

## THE POSTSECULAR SITUATION OF JEWISH THEOLOGY

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**S**IMPLY TO report the situation I discern in contemporary Jewish theology often leads to grave problems in communication; for in considerable measure it is taking a direction substantially opposed to that of contemporary Protestant thought and at even further variance from most Roman Catholic thought. Hence I believe it to be almost as important to set the context within which Jewish theology is operating today as to depict its major concerns. I hope that will account for what I feel as a grievous omission from this article,<sup>1</sup> namely, a consideration of what Jewish thinkers are learning from their Christian colleagues. I think there is still a good deal of which we are the beneficiaries, but I cannot say that the dialogue with Christian theology is, at the moment, either central to, or deeply influential in, Jewish thinking. Within the limits of this article, then, I must confine myself to what is transpiring within our community. Yet I do so with the clear hope that our apparently insular experience will be of direct relevance to the current revolution in Roman Catholicism. Indeed, I have permitted myself this restricted focus because it is my conviction that the experience of Judaism in the modern world has much to teach Roman Catholics in their present state of change and anxiety.

Jewish theology does not begin with a consideration of dogma, for Judaism has none—not even that one. Every time a scholar has taken the field to claim that Judaism has or does not have dogmas, he has drawn the heavy fire of equally learned and admired teachers. It is, then, quite difficult to know where Jewish theology does start and, in our present age of methodological skepticism, taking the first step has become the most difficult of all our acts of faith. Yet I venture to suggest, with all the ages of Jewish history stretched out before us by several generations of modern historians, that Jewish theology can most easily be understood when approached through its social context. That is, from biblical times on, Jewish faith and reflection upon Jewish faith are intimately connected with the Jewish people. And because they are a people like all other peoples, though covenanted to God, it

<sup>1</sup> Originally presented as a paper in the Jewish-Christian lecture series cosponsored by the Pope Pius XII Religious Education Center, Detroit, Mich., and the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee.

is in their social and historic experiences primarily that they have come to know who they are and whither they are destined. Thus the Bible is not so much a book of theology or spiritual exercises as it is an account of the history of the world, of the Hebrew people, of the prophets who arose to criticize their behavior in history, and of various other books reflective of man's place in that process. Moreover, it is quite clear that the sort of abstract, rigorous thinking about the content of faith which we normally call theology is neither native nor central to the Jewish religious experience. Aside from Philo, who was unknown to traditional Judaism, theology—or philosophy, as we often prefer to call the medieval writings—comes into Judaism only in the last thousand years. With the passing of the great Moslem Jewish centers it fades out of Jewish intellectual life for several centuries, only to re-emerge in the modern world. Apparently, then, it is less an inner need of Judaism than a Jewish response to a given social situation, namely, being immersed in a culture in which Greek-style rationality is highly esteemed. Thus Philo is a reaction to the Alexandrian Hellenistic culture, just as Maimonides and his medieval colleagues are a result of the hybridization with Islamic society in the period of its philosophical creativity. And Jewish theology today is awakened and shaped by the emergence of the Jew into the modern Western world.

One can hardly overestimate the importance of understanding the process we call the emancipation, if one is to understand modern Judaism or the modern Jew. The Jew was emancipated from a situation of physical, social, and economic segregation. From roughly 315 until the time of the first Crusade, the Jews were degraded but lived in relative personal safety. With the Crusades, riot, forced conversions, expulsions, and other forms of terror were added to Jewish existence. About 1500, what had for long been Jewish sections in a town were often walled in and provided with a gate behind which the Jews were locked each sundown—the infamous ghetto. That originally Italian invention became the symbol for the whole pattern of living imposed on the Jews until the time of the French Revolution. With the proponents of liberty, equality, and fraternity in power, freedom was extended even to the Jews—though it took a debate of nearly three years to agree to it. Then slowly, and by fits and starts, with much variation in given areas, the Jew began to come into Western society as an equal.

