

## **Piety, Tradition and Community in the Thought of Lily Montagu: An Anglo-Liberal Jewish Theology of Relation**

**Daniel R. Langton, University of Manchester, UK**

### **Abstract**

Lily Montagu (1873-1963) was a founding figure of the Anglo-Liberal Jewish Synagogue and, like her co-reformer Claude Montefiore, she had a special interest in Christianity. This article explores the way in which Montagu related to Christianity and Christians in the context of working out her own understanding of authentic Jewish spirituality, that is, a kind of individualistic piety, and in relation to her approach to Jewish religious tradition more generally. For Montagu there was a special relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and this led her to a highly inclusive conception of religious community. Many of her works were written for children or young adults, and include novels, short stories, biblical commentaries, theological reflections, and sermons. It will be suggested that this remarkable range reflects a distinctively feminist approach to a construction of a ‘theology of relation’.

### **Introduction**

In modern times a few religious thinkers have attempted the controversial and challenging task of defining ‘the other’ in terms that acknowledge what is shared whilst trying to maintain a distinctive identity. Well known Jewish examples include Martin Buber (1878-1965), Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) and Claude Montefiore (1838-1958). All three were innovative thinkers who sought to redefine Jewish religious identity, that is, they wrestled with how to relate their personal, eclectic religious convictions with Jewish tradition; they treated authoritative sacred texts in unfamiliar ways and/or became interested in non-Jewish scriptures; and they tried to reconceptualise what constituted authentic religious experience and community. In the process, all three wrote about Christianity in ways that appeared suspiciously sympathetic to many of their fellow Jews. Their valuing of Christianity provoked accusations of inauthenticity as Jewish theologians for, although they ultimately rejected it for themselves, yet they sought to create a space for it within their very different Jewish theologies. Thus Buber acknowledged the mysterious inner reality of the religious truth of the Christian; Rosenzweig recognised Christianity’s equally legitimate yet unique role as a pathway to God for pagans; and Montefiore’s Liberal Judaism resonated with many aspects of

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Christian thought.<sup>1</sup> Buber and Montefiore, in particular, were fascinated by the New Testament and its central figures, almost to the point of obsession: Buber called Jesus “my brother”, seeing him as the epitome of Jewish faith or *emunah*; Montefiore, too, held Jesus up as the epitome of an idealised form of Judaism and even attempted a limited rehabilitation of the Apostle of the Gentiles for Jews.<sup>2</sup> No doubt their unusual value judgements were largely due to the fact that such had grown up in environments which had instilled in them a high regard for Christian culture, and also the fact that they had all personally experienced the companionship and friendship of Christians whom they deeply respected. Certainly, Buber, Rosenzweig and Montefiore were acutely conscious of the fact that the Western European culture in which they immersed themselves and with which they found themselves so much a part, included Christianity as a major component. While they were intensely concerned to forward the cause of Judaism, they could not quite leave behind the admiration and appreciation they had developed for Christianity, and they sought to reconcile their regard for Christianity with their loyalty to their Jewish roots. The next logical step would be for them to construct a coherent Jewish theology that could incorporate Christianity in a positive way. Arguably, such a ‘theology of relation’ is exactly what all three attempted, even if the results were not always entirely successful.

One Anglo-Jewish woman, Lily Montagu, who wrote in the early 1900s, was likewise profoundly interested in Christianity and in working out the relations between the two religious communities. In what follows, Montagu’s views of Judaism and Christianity will be organised according to three areas crucial to religious identity. That is, we will consider the way in which she (i) drew upon and privileged her individual or personal experiences, (ii) related this to her tradition and scriptures, and (iii) related both of these to her community and to the relationship between Jews and Christians. Like Buber, Rosenzweig and Montefiore, Montagu struggled to define the nature of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and the ambiguity of her attitude to Christianity itself must be acknowledged from the start. However, it will be argued that this ambiguity, together with other characteristics including her reforming programme for Judaism and

the richness of her many writings styles, are features of a specific theological project, that is, the production of a constructive ‘theology of relation’.

## **Biographical Remarks**

Lily Montagu (1873-1963) was one of the world’s first female Jewish religious leaders, president of the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues in the United Kingdom and also of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. She was also a pioneer in youth work, and closely associated with the establishment of the National Organisation of Girls Clubs. She was brought up as member of the Cousinhood that inter-related group of families that dominated Anglo-Jewry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. As the daughter of the Liberal MP Samuel Montagu, who typified paternalistic Orthodox philanthropy among the English Jewish elite at the time, Lily would have been expected to engage in charitable work.<sup>3</sup> To her father’s disapproval, however, she soon became obsessed with it and renounced her privileged life, committing herself at an early age to the moral improvement of underprivileged Jewish children in-line with the spiritual teachings of Judaism, as she understood it. Montagu’s own religious evolution had been a troubled one. One of her biographers, Ellen Umansky, hints that had she been born a hundred years earlier, before progressive forms of Judaism had emerged, she would have converted to Christianity.<sup>4</sup> As a young girl she suffered a breakdown, a period of intense religious despair and a profound sense of a lack of spiritual meaning in her father’s traditionally observant religion,<sup>5</sup> which she regarded as highly significant for determining the course of her life.<sup>6</sup> Her early religious education had been unremarkable, her first tutor being Rebecca Aguilar.<sup>7</sup> But later she would write of the dangers inherent “when we do refuse to stifle our conscientious questionings and to profess a creed to which we are really indifferent.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to her conviction that traditional Judaism lacked spiritual depth, Montagu became convinced that the solution to assimilation and intermarriage within the Jewish community lay in a radical reformation of Judaism.<sup>9</sup> As a seventeen year old, she began leading children’s Sabbath services at the West London Reform Synagogue, which involved the creation of hymn and prayer books.<sup>10</sup> It was not long,

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however, before she was ready for more radical action. In 1899, aged twenty-six, she wrote an article in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* on ‘The Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today’ which gave vent to the “vague thoughts and aspirations which were seething in the minds and hearts of [her] co-religionists” in London.<sup>11</sup> In November 1901 she organised a provisional committee and in early 1902 a letter was circulated to around a hundred potential supporters asking for their assistance in establishing a “Progressive” movement.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, she persuaded the philanthropist and scholar, Claude Montefiore, whom she admired enormously, to help her establish the Jewish Religious Union, an amorphous group whose remit was vague enough to meet the needs of a wide variety of individuals, progressive and traditionalist alike.<sup>13</sup> Eventually this led to the establishment of a Liberal Jewish Synagogue in 1910, at which time she was forced to cut all links to both Orthodox and Reform Judaism.<sup>14</sup> Dependent upon Montefiore’s theological teaching and spiritual leadership, which emphasised a universalistic conception of Judaism and called for due appreciation of the spirituality of much Christian thought and behaviour, Montagu focussed her energy upon the general administration of the growing movement, and in particular to the promotion of religious education for Jewish women and girls. Montefiore himself credited Montagu with the success of Liberal Judaism in Britain, and she certainly often appeared to set the Liberal agenda; she organised, for example, the first world conference for Progressive Judaism in 1926.<sup>15</sup> Undoubtedly, her fierce commitment to the cause and revolutionary fervour, made more acute by her father’s disapproval, left her frustrated at times with Montefiore’s more conservative approach.<sup>16</sup> Montagu was the driving force in forwarding the role of women within the synagogue and indignantly complained at the “thirteen year delay” before they were able to partake in leading the service; the Liberal Jewish Synagogue’s reforms included giving women permission to preach (1918)<sup>17</sup> and to read prayers from the pulpit (1920).<sup>18</sup> She herself was the first woman to be made a lay minister in the United Kingdom (1926) and was also the first woman to occupy a pulpit in Germany (1930).<sup>19</sup> The Liberal Jewish rabbi Leslie Edgar, sums it up well when he suggests that Montagu can be regarded as “a woman of religious genius” who won for

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herself a major place in three key transforming movements of the modern age, namely, that of women in national and Jewish life, the extension of opportunities to the socially disenfranchised, and in the development of progressive Judaism.<sup>20</sup> During her long life she wrote eleven books, including several novels and collections of short stories, an autobiography, a Bible commentary for children and edited several collections of devotional literature, in addition to very many pamphlets and sermons.<sup>21</sup> Three key themes predominate in these writings. Firstly, her concern for the religious education of young Jewish women and girls; secondly, her dedication to a living Judaism that was founded on an individual piety and prayerful spirituality, and that expressed itself in outward social action; thirdly, her recognition, as the disciple of Montefiore, that not all light shone through Jewish windows and that Jews and Christians shared more in common than either often assumed. Her literary endeavours, which garnered favourable reviews in the Jewish press, succeeded in raising her profile and that of the Liberal Jewish movement with the Anglo-Jewish community, and although it is uncertain how widely read they were, at least one novel was popular enough to warrant a second edition.<sup>22</sup>

