if they showed such tenacity with their own brethren, all the more so did they show it with foreigners. Let me tell my lord that there was a Jewish man named Menasseh who had a Moabite wife contrary to the order of Ezra, who had decreed that Jews should expel all of their Moabite wives in accordance with their own law. But Menasseh refused and all of the priests gathered together and banished him from the Temple service. Then Menasseh, with the help of his father-in-law, Sanballat, gathered all of the heads of the priests and told them that if they would support his claim to officiate in the Temple service, that would be good but if not, he would do something that all of them would regret and would forever be unable to repair. The priests laughed at his words. Then he went and assembled many people through many bribes because he was very rich, and planned to build a temple on Mount Gerizim. Then Sanballat brought King Alexander a considerable bribe in an effort to persuade, which he did. Now all of the towns nearby were very happy because of the burden upon them when they had to go to Jerusalem, and because of the profit that was derived from the pilgrims who had come there to celebrate a festival.

Now Menasseh was very clever. He sent a courier to all of the surrounding territories saying that whosoever wanted to go to his sanctuary would not have to give obligatory terumah and tithes, only whatever he felt he could voluntarily give. He said that God has no desire of things that are done through compulsion but only through free will offerings. In this way, he attracted the heart of the poor people to him and he built a sanctuary. Then all of the surrounding territories abandoned the sanctuary which was in Jerusalem which God had chosen because the Jews have no law that has any profit motive attached to it. As a result, wars dragged on between the Jews going to Jerusalem and the Jews who were going to the new sanctuary and a large number of people from both sides fell in these wars. And so the true priests used to go forth against the new priests whom Menasseh had created. And at the time of the pilgrim festivals people fell by the thousands. This new sanctuary lasted for about two hundred years until a new king arose named Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus was a very kind and religious king and he broke down that new temple and destroyed it and he killed many people and did fearful things and the Jews returned to Jerusalem. But, in those wars, there fell a third of the entire Jewish populace.

Now I shall tell my lord of the obstinacy of these various groups. Among them were found two brothers, the children of a righteous man among the Jews. The older one did not know as much about the service of the Temple as the younger one, so their father ordered that the younger one should be named High Priest. But the younger one did not want it and said that his older brother should be named the High Priest and that is the way it was for a period of time. In the course of time, the younger one had a change of mind.

So he sought a strategy to bring his older brother down and remove him from being the High Priest. So he said to him, 'Come, let me show you how the service is to be done. So he dressed his brother in a garment which priests were not accustomed to wear and girded him with a belt that was not the belt of the service but rather looked like the garment and the belt of the clothing that women wear. And, in this way, he brought his brother to the altar. He then went to the priests who were in the Temple and said to them, 'Just look at him, for my brother has a lover with whom he is living out of wedlock and this is her garment and her belt which he had sworn that on the day he would become the High Priest, he would wear as a sign of his love for her.' Then all the priests arose to kill his brother, but he begged mercy from them and asked them to first listen to what he had to say. So he told them of the stratagem of his brother and it was found that he was telling the truth. So they ran after his brother to kill him, but he took refuge in the house of the king and from there they sought him out. And from there he went to Alexandria in Egypt, built a sanctuary there and was appointed the High Priest in that sanctuary. And that sanctuary stood for about two hundred years."

Said the King, "I am surprised how all the details regarding the Jews are stuck in your memory."

Said Thomas, "Perhaps because of this my lord will say that I am one of them. But the truth of the matter is that I preach sermons of rebuke to Christians and I bring a proof from the misfortunes of Jews and a reason for their downfall.

Now I would like to tell my lord two additional reasons. One is that, at first, when the Jews found favor in God's eyes, he used to fight their wars as is known throughout

the book of the Bible. Therefore they did not learn the strategies of war because they were not needed. And therefore it is said concerning them, 'neither a shield nor a sword will be seen.' However, when they said 'God hid his face' from them and they were left bare on all sides, they did not know about the weapons of war or their utilization and the will of God was not with them. As a result they were left defenseless and kept falling like sheep without a shepherd. The second reason is that they did not have the machinery of war to demolish the walls which the Romans and the Greeks had erected. Likewise they did not have the fearful battering rams. Also, in the case of elephants with towers on their backs, since the Jews had not experienced them nor seen them at any time, they did not know how to protect themselves from their damage. They said, to one another, 'look at those strange beasts that they had never heard from before' because they thought that they were beasts of the field."