As the transition took place, the cultural shock was enormous. The Jew was now to wear the society's clothes, speak its language, follow its manners, accept its sense of good taste, read its literature, hear its music, go to its universities, participate in its economic endeavors, and

be a citizen in its social undertakings. A tradition of fifteen centuries of segregation, reinforced by a virulent, irrational, and often deeply unconscious hatred, was now, in theory, radically altered. And the Jew, having been given these rights, was expected to take full advantage of them, adapt himself to his new social context, and be a credit to those liberals who had fought so hard for him and his rights.

Wherever the emancipation was at all honest, the Jews responded with eagerness and will. They rushed from the ghetto into the modern world. But the authoritative leaders of the Jewish religion were not equipped personally or institutionally for such radical change. The heartland of Jewish existence was, in the nineteenth century, Eastern and Central Europe, and there simply was no emancipation there. The rabbis in an unaltered social situation could not see any need for great change or even flexibility. Worse, the last few ghetto centuries had been so oppressive that the Jews had been robbed of their energy and sapped of their spirit. It had taken about all they had to survive with dignity. Even in the West they could not cope with the rapidity of the change and the newness of the arrangements. Of course, one should also keep in mind that we are not speaking of a hierarchical, structured, institutionalized pattern of authority but an essentially atomized, localized, and informal one. Almost everyone was afraid or unwilling to institute change. The authorities stood pat in what they said Judaism demanded of Jews even in the new social situation. As a result, the Jewish community overwhelmingly, as it moved into the modern world, deserted traditional Jewish law and its authoritative interpreters.

Hindsight, focused through the lenses of the sociology of change, does not see the many Jewish conversions to Christianity or the wholesale assimilation of Jews to the Western cultural style as surprising. Considering what the majority was now offering this tiny group, what strikes me as remarkable is that so many of them insisted on remaining Jews. They somehow wanted the best of both worlds, the modern and the Jewish, and that is the continuing problem of all Jewish thought. How is it possible to reconcile the freedom which is so central to the contemporaneous ethos with a religious tradition that one does not create but inherits? How is it possible to view religion as a matter of the most inner personal commitment and determination, and yet have it come to one heavy with historical freight and institutional rigidity? For the Jew those questions were doubly poignant; for without the modern commitment to freedom, he would still be in the ghetto. And if he elected to continue in his Judaism, he had identified himself with

a religion that might be tolerated in the modern world but that was, at the same time, a peculiar and alienating religion to hold.

The result of this position, more intuited than thought through for some decades, was the birth of nontraditional forms of Judaism. First Reform Judaism, and then Conservative Judaism, came into being with varying mixes of freedom and tradition. In reaction to them, a self-conscious Orthodoxy emerged and the basic institutional manifestations of present-day Judaism were established. That is to describe the situation in its religious aspects only. What is equally important for our twentieth century and, particularly, our American situation is the concomitant secularization which Jewry underwent.

#### THE PROCESS OF SECULARIZATION

Harvey Cox has identified the two major spurs to secularity as the city and the university. The process of emancipation is intimately involved with both of these. For the Jew, prohibited from farming in the Middle Ages, the town and then later the city became his normal habitat in Western Europe. And it was the towns, growing in size and in commerce in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that made it possible for the Jews of Eastern Europe slowly to make their way back into the Western countries from which they had been expelled. So as the towns grew to cities, their Jewish population grew too. And as the cities became increasingly the place where pluralism developed into the modern secular style, the Jews, as they were freed, were immediately involved in it.

To the emancipated Jew the university quickly became the surrogate for the Yeshivah, the advanced academy of Jewish study. All the old Jewish drive and passion for learning was now channeled into modern disciplines, and the result was a burst of productive scholars and professional men that was as remarkable then as it is taken for granted now. But being largely urban dwellers, this increasing proportion of Jewish university graduates led to the thoroughgoing secularization of the modern Jewish community.