Several studies of Lily Montagu have been published, the key ones being those by the amateur historian and intimate Eric Conrad and by the Jewish feminist historian Ellen Umansky. For both of these, Montagu was first and foremost a feminist reformer of Judaism. *Lily H. Montagu: Prophet of a Living Judaism* (1953) was written by Conrad who freely admitted that he “fell under her spell” and had gone on to marry her niece.<sup>23</sup> Highly dependent on Montagu’s autobiography, Conrad’s originality was to see her as “the real founder” of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, arguing that Claude Montefiore was neither a fighter nor a missionary while Montagu had been both and had felt the urge and vocation to take the initiative.<sup>24</sup> As a true reformer, one of her most remarkable achievements had been to have “rekindled the missionary spirit among the Jews.”<sup>25</sup> Conrad described meeting Montagu as the realisation “that one has come face to face with a prophet; one is roused from one’s indifference, and the Judaism of one’s inheritance has become a new, a living force.”<sup>26</sup> He stressed her force of character and

powers as an organiser,<sup>27</sup> and suggested that in one respect only she seemed too exacting in her demands on others, namely, she was uncompromising in her objection to mixed marriages, however apparently secure and happy they were.<sup>28</sup> He also dismissed Montagu's "occasional excursions" into the realm of fiction writings, suggesting that she was "most at home when she expresses her thoughts about religious or social matters."<sup>29</sup> As a result, his presentation overlooks Montagu's universalist interest in women's spirituality, a spirituality common to Jew and Christian, as we shall see.

Ellen Umansky's seminal biographical study of Montagu's thought, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism: From Vision to Vocation* (1983), is a comprehensive analysis that adds meat to the bones of Conrad's claim that Montagu established Anglo-Liberal Judaism. Taken together with the companion volume, *Lily Montagu: Sermons, Addresses, Letters and Prayers* (1985), a clear picture of Montagu emerges as a forceful, charismatic religious leader and reformer who "took the ideas of others and sought to imbue them with her personal experiences and concerns."<sup>30</sup>

According to this presentation, Montagu's chief concern was to emphasize the ways in which Judaism could be emotionally as well as intellectually satisfying. Her distinctive conception of 'personal religion' was the solution to the questions of how to be modern and Jewish at the same time, and how to make Judaism correlate to the authentic religion of non-Jews, usually Protestants, whose inner piety and sense of communion with God were so attractive.<sup>31</sup> Because Umansky's primary interest is Jewish feminism, she focuses on the question of whether Montagu succeeded in finding a workable solution for other women who struggled to find meaning in Judaism. Less attention is paid to the question of explaining what Umansky describes as "Montagu's Protestantized notions of religion", notions that seemed dangerously inauthentic to many observers.<sup>32</sup> Montagu's interest in Christian thinkers and her commitment to a universalist conception of Judaism that shared a good deal in common with Christians is readily acknowledged, but the complicated nature of her conception of the relationship between Jewish and Christian thought is not teased out. Arguably, Montagu was trying to develop an ideological framework that aimed to prevent conversion and to justify why one should remain a Jew,

that presented a robust critique of Christianity's distinctive doctrines, *and* that granted it a positive value-judgement, even to the extent of encouraging a sense of identification with, and emulation of, it. Again, in this context, Umansky is too little interested in the range of Montagu's literary endeavours – from edifying novels and collections of stories to works of formal theological exposition and commentary. It shall be argued that the different styles were explored in a frustrated search for a medium that would adequately capture the complexity and the intangible uncertainties of her personal religious worldview for the edification of both Jew and Christian.

### **(i) Personal Experience and Inner Spiritual piety**

In terms of personal experience, Montagu's Judaism had little to do with tradition and everything to do with an intensely personal, internal spiritual understanding, and the genre which Montagu felt herself to be most comfortable in communicating her personal spiritual insights was that of edifying or devotional literature. Even from a cursory glance at her autobiographical writings, including *The Faith of a Jewish Woman* (1943), it is clear that her written stories should be viewed essentially as "introspective autobiographies", as Umansky puts it.<sup>33</sup> Like the young heroine of her first novel, *Naomi's Exodus* (1901), for example, Montagu was brought up in a traditional Jewish home (although of a very different class) and she, too, suffered anxieties as a result of her musings on the meaning of religion. She also endured a spiritual exodus from her received traditional Judaism and, although she herself never returned, like Naomi she also found emotional relief in her social work and in the idea of "living Judaism". Again, she suffered condemnation and suspicion from her family in the shape of her father, Samuel Montagu, and she found spiritual solidarity and support from non-Jews.<sup>34</sup> Even Naomi's unrequited love of an aristocratic, Liberal Jewish academic and social-worker Clement Marks, has echoes of her own relationship with the aristocratic, Liberal Jewish academic Claude Montefiore, who was also interested in social-work and who happened to share the initials 'C.M.' Naomi's failed love story was the driving force behind her dedication to service and self-sacrifice, and one suspects the same was true for Montagu. In a very

direct way, Montagu's personal experiences informed her fictional projects. Let us take a closer look at what her writings can tell us about Montagu's conception of spirituality. In *Naomi's Exodus* the heroine, a young Jewess, has been brought up in accordance with rabbinic laws and customs. All her life she has failed to recognise their religious significance and has no sense of God's reality. As the narrator explains, "Never having realised the presence of God, or even thought much about Him, she [Naomi] had satisfied herself with a vague feeling that willing obedience meant piety, and was in fact what God wanted."<sup>35</sup> Naomi meets a series of spiritually minded souls whose influence profoundly challenges such assumptions and who seek to sensitize her to the presence of God. She becomes increasingly aware of beauty in paintings and music and suffers a growing sense of discontent with her non-spiritual lifestyle,<sup>36</sup> becoming ashamed of her former companions, who dressed showily with objectionable hats, and who talked too loudly and attracted vulgar attention.<sup>37</sup> Naomi leaves home for a year and comes to understand true religion through the generosity of the poor,<sup>38</sup> and by the example of her spiritual guardians, all of whom are women. The faith of one of them, a youth-worker, is expressed explicitly in terms of an interior awareness of God. Thus,

She [the female youth-worker] learned to bow her head before a mysterious, inexorable Power to which she gave no name, although she did it in reverence. This Power, she felt, influenced the world somehow, and to some extent. She understood nothing of its methods; she could not implore its assistance. She could only do it reverence, accept its decrees and live – alone.<sup>39</sup>

Through such examples, Naomi comes to see that religion is much more than obedience to the Laws. And the progressive Jewish author's point is made more clearly still in Naomi's appreciation of another spiritual role model who "obeyed no laws; but her religion, whatever it was, seemed to fill her own life... I knew at once... that she had something and I had just nothing – that the laws were no use."<sup>40</sup> Crucially, Naomi learns from her year-long exodus that her Jewish religious heritage cannot be taken for granted, that it is necessary for her to make it her own, that without effort and cultivation on her own part the living roots of her religion would dry out.<sup>41</sup>

This concern to revivify a decayed Judaism is addressed most famously in Montagu's theological tract, 'Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today' (1899). In this essay, the young schismatic called for a reformation of Judaism, arguing,

At present our thinkers are oppressed by the religious lethargy from which our age is emerging... The problem before us is how to restore confidence to our thinkers, and to encourage them to free our religion from the earth which is clogging it, and to allow it to spread and to stimulate the lives of all generations... We... must organise ourselves into an association to rediscover our Judaism... to lift Judaism from its desolate position and absorb it into our lives. Together we must sift with all reverence the pure from the impure in the laws which our ancestors formulated in order to satisfy the needs of their age, and to refuse to resort to hair-splitting argument in order to re-establish a religion which was originally founded on a basis of truth, dignity and beauty.<sup>42</sup>

The call was not to paint a prettier Judaism or Jewish Law, but to excavate the authentic form of the religion, to free and purify it from the pollution of centuries of pedantic obsession with the Law and traditional practices that had left the Jewish religion desolate and in bondage. Jewish children in particular suffered from existing synagogue practices, as Montagu was keen to point out. Despite the fact that children were "naturally religious", the life-long youth-worker suspected that "[i]f they pray at all, it is that the prayers may speedily end."<sup>43</sup> It was partly as a result of this concern for the child that she rejected the idea that ritual was to be abandoned altogether, for ritual addressed the difficulty of thinking in the abstract.<sup>44</sup> But there was no doubt that personal spirituality and the cultivation of the practice of individual prayer were understood to be the key to the revival of Judaism.<sup>45</sup>

