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Menorah Review (No. 10, Spring, 1987)

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MENORAH

REVIEW • THE JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • NUMBER 10 • SPRING 1987

JEWES BY BIRTH AND JEWES BY CHOICE: CONVERSION IN JEWISH HISTORY

By Robert M. Seltzer

The following article is an excerpt from the lecture presented by Robert M. Seltzer for the Selma and Jacob Brown Annual Lecture held last October. The annual lecture is sponsored by the Judaic Culture Advisory Committee and the Judaic Studies Program of VCU. Dr. Seltzer is professor of history at Hunter College and the Graduate School of the City University of New York.

Under the influence of the modern threat of assimilation, popular Jewish history has tended to be acutely aware of events and developments that have resulted in the disappearance of Jews into other national groups or religions. But the drifting away of Jews or their forced conversion or massacre obscures a contrary movement: the absorption of non-Jews into the people of Israel. Non-Jews have become Jews for reasons ranging from military conquest by Jewish kings to the desire to marry Jews to admiration of Jewish ethical monotheism and a decision to accept the yoke of the Torah in the fullest sense. The boundary separating the people of Israel from the nations of the world have been permeable not in one but in two directions. In every period of Jewish history there have been those who became Jews by choice as well as by birth. It is the historian's task to relate the factors affecting entrance of gentiles into the people of Israel to the changing circumstances of the Jewish people and the Jewish religion.

The Hebrew Bible may indirectly testify to the integration into Israel of inhabitants of the land of Canaan who were not born into one of the

Israelite tribal groups. There has been a considerable debate in recent biblical studies over the extent to which the Israelite tribal confederacy of the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE contained groups who joined the nucleus of those who entered the Israelite covenant with its God in the wilderness during the previous century. An indication of individuals in the process of absorption is legislation concerning the *ger* or resident alien (in contrast to the *nohri* or foreigner). Thus Exodus 12:48 allows a circumcised *ger* to share in the paschal lamb, like the native Israelites. Deuteronomy 23:2-8 specifies that no Ammonite or Moabite was to be admitted to the assembly of the Lord and that the children of the third generation of Edomites and Egyptians were to be so admitted. Regulation of who could or could not enter testifies that there was such entering.

Why is there no description in the Hebrew Bible of the absorption of Canaanites in the biblical narratives as testimony to the power of the God of Israel? A prominent theme of the so-called Deuteronomistic ideology, which played a leading role in the reform of Israelite religion during the reign of late seventh-century king Josiah, was that the descendants of those present at Mount Horeb in the generation of the Exodus were bound by the Torah of Moses. The assumption that the population of Judah in Josiah's time was mainly offspring of those who had accepted the covenant voluntarily for themselves and their future generations at Mount Horeb presupposes the factual absorption of large numbers of the various nations in Canaan over the intervening six centuries. Two centuries later this Deuteronomistic doctrine had consequences quite different than its earlier intent. Then it gave rise to the campaign of Ezra in the mid-fifth century against intermarriage with the people of the land, who were not

considered to be descendants of those present at the making of the original covenant. Apparently in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, there was yet no mechanism through which admirers of the God of Israel could be brought *en masse* into the community, if the remnant of Israel was to remain truly the Israel of God.

Such a defensive stance was hardly characteristic of other biblical writings of the exile and post-exilic period, including Deutero-Isaiah and the book of Ruth. Eschatological passages in the prophets hold that it is a goal of history that all humanity will join in the worship of the God of Israel: "And the Lord will be king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one" (Zechariah 24:9). Isaiah and other prophets anticipated that the other nations would continue to exist alongside the people of Israel even after the whole world acknowledged the kingship of God. The salvation of humankind was not contingent on everyone's eventually becoming an Israelite. But there were those who, in the post-exilic era, "joined themselves to the Lord" (Isaiah 56:3-8), or who "became" or "acted like" Jews, such as the Persians in Esther 8:17. These new Israelites were harbingers of the quite different period in the history of conversion to Judaism that was to follow.

After the successful conclusion of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids, the Jewish historian Josephus relates that the Hasmonean rulers of the newly independent state of Judea employed forced conversion to cement the loyalty of the new population. Certain Pharisaic sages of the end of the first century BCE and the first century CE are said to have placed a very high value on proselytism; indeed, Matthew 23:15 attributes a veritable passion for proselytizing to the Pharisees. The traditions concerning Hillel dwell on

his receptivity to even the nudniks among the prospective proselytes (Shabbat 31a). In contrast, it seems that Jesus of Nazareth and his circle of disciples were not interested in making converts (Matthew 10:6, 15:24).

Josephus and several Roman writers allude to considerable Jewish proselytism in the diaspora in the last century BCE and the first century CE. Individual diaspora converts of high status include Queen Helena of Adiabene and her sons, Flavius Clemens (a nephew of the Roman emperor Domitian), and Fulvia (the wife of a Roman senator). The Roman historian Tacitus speaks of this appeal as an unfortunate matter but, by doing so, adds confirmation to its existence. Similar references can be found in the writings of Horace, Juvenal, Cicero, and Dio Cassius.

The Hebrew term *ger* was rendered by the Greek *proselutos*, one that has arrived, the stranger or sojourner, in the Septuagint, the translation of the Torah into Greek produced in second-century BCE Alexandria. *Proselutos* soon lost the connotation of changed geographical residence and came to designate someone who had arrived at a new and God-pleasing life. The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo defined the proselyte as the person who abandons polytheism, who recognizes and worships the one God, and who therefore conducts his life according to the best virtues. To Philo the proselyte is the equal of native Jews and superior to those who are Jews only by birth and not by virtue and observance.

In talmudic law, conversion to Judaism was conceived of as legal rebirth, the proselyte being considered to have terminated his ties with his former family. Thus, if he died without heirs born to him after his conversion, his property was ownerless. The legal status of the proselyte in the Talmud was equal to the born Jew, apart from some theoretical restrictions on the right of a proselyte to serve as judge in criminal cases and of female proselytes to marry a *kohen*.