One special Jewish motivation needs to be taken into account. Secularity has been particularly congenial to the modern Jewish spirit because it is directly associated with Jews having rights. When states are Christian, as they were in the Middle Ages, the non-Christian has no legitimate place in them. The Jews had to be outsiders in the feudal ages because they could not swear the feudal oaths, based as they were on Christian beliefs. Only as states became secular, only as society made religion a private matter and opened up large nonreligious, that is, sec-

ular areas of existence, could the Jew have a fully authorized place in things. For the Jew secularity has meant belonging, equality, opportunity. No wonder he has embraced it wholeheartedly.

Of course, it needs to be added at once that the secular style is not nearly so strange to the Jewish tradition as it seems to be to some kinds of Christianity. Since the Jews are a people and not a church, their sort of religiosity has always included elements that from a Christian perspective might appear to be secular rather than religious. But since the full dimensions of Jewish folk existence were not finally separable from the covenant with God, then the rather sharp distinction which Christians tend to draw between the religious and the secular are simply not applicable within the Jewish frame of reference. And that is still true today.

It may be of some help to show, first, how that affected the style of modern Jewish religiosity. In two separate but not unrelated areas, it is continually involved with what seem like worldly things. The first of these has to do with the status of Jews. Unless the Jews have rights and are allowed to exercise them fully, the entire enterprise of modern Judaism is a fraud. Hence, in its most central religious manifestations, modern Judaism necessarily is involved in fighting anti-Semitism and working to secure the rights of Jews, and thus by extension of all other minority groups, in the United States. Those are social and political matters, it would seem, but for a Jew they are obviously matters of the most primary religious concern. By the same token, the threat to Jews in other parts of the world is equally a danger to Jews here, so the protection of world Jewry, with all the political implications involved, is a major religious obligation. Thus the Jews of the United States, as Jews elsewhere in the world, become deeply involved in what was Zionism, and today are deeply tied to the State of Israel. This strange sort of spiritual-social mixture, what Martin Buber so perceptively called the theopolitical thrust of biblical religion, may seem odd to Christians who think of religion in rather strictly churchy forms. It is, for Jews, the most authentic way of expressing their peculiar sort of faith.

The other area in which modern Judaism is shaped by the secular style is in its role as mediator of the surrounding culture. It is not just that Judaism takes on some of the forms of the surrounding society, but rather that in the creation of a new, hybrid style of Jewishness the Jew is brought into close contact and personal familiarity with it. Consider the most immediate changes in the synagogue. The liturgy is translated into the vernacular. The organ and the mixed choir are introduced. The rabbi is not only expected to lecture in the vernacular and

cite copiously from modern literature; his training soon requires that he be a university graduate, preferably with Phi Beta Kappa key and ultimately a doctorate. That makes the religion seem modern and supposedly more acceptable. It is equally to be seen as a means of taking a community from its ghetto and getting it to accept the standards of the general culture.

What is less easy to appreciate for those who have not grown up in the Jewish community is the effect of secularization in creating that perplexing yet widely observable creature, the irreligious Jew. Indeed, so many Jews so regularly and so emphatically tell you how little they believe that one sometimes wonders if there are any believing Jews left! Part of that strange phenomenon comes from the fact that Jews, thinking of their pious grandfathers and conscious of their own radically different practice, cannot see themselves as "religious." But a greater part of it derives, I have become convinced, because they do not recognize how large a measure of belief remains in what was, long before Rudolf Bultmann ever coined the term, an emerging demythologization of Judaism.

The urban-dwelling, university-trained, secular-minded Jew can easily think of a dozen good reasons why traditional Jewish belief is no longer tenable in the modern world. He reduces God to nature, law to ethics, sin to error, repentance to psychotherapy or education, Torah to culture, and salvation through commandments to a new society through good politics. He does not give up Judaism for hedonism, self-seeking, or the pursuit of power. In distinctive statistical disproportion, he devotes himself to what, in effect, he considers the best of Judaism, the myths having been cast aside. He is now concerned with high intellectuality, liberal politics, and the pursuit of culture. So many Jews would not be so frequently involved in such activities in all the decades since the emancipation began to take effect, were it not for the fact that in this pattern they see the modernized continuation of traditional Jewish faith. If one wants to see what a thoroughgoing demythologization and politicization of Christianity would lead to, if one would like to weigh all its ultimate virtues and failings, I suggest one take a look at the contemporary American Jewish intellectual. He is, in the flesh, everything Harvey Cox was looking for in the last chapters of *The Secular City*. I shall have more to say about him below.