In a theological treatise, *Thoughts on Judaism* (1904), which Montagu acknowledged had been profoundly influenced by her mentor Montefiore,<sup>46</sup> she reiterated and developed the theme of inner spirituality, presenting it as the bedrock of her faith in God's existence<sup>47</sup> and the source of the power to live a moral life.<sup>48</sup> She was also keen to develop other interests and concerns. Thus prayer and the world of the interior are emphasised over and above external forms, and the value of traditional learning is regarded as suspect when such fundamentals were neglected.<sup>49</sup> In her appeals to educators, she suggested that proper appreciation of nature and of works of art were an effective means by which the

presence of God could be inculcated.<sup>50</sup> And she stressed that the religious education of the young and the world of the home were the religious provenance of women and that such education was of paramount importance, to be neglected at society's peril.<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, her first sermon to the Liberal Jewish Synagogue (in 1918) had as its topic, 'Kinship with God'. The sense of close relationship to God was, she suggested,

based primarily on intuition, [and] supported by the testimony of the past and the character of our ancient worship. But our conception is also assisted by the actual experiences of everyday life... I would plead with you today that kinship with God is derived from the actual experience of prayer, and from the effort after righteousness.<sup>52</sup>

In discussing the need to conceive of God in a more immanent fashion, Montagu intriguingly used this very public occasion to offer a view of "a suffering God" which sought to bring Him into close relationship with human life.<sup>53</sup>

Montagu's autobiography, *The Faith of a Jewish Women* published forty-four years after her first article demonstrated that the years had done nothing to weaken her commitment to a reforming programme centred on an all-encompassing, personal faith in a God whose presence was almost tangible. In a chapter entitled, 'The Expression of My Personal Faith', she offered a paean to the potential of prayerful faith.

I feel the reality of God. Believing in God as the God of Love, I believe that His Presence in our midst gives us the power to love...

I believe in the God of truth... We know that some of the best Jews the world has produced have been unlearned, and that learning and the love of truth are not necessarily the same thing... The old traditional authority has passed away...

We reverence God as the God of Beauty. The reality of God in the universe makes nature herself beautiful... Similarly, we feel the at-one-ment [sic] of the artist with God even while we enjoy the human techniques of the artist...

All through the ages Judaism has been criticised as a legalistic religion... [Ceremonies and laws] are not ends in themselves but aids to right living... We hold on to our faith in God's Unity because, through that faith, life in its entirety is made holy...

[T]he name Jew is no longer synonymous with a faith in the vitalising power of religion. We have to come into our own again, and by the intensity of belief increase the spiritual life of humanity...

God placed the Jews in the world as witnesses to the reality of his being. That is our function...

We can serve in this most holy cause only if we ourselves, besides inheriting this mission, become

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convinced of its truth through our own passionate faith supported by actual communion with our  
Divine Father in prayer.<sup>54</sup>

Here we return to the familiar ideas of truth and beauty set in opposition to Law and ritual, although the framework in which these are discussed is an almost mystical sense of the living God's presence. While it is not explicit in Montagu's novel, *Naomi's Exodus*, there is a strong hint that such instinctive, heartfelt spirituality is more typically characteristic of the faith of a woman, and superior to men's more cerebral, unfeeling religion. Not only are all her heroes women but in one key episode the most significant male character, the socially and intellectually superior Clement Marks, is seen to be impotent in easing the suffering of a child he knocks down in contrast to Naomi whose spiritual commitment to others' well-being is expressed in her success in nursing the child back to health. The theme of difference is treated in her non-fiction, too. As Montagu saw it,

A man analyses and sifts and reasons while with the woman he climbs the mountain of God. I have heard it said how a man climbs step by step until he reaches the level within his reach. His path has been sure but rather slow. He looks round and sees a woman by his side. He did not see her while he was climbing because she sprang from ledge to ledge taking many risks.<sup>55</sup>

And again, "Judaism is based on reason and emotion. Women being more emotional than men must help in rendering that element pure and strong."<sup>56</sup> She believed passionately in women's spirituality as a potentially civilizing influence. Since the time of Adam and Eve, the behind-the-scenes power of women over men had proved itself "a law of nature against which rebellion is impossible". The ideal "girl in the background" should recognise her responsibilities and use them for inculcating "purity, temperance, righteousness, and peace".<sup>57</sup>

*Naomi's Exodus* ends with Naomi returning to her home, spiritually vitalised and committed to a life of duty and public service to God as a Jew.<sup>58</sup> And here Montagu promotes the fruits of true spirituality in terms of public service and leadership. She was quite insistent about this. As she wrote elsewhere,

We women must be unafraid to enter public life by whatever door we think fit, so long as the light from Heaven illumines our work, and we venture to seek God's guidance in dealing with the

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problems that confront us... The recognition of the moral law must, I think, be carried [by women] from the home sanctuary into public life... I think that we must really carry our faith into public life and affirm that it is still applicable.<sup>59</sup>

Partly, at least, this was because Montagu was concerned to challenge the common assumption that Christians were the only ones concerned with spirituality as expressed through social work. She explained,

I think women's contribution cannot be very effective if she lacks the courage to be articulate [or to speak out]... I think that you may increase the respect for Judaism among your colleagues if when occasion arises you are unafraid to make its principles known. Our Christian neighbours must not be allowed to think that they have a monopoly in conscientious scruples, or indeed in religion itself.<sup>60</sup>

But mainly this was a claim for equal respect for women. Although she emphasised men and women's differences, she also stressed their equality,<sup>61</sup> and Montagu was herself the first woman to preach in a British synagogue, and wrote passionately in support of the idea of women rabbis in 1956.<sup>62</sup> In this call to public witness, Montagu went well beyond any traditional idea of women's role as belonging to the private sphere.

In this brief survey of different works by which means we have explored Montagu's personal experience of Jewish spirituality, and in particular her interest in a specifically womanly conception of spirituality, we might note the necessity as she saw it of reforming Judaism along universalist lines. Jewish and Christian women are both seen to experience an inner knowledge of the divine to the extent that laws and labels are immaterial. They both understand the spiritual power of prayerful piety. At this level, at least, Montagu is keen to stress sameness, especially in her fiction. Her ideological universalism is untroubled, her only concern being the need to convince Christians of the reality of Jewish spirituality, especially as expressed through social work.

## **(ii) Relating to Tradition and Scriptural Resources**

Montagu regarded the Bible as the obvious resource from which to propound her agenda. In 1922 she published with her sister, Netta Franklin, an edited work, *Daily Readings from the Old Testament*, in which a few comments on a particular weekly theme (for

example, imagination, knowledge of God, divine love), were followed by a short list of readings taken from throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>63</sup> Its primary focus, once again, was that of inculcating the presence of God and devotional-feelings. Later, in *Letters to Anne and Peter* (1944), Montagu used Bible stories to draw moral lessons for children and, incidentally, to inculcate a sense of unity between Jew and Christian.<sup>64</sup> Shared by both communities, the Bible represented an opportunity to empathize with each other. As Montagu explained,

[The Old Testament] gives the history of an ancient people and describes the development of the religion by which they have lived through all their generations even to this day. Perhaps it may be well for Christian children, even while they are strengthening their own faith, to have some understanding of the Jewish children in their midst.<sup>65</sup>

Jew and Gentile alike could learn generosity from the story of Abraham and Lot, courage from the story of Joseph's adventures in Egypt, and friendship from the story of David and Jonathan. Some attempt was made to highlight women's experiences. For example, Montagu expounded the story of Rebecca's hospitality to Eliezer, highlighted Ruth's worth as a convert to a Judaism, praised Hannah's prayer for a child as the first biblical example of silent prayer, and stressed the injustice of the historically patriarchal context of the story of Leah's marriage to Jacob ("People in those times didn't bother much about what girls felt").<sup>66</sup> But her gender agenda was nowhere near as radical as it would be for later thinkers. This was because Montagu's chief concern was not to stress the place of women in Jewish tradition. Rather, it was to emphasise the universal teachings that the Bible offered spiritually awakened Jews and Christians; her final text addressed to both Jewish and Christian children was "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us all?"<sup>67</sup> It seemed natural to her to point to the Christian Quaker's silent contemplative practices in her discussion of the Sabbath commandment, to the Archbishop of Canterbury's views on international relations in the context of Isaiah and Jeremiah's teachings of social justice, and to St. Paul in exploring the characteristics of love, and to Jesus with regard to the *Shema*.<sup>68</sup> The sense of a shared worldview led

