Religion in Israel

by ZVI YARON

THE CONTROVERSY

RELIGION in the State of Israel has become noted for its potential to generate strife. The frequent controversies over its role in society, an issue affecting the most sensitive areas of Israeli life, are acrimonious and harsh in tone. Many of them are accompanied by demonstrations and spiteful incidents instigated by extremists of all shades and opinions, ranging from the zealous Neṭure Ḳarta to the frenetic League for the Prevention of Religious Coercion. No doubt, they reflect the acerbated feelings of many moderate Israelis. Religious disputes have arisen over education, the legal definition of "who is a Jew," the authority of the rabbinate, autopsies, marriage and divorce, the legal status of the common-law wife, the status of women, army service for girls and yeshivah students, Sabbath observance, kashrut, the prohibition of pig-raising, and the closing of cinemas and theaters on religious holidays.

Some people complain that Israel is a theocracy, arguing that religion intrudes into every important aspect of public and individual life and imposes its authority on the governing of the state.[1] At the same time, there is the often-heard lament that Israel is a radically secularist state, in which the religious areas are narrowly circumscribed and the decisive influences

[1]On the complexities of the meaning of theocracy (first used by Josephus in his *Against Apion*) and its application to modern Israel, see Mordecai Roshwald, "Theocracy in Israel in Antiquity and Today," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 14, No. 1, June 1972, pp. 5–42.

are nonreligious. The actual situation is too complex, too full of contradictions and overlapping influences, to be defined in neat categories. Religion in Israel can be understood only in the light of historical events that shaped its role in the life of the Jewish people. Thus, it would be completely wrong to take into account only the period since Israel's establishment, or to analyze only the legal and political aspects of the problem.

Both in Israel and the United States, there has been an effusion of popular and scholarly writings offering simplistic interpretations of the problem of religion in Israel by reducing it to a legalistic church-state issue and a power struggle between religious and secularist parties. These interpretations are based on the assumption that Israel is a democratic state, in which the religious parties are trying to force religion on a majority of unwilling, secular Israelis. Religious laws, they contend, are the result of the "tactic of political extortionism by a minority,"[2] the religious parties in a coalition government whose majority parties "acted from constraint and against convictions." The rationale for this view is that the issues can be understood within the context of the here-and-now, without reference to the historical relationships between the Jewish people and its traditional beliefs and patterns of behavior. The subject of the writings is contemporary Israel; all that went before and all Jewishness existing today outside Israel are considered impertinent to an understanding of the problem. According to one political scientist, the entire problem is one of theopolitics, which he defines as "the attempt to attain theological ends by means of political activity."[3]

No doubt, religion in Israel has the classic church-state features of political struggles, with religious or antireligious coercion creating a serious problem of individual liberty. But to isolate these aspects and to magnify them into the quintessence of the issue is to distort it. A serious study of

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[2]Ervin Birnbaum, *The Politics of Compromise: State and Religion in Israel* (Rutherford, 1970), p. 86. See my review of this book and the subsequent discussions in the *Jerusalem Post,* September 24, October 15, November 5, 1971.

The purely legalistic and political approach, best exemplified by Shulamit Aloni, *The Arrangement: From a State of Law to a State of Halakhah* (Tel Aviv, 1970; Hebrew), is based on the assumption of an unbridgeable contradiction between the rule of law and the role of *halakhah,* Jewish religious law. See also Eliezer Goldman, *Religious Issues in Israel's Political Life* (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 52–53.

[3]Norman L. Zucker, *The Coming Crisis in Israel: Private Faith and Public Means* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973). Sensational titles such as this are characteristic of writings that analyze the religious problem solely in terms of party politics and legislation, probably because they view religion as an abrasive element in a secular society, and religious encroachments as a threat to the democratic system. For a more comprehensive discussion, see Samuel Clement Leslie, *The Rift in Israel: Religious Authority and Secular Democracy* (London, 1971). Joseph Badi, *Religion in Israel Today* (New York, 1959) reflects the legal approach to the problem.

the question must start out with the uniqueness of Israel in its links with the Jewish past and the contemporary Jewish Diaspora. Israel's intrinsic Jewishness is at the root of its dynamism and ways and means of grappling with difficulties.