The most important form this demythologized, secularized Jewishness has taken is Zionism. Here the thrust toward modernity utilized the nineteenth-century form of nationalism and projected it through the twentieth-century historical situation to establish the State of Is-

rael. That state is surely not what traditional Judaism had in mind when it set prayers for the return to Zion, yet in all its modernity it cannot be understood, nor can the concern for it of Jews around the world be understood, unless one can see it as a continuation, in modern transformation, of the Jewish religion. The Zionism that brought the State of Israel into being is largely the creation of Eastern European Jews. If they were to opt for modernity in their special social and political situation, it could not be via the liberalization of the Jewish religion. There was no Reform or Conservatism available to them; for as the Christianity around them was essentially monolithic, so the government and the cultural mood would not tolerate religious innovation. Their only hope to carry through emancipation was to think of themselves in ethnic terms. Like the Ukrainians, the Georgians, the Finns, they wanted the right to develop their language, their culture, and their customs. If some of their number wanted to be religious—and that meant to continue the segregated, inner-directed style of existence—then that was their privilege as part of the folk. But the group itself was now entitled to exercise cultural self-determination, free of clerical control and open to any truth that the modern world was ready to teach it. It was only one step to full-scale political claims, that the people should go back to its ancient homeland and there re-establish itself as a sovereign nation. And with the destruction of European Jewry by Hitler, the desperation of the Jewish survivors and the guilt of the European nations somehow made that possible.

The State of Israel claims to be thoroughly secular and the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants are nonbelievers by traditional standards. Yet the ethos of the State is a far cry from simple nationalism. The Israelis expect of themselves and their government a high standard of ethics and a thoroughgoing commitment to enhancing their social welfare. And I would judge that world Jewry takes the greatest pride, not in any material Israeli accomplishment, certainly not in any military victory, but in the high humaneness the Israelis have exhibited in the midst of the most excruciating power realities. As the Bible again and again makes perfectly clear, it is one thing to write or preach about ethics and another thing to have to confront the terrifying pressures of history, knowing one stands under the judgment of the Almighty.

Again, if one wishes to see what might happen to Christianity were it radically demythologized and radically committed to social and political existence, then one might well turn to the State of Israel. And seeing it now as a special case of emancipation and transformation of Judaism,

I think one will be able to appreciate why what appears to be so secular by Christian standards, is, by Jewish standards, still firmly part of the Jewish religious tradition.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN THOUGHT

In all this process of modernization philosophy has played a role quite different from what it has in traditional Roman Catholic thought. There philosophy has been (at least till the recent past) the handmaid of theology. It has been studied and cultivated as a means of establishing the heritage of the Church. The magisterium has gone so far as to commend the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, dynamically viewed, as being of perennial significance. Thus philosophy, so to speak, has been a major instrument of maintaining the establishment. A major problem in contemporary Catholic thought, as I read it, is how to find a philosophy which will allow for movement away from the established positions of the Church and open up the rich areas of personal freedom and existential depth which are so important to modern religiosity.

In modern Judaism philosophy has been the means of directing change and validating flexibility. It could serve that role because, as we have noted, it was not part of the core of Jewish religiosity nor did the tradition rely on it to any great extent. Hence, when the Jews came into the modern world and discovered philosophies which they felt were reasonably congenial to Judaism while being acceptably modern, they utilized such thought systems to explain why an old tradition could now take a new form without contradicting itself. The earliest major accomplishment of this sort was the German idealist interpretation of Judaism created by Hermann Cohen before World War I. Here the neo-Kantian emphasis on ethics, and the need for an idea of God in the system to connect ethics to nature, became the essence of Judaism. According to Cohen, what is permanent in Judaism, then, is ethical monotheism. What changes is the customs and practices in which this fundamental truth is expressed, taught, and transmitted from generation to generation. In Hermann Cohen, and in his more religiously oriented disciple Leo Baeck, modern Judaism was given a firmly universal ethical cast which distinguishes it to this day.