The attitude toward proselytes in rabbinic literature is overwhelmingly positive. *Gerei tsedek*, righteous proselytes who accept the full responsibilities of a Jew, are singled out for honor in the benediction for the righteous and the pious in benedic-

tions recited three times daily (Megillah 17b). Prospective converts were to be warned that "this people was debased, oppressed, and degraded more than all other peoples," but if they persisted they were to be accepted with joy: "To Whom are you cleaving? Happy are you! To Him Who spoke and the world came into being" (Yevamot 47a-b). The making of proselytes was a most honorable task for Israel, an imitation of Abraham. The third-century rabbi Johanan and Eleazar were cited as teaching that "The Holy One, Blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations only in order to increase their numbers with the addition of proselytes" (Pesahim 87b). On the other hand, there are a few statements that seem to express suspicion of the motives and behavior of proselytes, the best known being that "proselytes are as hard for Israel [to endure] as a sore" (Yevamot 47b). Some rabbis may have become disillusioned with proselytes that relapsed (e. g., "they revert to their evil ways" in Baba Metsia 59b). The extent of the references to proselytes, both laudatory and cynical, in rabbinic literature would seem to testify to the frequency of the phenomenon until late in antiquity.

Judaism did quite well at that time in gaining proselytes, and Christianity did far better. The requirement of circumcision may not have been as great an obstacle to conversion to Judaism as some historians have suggested. But the "fences to the Torah" (cautionary regulations that acted as a check against the committal of religious transgressions) might have limited the social intercourse with gentiles, which could have facilitated large-scale conversion in the big cities of the Roman empire where Christianity was going so well. More important was the absence of a Jewish compulsion to undertake mass proselytism. Christianity viewed proselytism as its mission with a far greater intensity than did Judaism, because it held that redemption from sin could come only through Christ and salvation was not to be found outside the Church. While welcoming proselytes, the rabbinical leadership saw as its primary task raising the level of Torah-observance and Torah-knowledge among the Jewish people. In line with prophetic eschatology, rabbinic Judaism adhered to the notion that only the Jewish people was

bound by the full complement of divine commandments, but that seven Noahide laws were incumbent on all humanity (e.g., Sanhedrin 56a). Rabbi Joshua's dictum that "the righteous of all nations have a share in the World to Come" (Tosefta Sanhedrin XIII.2) eventually became normative Jewish doctrine.

For the Jewish communities around the Mediterranean, a new era in the history of conversion to Judaism began with elevation of Christianity to the state religion of the Roman empire. The transition was completed with the rise of Islam and the Arab conquest of large parts of the Middle East and Sassanian Persia, bringing many ancient and populous Jewish communities under the rule of yet another monotheistic religion with a close historical affiliation to Judaism. As did Christian rulers, Islamic rulers considered conversion of members of their faith-community to Judaism a capital offense. In view of the powerful Christian missionary program and the comparable prestige of the Islamic states, the appeal of Judaism to pagans on the geographical and social margins of civilization must have been slim indeed.

There were, however, notable instances of Jewish proselytizing activity in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. There are hints of Jewish proselytizing activity in the Arabian peninsula; and in the sixth century CE, shortly before the rise of Islam, the kings of Himyar (in Yemen) became Jews. In the first half of the eighth century a significant part of the ruling class of the Khazar people living on the Volga turned to Judaism, perhaps to avoid having to choose either Christianity or Islam. The Judaizing of the Khazar royal family seized the literary imagination of medieval Hebrew writers, especially the Sephardic poet and philosopher Judah Ha-Levy. But neither Yemen nor the Russian steppes came to constitute a major base for Jewish population expansion.

Individual proselytes continued to be noted in the chronicles, despite the hazards to convert and Jew alike. The responsa literature refers to the conversion of slaves, especially female slaves in the early Middle Ages. Information has survived of a number of conversions to Judaism by Christian clergy and nobility. Bodo, a court deacon of Louis the Pious in ninth-century France, fled to Spain

and wrote a polemic against Christianity. Around 1100 a priest named Johannes, of a noble Norman family living in southern Italy, became a proselyte, renamed himself Obadiah, and settled in Baghdad. He visited several Jewish communities in the Middle East, and writings by him, found in the Cairo *genizah*, relate that he was following the example of an archbishop in the province of Bari who had converted to Judaism several decades earlier and fled to Egypt. Mordecai ben Hillel ha-Kohen wrote of the burning of a proselyte at Augsburg in 1264 who had attacked Christianity after his conversion. In 1270 a proselyte from France was burned at Wisenburg; in 1275 Robert of Reading, an English monk, became a proselyte. The individuals who are mentioned in the sources came to a sad end, but presumably others, who remained anonymous, were happily integrated into the Jewish community along with their descendants.

The best known responsum on the religious status of the convert to Judaism is Maimonides' letter to a proselyte named Obadiah. Asked if the convert could pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the "God of his fathers," Maimonides answered that "Abraham our father, peace be with him, is the father of his pious posterity who keep his ways, and of his disciples and of all proselytes who adopt Judaism." Maimonides concludes that "a man who left his father and birthplace and the realm of his people at a time when they are powerful, who understood with his mind, and who attached himself to this nation which today is a despised people, the slave of rulers, and who recognized and knew that their religion is true and righteous . . . and pursued good . . . and entered beneath the wings of the Divine presence . . . the Lord does not call you fool (*kesil*) but intelligent (*maskil*) and understanding, wise and walking correctly, a pupil of Abraham our father."

Increased Jewish spiritual withdrawal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and increased vulnerability to the better organized European state of early modern times militated against much Jewish proselytizing. Jewish authorities warn against active efforts to convert members of other faiths, citing the dangers to the survival of the community. Without denying that

proselytism is a legitimate notion of Jewish law, in the eighteenth century the argument was that it had been rendered unnecessary because Christianity was a monotheistic Noahide religion whose adherents had rejected idolatry. Thus Moses Mendelssohn stated in his well-known letter to Johann Caspar Lavater: "According to the principles of my faith, I must not seek to convert anyone not born a Jew. The zeal for making proselytes runs diametrically counter to the spirit of Judaism—assertions to the contrary by certain people notwithstanding. . . . Our rabbis are not only far from feeling any compulsion to proselytize but make a point of enjoining us to dissuade with the most serious arguments anyone asking to be converted. We are to tell any would-be convert how unnecessarily heavy a burden this decision would put on him. . . . It should be evident, then, that my fathers' faith does not ask to be propagated."