Montagu to the claim that, through Christianity, the sacred Mission of Israel to communicate God's teachings to the nations had been made possible.<sup>69</sup>

As a Progressive Jew, Montagu's other concern in *Letters to Anne and Peter* was to introduce the idea of biblical-criticism to children. On a number of occasions, she stressed rational explanations of miraculous stories (such as the burning bush) and carefully integrated ideas of multiple-authorship (such as in Isaiah) and misattributions (such as in Proverbs and Psalms).<sup>70</sup> This revisionism was necessary if Judaism was to be modern and intellectually robust, and by no means undermined the value of the texts themselves as a treasured source of moral inspiration. In explaining how the teachings of Elijah had been recorded (likening the process to Chinese whispers), Montagu concluded, "and so we have a mix-up of thought in the Bible, but the mix-up is very good and we are grateful."<sup>71</sup> Ever concerned with ethical issues and behaviour, Montagu was not averse to allegorizing or spiritualizing certain narratives,<sup>72</sup> or setting aside unpalatable customs or attitudes as those of a thankfully bygone era.<sup>73</sup> Writing during the War, she was particularly concerned to implant a horror of warfare.<sup>74</sup> Overall, there was something of a nervous tension in the work: the Bible was *the* Jewish devotional aid, but modern conceptions of Progress made much of it seem inappropriate for the proper moral education of the young.<sup>75</sup>

As one might expect of the co-founder of Anglo-Liberal Judaism, Montagu sought to integrate non-traditional material in her writings. Directly as a result of Montefiore's influence, Montagu came to believe that non-Jewish religious teachings were of real religious value. In an address in 1953 she urged,

[W]e must not confine ourselves to the Bible as the only source of religious truth... Our theologians must study our neighbours' religion, as well as our own, and strengthen our devotion to the One God, while realising that some aspects of devotion drawn from the New Testament are not incompatible with our own faith. We should be prepared to learn more about temptation, sin and suffering, while holding fast to our glorious Jewish doctrine of atonement... The time has come when we need no longer be afraid of profiting from the learning of our neighbours on those basic elements of religion we hold so common.<sup>76</sup>

Rather than dismiss temptation, sin and suffering as subjects over which Christians mistakenly obsessed, Montagu actively sought to draw upon Christian expertise on what were, in her eyes, universal spiritual challenges. Likewise, literary and artistic works were also potential devotional aids, and in her biographical study Umansky dedicates an entire chapter to Montagu's frequent use of non-Jewish literary sources including Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, George Elliot, and, especially, Robert Browning.<sup>77</sup> Montagu was aware that many Jews would fear the weakening of Judaism if it drew heavily upon non-Jewish authorities, but her answer was immediate: "Truth... must be sacred everywhere." To deny the universal nature of religious truth was to deny the universalist claims of Liberal Judaism.<sup>78</sup>

In the same year, however, Montagu succumbed to the pressure to offer Jewish alternatives to Christian edifying literature. It had been drawn to her attention that "although there were plenty of excellent Christian anthologies for all the world to use, we [Jews] lacked religious thoughts drawn from purely Jewish sources to enrich our spiritual treasury."<sup>79</sup> The resultant anthology of Jewish teaching, entitled *God Revealed* (1953) included ninety texts from the biblical, Talmudic and medieval periods, forty-four texts by men and fourteen texts by women from the modern period, and twelve of her own prayers, which gives some indication of the extent to which this liberal Jewish thinker was reliant (or not) upon traditional resources. Scriptural and classical religious literature was set alongside modern reflections and poetry. Women contributors wrote about children, health, the beauty of nature, social service, friendship, the non-intellectual ability to sense God in others, the importance of cultivating serenity at within the home, suffering, religious observance – and even clairvoyance. The over-arching theme was the idea of sensitizing oneself to God's presence in a variety of everyday-life experiences, according to various Jewish perspectives.<sup>80</sup>

In her fiction Montagu tended to focus almost exclusively upon on individual women's experiences in communicating her religious ideals, rarely drawing upon biblical resources for inspiration as one might have expected.<sup>81</sup> Thus, in one short story, 'Miss Susan', a young coquette who flirts shamelessly and whose sole concern in life is to amuse herself

is provoked to indignation and jealousy by the inattention of a more spiritually-minded young man, and has to learn to grow up and take responsibility for herself and her family.<sup>82</sup> Here the moral (that a single women's petty jealousies arise as a result of not having enough to do) is made by means of exploring an individual's experience and spiritual development. For a Liberal Jew adhering to the teachings of Montefiore, the individual's experience (here, based upon Montagu's social work in Girl's Clubs) was as valid a source of spiritual authority as were scripture and tradition; ultimately, whether one was a Jew or a Christian, all of life and tradition had to be understood through the prism of reason, anyway.

In summary, Montagu orientated herself to her faith's sacred writings in two specific ways. She regards the Bible as a source of religious Jewish authority and also as a means by which to promote universalist aspirations, uniting Jew and Christian. Montagu's Liberal belief in Progress meant that biblical criticism and an historical perspective on the scriptures were regarded as vital, and that later writings were considered to possess devotional merit, including Christian and non-religious poetry and even the Christian Bible. Crucially, Montagu stressed the individual's conscience and life-experiences as legitimate resources from which to derive spiritual understanding, even over tradition and scripture.

### **(iii) Relating to Community in terms of both Jews and Christians**

When it comes to interfaith relations and the question of religious community, Montagu emphasized women's shared spirituality and was keen to use Christians in her novels as the means by which to communicate this. In *Naomi's Exodus* (1901), the eponymous heroine fortuitously makes the acquaintance of an elderly Christian woman, Mrs Finch. This woman, who possessed "eyes which were luminous with a light, which Naomi had never seen before", effortlessly, communicates to Naomi a sense of the divine presence and her desire to share God's teachings with others.<sup>83</sup> Naomi's aunt, Mrs Saul, a representation of the idea that external observance make one righteous, is contrasted starkly with Mrs Finch, who represents the love of God and humanity, faith that leads to

self-sacrifice, and humility. Suspicious of Naomi's friendship with Mrs Finch, the aunt accuses her niece of conversion. In frustration, Naomi leaves her home and wanders for a year, finding herself in the company of Christian models of spirituality such as the Girl's Club leader, Jean Miles. The message that true spirituality can be found among Christians as well as Jews is powerfully reinforced when Jean Miles explains to Naomi that she need not convert to Christianity to find inner peace, because "this wonderful, mysterious thing which makes people happy has nothing to do with creed."<sup>84</sup>

The artifice of using Christians as spiritual models or guides is adopted throughout Montagu's fiction. Stories that use this device include 'What can a Mother do?', 'The Lure of Suffering' and 'The Great Idea' in her collection of short stories *What Can a Mother Do?* (1926). In the novel *Broken Stalks* (1902), Montagu makes no mention of Judaism or Jews whatsoever in her tale of the religious journey of young English girl, Joan Carey.<sup>85</sup> The plot, such that it is, revolves around Joan's dilemma as to how to help a close friend, Millicent, when her long-lost alcoholic father returns, threatening to disrupt her life. She learns that God makes people whole and rescues situations according to simple faith (for example, a child called Molly plants a broken geranium stalk and expects God to heal it), or from hard-won experience (for example, her father George Carey). Impressed by their inner conviction (and their emphasis upon moral intention), Joan sees return of the prodigal father as providential. She advises Millicent that God "means you to mend your father's broken life with your love." By living her life according to faith, human sympathy and love, she learns to stand straight like the geranium stalk. The lesson of redemption is a universal one, Montagu preaches, and one, which need not be taught, in explicitly Jewish terms.