In the United States, idealistic philosophy was uprooted by various forms of pragmatism and naturalism in the twenties and thirties. These found their Jewish exponent in the person of Mordecai Kaplan. Using the newly emerging science of sociology as his foundation, Kaplan created a philosophy of Judaism which based everything on the Jewish people. This allowed him to remedy a serious defect in the theories of



the idealistic interpreters, who could never quite explain why, when all truth was universal, one needed to be particularly Jewish, with all its minority handicaps. For Kaplan there now seemed a simple scientific answer to this question. Sociology showed how the group into which one was born shaped one and gave one values by which to live. A Jew, being born into the Jewish people, should normally utilize its modes of expression. Not to do so was already to be sick. Yet, at the same time, the Jews had been guilty of not recognizing that they were a people in the full sense of the word. They had been talking as if they were a church. What they needed to do was to rebuild a full-scale culture, or civilization, as Kaplan preferred to call it. This would include all the elements that a folk normally had in its way of life, the most significant of which would be its religion. Hence one could well find one's place in this sort of Judaism without making religious belief vital, though if it were completely left out something would be lacking. This sort of ethnic humanism has great appeal to those Jews who still think that Judaism's major problem is adjusting to the truths revealed by science.

At the present moment, however, it would seem that science has become more of a problem than religion. That has led to the current popularity of various forms of Jewish existentialism which derive from Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. The former, particularly, has become something of a cliché among Jewish college youth as among students generally, and it is difficult in conversations with them to long avoid such terms as "I-Thou," "relationship," or "real person." As contrasted with the American shift from German idealism to science-modeled philosophies, the existentialists in Germany came into being through their insistence on replacing mind as the medium and measure of all things, with the whole self, including rationality, but integrating it in the person entire. That brought about a substantial transformation of religious talk. Now ideas, and most specifically ideas of God, could no longer be the major concern of theologians. The problem was not conceiving Him, an obviously impossible task, but learning to relate to Him and only then reflecting on what such relationship meant. That sounds more traditionally religious, even pious, than what previous modern philosophies of religion had made possible. The same sort of revivification was practiced with regard to most other religious terms and that led on to seeing new virtue in older forms of practice. The continuing appeal of Jewish existentialism is its central emphasis on the person in a time of social depersonalization and its mode of clarifying how belief is primarily a noncerebral matter without at the same time

being superstition. In a situation newly awakened to the possibilities of faith, such teaching will continue to have much to say.

In a very real way, all that is history. To be sure, it is still the content of what most thinking Jews talk about and it would surely account for the overwhelming bulk of most courses on Jewish thought being given in congregations or universities. But if we are concerned to know something of what is going on at the moment and what then is likely to be emerging in the coming decade, then we must move on beyond these great, accomplished systems to the area of experiment and creativity. There is great difficulty in doing so. I do not know how one could claim to give a reasonably objective account of what is going on. The judgment as to which efforts are significant and which are not is highly subjective. The paucity of the people involved makes such judgment more, not less, difficult, for it is difficult to know who that is not now in the public eye might soon emerge as a major figure. And being myself one of the dozen or so professionally concerned theologians and partisan to a position I am seeking to create, my judgment may be skewed. Nonetheless, while I may be wrong in what I am about to say, I think it fair to add that I am reasonably well informed about what is going on and do not refuse to listen to what may be happening that goes in directions uncongenial to me.

What seems to be central to the serious Jewishness of an increasing minority in our community is their recognition that they cannot remain as dependent upon the surrounding culture as they once were. The point is not that the culture has nothing to offer them nor that they do not want to be acquainted with it. Remember, we are speaking precisely about Jews who emerged from the ghetto, who were delirious about the new autonomy, and who secularized themselves thoroughly. This is no obscurantist insistence on remaining in the past as society moves ahead. Rather, having been through all that the society has to offer, having sampled all its goods, indeed having contributed in overwhelming measure to the creation of a better civilization, has now brought some Jews to believe that traditional Judaism may have something to teach in its own right, that rather than always genuflecting to what modern man and modern science and modern culture say, one of the most useful things Judaism could do would be to stand up to them, correct their excesses, and shape their values.