Despite this unpropitious atmosphere, there continued to be a steady trickle of individual converts, indicative of a tendency to Judaizing within Christendom. Moses Germanus in sixteenth-century Germany; Alexander Voznitsin, a Russian naval officer who was publicly burned at the stake in 1738; and Lord George Gordon in eighteenth-century England were among those who became Jews by choice during this period.

A hallmark of Jewish modernity is the transformed legal situation of Judaism in Western countries. Although not all Western nations disestablished their privileged religion, the legal barriers preventing a non-Jew from converting to Judaism have fallen away. Yet, until recently, conversion to Judaism has remained low on the agenda of Jewish issues. Various nineteenth- and twentieth-century Jews did call for the establishment of societies to facilitate the active spread of Judaism among non-Jews, but their efforts were greeted more with embarrassment than enthusiasm and little concrete support. Certainly the negative image of Jews and Judaism inherited from the Middle Ages and the upsurge of anti-Semitism in the last decades of the nineteenth century worked powerfully against Jewish proselytism. Moreover, the Jewish situation of being under seige by anti-Semites meant that Jewish energies should be

spent principally in protecting inner lines of defense.

Nineteenth-century German Jewry had attempted to break away from the Jewish theological disconnectedness from the world of the preceding centuries, a disconnectedness appropriate to a small, sometimes persecuted minority wary of calling much attention to itself in the gentile world. The nineteenth-century ideal of the "mission of the people of Israel" to lead humanity to God and higher moral standards, to help bring peace and brotherhood to the world—these noble goals were seen in the role of the Jewish people as mentor in religion and ethics, a mission to be fulfilled by example, not by conversion (an attitude consistent with prophetic eschatology and rabbinic teaching). Rabbinical deliberations on conversion in the Reform movement in the nineteenth century centered almost exclusively on whether circumcision was still to be required of a male convert; the tenor of the discussion was that prospective converts would find their way to Judaism on their own.

The ideological orientation of modern East European Jewish intellectuals in the late nineteenth century rendered almost impossible the taking of conversion very seriously. Many of these individuals, often men and women of great moral idealism and selfless devotion to human betterment, had absorbed the view of the positivist Russian intelligentsia that traditional religion was politically reactionary and an impediment to cultural progress. "Free-thinkers" who returned to the Jewish people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through Zionism or Jewish socialism accepted that it was natural and psychologically healthy for Jews to express their modern cultural interests in a Jewish way, but considered friendly non-Jews at best as allies in the struggle for Jewish and human liberation, not as potential Jews-by-choice. More recently the Jewish reluctance to engage in energetic proselytism, rooted in a variety of historical factors and reasons, is sustained by the feeling on the part of many educated Americans that one's religious identification, if any, is a private matter, and that a polite invitation to convert is an intrusion. Some Jews feel that Jewish proselytism presupposes an unseemly Jewish religious zeal anyway and opens the

door to condoning Christian efforts to missionize the Jews. Still, it would seem that the Jewish inhibitions on engaging in proselytism is changing and that this change may have considerable implications for Jewish religious identity in the diaspora and for the unity of the Jewish people everywhere.

First, a historical parallel. We have noted that the boundary between the Jews and the peoples among which they lived was always to some extent permeable, and that considerable numbers of individuals became Jews by choice in certain situations, such as the pagan Hellenistic and Roman environments. We live in an era that resembles, in certain regards, the pagan Hellenistic and Roman empires with their heterogeneous, cosmopolitan cities; breakup of local cultures; decline of old gods; diffusion of cults; emergence of syncretistic new faiths; and enhanced appeal of relatively small-scale, cohesive, and supportive ideological and religious groups like the Jews. Certainly in America there is a fascination with things Jewish virtually unprecedented in Jewish history, which makes joining the Jewish people more attractive than it has been for centuries.

Second, the specific sociological impulse. A dramatic rise in Jewish intermarriage in recent decades has given a special urgency to the question of proselytism. Conversion of the non-Jewish partner to Judaism has become sufficiently common to suggest that it has become a significant factor in maintaining the size of the American Jewish community. While some conversions may be perfunctory, others tap profound spiritual depths. Rabbis report that new Jews, who have made a serious study of the beliefs and practices of Judaism, are among their most active and committed congregants. The trend poses a great challenge to facilitate the hospitable reception of converts into the Jewish community, and it raises serious problems for those not actively involved in the new Jewish proselytism. The insistence by Orthodox authorities, especially in Israel, that Reform and Conservative conversions are invalid may tear apart the American Jewish community and alienate non-Orthodox American Jews from Israel. It has happened before in Jewish history that disagreements over such matters have escalated into prolonged and

painful confrontation over who has authority to decide on what is permitted and what is prohibited. At least one recent effort, in Denver, indicates that there may be found a sufficient grey area in Jewish religious law such that procedures could be evolved to avoid a confrontation fatal to Jewish unity. Resolution will require of all parties the acceptance of ambiguity and toleration of diversity, together with acknowledgment of the priority of sustaining the unity of the Jewish tradition—attitudes on the wane at present. The determination to effect such a resolution will have to be based on the realization that these are unprecedented times for Judaism.

Why unprecedented? Useful as is the distinction between Jews by birth and Jews by choice, it is no longer appropriate in America. Even Jews by birth have to become Jews by choice. For born Jews, being Jewish is more voluntary and self-committing than ever before, so that the condition of a Jew by choice is no longer unique. That the future of the majority of the Jews in America is a consciously voluntary Jewishness may be disconcerting and unsettling, but also vitalizing and challenging—posing another demand that the Jewish tradition be adjusted to the unprecedented. But adjustment to the unprecedented is a main theme of Judaism's long and richly diverse history. If not now, when?