Zionism and the Jewish state arose with the declared purpose to renew national life and break with the ghetto past. But renewal does not imply a hiatus in the nation's history. The traditions of the past pervade the present. And yet, the Jewish national renascence challenged what hitherto had been the very essence of Jewish existence, religious faith, and way of life. Martin Buber bemoaned this schism:

> When at last we stepped out of the ghetto into the world, worse befell us from within than had ever befallen us from without: the foundation, the unique unity of people and religion, developed a deep rift, which has since become deeper and deeper. Even the event of our days, the re-entry of the Jews into the history of the nations by the rebuilding of a Jewish state, is most intimately affected and characterized by that rift.[4]

Indeed, this schism is the underlying cause of the dispute about religion. For what we have in modern Israel is not the classical church-state conflict between secular and religious forces, but a debate between opposing views of the relationship between the Jewish nation and traditional Judaism, which is also reflected in the differing patterns of the daily behavior of Israelis.[5] To religious Jews the new secularism is an aberration that is not only untrue but also un-Jewish. To secular Jews the traditional religion is an unconscionable burden that depresses the potentialities of man and thwarts the free development of Jewish culture.

RELIGION AND NATIONALITY

The nature of the dispute about religion is new in Jewish history. No one had thought it possible to separate Jewish religion from membership in the Jewish people. Rejection of the Jewish religion automatically meant a break with the Jewish community. Today, however, many Jews consider religion to be no part of Jewishness. While Judaism is a faith held by many Jews, it no longer is an essential condition for belonging to the Jewish people. There has thus arisen a distinct difference between the individual Jew's

[4]Martin Buber, *On Judaism* (New York, 1967), p. 200.

[5]For a survey and analysis of one year's (1972) religious issues in Israel see my article "Religious Developments in Israel," *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1973*, pp. 306–309.

belief in the tenets of Judaism and his conscious identification with the Jewish people.

The new Jewish state is the embodiment of these profound changes, giving them political and social shape, and territorial concentration. At the same time, the revolution the state's establishment wrought in Jewish life served to accentuate earlier cultural and religious problems. Therefore, the religious situation in Israel can be understood only by a study of these changes and their implications.

One of the crucial developments in modern history is the secularization of society. Its main significance is not only that many people ceased to be religious, but that religion no longer is central to the life of the individual and society.[6] The impact of secularization on the patterns of living goes far beyond the narrowly circumscribed issues of religious faith and ritual. Religion is not a strictly defined human function. It involves man's personality, culture, and aspirations in all their ramifications. And when the attitude toward religion changes from confident assertion to nagging question, the crisis spreads within this wider context.

Hayim Greenberg[7] states that religion can never be a peripheral matter: "Either it stands at the core of things, and all other cultural activities intentionally or unintentionally serve as its periphery—or it ceases to be religion." When it ceases to be a central element in the Jewish community, it becomes tedious and insipid. Says Greenberg: "When Satan wishes to undermine religious life, he afflicts it—if he is successful—with a yawn." Even where religious beliefs hold sway, they are usually not pervasive and do not provide the basic frame of reference and the focal and integrative point of social life.

In his analysis of the religious experience in contemporary society, "The Lonely Man of Faith,"[8] Joseph B. Soloveitchik writes that, while he is not troubled by the theoretical problems with which religion has been assailed, he cannot shake off the disquieting feeling that for the man of faith the very

[6] Cf. Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in a Secular Society* (London, 1968); John Cogley, *Religion in a Secular Age* (New York, 1968).

[7] *The Inner Eye* (New York, 1974), Vol. 2, pp. 68–69. Abraham Joshua Heschel often spoke of the "irrelevance" of contemporary religion. In *God in Search of Man* (New York, 1955), p. 3, he said: "Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid." And more emphatically, in his posthumously published *A Passion for Truth* (New York, 1973), p. 307, he declared that it cannot exist in modern times unless the religious are committed to a life of relentless opposition to "spiritual leprosy."