The Jews of the United States, about whom we are speaking, have special historic reason for that. One must always remember, in speaking about this community, that it has undergone the emancipation process quite recently. The vast bulk of American Jews derive from

Eastern and Central European immigrants who came to this country from 1880 to 1925. In their countries there had been no meaningful emancipation. Some of them had known the modernity of the large cities and some (fewer) had been to the gymnasium or university. Mostly, however, their style was that of a long segregated Jewry; the shtetl style, that of the small Jewish village. It was very often only their children who, having arrived in the United States, truly made their way towards a free form of living. Thus the twenties and the thirties may well be characterized as the decades in which Jewish acculturation substantially took place. The forties brought war, heightened social dislocation, and a subsequent upward movement of a great deal of the American population. In the fifties and sixties the emancipation of the Jews in the United States was pretty well realized and the results were felt in every branch of American culture.

#### THE POSTSECULAR STANCE

The major hopes of the past twenty-five years are now being brought into question. For the overwhelming segment of American Jewry it was hope in secularity. They were willing to give up much of their Jewishness to benefit from the many good things that the American style had to offer. Now they have come to realize that, for all its benefits, there are many things wrong with the American society. What is so painful is the consciousness that we are not dealing with a specific problem or group of them. There have always been problems and it was not blindness to them that made the secular way of life so attractive. Rather it is obvious that many of the problems are inherent in the system itself, that the structure of our society, for all its greatness, is also productive of evil. And the root difficulty is that there is little or nothing in the secular approach to things today which is productive and empowering of human value. The civilization is in crisis because all its major instrumentalities are value-free or even antihuman. No amount of going to college or reading books or attending the theater or buying paintings will give us the kind of human beings we need. The dream that the cultured man would automatically be an ethical man, in some biblical sense of that term, has collapsed.

What is slowly giving way with it is the old religious accommodation to the culture. We really believed that we could win autonomous, modern man to religious faith and practice by changing the old, imposed forms of our faith and making them essentially voluntary and self-commending. There was a period of time when the innovations were met with great enthusiasm and it seemed as if a new mood had

been created in the ancient faith. But our experience in the long run has been deadly. Orthodoxy, Conservatism, and Reform alike show pervasive apathy as the standard tone. Nonobservance of whatever standards are set is common, and an air of irrelevance is generally felt. But now it is difficult to believe that further modernization will solve anything. Having gone from monophonic to polyphonic music, from the cantor unaccompanied to adding mixed choirs and organs, from Slavic modes in minor keys to Western ones in major keys and thence on to atonal compositions, how can we now hope that we will solve something by introducing guitars, classical or electric? They obviously have their place in youth or experimental liturgies, but as solutions to the problem of a general lack of religiosity, we cannot remain so hopeful. Our experience is that, although liturgical and hierarchical and clerical tinkering may be useful, indeed necessary, to make it possible for modern men to take their religion seriously, they themselves do not resolve our problems. Having tried them all, the time comes when one must turn back to the questions of faith and belief. And when the culture can no longer be the surrogate for the old tradition, the time has come to bring all one's tattered social attainments with one and take another look at the commitments of one's fathers. That is the postsecular situation of what I see as the most significant minority working at Jewish theology today.