MODERNIZATION THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY JEWISH HISTORY

The Transformation of the Jews
By Calvin Goldscheider and
Alvin S. Zuckerman
University of Chicago Press

A Review essay by
Edward S. Shapiro

Historians, like me, are usually skeptical of broad conceptual schemes of interpretation. Our sympathies are with the particular rather than the general, with the concrete rather than the abstract, and with the diverse rather than the uniform. We dread committing the sin of reification, of mistaking general categories and intellectual constructs, such as "bourgeoisie" and the "warrior class," for reality. We view Toynbee,

Marx, and other "metahistorians" as philosophers and sociologists rather than historians, and we generally leave the teaching of the philosophy of history to philosophers. This bias against historical theory, this hard-headed attitude toward abstract speculation, is largely due to the historian's recognition of the diversity of human experience rather than to a bias against speculation per se. While Marx dealt with individuals "only insofar as they are personifications of categories," historians are continually enjoined by their peers to respect the peculiarities of diverse cultures and individuals and to beware of historical abstractions such as class consciousness and the Oedipus complex. Historians are familiar with countless historical schema from the Greek cyclical theories through Marxism that have not stood the test of time.

Marxism is one version of a more general view of history included under the rubric "modernization." Modernization theories usually posit a universally applicable general theory of political, social, and economic transformation characterized by secularism, egalitarianism, collectivism, and rationalization. The model for modernization is invariably western Europe and the United States, a paradigm toward which the more primitive societies of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are supposedly moving.

The Transformation of the Jews is a recent attempt by a sociologist and political scientist at Brown University to apply modernization theory to Jewish history of the past century, and in doing so the authors sharply dissent from the most basic thrust of Jewish historiography. Their goals are to explain the radical transformation of a population that had been primarily Orthodox, working-class, and impoverished, to understand how the Jew qua Jew and Jew qua individual as well as the Jewish community have been affected by modernization and to evaluate the impact of modernization on Jewish identity and survival. The book seeks to lift Jewish history and sociology out of their isolation, to integrate them into the broader corpus of general social science, and to show what contribution the social sciences, particularly comparative sociology, can make in explicating recent Jewish history. The volume's conclusions are not the

result of original research but are based on secondary sources.

Totally rejecting the emphasis of traditional Jewish historians on cultural, religious, and intellectual influences, Goldscheider and Zuckerman believe that ideas, intellectual elites, and religious norms had little impact on nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and American Jewry. Religious behavior in Europe even prior to emancipation and urbanization, they remark, "was for most people not necessarily tied to deep devotion but to living in tune with one's community. . . . Poor conditions and the strains of daily life left few to ponder the broader issues of God and man." The debates over hasidism and the *haskalah* were thus full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. This is, of course, a rather idiosyncratic reading of Jewish history.

Goldscheider and Zuckerman's structural approach (in contrast to a cultural approach) argues that social interaction has been far more influential on Jews than individual values and motives. The social, political, and economic effects of modernization have mattered, particularly the development of capitalism and the emergence of the nation-state. An egregious example of their line of thought is the assertion that the presence of the great talmudic academies in Lithuania can be explained by the absence of economic and educational opportunities for men, which reinforced the values placed on traditional study. One wonders how they would explain the fact that today there are more students in yeshivas in Israel and America, and their number is growing, than there ever were in eastern Europe, and yet there certainly is no lack of economic and educational opportunities in Israel and the United States.

Goldscheider and Zuckerman believe the response of Jews to modernization almost completely explains their occupational, economic, religious, social, and political patterns. Most historians will find this rejection of cultural and intellectual influences highly problematical. As Daniel T. Rogers noted in 1977 in a discussion of American labor, "what shaped those who moved across the boundaries of industrial society was neither culture nor economic conditions but the highly specific interaction of the two—the ways in which

expectation, memory, and habit met with the force of circumstance. The process contained not one, but a wide variety of potential outcomes." Also apt is the warning of the political scientist Raymond Grew that the concept of modernization "easily carries with it, poised to mislead or distort at every turning, a deterministic teleology that exaggerates change and attends only that part of it that points in the right direction; theories of modernization can become relentlessly tautological."

As the examples of Rogers and Grew demonstrate, the qualms about modernization often concern the concept itself rather than the details of particular versions of the modernization process. While Goldscheider and Zuckerman describe modernization as "the master theme of contemporary social science," historians often question its usefulness. They find the distinction between static, rural, and traditional primitive society and mobile, urban, and innovative modern society too neat and reductive, too reminiscent of previous theories of progress, too parochial in holding up western Europe and the United States as the standard of modernization, and too prone to ignoring the differences among so-called "traditional" and "modern" societies. "Tradition and modernity," Rogers cautioned, "are too homogenizing of the intractable variety of both past and present to serve historians well," and he warned historians "to subject the current revival of evolutionism in the social sciences to critical scrutiny." Rogers was, however, heartened by evidence that "modernization theorists have become increasingly tentative about hypotheses that they boldly argued less than a decade ago." Judging from *The Transformation of the Jews*, his optimism was perhaps premature. (For a provocative attack on the concept of modernization, which argues that "where modernization theory has not been wrong or misleading, it has all too often been irrelevant," see Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XV (1973), 199–226.)

Another fundamental and equally questionable assumption of this volume is its contention that during the past century Jewish history has not

had an autonomous existence but has merely reacted to the modernizing influences of the general society. With Jews responding to the same forces in roughly the same ways as Italians, Germans, French, and Turks, Jewish history (as distinct from the history of Jews) no longer has any particular *raison d'être*. Jews are like everybody else, only more so. Thus, in discussing the increased economic opportunities and occupational mobility accompanying capitalism, Goldscheider and Zuckerman deny that Jewish ideologies, values, or religious patterns were important in determining the ability or willingness of Jews to take advantage of the new economic patterns. "The primary determinants" of the occupational changes and growth in wealth of Jews in Europe and America were, they write, "structural rather than cultural." Similarly, the extent to which Jews availed themselves of modern secular education was due not to any specific Jewish educational values but merely to "variable access to government and communal schools." For Goldscheider and Zuckerman, the major economic and social differences among European Jews can be explained almost solely by the various rates of modernization of the host countries.