[8] *Tradition*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Summer 1965, pp. 5–67.

fact of living in the modern secular society presents an insoluble dilemma. The contemporary man of faith, Soloveitchik holds, lives in a difficult and agonizing crisis, and his religious faith is a "passional" experience. He regards himself as a stranger in modern society; for what, asks Soloveitchik, can such a man say to a "functional utilitarian society which is saeculum-oriented?" Since he neither renounces secular society nor withdraws from civilization, he lives in constant and dialectical tension with that society, fulfilling an exacting and sacrificial role.[9]

In Jewish life, secularism seriously challenged religious faith and national cohesion. For Judaism was always understood as both the religion of the Jews and the essential component of Jewish nationality. The existence and destiny of the Jewish people were interpreted in distinctly theological terms. At Sinai, before the people of Israel received the Ten Commandments, God asked that they become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This involves not only the behavior of the individual, but the dedication to God of the nation "with all its substance and all its functions, with legal forms and institutions, with the organization of its internal and external relationships."[10] The implication is that the nationhood of the people of Israel has religious significance. This view was summed up by Saadya Gaon in his classic definition: "Our nation, the Children of Israel, is a nation only by virtue of its laws."[11] The definition of Judaism as a "nation-creating religion,"[12] or a "nation-religion"[13] derives from the fact that the Jewish religion and the Jewish nation have always been regarded as one. According to Heschel, Israel is a "spiritual order in which the human and the ultimate, the natural and the holy" enter a lasting covenant with God:

> For us Jews there can be no fellowship with God without the fellowship with the people of Israel. Abandoning Israel, we desert God. Jewish existence is not only the adherence to particular doctrines and observances, but primarily the living spiritual order of the Jewish people, the living *in* the Jews of the past and *with* the Jews of the present. It is not only a certain quality in the souls of the individuals, but primarily the existence of the community of Israel.[14]

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[9]As representative of the dialectical "theology of crisis" school in contemporary Jewish thought, Soloveitchik interprets his *halakhah* theology as a confrontation with the secular situation. See his "The Man of Halakhah" (Hebrew), *Talpioth* Vol. 1, 1944–45, particularly note 4, pp. 652–54.

[10]Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford, 1946), p. 107.

[11]*Emunot we-de'ot* ("The Book of Beliefs and Opinions"), Treatise 3.

[12]Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York, 1973), pp. 146–47.

[13]Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism* (Chicago, 1957), pp. 3–7.

[14]Heschel, *God in Search of Man,* p. 423. Heschel further elaborated these views in *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (New York, 1969).

Intrusion of Secularism

If the challenges of modern secularism are unprecedented in the history of mankind, they are of crucial importance to the Jewish people; for no other people has been so closely involved and intrinsically identified with religion. Religion decisively influenced ancient Greece and Rome, as well as medieval Europe; but there were periods in the political and literary life of some nations that were not under its sway. In the history of the Jews such nonreligious areas were almost unknown until the 18th century.[15] As secularism spread, Jews began to question their own traditions and pattern of living, and changes in their religiosity radically affected their self-understanding. At the same time, Jewish life was torn by almost uninterrupted political and social revolutions.

The era began with the lure of emancipation, when European nations held out to the Jews the promise of complete freedom at the price of total obliteration of Jewish identity. It ended, in our own time, with the most frightful abomination—the extirpation by the Nazis of six million Jews while the world remained silent. In the intervening period, the Jewish people experienced every imaginable kind of crisis: pogroms, discrimination, political disabilities, and antisemitic vilification.

The effects of the events that shook the foundations of Judaism and Jewish existence continued to be felt. The close identification of nationality with religious faith gave rise to anxious questioning. And today the issue of whether religion should be a criterion for belonging to the Jewish people is a subject of bitter polemics.

ZIONISM VS. TRADITION

It is one of the coincidences of history that Zionism sprang up toward the end of the 19th century, a time of the general decline of all religions. And since religion became a "problem" in Jewish life just when the Zionist movement was growing, the controversy over religion became an ingredient of renascent Jewish nationalism, first in the Zionist movement and later in the State of Israel.

This was bound to happen; for Jewish nationalism differed from European 19th-century nationalism in that it lacked two essential characteristics: territory and a common language. Yet Zionism brought about large-scale migration of Jews to Eretz Israel and, ultimately, the establishment of the

[15]Yitzhak Baer, *Israel Among the Nations* (Jerusalem, 1955; Hebrew).