One of the things that gained Abraham Heschel justified renown was his being among the first to recognize this problem. Having made his way from the highly traditional, Hasidic milieu in which he was brought up, through the German intellectual world in which he gained his Ph.D. without losing his deep faith, Heschel made the further transition from Europe to the United States in the late thirties and not long thereafter emerged as a major interpreter of Judaism to a postwar America. His medium has attracted as much attention as his message. He writes with extraordinary grace, a gift most admirable in a man who wants to open us up to the inner reality of faith. Heschel is willing to reason with us modern men and it is remarkable how well and how deeply he knows our problems with belief. But he does not share them. Rather his own faith, for all his modern understanding and his vast modern learning, remains substantially that of traditional Judaism. So though he can illumine the assumptions of our skepticism and bring to the surface the unconscious presuppositions of our doubt, he never really responds to them. He can show us how for a believer these are not the real questions, and with his magic style he can momentarily open up to us his realm of certitude. Yet though he has

touched many in the American Jewish community, he has persuaded very few. But if he cannot make a sophisticated traditionalism acceptable to American Jewry, it is difficult to believe that anyone else can.

That sets the dilemma for the contemporary Jewish theologian of this postsecular stripe. Cohen, Baeck, Kaplan, Buber, and Rozenzweig, all in their various ways allow the culture surrounding Judaism, mostly in the form of a general philosophy they accept or devise, to determine the content of Judaism in at least some critical areas. Entering the seventies, one must look back at them and say that they trusted modern education and modern intellect too much. Heschel, on the other hand, has accommodated it so little that, though we yearn for greater Jewish authenticity, we do not hear him speaking to us. We carry our secularization with us as we turn back to the tradition, but we know that without being firmly rooted in something like traditional Jewish faith our secularity will lead us and our society to human bankruptcy.

Since that is the core problem, as I see it, of contemporary Jewish thought, I am unable to dictate its solution. I can, however, point out three areas in which some directions begin to take shape.

The first of these has to do with belief in God, and it centers about the utter collapse of the death-of-God movement in the Jewish community. That was not primarily a philosophic question among us. There are occasional complaints against the philosophic adequacy of Jewish language about God, but nothing comparable to the sort of furor created among Protestants by van Buren or among Catholics by Dewart. Not having taken philosophy that seriously even in modern times, Jews were, on the whole, not terribly shocked that empiricist-oriented philosophers found it difficult to speak meaningfully about a nonempirical God. What did arouse the Jewish community, quite characteristically, was the question of God in history. The Holocaust under Hitler could somehow be ignored by Christian scholars talking about the reality of God, but for Jews it was the central question. Auschwitz and all the other death camps became an unanswerable protest against God's goodness or His very existence.

Those scars still remain. No amount of subsequent Jewish accomplishment can assuage them. But to say that God was dead, or neutral, or Nothing, in a somewhat devouring sense, may have explained the matter cognitively, but it also destroyed the possibility of meaningful human existence. If there is no standard of value at the very heart of the universe, then Auschwitz is permitted. If anything, it is a reasonable indication of the reality in which man finds himself. By the same token, our utter revulsion at what took place is utterly unreasonable

if the world is neutral or devouring and each man has as much right to do what he wants as any other. If it is our sense of protest which brings us to pronounce God dead, then we have contradicted ourselves. For having said the obsequies over Him, we have similarly deprived ourselves of any fundamental ground on which to oppose Him. That may be a paradox, but it will not be the first one in Jewish faith. We need God in order to be able to stand up against Him; without God there is no reason to be righteously indignant about anything men do.

More, we know that if we now deserted God and the Jewish tradition He so centrally formed, we would be giving the worst possible reaction to the Hitler barbarity. Though Hitler could not succeed in putting an end to Jewry, we would now be doing that for him. The absurdity of that response seems reasonably clear to most Jews, though they rarely articulate it. They know they must go on being Jews and carry forward the Jewish tradition. Again paradoxically, that which should have been the most cogent reason for giving up Judaism now becomes a powerful commandment to continue it.

That tells us something about such commitment as remains among us Jews. The death-of-God movement and Hitler have, in effect, radicalized some Jews. They can no longer feel at ease in the old agnosticisms. Believing in human value as they do, concerned with Jewish continuity as they are, they must now ask, what is the ground for such tenacity? That is, it seems to me, the way that contemporary Jews are reaching for a God whom they may not understand but whom they find, partially to their own surprise, they still believe in.