Wherever Goldscheider and Zuckerman look they find that the transformation of Jewish life in Europe and America occurred "not for reasons of preference or volition but as the result of broader economic conditions and opportunities." This, they believe, was equally true for the emergence of new religious ideologies such as Reform Judaism, Conservative Judaism, and Modern Orthodoxy, as well as for the decline in religious observance. These appeared not in response to ideological challenges by intellectual elites or to demands by the Jewish masses, but to social and political centralization and rationalization. The transformation of the Jews and Judaism is thus simply "a case study" of the impact of modernization on passive Jews who did not actively participate in shaping their own history. Max Weber, the greatest of modern sociologists, was perhaps more correct when he argued that intellectual, scientific, political, economic, and religious spheres influence one another

while simultaneously retaining a relative autonomy.

It is difficult to see how Jewish studies can be justified if their only rationale is to provide case studies of general sociological trends. Also, by subordinating history to an abstract sociological theory, Goldscheider and Zuckerman deprive Jewish history of its significance and dignity. Jews were not simply inert objects waiting to be shaped by historical processes. If so, how can one explain the distinctive political, economic, and social profile of Jews, a profile that is still quite different from that of other ethnic and religious groups?

A third problem with *The Transformation of the Jews* is an optimism about the Jewish condition that borders on the polyanna. The book argues that modernization, while destroying traditional sources of Jewish creativity and identity, has simultaneously created new and equally vigorous forms of cohesion. Thus economic and social upward mobility has resulted in new forms of Jewish interaction; an increased rate of intermarriage has caused more gentiles to identify with the Jewish community; and nationalism has led to the establishment of the state of Israel. "Instead of simply eroding institutional strength," the authors conclude, "modernization processes have reshaped and strengthened levels of Jewish cohesion.

This benign picture stems from the authors' openness to modernization and their revulsion over the isolation, poverty, and intellectual narrowness of Jewish life prior to the advent of capitalism and nationalism. By associating modernization with "educational opportunities, social mobility, urbanization, and secularization," Goldscheider and Zuckerman are almost forced to emphasize the positive aspects of modernization. Had it not occurred, they would not now be sociologists at an Ivy League university. This refusal to recognize the shattering impact of modernization on Jewish identity reveals more about the outlook of those modern American Jewish intellectuals who are committed both to Jewish survival and the methodologies of the supposedly objective social sciences than it does about the contemporary status of yiddishkeit.

The most fundamental question raised by *The Transformation of the Jews*

is whether an extreme historicism can do justice to the Jewish experience or to the experience of any group. Jews, after all, have been part of a religious and ethnic civilization, and, as the cultural anthropologists have taught us, only by according significant roles to myth, symbols, ideas, and other cultural phenomena and by realizing that each culture is unique can one adequately explain social patterns and values. A discussion of American Jewry that omits Issac Mayer Wise or Stephen Wise and a discussion of European Jewry that fails to mention the Chofetz Chaim and Chaim Zhitlowsky resembles a challah without raisins. It might be filling but it will lack flavor and satisfaction.

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THE LANGUAGE OF EXTERMINATION

Hitler and the Final Solution
By Gerald Fleming
University of California Press

A Review essay by Herbert Hirsch

This meticulously researched and well-written book should dispose of, for all time, the ridiculous notion that Hitler did not know that the Jews of Europe were being exterminated. Attempts to claim that Hitler was unaware of the fruits of his own thoughts and policies have been made. In particular, David Irving in his 1977 book, *Hitler's War*, takes the position that Hitler did not know until 1943. To be ignorant of the large scale acts of brutality, which Walter Laquer, in *The Terrible Secret*, points out were published in newspapers around the world, would mean that Hitler must have been either a singularly insulated or stupid individual. Gerald Fleming demonstrates, I think irrefutably, that Hitler not only knew but personally initiated the "Final Solution."

Fleming is very clear about his interpretation. He argues that Hitler ordered the extermination of the European Jews and that the order flowed directly from his anti-Semitic ideology. Precisely when or how this order was communicated remains murky. While no written order was

ever discovered, and it seems almost certain that none was given to avoid connecting Hitler to the extermination, verbal orders were transmitted as "Führer Orders."

It appears likely that an order to exterminate was communicated orally sometime in the summer of 1941, but this cannot be proven. It is known that Hitler kept informed about the process and expressed and transmitted his intentions to those in charge of carrying out the exterminations—particular Himmler and Heydrich. The development of Hitler's obsession with the Jews is the core of Fleming's thesis.

That Hitler became an anti-Semite early in life is convincingly demonstrated in this book. As Fleming notes: "From his speeches of 1919 and 1929 to his political testament of 29 April 1945, Hitler continuously held this goal [extermination of the Jews] up before the German nation." His early thinking formed the basis for the strategy to be pursued. As Fleming views the process, it entailed several steps. The first was "to uncover the Jewish imperialist designs on world hegemony and parade them before the largest segment of our nation . . . to immunize the masses against 'the Jewish-Marxist poison' of internationalism and class struggle." The masses were to be made ready to proceed to the next step, which was "to translate agitation into an effective mass movement." The third step involved "propaganda and organizing . . . which would be crucial . . . to establish the prerequisites for the victory in the final phase of the struggle against the domestic political enemy." Step four would bring about "domestic peace through the founding of a 'genuinely . . . German and Austrian nation' to be headed by a national government invested with power and authority." Finally, the fifth step would assure the permanent establishment, for Führer and country, of Germany's proper place in the system of world powers through the display of economic and military power. This was to be achieved by focusing on the Jew as the source of all trouble and as the wellspring of "evil."