Arguably, Montagu struggled to find the appropriate forum in which to make this point about the 'sameness' of Christian and Jewish spirituality. Certainly her autobiography, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman* (1904) and her major work of theology, *Thoughts on Judaism* (1943), do not treat the subject to anywhere near the degree that this is assumed and promulgated in her novels. In her autobiography, quite the reverse is the case: Montagu spends time viciously attacking intermarriage as threatening the transmission of

Judaism to the next generation, emphasising differences in doctrine, dismissing negative Christian views of Judaism as ‘legalism’, and arguing for the importance of correcting Christian ignorance about Judaism.<sup>86</sup> About the most positive comment she has to make has to do with combining forces with Christians in the context of social work, which “revealed different aspects of the God-idea which both communities held in common.”<sup>87</sup> In the theological treatise, *Thoughts on Judaism*, there is again a striking lack of interest in the subject of the spirituality shared in common between Judaism and Christianity. On one hand, she is prepared to complement Christians who are suspicious of the doctrine of trinity, and even to suggest that something can be learned from some developments of Jewish thought to be found in the New Testament.<sup>88</sup> And there is an interesting passage on the subject of the fate of Jews who fall away from Judaism, which hints at a recognition of the spiritual equality of Christianity and Judaism. Thus:

It may be urged that the tendency of lax Jews is to join the larger Christian community, and that the Christian ideal of righteousness is as noble as our own... The burdens and responsibilities of Jews are so heavy; why should we fret ourselves if some members of our brotherhood choose a lighter religious discipline, in order to arrive at the same end? But we cannot console ourselves so easily. Men and women do not *drift* into the realisation of a new faith. By mere indifference to Judaism, they do not become Christians... Most Jews who drift from Judaism drift into nothingness...<sup>89</sup>

It is possible to read this as implying that were such unfortunates to convert to Christianity properly, then this would be preferable to their drifting away from religion altogether. But all this has to be read in conjunction with her condemnation of intermarriage, which she denounces as strongly here as she had forty years previously,<sup>90</sup> and which was the focus of one story, and which lurked under the surface in several others.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, her five principles of Judaism, in contrast to the classic Reform principles enunciated at the Pittsburgh Platform (1885),<sup>92</sup> and even those espoused by Montefiore,<sup>93</sup> make no reference to the truths revealed to other religions; rather, one of them categorically states, “No intercessor is possible or necessary between man and God,” a clear reference to Christian views of Jesus’ role.<sup>94</sup>

It seems that artistic or literary forms of expression allowed Montagu to explore issues that would either have been too controversial to articulate in the genre of more explicitly theological works, or, and this is more likely, that required an emphasis on feeling, on emotion, on spiritual sensibilities, which might only be captured in a distinct genre. Furthermore, such media enabled more of the writer's own experience to come through, and individual experience was for Montagu an authority which would sit uncomfortably in a formal work of theology. In any case, her novels demonstrate that she obviously believed passionately in the idea of a universalist conception of spirituality. Such a sympathetic view stems from Montagu's Liberal Jewish belief that all faiths were windows onto divine truth.<sup>95</sup> The influence here of her colleague and mentor, Claude Montefiore, is significant; it is important to recognise that his own view of Christianity was unusually sympathetic.<sup>96</sup> But more than that, it also has to do with her commitment to personal piety in general and, in particular, her belief that women are more spiritually sensitive than men, be it of any creed. While a small number of religious men do appear in her novels, women are generally presented as a good deal more spiritually aware. For Montagu, her community is one of what she would regard as spiritually awakened Jews and Christians, and especially women.

In trying to establish Montagu's sense of community, one needs to remember that she was one of the founders and member of the executive committee of the London Society of Jews and Christians,<sup>97</sup> and that she regularly attended all the functions of the Council of Christians and Jews.<sup>98</sup> Her universalism meant that she could use Christians, real or fictional, and especially Christian women, as spiritual role models. There is no doubt that Montagu criticised certain Christian teachings, and in her main theological treatise she expressed these concerns forcefully, but it is also the case that she was prepared to overlook differences for a greater universalist truths, such as redemption, which she explored more readily in her fiction.

## Conclusion

In 2005 a collection of essays was published entitled *Women's Voices; New Perspectives for the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*. It includes contributions from eight Jewish and Christian women (Helen Fry, Rachel Montagu, Lynne Scholefield, Anne Clark, Clare Jardine, Kathleen de Magtige Middleton, Beryl Norman, Marcia Plumb, and Irene Wise) who, after a number of years of group discussions, believe that within Jewish-Christian dialogue as practised widely today, the experiences, interests and perspectives of women have been sidelined.<sup>99</sup> They point out that the legitimacy of a contributor to dialogue is closely related to authority and official position and that, within the Jewish and Christian traditions at least, this means that male scholars and leaders have tended to predominate.<sup>100</sup> Amongst the subjects that the authors select for discussion was that of story telling as a women's genre.<sup>101</sup> Here, as described by one Jew and one Catholic, storytelling is a technical term relating to a distinctive style of dialogue. They suggest that women's methods or ways of dialoguing tend to be more fluid and this means that they often present material that is academic but also interwoven with their own spiritual or religious experiences.<sup>102</sup> As a result, it is argued, women's dialogue, in contrast to men's, tends to be more subjective and egalitarian. As they put it, "The weaving of autobiographical and anecdotal material with scholarly research combines styles in a post-modern approach that challenges established ways of doing theology and dialogue... thereby push[ing] forward the boundaries of that dialogue."<sup>103</sup> The authors accept that such a method is possible for men, too, but suggest that it is distinctive for women to approach it in this way.<sup>104</sup> The authors of *Women's Voices* also stress that women's knowledge is constructed in an interpersonal, relational way and that this has obvious relevance for interfaith dialogue, where learning to relate is regarded as a goal in itself. In a process described as *narrative theology*, women "weave connections between our individual story, our scriptural story and our community's story", and "meaning is only achieved when... [these three aspects] engage with one another." The feminist view that women's identities and meanings are constructed against patriarchal power structures is

affirmed and as a result the stories often make visible and critique the existing power structures. In this and other ways, the idea is to “use stories to make sense of our lives.”<sup>105</sup>

What does all this mean for Lily Montagu? Firstly, one can see her engaged in a kind of interfaith dialogue. Her project to relate Judaism to the Christian other was one means by which she developed self-knowledge and worked out her own religious identity. It is clear that from early on she had set out with a clear conclusion in mind: that, as a Jew, she could identify with the Christian on a profound level. She also wanted to generate Christian respect for Jewish spiritual integrity. It is just as clear that she also planned to reform Judaism according to the spiritual insights she had received from her time with Christians and from her reading of non-Jewish literature. These objectives would involve an on-going deliberate effort to write for and engage with both Jewish and Christian audiences.

Secondly, if Montagu was engaged in what we would nowadays describe as the generation of a relational theology, and if the authors of *Women's Voices* are correct, then it comes as no surprise that, as a woman, Montagu's means of expression was a form of narrative theology. In other words, it should come as no surprise that she interwove her personal story (that is, as reflected in her literary musings on women's spirituality), with the scriptural story (that is, giving voice to woman who inhabited the pages of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish history), with the community's story (that is, the community redefined so that it included both Jews and Christians who shared a common sense of personal piety and social conscience). As a woman, it should also come as no surprise that in her reforming programme that privileged womanly spirituality, she offered a critique of patriarchal power structures and traditionalist conceptions of what constituted authentic Judaism. She certainly did challenge the male monopoly over externalised religion as performed in the public domain, the hegemony of the familiar voices of the Patriarchs, and the unquestioned communal authority of those dedicated to the world of traditional rabbinic learning.

Thirdly, while Montagu saw clear differences between Judaism and Christianity, she chose to highlight common attitudes and experiences among those Jews and Christians, especially women, whom she regarded as spiritually awakened. In embracing and identifying with this wider spiritual community, in redefining her community in this way, she went beyond identifying markers of similarity between the two systems, which so many Jewish theologians have limited themselves to. She was drawn into a hazy world in which she found herself simultaneously attracted and repelled by the similarities and differences she perceived between the two communities. She had learned to see each through the other's eyes and she could sympathize with each critiques of the other. But there was to be a profound cost in terms of a tendency to shift from one way of seeing things to the other. The development of a 'theology of relation' is very much a dynamic process and one must be prepared to live with the confusion and even contradiction that is attendant to attempting to define the relationship between oneself and the other. This is not a linear process, but rather a cyclical one, for one is always moving between what differentiates or pushes us apart and that which binds together or that which unifies. Such an understanding makes for an honest account of paradoxical attitudes towards the subject of one's relational theology, which, in the case of Montagu, was Christianity. It better accounts for her admiration and criticism of Christian practical social and missionary action, teaching and spirituality, and explains her shifting concerns when dealing with the relationship between the two faiths. Rather than try and reconcile her occasionally conflicting positions, one can acknowledge them as part of this difficult process.