Jewish state. What doubtless compensated for the lack of "normal" national traits was the allegiance which, over the centuries of dispersion, firmly held together all Jews in the unassailable conviction that they belonged to one nation; that they not only worshipped as one, but also lived the life of one national community.

The political and social emancipation of the Jews in the century before the advent of Zionism resulted in the severance of their ties to Jewish nationalism and a strong thrust to assimilate with the non-Jewish society, which often led to baptism. Heinrich Heine epitomized this struggle in his observation that baptism was the ticket to European civilization.[16] In time, however, a formula was worked out that attempted to divorce Jewish nationality from religion. It went like this: "I am a German [French, Dutch, etc.] citizen of the Mosaic faith." Judaism became like one of the Christian denominations in that it claimed no national attachment.

Zionism rejected all forms of assimilation and urged the renascence of the distinctive Jewish nationality. Permeated with the traditional longing for the ultimate redemption of, and return to, Zion, the movement always had the support of many religious Jews. But its impetus came mainly from nonreligious Jews who opposed assimilation as a threat to the survival of the Jewish people.[17] The historical concomitance of Zionism and irreligiosity produced a built-in tension between a nationalism traditionally steeped in religion and the view that insisted on divorcing Jewish nationality from religion. Since the revived nationalism was intended to preserve the historical ethos of the Jewish people, atheistic or agnostic Zionists faced the dilemma of how to reject Judaism and, at the same time, preserve Jewish nationality.

Herzl's Blueprint

Not all Zionists were aware of the complexity and acuteness of this problem. When Theodor Herzl declared, at the first Zionist Congress, that "Zionism is the return home to Judaism even before the return to the land of the Jews,"[18] he was not talking of *teshuvah,* religious repentance, but of the return of the estranged and assimilated Jews to their people. His knowl-

[16]The "functional" purpose of conversion was reflected in the remark by the Russian scholar Daniel Chwolsky that he became a Christian out of conviction—the conviction that it was better to be a professor at a university than a *melammed* (teacher) in a poor Jewish community. See Milton Himmelfarb, *The Jews of Modernity* (New York, 1973), p. 28.

[17]See Eliezer Livneh, *Israel and the Crisis of Western Civilization* (Tel Aviv, 1972; Hebrew).

[18]*Protokoll des I Zionistenkongresses, Basel 1897* (Prague, 1911), p. 16.

edge of Judaism was scant; he thought of religion in terms familiar to non-Jewish liberals of the Victorian age: It was the duty of a well-ordered society to provide churches and clergymen for religious guidance but, at the same time, leave room for disbelief. Religion was to be the private concern of the individual. In *Der Judenstaat,* the first blueprint for a Jewish state, Herzl declared that "each group will have its rabbi who will travel with his congregation" because, he explained, "we recognize our historic identity only by the faith of our fathers."[19] At the same time, Herzl ruled out theocracy for the state: "Faith unites us, knowledge makes us free. Therefore we shall permit no theocratic tendencies on the part of our clergy to arise. Every man will be as free and as unrestricted in his belief or unbelief as he is in his nationality." The clergy was to be restricted to the temples, "just as we shall restrict our professional soldiers to their barracks."[20]

Because he did not grasp the significance of the role of religion in Jewish nationality, Herzl thought he had disposed of the problem with the formula that Zionism would do nothing that contradicts the Jewish religion.[21]

However, for the nonreligious Zionists in Eastern Europe, who lived in communities that were steeped in Jewish life and cultural traditions and where Jewish nationality was a conspicuous and inseparable element of existence, religion was a serious problem. For them it was not only a question of personal freedom of religion, but of the very meaning of Jewishness and collective Jewish life. They had to find the answer to the nagging question of how to reject religion and still remain Jews in nationality; how to conceive of Jewish nationality that is shorn of its religious content. With the rise of nationalism, many West European Jews debated whether or not they were a nation, while the nonreligious Jews of Eastern Europe asked why the disappearance of the separate Jewish nation through assimilation should not be encouraged. Was it enough to affirm Jewish nationality without inquiring into the particularity of Jewish national existence? Continued identification with the Jewish nation, they argued, could not rest on tradition alone—on the sanctity of long-cherished beliefs, laws, and customs, which they were determined to reject.