The power of Fleming's book is that he thoroughly documents Hitler's monomaniacal pursuit of Jewish extermination. He points out

that as early as 1922 Hitler was asked: "What do you want to do to the Jews once you have full discretionary powers?" Hitler's response: "Once I really am in power, my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews." Clear and unambiguous, Hitler left no doubt of his intent. He did, however, dissemble—cover his intentions through a series of linguistic maneuvers. Most important was his care to avoid leaving a written record. As Field Marshall Keitel noted, Hitler employed "semantic conventions," or code language, to communicate with his subordinates. This functioned as a mechanism to keep his name from any connection with the exterminations.

The code words for extermination have entered the language and are well known. "Final Solution" is only the most obvious. But this type of obfuscation also was by no means unique to the Nazis. Rather, it has been a common practice of nation states seeking to disguise their actions. "Free fire zones" used in Vietnam simply meant that anything that moved in that particular space was fair game. A more contemporary example is the reference to a nuclear missile as "the peacekeeper." The function of such code language is to hide the actual actions and intent, which, in most cases, is destruction of life.

Fleming not only demonstrates that Hitler was cunning and cleverly used these mechanisms to avoid connection with the exterminations of the Jews; he also documents this connection. Taking the reader through a tangled web of commands and communications, Fleming clearly shows that the Führer was unambiguous about his intentions to kill the Jews.

From 1922 to his last testament of April 19, 1945, he maintained this goal. The final sentence of his testament leaves no doubt: "Above all, I obligate the leaders of the nation and their following to a strict observance of the racial laws, and to a merciless resistance to the poisoners of all peoples, international Jewry."

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THE PREDICATE THEOLOGY OF JUDAISM

Evil and the Morality of God
By Harold Schulweis
Hebrew Union College Press

A Review essay by
Matthew B. Schwartz

The ongoing existence of evil in this world constantly forces new attempts to answer the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" Dr. Harold Schulweis in *Evil and the Morality of God* sees the question of the existence of evil as the most significant factor in the breakdown of faith in the modern world. It is no longer science that challenges faith. "For most people, the breaking point of traditional monotheistic belief lies not in Darwin or Einstein, but in Dachau and Hiroshima." If God is benevolent, how do these things happen?

Schulweis reviews the theories of a number of major thinkers: Barth, Buber, Tillich, and others. Only in the final chapter does Schulweis present his own answer. Traditional theologies view God as an independent, perfect eternal subject who cannot be adequately described. This God need not explain His actions, and when these actions seem harsh or immoral, people must assume their own limited understanding. Yet, this view makes God seem morally defenseless and indifferent to suffering. Schulweis's own response to theodicy centers in what he calls "predicate theology." We should view God not as a personal subject but by means of His qualities, not that God is good but that goodness is godly. We must focus on the processes that disclose godly qualities. These qualities are the proper objects for our adoration and emulation. "The God terms of subject theology, which have been reified, enwrapped in noun substantives and located on an occult Power, are unravelled and demystified. . . . The haunting question 'Why me?' cannot be answered on its own terms. Entailed in the 'why' is an unstated set of presuppositions about the character of the world and of God. It rises out of a theological atmosphere of occult power exercised upon the world." Schulweis warns his approach is not for those who find consolation "in the promise of a world controlled by

an unfathomable agent and of an ultimate reward." In predicate theology, evil is not the work of a malevolent personal will. Evils are of earthly origin and therefore subject to analysis and investigation. Evil need not be personified or demonized. "Nature is neutral." Theology shall not compete with science in explaining, for instance, a flood. "Predicate theology will express sympathy, organize relief, and urge the reclamation of the land." The causes of evil must be sought in natural and historical processes, not in acts of God. In this view, prayer is not directed to a subject who, as it were, holds the cure in His hand and must be moved to dispense it to the sick. In its petitionary role, prayer is said in order that something be done by those who say it. Schulweis recognizes that his views on prayer and his opposition to the traditional notions of a personal God are "not for everyone."

This is a solid scholarly work, carefully and strongly argued, but difficult for the intelligent layman, as we are cautioned both by Schulweis and by Chaim Potok's introduction. And it does not help to have the explanation of Schulweis's own theory held back until the last chapter. The major problem with this book, however, is, strangely enough, the first two words on its cover, "Jewish Perspectives." The book is the third in a series of "Jewish Perspectives" being published by the Hebrew Union College Press. Its author is a noted rabbi, the writer of its foreword a celebrated Jewish novelist and scholar, and it sports the imprimatur of Hebrew Union College, an important center of Judaic Studies. Yet, for all that, there is nothing Jewish about it. It is only fair to point out that Schulweis never claims to be presenting a specifically Jewish view, but the entire context of the volume leads one to expect it. And in any case, why should a Jewish scholar omit an important body of Jewish opinion on his subject? I shall suggest here not the total Jewish approach to theodicy but a few suggestions and comments to which Schulweis's work gives rise.

Classical Jewish literature is not lacking in opinions on theodicy; however, one finds here few references to Talmud and Midrash, and surely Ramban is not less worthy of inclusion in a Jewish Perspective on theodicy than Paul Tillich or Ludwig Feuerbach.

A Jewish perspective on theodicy was summarized in the mishnaic statement, "In our hands is neither the prosperity of the wicked nor the affliction of the righteous." Man does not, need not, understand everything in order to have a good and productive life. Theological certainty is neither an attainable state nor necessarily a useful one. It is quite axiomatic in midrashic thought that even for the very righteous there is no security. Moses and Jacob are both depicted as concerned over whether they would be worthy of enjoying the fulfillment of God's promises to them. In fact, God is strict with the righteous even to a hair's breadth because of His love for them.

As Schulweis recognizes, predicate theology weakens the traditional notion of a personal God. His approach, he says, is, after all, theological and cannot be expected to do the work of "ritual and liturgical choreography." Yet, if we accept this attitude, do we not knock the stuffing out of the Jewish closeness to God? This is near to arguing that we find nothing troubling or paradoxical in theodicy if we remove God from the scene. Can people indeed be loved by a predicate? Can Judaism be imaginable without a God Who responds to prayer? If we accept this, we must discard much of the Hebrew Bible and thousands of years of faith and scholarship.