Fourthly, and finally, one might point to Montagu's unusual combination of writing styles, which included the full range of genre from the 'edifying literature' of her novels and short stories to her biblical commentaries and more explicitly theological writings and sermons. Again, it seems reasonable to put this down to the kind of theological project she was attempting. It is not easy to try to capture the ephemeral sense of relation, of shared-but-distinct identity, between oneself and the other. It is not easy to express this complex sense of religious identity. If one has the skills, one might well attempt to

express it in different forms and media. Arguably, Montagu's range of writings styles could be explained by reference to her historical context and, in particular, to the influence and norms of the surrounding Christian culture; certainly, there is no difficulty finding examples of Christian women who wrote religious edifying works. But there were few who were simultaneously writing works of theological meditation and biblical commentary, and it is not clear whether the emulation of Christian women is entirely adequate as an explanation. If, on the other hand, Montagu was engaged in 'relational theology' well before it was formulated as such, and if this involves an interweaving of personal experience and spiritual reflection together with conventional academic study ("story-telling" as it is described by the post-modern theologians of *Women's Voices*), then perhaps we can understand how it was that Montagu's ambiguous attitude toward Christianity came to be captured in such a combination of genre.

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<sup>11</sup> For a comparison of Buber's and Rosenzweig's conceptions of Christianity with that of Montefiore, see Daniel R. Langton, *Claude Montefiore: His Life and Thought*, Parkes-Wiener Series on Jewish Studies (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 157-165.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951). Claude G. Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1914). Claude G. Montefiore, "What a Jew Thinks About Jesus," *Hibbert Journal* 23 (1934-35).

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Montagu was a private banker who was closely involved in the creation of the Federation of Synagogues in 1887, which sought to cater for immigrant Jewish traditionalists. He was an influential public opponent of Reform Judaism on the welfare organisation known as the Jewish Board of Guardians and the representative body known as the Board of Deputies.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen M. Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism*, Studies in Women and Religion (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1983), 211-220.

<sup>5</sup> From her early experiences of Yom Kippur, she recalls, "I began to wonder about the funny religion which permitted such crass irreverence... What did all this piety mean? Why didn't it get inside you and change you a little?" Lilian H. Montagu, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1943), 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-13. Among other things, Montagu recalls being advised to "start writing stories" as a kind of therapy, which set her off on a literary career.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca was the sister of the acclaimed nineteenth-century novelist and theologian, Grace. See Grace Aguilar and Michael Galchinsky, *Selected Writings*, Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ont., Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2003). Montagu recalled learning from Rebecca Aguilar the Hebrew Grace for mealtimes and nothing else. Montagu, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman*, 6. Eric Conrad reports that Lily's sister, Henrietta, taught her Hebrew and Latin. Eric Conrad, *Lily H. Montagu: Prophet of a Living Judaism* (National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, 1953), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Lilian H. Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism* (London: R. B. Johnson, 1904), 143.

<sup>9</sup> As she later recalled: "I saw some of my friends give up their allegiance very early and drift into intermarriage.... The treasures of Judaism lay hidden from them... I felt that if these same young people knew the meaning of their religion, if they had been brought up to value its beauty, they would have thought themselves to be links in the chain of testimony... I felt impelled by a strong desire to found a movement to revitalise Judaism and rekindle the ancient lights..." Montagu, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Montagu, with the approval of the orthodox rabbi Simeon Singer, led these services at the Berkeley Street Reform Synagogue for ten years, boasting an average attendance of fifty. *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> Lily Montagu, "Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 11 (1899): 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> The *Jewish Chronicle* published a report of these developments. *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 15.

<sup>13</sup> The initial private meeting arranged by Montagu in February 1902 had simply set-up a provisional committee to organise "special services supplementary to those now held in the synagogues". *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 15. For historical treatments of the founding of the LJS, see: Lawrence Rigal and Rosita Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism: The First Hundred Years* (London: Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 2004). Anne J. Kershner and Jonathan A. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain, 1840-1995* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995). Langton, *Claude Montefiore: His Life and Thought*.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Montagu was obliged to resign her leadership of youth-services with the Reform Synagogue. *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 October 1909, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Writing privately in 1926 of her organisation of a world conference for Progressive Judaism, Montefiore enthused, "It is a *wonderful* achievement; the unaided work of one woman: a remarkable result of faith, enthusiasm, patience, courage and systemised attention to detail." Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Lucy Cohen, 20 June 1926. Lucy Cohen, *Some Recollections of Claude Goldsmid-Montefiore 1858-1938* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 155.

<sup>16</sup> As she put it: "Indeed, he [Montefiore] gave the other man's point of view so fully, so fairly, and so attractively, that his own teaching sometimes became a little confused just because he could not be dogmatic." L. Montagu, 'Claude Montefiore – His Life and Work', address to the Liberal Jewish Synagogue (Sun 30 January 1944). And again: "We sometimes thought that his own beliefs were not given the emphasis they deserved, because of the explanation he gave of the opinions of those who thought differently from him." Lily Montagu, "Claude Montefiore as Man and Prophet," in *Lily H. Montagu Papers, Sermons and Addresses* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1958), MS 282/3/7.

<sup>17</sup> Her sermon was entitled 'Kinship with God' and is reproduced in Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism*, 111-120.

<sup>18</sup> Lily Montagu, "The Jewish Religious Union and Its Beginning," *Papers for the Jewish People* 27 (1927): 27. Montefiore had made public his support in principle for women ministers in 1920. *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 March 1920, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Her sermon was entitled 'Personal Religion'. Montagu, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman*, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Leslie Edgar, "Address at Memorial Service," *Liberal Jewish Monthly Supplement* 1963, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Montagu's published works include the novels *Naomi's Exodus* (1901) and *Broken Stalks* (1902), the collection of short stories *What Can A Mother Do?* (1926), the theological meditation *Thoughts on Judaism* (1902), her autobiography *The Faith of a Jewish Woman* (1943), a commentary on the Hebrew Bible for children *Letters to Anne and Peter* (1944) a history of her involvement in social work, *My Club and I* (1953). Edited works include *Prayers, Psalms and Hymns for Jewish Children* (1901), the devotional work *God Revealed* (1953), and *A Little Book of Comfort for Jewish People in Times of Sorrow* (1948). An edited collection of her other written output can be found in Lilian H. Montagu and Ellen M. Umansky, *Lily Montagu: Sermons, Addresses, Letters, and Prayers*, Studies in Women and Religion (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism*, 125, 129, 134-135.

<sup>23</sup> Conrad, *Lily H. Montagu: Prophet of a Living Judaism*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> While he understood why some spoke of her as a saint, Conrad assured his readers that she was uninterested in sitting back in a life of meditation and contemplation. Rather "She is out to kill the dragon. And the World Union for Progressive Judaism can be one of her most potent weapons... Yes, this gentleness of women can bully alright..." *Ibid.*, 56, 60.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism*, 203.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-221.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 129, 133.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Montagu highly rated and frequently cited from Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, George Elliot, and, especially, Robert Browning. She also credited her friendship with Margaret Gladstone, who became the wife of the prime-minister, Ramsey McDonald, as having "a formative influence" in terms of social work. Montagu, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Lily Montagu, *Naomi's Exodus* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> Naomi is taken to the National Gallery where "she felt for the first time humbled in the presence of their beauty... [She] could not discuss the pictures. She could only hold her [companion's] arm in silence and

long to get outside and get rid of a feeling of oppression that seemed to petrify her understanding...” And after being taken to hear a concert: “No sooner did she reach home than [Naomi] was conscious of the miserable discontent which had tormented her increasingly for the last month...” Ibid., 9.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>38</sup> For example, after being invited by some poor girls to share their meal and accommodation, the author comments “Here was no question of terms, no question about respectability; here was simply love; here, although Naomi hardly realised it, was religion.” Ibid., 61.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>41</sup> As one spiritual mentor tells her, “You’ve got the roots of religion buried somewhere. Your fathers did the planting for you, and it took them thousands of years, but the flower has got to struggle into life again and become part of you to help you when you want it, or – it’s just no good.” Ibid., 113.

<sup>42</sup> Montagu, “Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today,” 224-225.

<sup>43</sup> “As a rule they [that is, children] are inattentive; and if they pray at all, it is that the prayers may speedily end. The occasional introduction of a children’s sermon does not for them materially relieve the tedium of the service... Yet children are naturally religious.” Ibid.: 221.

<sup>44</sup> “Yet, at the outset of our search, we shall be persuaded that only the elect among us can worship at the ‘Fount of Inspiration’ without some assistance in the form of a ritualistic system, and that the perpetuation of Judaism therefore requires the maintenance of certain ceremonial observances. For the essence of a religion cannot be transmitted in all its simplicity to a child, whose mind cannot conceive an abstraction, and a certain discipline of observance is essential to character-training. We can only combat our tendency to self-indulgence and to spiritual sloth by having fasts and holydays reserved for communion with God.” Ibid.: 225.