With the steadily increasing secularization of Jewish society throughout

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[19]English edition, *The Jewish State* (New York, 1970), p. 81.

[20]Ibid., p. 100.

[21]Resolution adopted by the second Zionist Congress in 1898. See *Stenographisches Protokoll der Verhandlungen des II Zionisten-Kongresses, Basel 1898* (Vienna, 1898), p. 222, and Herzl's earlier statement at the close of the first Zionist Congress, *Protokoll des I Zionistenkongresses, op. cit.,* p. 216.

the years, the once ostracized opponent of religious tradition became a respectable member of a society that defied traditional convictions and obligations. Indeed, the very notion of tradition underwent a far-reaching transformation. For after a few generations of continuous erosion of religion, secularism, which was both established and fashionable, assumed the role of "tradition."[22]

Zionism: "Preservative Revolution"

In modern times, according to Franz Rosenzweig's incisive characterization, everyone's Jewishness is wriggling on the needle point of a "why."[23] The query gave rise to two main responses: Some Jews opted for the deliberate act of assimilation, the obliteration of all Jewish identity; others made strenuous efforts to work out an answer which was contemporary in relevance and, at the same time, upheld the timeless validity of Jewishness. The most radical "survivalist" answer to the challenges threatening the continuity of the Jewish people is Zionism. However, it, too, has failed to escape the tensions that have characterized Jewish life in modern times.

The rationale for modern Zionism is that Jewish life in the dispersed communities is an aberration of nationality, and that normalization can be achieved only by ingathering and the establishment in the historic homeland of an independent, creative Jewish society.[24] This view has its antecedents in the long and firmly established Jewish tradition that the dispersion is considered as *galut,* exile, a condition which will be replaced by *ge'ulah,* redemption, and the ingathering of the exiles in Eretz Israel.[25] In modern Zionism, "normalization" acquired a compelling thrust for immediate, revolutionary change. This is one of the most significant characteristics of modern Jewish nationalism, which differs profoundly from other nationalist movements in its efforts to transform the people's established conditions and ways of life.

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[22]The American Catholic philosopher Michael Novak pointed out that the bias of our age leans towards irreligion and that "those who believe in God are now the chief bearers of the tradition of dissent." See *Belief and Unbelief* (New York, 1967), p. 16.

[23]See his essay, *Die Bauleute* ("The Builders", 1921) in his posthumous *Kleinere Schriften* ("Shorter Writings"; 1937); English edition: *On Jewish Learning* (Nahum N. Glatzer, ed., New York, 1955).

[24]Joseph Heller, *The Zionist Idea* (New York, 1949), pp. 68–70.

[25]Cf. *Neẓaḥ Yisrael* and other writings of Rabbi Judah Loew, the *Maharal* of Prague. For a discussion of his theology of Jewish nationalism, see Martin Buber, *Ben 'am le-arẓo* ("Between a People and Its Land"; Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1945), pp. 78–91.

This distinctively Jewish character of Zionism is responsible for the built-in tension between revolution and tradition, a tension that goes far beyond the universal conflicts between the old and new. It is different, too, from the post-emancipation clashes between the Orthodox and the reformers. There is in Zionism a dialectical situation[26] that has arisen from the paradox of the Zionist urge to "normalize" the Jewish people in order to preserve it from assimilation and extinction. The thrust for revolution is countervailed by the urge for continuation; the longing to revive the past is offset by the determination to change the tradition.

Every Zionist view begins with a critique of Jewish life in the Diaspora. This leads to the conviction that the Jewish people is faced with a crisis which demands a radical solution, involving politics, culture, society, and even personal lives, to conserve its continuous existence. Thus Zionism may be called a "preservative revolution." Every Zionist, then, faces two questions: 1) how much change is necessary to achieve preservation; 2) how much continuity is ideally important to justify change. The revolution to preserve clearly affects the nonreligious Zionists, but even Orthodox Zionists cannot escape the tensions created by the urge to change and the simultaneous yearning to preserve the tradition.