The second focus of present theological concern is the people of Israel and, more specifically, the State of Israel. Modern religious thought has been quite personally centered and quite universally directed. At the moment, those traits have brought about a crisis in the validity of any religious institutions. Persons can be religious without them and service ought to reach out to all mankind. Hence particular institutions seem anachronistic. In the same way, though for a much longer period, the peculiar social form of Judaism has been under modern attack. The problem is that the Jews are not a church but a folk, a people, an ethnic group. That may seem strange to Christian eyes, but it is clearly and quite unambiguously what our Bible proclaims the Jews to be. The defense of Jewish particularity, of the reasons for maintaining and continuing the Jewish group, especially when it is so tiny and disliked a minority, has been difficult in the face of modern individualism and universalism. But the Holocaust and the State of Israel have made clear that a good deal of the objection to

Jewish particularity was quite spurious, often downright anti-Semitic, even when it emanated from those born Jewish.

One cannot understand the mood of the contemporary Jewish community if one does not realize how deeply they are committed to the fact that there will be no more Holocausts. The Jews under Hitler so trusted Western governments that they co-operated in what turned out to be their own destruction. And the Jews of the United States have now discovered that their government knew about the death camps but was not willing to do anything about them. Facing a hostile world, martyrdom has now been removed as a Jewish religious option. The fundamental Jewish duty is rather to survive. In the face of what the world has done to the Jews, in the face of what the world continues to be today, that needs no further justification. Just by being in history, the Jews are already carrying out a high mission. By refusing to disappear, they are already a unique testimony among the nations.

But all that holds doubly true of the Jews of the State of Israel. It is hard to think of religious imperatives more central to the contemporary religious consciousness than that the Jews of the State of Israel, the survivors of Hitler, the refugees whom no nation would admit, the refuse of a dozen backward and inhumane states, now brought to full humanity by their own efforts and against tremendous odds, have a right to live. And other Jews have a duty to see to it that they do. That seems like politics, and it is. Only, in the Jewish covenant with God, because the Jews are called to be a people and participate in the real history of the peoples of the earth, we are simultaneously dealing with a religious question. The two cannot be separated, the one from the other. So threats to exterminate the State of Israel and all its inhabitants are a major threat to adherents of the Jewish religion everywhere, and the refusal of the Israelis to become brutalized or militarized in the face of the stark power realities confronting them is one of the major glories of contemporary Jewry.

Third, the collapse of confidence in the culture has opened up the possibility that the old Jewish way of life may have more to commend it than the generations panting for Americanism ever realized. It is difficult to see in the culture surrounding us any institution which will produce the masses of consistently humane people that the Judaism which passed through the modern experience did and does produce, at least for some little time yet. But if those values are to be transmitted with sufficient power to resist the pernicious effects of the American culture, then perhaps they need not only the grounding of Jewish belief but the warmth and habituation of a rather traditional Jewish practice.

One sees this possibility most dramatically in the number of young Jews who consciously choose to be Orthodox. This is not something simply inherited or carried out because they do not know any other possibilities, but rather because, having seen whither the civilization is tending, they want to assert a full-scale Jewish authenticity. They voluntarily take upon themselves the full yoke of the commandments and carry them out with a will reinforced by knowledge concerning them. They are a small number as the millions of American Jews go. But they are such a repudiation of the vulgar antitraditionalism of much of American Jewry some years back that they are highly significant. One sees the same phenomenon among individuals and small handfuls of Jews in the Conservative and Reform movements as well. One is no longer surprised in community after community to run into the family or the few couples who want to know what it might mean to commit themselves to Jewish existence and how they might best express it. They are nothing like a decisive number nor even recognizable enough to become a nucleus for change in the Jewish community. But they exist. They seem serious about their Jewish intentions. And their number seems to be increasing.

They are the social reality to which postsecular Jewish theology is addressing itself. With all the noise being made by liturgical swingers and institutional revolutionaries, by theological anarchists and professional mourners at the death of religion, it is good to know such people can arise. And for such as me, it is God's grace to be permitted to work at a theology adequate to their modern but authentic Jewishness.