So the king answered and said, "It is known that something which people have never seen, they cannot imagine the reality of what they are. We find that in ancient times that men riding on horses would come down from a certain mountain to a plain to rob and pillage the people in the plain and these people, since they had never seen someone riding a horse, imagined that the combination was the form of a living creature, from the middle up the form of a man, and that the man and the beast were one body. They called this combination centaurs. This continued until the great hero Hercules passed by and when he saw the centaurs, he laughed at the people of the valley and he pursued the centaurs and showed them that they were men riding on horses. In one war, we had a wagon with a great battering stone and we put it in front of the gate of the city

and we ran with it and the poor people who were in the city thought that it was a wild animal and they fled. So we entered the city and we conquered it. But what should I say, that the Jews did not know what this was all about? That is a lie because the great Josephus wrote that when Titus ordered that they should bring the iron weapons to the wall, a young man came forth and dug underneath the wheels of the wagons and he placed sulphur and pitch there and set them to fire. As a result, the iron rams were burned and all of the people who were guarding them. After that, they brought forth the three iron rams that remained Titus said that four young men had come out from Jerusalem whose names were Tachtius the Galilean, Magnus the Hebronite, Jerome the Samaritan, and Arias the Jerusalemite. They approached the Romans, killed all of the guards and inflicted a great blow on the Roman's camp. And they came at the Romans like a man comes at his maidservant until the Roman army retreated. Then they set fire to the rams. So how should I say that Jews did not know and that these instruments appeared to them like a wild beast? Now in the war of Antiocous, a young man came forth and stuck a sword in the belly of the great elephant because Mattathias had said that if someone could manage to kill the elephant then the tower on it would fall down. So this proves that they knew that it was a tower. So the initial query to this is a query that does not admit any doubt but at least let us know why God banished them from his house."

So Thomas answered, "The reason is that they had brought a foreign god into the house of their God. Therefore, their appropriate recompense was that they should go to the territory of the foreign god and serve him there. And this is known from the words of Jeremiah. The Torah also says 'you shall there serve foreign gods.' Then they went to

Babylonia and there they stayed for seventy years. And I have a very subtle thought regarding this. Why seventy years? This is because of the influence of the planets, for the influence of the planets adds up to this number, and then they return to their original rotation. That is, the years of Saturn are eleven, the years of Jupiter are ten, the years of Mars are seven, the years of the Sun are ten, the years of Venus are nine, the years of Mercury are twelve, the years of the Moon are nine. And thus the Jews remained in their captivity for the years of all of them together because they served all of them together."

Said the king, "And now that they do not have idol worship, why are they being punished for such a long time?"

Said Thomas, "Let it be known to our lord that the sins between any person and his fellow human being are much more severe than the sins between a human being and God because those sins effect the social order of cities and world peace. Now, the Christian is very careful about robbery and deceit and taking interest and the like, but with regard to the sins between them and God they are not careful and there are even Christians who pray only once a year. But with the Jew, it is just the opposite. Because who among the Jews would miss a single prayer? But on the other hand, with regard to thievery and deceit and robbery, they are not very careful. Therefore, God who hates robbery has punished them. And their redemption has been delayed; they have no Messiah and the fools keep calling for him at the end of every Sabbath."

So the King said to him, "So why do they call for the Messiah over wine?"

Said Thomas, "I do not have a reason for it but perhaps the Messiah can be enticed by their wine. And as for the reason why the Temple was destroyed, let me tell

my lord that what happened to the Temple is what essentially happened to our Messiah because Jesus came to atone for the sin of the first man and he received death on account of him, and therefore the Temple came to atone for the sin of Israel and it was burned on account of them?"

Said the King, "The answer that you have given is just as strange as your previous answer because who ever saw a king whose servants sinned against him and he then killed his son in order to atone for their sin or burned his palace."

Said Thomas, "The case of the Messiah is not the same because if he accepted death, only the flesh accepted it while he went immediately to his father who was in heaven and he remained fully alive before him forever. And when he died, he was not really killed except in appearance."

Said the King, "We have spoken enough about matters regarding Jews and what you have said is also appropriate in the case of the sanctuary. But I also have conceived another query because even on the day of anger and rebuke, God remembered their love; and even though his intention was to banish them as nature had condemned them for their sin as you have said. Nevertheless, God did not wish for the Temple to remain in the hands of strangers. All the more so because those sacrifices were appropriate only for the people who had left Egypt. May the God of truth, who knows everything in truth, be praised. But we will speak of matters in a rational way and not deal with their essential theological truth. But in any case, I am very happy by the revelation that there is no truth to what people charge the Jews with doing. And he who seeks evil against someone who has not sinned, evil will come to him says God."

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