Schulweis's predicate theology stresses the element of pragmatic reaction to human problems and misfortunes. This is fine. Again, however, when this entails the removal of God from the equation, it denies all that Judaism means. Shall predicate theology now replace the wonderful dialogues of the Berditchever Rebbe with the Master of the World? A "Jewish Perspective" might do well to deal with R. Moshe Cordovero's *Tomar Deborah* or Rabbi Kuk's *Musar Avicha* and *Orot Teshuva*, works that offer a distinctively different and Jewish view of God. A parable cited in the name of Martin Luther is hardly more suitable than a similar image used by R. Cordovero.

Schulweis removes the discussion from a Jewish context entirely by attuning his theodicy to the *homo religiosus*, the "man of religion" who seeks to know the ultimate and to be known. The *homo religiosus* is, to be sure, a noble type, but he is not an especially Jewish type. Rabbi J. D.

Soloveichik argues cogently in his recently translated *Halachic Man* that the Jew lives within the halachic system, not the religious. A Jew would thus understand divine acts through the prism of the Torah, not only of subject or predicate theology.

There is an assumption widespread in recent literature that somehow our age has a greater problem coping with theodicy because of the awesome immensity of the Holocaust. Without minimizing the impact of the Holocaust, one must see this view as a bit short-sighted. Let us not forget the Cossack massacres of 1648, the expulsion from Spain, the massacres of Jews during the Crusades, two destructions of Jerusalem—the litany seems unending. In each instance, the Jews faced serious challenges and survived. Periods of tragedy have been explained in Jewish literature as times of *hester panim*, an expression derived from Deut. 31:17-18, "I shall surely hide my face on that day." God, for reasons of His own, hides His face from man, and the world returns to a state of almost primitive chaos, a fit parable of the Third Reich.

It is typical of books on theodicy to see in Job a fertile ground for investigation. The magnitude of Job's sufferings and the courage with which he seeks meaning are wonderfully impressive; however, in the Hebrew Bible, Ecclesiastes too addresses this issue. There theodicy is a worrisome point but does not occupy center stage, again a view more aligned with rabbinic thinking.

Predicate theology attempts to demystify God and to view Him by means of predicates and processes, but does this not imply a dehumanizing of humans? If the personality of God is not important or indeed non-existent, how can we see ourselves as having any essential worth? If we soil the Mystery of God, do we not ultimately degrade ourselves from being the central aim of creation into an object? Will we still see ourselves as worthy of love? Does one have any impetus to seek self-knowledge or spiritual self-improvement?

Jewish thought has not yet formulated a final dogma to theodicy, and it is hard to imagine that it ever will. However, through the centuries certain responses have been suggested, certain questions asked and insights offered that have produced an approach quite different from the

purely theological. One might say that Jewish thought allows that God do His task and we do ours without hostility and mutual recriminations. There is a relationship, a covenant, a dialogue. Neither party loses significance or self-worth because of the importance of the other. Neither need compromise the independence of action of the other.

Predicate theology is a new and interesting approach to an old problem, but its parameters are theological. It is not a "Jewish Perspective"; it is hardly even aware of Judaism.

Matthew B. Schwartz is professor of history at Wayne State University.

STREAMS OF DEPTH

Later the Same Day
By Grace Paley
Farrar Straus, Giroux

A Review essay by Linda
Bayer-Berenbaum

Like Hemingway's *In Our Time*, Grace Paley's *Later the Same Day* is a book about our time and all time, about modernity and continuity. Also like Hemingway's collection, these disparate stories are held together by recurring characters and themes. The lives of women; the irrelevance of men; the futility of politics; the persistence of hope, aging, death, friendship—these threads bind together a rich tapestry of feminist patterns edged with Jewish fringes. Paley's clever phrases and images sparkle like golden strands among the warp and weft. The fabric is strong and taut, without creases.

The Title—Time and Its Seepage

In "The Story Hearer" one person asks another what she did *today* with her *year off* (while the *Times* is folded on the doormat one sentence away), and a man hugs his wife as sweetly as the long *day* he slept with his former wife. Likewise, two little girls are playing in "Ruthy and Edie," but in the very next paragraph, it is Ruthy's 50th birthday. In Paley's equation, days equal years, which ultimately equal a life-time. As we turn the pages, stories start and end; the characters disappear and return. The mystery of duration, of memory and change—this is the secret that prompts all art. Telling and listening, living and reliving, we seek to catch

time by its tail before it drags us away from ourselves and each other. "The past thickens the present," Ruth remarks, and luckily so since the future will dilute both. *Later the Same Day* harps on a contradiction: the same is undone by the *later*.

In that people exist in time, individuality itself is relative, slipping from moment to moment, from experience to recollection—in need of re-collection. Nearly all of this book is conversation, but there are virtually no quotation marks. Why? Was the author in a hurry? Or were her characters? Is it a point of style? Of modern affectation (like dropping capitalization or punctuation)? A clue comes in the effect. The voices run together—as do the people's lives. The narrator blurs into the other characters, the *I* into *he* and *we*. The reader slides faster across the page in the stream of consciousness that builds from merging tributaries. Sometimes there is a loss of differentiation, sometimes the merger of community. Always there is movement, whose abstraction we call time. The particular resonates with the universal. We move from one woman to womankind.

The Angle of Vision

The question of perspective is also involved. At those points where the reader becomes unaware of the speaker, the audience is prepared for the dissonance between narrator and author. What does the character think? What does the narrator think? What does Paley think? What do I think? The progression has been set in motion. The interrogation guards against false positives.

So, Paley tells us that we live in slippery times. Danger is always around the corner from delight. One character tries to knock on wood but, alas, the whole company is sitting in plush and leaning on plastic. In the atomic age, we are running out of luck and religion. Instead, American science gives us "wash and wear in one test tube and nerve gas in another. Its right test tube doesn't know what its left test tube is doing." With echoes of Dachau still ringing in their ears, Paley's characters attend rallies and hand out leaflets in impotent gestures of self-defense. The regular beep-the-horn-if-you-love-Mao meeting seems laughable, but humor (I guess) is a weapon too.