<sup>45</sup> “Our children have to learn that prayer requires *effort*. If they could see their leader moved by spiritual need, struggling to approach his God, they would unconsciously join in the search, and experience veneration in the presence of God... The Judaism will have gained through fervent prayer far more than it can have lost through less regard for form.” Ibid.: 226-227.

<sup>46</sup> Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> “It seems clear that *experience* alone can convince us of the existence of God, of His love for righteousness, of His relations to each human soul.” Ibid., 20.

<sup>48</sup> “We feel God’s presence within ourselves and in the good desires which sometimes obtain a mastery over our lives and force us to accomplish deeds of love... When we peer into the future and consider certain troubles which may overtake us, we are sometimes include to believe that such troubles will be quite intolerable; we should succumb under their burden. But God reveals Himself in many ways, and sometimes the whisper of His love is most clearly heard in the midst of tribulation.” Ibid., 19, 20-21.

<sup>49</sup> Montagu is relatively respectful of ceremony/ritual, insofar as it is associated with prayer. “What a mockery ceremonial observance becomes, when it is disassociated from a moral life!” Ibid., 45. This was even more important in terms of children’s education. “All observances should be connected with prayer in the child’s mind – prayer in which he must take part, which he must thoroughly understand... It is of course very satisfactory when our children are good Hebrew scholars. Their learning is likely to lead them to the most useful of all studies – the study of the Bible. But unless they have acquired the habit of prayer, unless their conduct reveals a devotion to Jewish principles, they will not be equal to the responsibilities which they have received from God.” Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 69, 73.

<sup>50</sup> “In beautiful works of art, too, we can find God... We must learn, if we can, to love nature religiously, looking upon her, as the creation of God, and seeking from, and finding in her all the comfort and the strength which we can. If children grow up ‘streeety,’ if they feel lonely and miserable in the country, without the noise and excitement of city life, we feel that they have lost something for which no material comfort can compensate them.” Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 37, 103. See also the spiritual lessons she derived from a trip to the local gallery and in perusing world literature. Lily Montagu, “Seen at the Tate

Gallery' (1925) and 'Immortality in Literature' (1924) in Montagu and Umansky, *Lily Montagu: Sermons, Addresses, Letters, and Prayers*, 40-46, 31-40.

<sup>51</sup> "There are Jews influenced by Oriental conceptions, who still seem to think that Judaism is less concerned with women than with men... Upon her [the mother's] virtue and godliness, does the purity of the home ultimately rest. [Footnote:] When we hear that some of our co-religionists spend their Friday nights in going to theatres and music halls, or parties, or in card-playing, we feel that they are making a terrible mistake – a mistake that may spoil their whole lives and the lives of their children. By choosing the wrong time for their amusements they cut themselves off from the highest influences of Judaism. They are even desecrating the sanctity of their home." Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 85. Elsewhere she wrote, "The father tries to explain certain externalities to his child; the Seder night symbols, for example. The mother seeks to share with her child her experience of prayer... Judaism is based on reason and emotion. Women being more emotional than men must help in rendering that element pure and strong... [W]omen's contribution to religion is in the field of religious education... and in the quickening of the moral sense in her own life and in the lives of those whom she can influence." Lily Montagu, 'Women's Contributions to the Spiritual Life of Humanity' (undated) in Montagu and Umansky, *Lily Montagu: Sermons, Addresses, Letters, and Prayers*, 161, 163.

<sup>52</sup> Montagu, 'Kinship with God' (June 1918) in Montagu and Umansky, *Lily Montagu: Sermons, Addresses, Letters, and Prayers*, 114, 118.

<sup>53</sup> She took as her text, "In all their affliction He was afflicted and He bore them and carried them all the days of old." (Isaiah 63:8). Montagu, 'Kinship with God' (June 1918) in *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>54</sup> Montagu, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman*, 64-70.

<sup>55</sup> Lily Montagu, 'The Spiritual Contribution of Women as Women' (1948) in Montagu and Umansky, *Lily Montagu: Sermons, Addresses, Letters, and Prayers*, 172-173.

<sup>56</sup> Lily Montagu, 'Women's Contribution to the Spiritual Life of Humanity' (undated) in *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>57</sup> Lily Montagu, 'The Girl in the Background' in Edward J. Urwick, ed. *Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1904), 233-254.

<sup>58</sup> A number of Montagu's short stories feature young women who have to leave home before they can return wiser and spiritually awakened. These stories also often present social work in a positive spiritual light. For example, 'What Can a Mother Do?', 'The Lure of Suffering', and 'The Great Idea' in Lilian H. Montagu, *What Can a Mother Do? And Other Stories* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1926), 19, 46-47, 118.

<sup>59</sup> Lily Montagu, 'Religious Responsibilities in Public Life' (undated) in Montagu and Umansky, *Lily Montagu: Sermons, Addresses, Letters, and Prayers*, 179, 180, 181.

<sup>60</sup> Lily Montagu, 'Women's Contributions to the Spiritual Life of Humanity' (undated) in *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>61</sup> "I am a feminist too and believe in complete equality between men and women in the social, economic and religious spheres, but I think that humanity is enriched by the diversity between the two sexes." Lily Montagu, 'The Spiritual Contribution of Women as Women' (1948) in *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>62</sup> Lily Montagu, 'Jewish Women in the Rabbinate' (1956) in *Ibid.*, 183-184. Montagu preached at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in 1918, although, according to Umansky's reading of the minutes, the decision to give women the permission to preach was arrived at in June 1916. Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism*, 170.

<sup>63</sup> Lily Montagu and Netta Franklin, *Daily Readings from the Old Testament* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1922).

<sup>64</sup> Texts included Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, I Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes.

<sup>65</sup> Lily Montagu, *Letters to Anne and Peter* (London: Mamelok Press, 1944), v-vi.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 74, 75, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Malachai 2:10. *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 47, 133, 89, 70. In fact, Jesus, “the founder of Christianity... [who was] brought up in the Jewish religion and said he came to fulfil the Law and the prophets and not destroy them,” was a useful bridging character, generally.

<sup>69</sup> “The Jews were told that if they loved God... other people would see what a help it is to love God and they would join them and love God, too. And this has actually happened. Christians, through love of God, love goodness, and they, like the Jews, show their faith in their lives. Jews and Christians must not neglect this special work even today...” Ibid., 67.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 20, 32, 44, 80, 94, 108, 113-114, 116, 124-125, 129.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>72</sup> For example, Montagu seeks to spiritualize the traditional use of *mezuzahs*, commenting, “[I]n the ‘Shema’ we are told to put the love of God on our door-posts, which means that we should have peace and not quarrels in our homes...”. And the Children of Israel’s gifts for Solomon’s Temple are used to teach us to prepare for a life of service: “You may be able to amuse people later on or give them music or instruction or advice... [Y]ou will polish up your gifts as the people did their jewellery for the Temple.” Ibid., 69-70, 111-112.

<sup>73</sup> For example, attitudes to sacrifice, slavery, foreigners, war, spirits, polygamy. Ibid., 8, 19, 26, 78, 84, 101.

<sup>74</sup> References to the war with Nazi Germany (together with measured expressions of British patriotism) are frequent. Ibid., 34, 38, 71, 78, 95-96.

<sup>75</sup> Montagu’s strategy appears to have been to make a virtue out of a vice. “The Bible is a mine full of lovely things, but we have to dig before we can find some of the best... One day you may read about these Judges, but I don’t think the stories belong to Bible talks... [The story of Samson] is not a religious tale, because it tells of cruelty and wickedness and unfaithfulness... But wouldn’t it be a dreadful world if we hadn’t learned something in the hundreds and hundreds of years which have passed...? We should be ashamed of ourselves.” Ibid., 119, 72-73.

<sup>76</sup> In addition to Christianity, Montagu also suggested that “our theologians” look to psychological research and modern science. Lily Montagu, “The Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today,” *The Liberal Jewish Monthly* (1952), reproduced in *The Liberal Jewish Monthly* in Conrad, *Lily H. Montagu: Prophet of a Living Judaism*, 97-98.

<sup>77</sup> See Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism*, 57-76.

<sup>78</sup> Montagu, “The Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today.” reproduced in Conrad, *Lily H. Montagu: Prophet of a Living Judaism*, 99-100.

<sup>79</sup> In the preface, Montagu explains the need for “a book of devotion of this kind, written by Jews for themselves and their non-Jewish neighbours... Indeed it has been pointed out to me not infrequently, that although there were plenty of excellent Christian anthologies for all the world to use, we lacked religious thoughts drawn from purely Jewish sources to enrich our spiritual treasury.” Lily Montagu, ed, *God Revealed; An Anthology of Jewish Thought* (London: 1953), 3.