These inherent tensions influenced the cultural debates that raged in the pre-state years and have intensified since 1948. Although the debaters' positions appeared to be clearly defined as rebels versus traditionalists, the arguments invariably crossed and blurred the demarcation lines; for they reflected the innate paradox and consequent ambivalence within the formally adopted Zionist positions. Every "rebel" had to come to grips with his traditionalism, and every "traditionalist" labored to fashion his rebellion. For while the revolution's goals were set for a state of normalcy, it was not intended to be anything but *Jewish* normalcy, implying a revival of something that was regarded as ancient and classical.

The theoretical arguments, articulated in Zionist literature in the new settlements in Eretz Israel and, with even greater force, in the State of Israel, were transformed into sharply defined practical, legal, and political ones. Israel's perennial religion-and-state issues did not originate after 1948, and they can be understood only as concretized and politicized versions of the dialectic of the Zionist "preservative revolution." And their full implications can be gauged only in the broader context of the clash between tradition and the movements to change Judaism.

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[26]In a 1970 interview, Gershom Scholem spoke of "the dialectic of two contradictory trends" in Zionism: continuity and rebellion. See Ehud Ben Ezer, ed., *Unease in Zion* (New York-Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 273–84.

CONTEMPORARY EXEGESIS

There has been a bewildering proliferation of theories to interpret Judaism in contemporary terms. The sheer abundance of exegesis has driven religion to a position where it can mean so many different things that its substance tends to be blurred. Much of the ambiguity derives from the tendency to cling strenuously to traditional patterns of thought, from the desire to preserve the format and the mold of tradition while giving free rein to change in content.

The search for contemporary exegesis is not new in Judaism.[27] What is new is the acute awareness of the revolutionary character of this exegesis. Judaism would long ago have become rigid had it not undergone continual interpretation. In the past, however, this process did not arouse the kind of misgiving or downright suspicion with which modern attempts at exegesis are viewed. In the past, exegesis was an integral and vital part of religious and traditional life, and had the unchangeable sanctity of the texts and laws. Revolutionary interpretation, by contrast, consciously aims at changing the meaning and practice of the traditional texts and laws. Recognition of the implications of contemporary interpretation has thus given rise to a sharp polarization. Reformers and revolutionaries, as well as the Conservative and Orthodox, are alive to historical changes, and both tend to exacerbate their differences. Against the declared intention to alter Judaism radically, the Orthodox strenuously try to preserve a timeless and unchanging Judaism.

However, this polarization is dislocated by the insistence of most reformist and revolutionary Jewish cultural, social, and political movements on the ancient origins of their innovations. They are accompanied by historical exegesis and, although there are many varieties, most of them reflect the desire to represent change as a revival of essential Judaism. Almost no one is satisfied with a new interpretation unless it is shown to represent the true essence of Judaism.

Essence of Judaism

The result is a "retroactive exegesis" which attempts to reinterpret Judaism from its beginnings. It seeks to show that the traditional exegesis was erroneous and that change therefore is a revival of the true meaning of

[27]See Simon Rawidowicz, "On Interpretation," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 26, 1957, pp. 83–126; Heschel, *God in Search of Man, op.cit.*, pp. 273–75. For opposition to theological interpretation see Walter Kaufmann, *The Faith of a Heretic* (New York, 1963), pp. 105–17.

Judaism. Modern Jewish thinking, whether religious or professedly secular, is distinguished by a persistent search for the essence of Judaism.[28]

The quest derived from the assumption that tradition has overlaid Judaism with rigid laws, customs, proscriptions, and teachings that have stifled the essential Judaism. Of course, no one denies that the *halakhah* has always been the predominant element in Judaism.[29] But the rationale of the retroactive exegesis is that the tradition is not necessarily the true, or the only true, interpretation of authentic Judaism. No exegesis can avoid a process of selection and elimination, choosing certain items as salient, while rejecting or suppressing others. Martin Buber wrote of "subterranean Judaism," which, "secret and suppressed, remains authentic and bears witness," in contradistinction to the "official, sham Judaism whose power and public representation have neither authority nor legitimacy."[30] He distinguished between religion and religiosity. Religion is the organizing principle: it wants to force the person into a system stabilized for all time, accepting the yoke of the laws. Religiosity is the creative principle: it starts anew with every person in each generation. The dogmas of religion are "handed down as unalterably binding to all future generations without regard for their newly developed religiosity which seeks new forms." Religion, Buber said, can be true and creative only as long as it is imbued with the new meaning that springs from religiosity. Buber maintained that the fence tradition has put around the Torah to guard against alien and dangerous encroachments has very often also "kept at a distance living religiosity."[31]