Spanning the Globe and the Life Cycle

Paley writes with equal ease of a Jew from the Bronx, an aspiring Puerto Rican, a sad Italian, or a tourist in China. From old-world ethnics to mid-Western Wasps, her characters form a veritable mosaic of American culture. Yet there is a remarkable consistency of tone—irony spiced with humor, absurdity seasoned with aloofness and joy. A vague search for meaning distracts the narrators; transcendence beckons but remains elusive.

Paley collects people and enjoys them as richly as she captures their language. No one is too insignificant for careful attention. Dramatic moments of crisis and more ordinary nostalgic memories vie for her concern. The conflict of life lived at the margins—whether by youth or the elderly—is depicted with assurance, sensitivity, and power. Regular daily details glean significance from their location at the periphery. All of life, not only the adventurous beginnings and humble endings, are magnified—indeed hallowed—by the backdrop of oblivion against which they are conducted. Small samples of friendship or melancholy or pain somehow partake of the heroic without losing their smiling banality.

Less intellectual than Bellow, less angry than Roth, less mysterious than Singer, and less sentimental than Malamud, Paley is more interested in people and so is enticed to enter their minds. She is less judgmental than any of these other writers. The touch is light, the plots simple, but her quiet streams bespeak their depth.

Linda Bayer-Berenbaum is assistant professor of literature at Boston University. The author of three books, her most recent work is a novel entitled The Blessing and the Curse.

NOAH AND UNIVERSALISM

The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws
By David Novak
The Edwin Mellen Press

A Review essay by Daniel H. Frank

Noahide laws. In it, David Novak exhaustively covers their halakhic

and non-halakhic, philosophical aspects. *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism* is a goldmine of information and philosophical reflection. Of interest are the major theoretical and historical conclusions Novak reaches about the Noahide laws.

Let us first be clear as to what the Noahide Laws are and to whom they are applicable. The laws are seven in number, and they enjoin the establishment of law courts and prohibitions of blasphemy against God, idolatry, murder, adultery, robbery, and eating a limb torn from a live animal.

To whom are these laws applicable? Reflection on this question leads us to the major theoretical point in Novak's book. We tend to think of the Noahide laws as those laws that non-Jews must follow if they are to lead a civilized life and possibly have a share in the world-to-come. This is true but only half the story, for as Novak points out the generality of the Noahide laws points in the direction of their universal applicability. In fact the Noahide laws have not only a post-Sinaitic reference to gentiles but also a pre-Sinaitic reference to all humankind. Indeed, the rabbis viewed the Noahide laws as divine commandments incumbent upon the sons of Noah (hence "Noahide"), Shem, Ham, and Japheth, who were the ancestors of humankind as a whole (Gen. 9:19). Thus the Noahide laws are not merely a rationally constituted legal system for all those people who rejected Torah; they were also the divinely given legal system for all people before Moses. Given this, the Noahide laws stand revealed in their full universality. They are in fact the Jewish version of natural law. As the sons of Noah are synonymous with humankind, so the laws enjoined upon them are the laws of all. (Until Sinai, of course. At that point humankind divided itself into those who accepted Torah and those who did not. For the latter the rejection of Torah was not only rejection of a peculiar body of commandments, but also rejection of divine legislation *in toto*, including, of course, the Noahide laws. Henceforth, acceptance of the Noahide laws by gentiles depends not upon awareness of their divine foundation, but rather upon their inherent rationality. And Jews continue to think of the laws in this manner today.)

Novak correctly stresses a further point to be gained by reflecting upon

the pre-Sinaitic aspect of the Noahide laws. The fact that, prior to Moses, the Noahide laws were applicable to all including Israel forces one to see the Noahide laws as providing the formal criteria and necessary conditions for acceptance of Torah. To underplay or not understand pre-Sinaitic man as civilized by virtue of obedience to the Noahide laws is to make acceptance of Torah by Israel an almost inexplicable mystery. While the Bible is replete with references to the "willfulness" of the exiled Hebrews, Novak argues convincingly that to press their recalcitrance makes a mockery of the rational aspect of Torah, its (consequent) acceptance by Israel, and its continuity with the Noahide laws. People needed Torah because they were already civilized. They were not forced to accept Torah, but they could not be perfected without it. Furthermore, those who rejected Torah were not obliterated for their (supposed) lawlessness. They, too, were civilized and thus could constitute themselves as moral agents, though not as "a nation of priests."

This brief compass is the theoretical backbone of Novak's book. I have said nothing so far that indicates whether or not Novak believes that the Noahide laws were in fact revealed to Noah's sons and were to be or ought to have been obeyed by all prior to the Sinaitic revelation. In fact it is Novak's view that the Noahide laws were promulgated by the early rabbis after the fall of the Second Temple and after the Jewish-Christian schism at the end of the first century CE. Given this historical frame, the Noahide laws were never laws that actually were applied to any peoples or persons, but rather they were merely a theoretical construct of the rabbis, an attempt on their part to deal with the gentile world, a world that had encroached upon Jewish consciousness forever.

And a brilliant attempt it was as Novak presents the case. The Noahide "hypothesis" was by no means a Mendelssohnian-type apologetic to show the gentiles that Jewish morality was just like their own. (After Sinai it ceased to be.) Rather it was an assertive and bold move on

the part of the rabbis and, based on their terms and history, to reach out to gentiles by understanding them as possible moral partners to the Jews in God's world. Given the fact that prior to the Sinaitic revelation all were enjoined to obey the same universal moral laws, so now all Jews and gentiles could live amicably with one another. Though the divine foundation of the Noahide laws had been lost after Sinai, the laws themselves lived on as rationally justifiable prescriptions. Indeed, the Jews had their commandments, but the crucial point for the rabbis here was that all were possible moral agents. Viewed in this way, the Noahide laws may be understood as a blueprint for peaceful co-existence.

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REVIEW • THE JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • NUMBER 10 • SPRING 1987

Menorah Review is published by the Judaic Studies Program and the Judaic Culture Advisory Committee of Virginia Commonwealth University. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. Address all correspondence to Judaic Studies Program, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA 23284-0001.

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