<sup>80</sup> Two entries by women actually cite Christian authorities. Lilian H. Montagu, *God Revealed. An Anthology of Jewish Thought* (London: Dillon, 1953), 65, 83.

<sup>81</sup> In this context, it is worth noting Montagu’s comment that “It seems clear that *experience* alone can convince us of the existence of God, of His love for righteousness, of His relations to each human soul.” Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> Montagu, *What Can a Mother Do? And Other Stories*, 80-95.

<sup>83</sup> Montagu, *Naomi’s Exodus*, 2-3. As an ideal Christian, Mrs Finch recognises the genius of the Jewish people. “I love your people... I have read so much about them, and understand something, I think, of their genius and their virtue.” Montagu, *Naomi’s Exodus*, 2-3. Referring to Mrs Finch, Naomi recalls, “The one day by accident I met a Christian lady, who made everything seem different. She obeyed no laws; but her religion, whatever it was, seemed to fill her life... I knew at once... that she had something and I had just nothing – that the laws were no use...” Montagu, *Naomi’s Exodus*, 114.

<sup>84</sup> Naomi fears the idea that she cannot find peace since she will not become a Christian. Jean Miles tells her, “And you needn’t [convert], my child. I have seen enough of this world to have found out that this wonderful, mysterious thing which makes people happy has nothing to do with creed. There is a great Peace somewhere, and it flows into this world and fills the empty wells in many human hearts, and there are quite as many channels as there are hearts, and nobody can tell which it will use. But all the people whose wells are filled are very close together, and get closer and closer as they draw in fresh strength from the Common Source.” Montagu, *Naomi’s Exodus*, 117.

<sup>85</sup> Lilian H. Montagu, *Broken Stalks* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1902).

<sup>86</sup> Montagu, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman*, 27, 53, 57, 61-62.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 53. Possibly, she is also making some sort of compliment when, in the context of Christian missionary activities, she observes, “If we have not done our duty to equip Jewish children with a knowledge of their faith, we cannot blame Christians who attempt to make good our neglect.” *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>88</sup> Montagu writes of being drawn to others who are “greatly interested in their own religion” and asserts, “we all know Christians who lead as high a life as any Jew of our acquaintance...” *Ibid.*, 53, 60-61.

Elsewhere she writes of the closeness of certain forms of Christianity to Judaism. “[W]e believe that men are gradually coming to worship the God of Israel, and to recognise the unity of His being and the law of righteousness, which he has established. Even now we see a gradual approximation of men of all creeds. The Trinitarian idea is accepted with intellectual reservations by believing Christians. The conception of the three Entities, seems to be merging into the recognition of different attributes of the one Divine Being. Christian divines insist more and more on the personal responsibility in the conduct of life. The universal Fatherhood is being so much better understood that the doctrine of the unbaptised, is being discredited. Then, again, other communities are coming into existence on purpose to minister to the one God, and to worship Him simply and directly by prayer, and by works of righteousness. These new Churches recognise most of “our” principles, and we feel consequently feel in close sympathy with them.” And again, “[W]e can study the doctrines of other faiths with reverence and respect, and we shall find among them some developments of Jewish dogma, which will help us in our search after God. We can gratefully adopt such teaching, consistent with the principles of Judaism to which we subscribe. For example, we shall find, in the New Testament, important and suggestive modifications of the doctrines of retribution and of the relations of suffering to sin...” Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 145-6, 147-8.

<sup>89</sup> Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 141-2, 144.

<sup>90</sup> “Around us are signs of [spiritual] disintegration. Men and women, professing different creeds marry in an irresponsible spirit, and the work of transmission [to the next generation] is arrested.” *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>91</sup> In the short story, ‘Grace Flossman’, the eponymous heroine falls in love with a Christian, Jack Clements, who loves her and asks her to marry him; she knows that her father would not accept the match. Jack argues, “It can’t end here, Grace... We believe in the same God – we lead the same sort of life. It can’t be religion which would prevent a man and woman who love each other as we do, from marrying and being happy. I am not going to give you up for a hateful, ridiculous prejudice, that has nothing more to do with religion than, than...” Grace means to tell her father (her mother is dead), but he is a gambler who shamefully unavailable to hear her dilemma. He is shortly arrested; in gaol he sees the error of his ways and promises to start a new life with his daughter. In his need, she finds strength to resist the temptation to marry Jack. “I should be dead to him if I married you, Jack, and I belong to my father. It is hard to understand why God made Jews and Christians like this [able to love each other], but I believe it’s because he loves us all... He wants us to be separate to feel his love more. The two separate truths merge together into one most glorious whole. There is God – but here on earth we must be separate... We should not have felt God so near us if we had been together, for there would have been a suggestion of doubt in our minds... He [her father] has helped me to feel God and has saved me from cowardice.” ‘Grace Flossman’ in Montagu, *What Can a Mother Do? And Other Stories*, 120-132. See also the short story, ‘The Lure of Suffering’, which features a character who profoundly regrets her ‘marrying out’. ‘The Lure of Suffering’ in Montagu, *What Can a Mother Do? And Other Stories*, 20-47.

<sup>92</sup> The first article states “We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man.” Declaration of Principles, Pittsburgh Platform (1885).

<sup>93</sup> Claude G. Montefiore, *Outlines of Liberal Judaism* (London: Macmillan, 1912). Throughout, Montefiore was concerned to show that Liberal Judaism could absorb what was useful – from outside as well as from within Jewish tradition – and reject what was not, in accordance with what he regarded as its ethical-theistic fundamentals.

<sup>94</sup> “I. There is one sole Creator or God. II. That the God of the World has relations with each human soul, and that each soul, being an emanation from him, must be, like him, immortal. III. We are responsible to God for our conduct, and if we sin we must bear the consequences of our sin. No intercessor is possible or necessary between man and God. The Divine love enters the heart of those who seek it with prayer and contrition. IV. The love of our neighbours is then a necessary development of our love of God. V. The Jewish brotherhood exists for a definite religious purpose.” Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 134-135.

<sup>95</sup> Montagu speaks of a vision of a communal service including “peoples of all races, colours and religions” with rabbi, priest, bishop, Quakers, Buddhist seers, all engaged in active roles. Adorning the synagogue were symbols of Old Testament, New Testament, and Koran. Each group voiced its own prayers, yet the result was harmonious. Lily Montagu, ‘A New Year Fantasy’ (undated pamphlet) in Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism*, 184-185.

<sup>96</sup> Montefiore was engaged in a project to develop a Jewish theology that would draw upon what he regarded as the best aspects of Christian thought. See Langton, *Claude Montefiore: His Life and Thought*. Montagu writes that her theology “owes a great deal to Mr Montefiore’s essay on ‘Liberal Judaism’, though the point of view is not everywhere the same.” Montagu, *Thoughts on Judaism*, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Eric Conrad, “Lily Montagu’s Life and Work,” *Liberal Jewish Monthly Supplement* (1963): 8.

<sup>98</sup> W.W. Simpson, letter reprinted in *Liberal Jewish Monthly Memorial Supplement* (1963), 20.

<sup>99</sup> The women describe themselves as “women who have had formal academic training and who teach and write in the areas of theology, Jewish Studies or Jewish-Christian relations.” They include representatives from Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Reformed Christian communities and from Reform and Liberal Jewish traditions (although there are no orthodox or conservatives of either faith). Helen P. Fry, Rachel Montagu, and Lynne Scholefield, *Women’s Voices: New Perspectives for the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>100</sup> Other topics include Christian Feminist anti-Semitism (which focuses on the idea that Jesus came to rescue women from misogynistic Judaism), studies of key biblical women, and the roles of women as influencers or educators. “Women are often the transmitters of faith and so it is particularly relevant to ask whether in the shaping of our traditions our religious observance should be shaped by the secular world around us.” *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>101</sup> The editors observe that “The genre of women’s dialogue is very different from that of the wider Jewish-Christian dialogue in its use of story as the mode for sharing their experiences and spiritual journey. The dialogue has enabled women to shape their own spirituality and affirm their identity within a new context. Judith Plaskow, a Jewish feminist, has expressed this succinctly: ‘Through the telling of my story, I reach out to other women. Through their hearing, which both affirms my story and makes it possible, they reach out to me.’ The very process of story-telling has affected the way in women express their identity. Such a mode of dialogue has been initiated solely from the women’s experience, termed *situated knowledge*, and it is in this respect that it differs from the dynamics of the wider Jewish-Christian dialogue.” *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>102</sup> They add, “Our journeys of faith are an integral part of what we bring to the dialogue and intensely personalized stories are often told.” *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 23, 24.