Buber's theory of two distinct movements, the official religion and the "subterranean" religiosity, rests on a highly subjective exegesis of historical developments. The fact is that there was creative religiosity among official *halakhah* personalities, and the revolutionary movements of religiosity were marked by a good deal of punctilious rigidity. Though eminently qualified, Buber never made an attempt at a scholarly analysis of history.

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[28]In *Die Bauleute, op. cit.*, Rosenzweig criticized Martin Buber for upholding this approach. The influential work in its support is Leo Baeck's *Das Wesen des Judentums* ("The Essence of Judaism"), first published in 1905.

[29]Louis Ginzberg in *Students, Scholars and Saints* (Philadelphia, 1928, p. 112) quoted Moritz Steinschneider's finding that between the first and 18th centuries almost 80 per cent of Hebrew literature was *halakhic* material. For divergent views on the role of *halakhah* in modern Judaism, see Max Wiener, *Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation* ("Jewish Religion in the Age of the Emancipation"; Berlin, 1933), introduction and chapter 1.

[30]*On Judaism, op.cit.*, p. 83. Buber first developed this view in his famous *Reden über das Judentum* ("Addresses on Judaism"), delivered to the Bar-Kokhba Jewish student organization in Prague, 1909–11.

[31]*Ibid.*, p. 91.

He imparted his polemical view of authentic Judaism as he saw it. And he urged rebellion against the established religion, which he held responsible for the "increasing ossification of the law," to achieve the revival of the authentic Judaism, which lives a "mute and underground existence" awaiting the day of renewal:

> Religiosity induces sons, who want to find their own God, to rebel against their fathers; religion induces fathers to reject their sons, who will not let their fathers' God be forced upon them.
>
> . I shall try to extricate the unique character of Jewish religiosity from the rubble with which rabbinism and rationalism have covered it.[32]

Buber's call for renewal was a deliberate break with tradition; but his message was consciously religious.[33]

Secular Interpretation of Judaism

The concomitant radical demand that Zionism declare the secular character of Jewish nationality accentuated the dilemma of how to integrate the religious tradition with secular nationality. The fact was that not even extreme nonreligious Zionists wished to divest their nationalism of tradition; they were dedicated to the renascence of the Jewish people and its culture. They resolved the dilemma with a retroactive exegesis of Judaism that was shorn of religious faith. The new interpretation of Judaism was in keeping with the secular view of Jewish nationality and invested Zionism with a meaning that spanned the centuries of Jewish history.

The most influential exegesis was that of Asher Ginzberg, the Zionist thinker who wrote under the pen name Aḥad Ha'am. The role of religion, he argued, was to ensure the survival of the Jewish nation, and this was its real significance in Jewish history. In their struggle against the "yoke" of exile and persecution, Aḥah Ha'am argued, the Jews used the heavy "yoke" of the *halakhah* as an effective weapon to combat assimilation and extinction. Applying the Darwinian evolutionary "will to survive" to the behavior of peoples, as was fashionable in his time, Aḥad Ha'am regarded the Jewish religion as the product of the collective will of the Jewish nation, which instinctively chose it to assure national survival. It was an instinctive reaction, like that of any living organism, to defend itself when attacked.

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[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 80–81; also Nahum N. Glatzer's own criticism, pp. 240–41.

[33] See Ernst Simon, *"Martin Buber we-emunat Yisrael"* (Buber and the Faith of Israel); *'Iyun*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1958, pp. 13–50 and Eliezer Berkovits, *A Jewish Critique of the Philosophy of Martin Buber* (New York, 1962).

Aḥad Ha'am's retroactive exegesis empties religion of its intrinsic value and provides it with the functional role of preserving and sustaining the nation throughout the prolonged exile and dispersion.[34] In his essay, "Sabbath and Zionism," he argues that Sabbath observance fulfilled the historic task of preserving the cohesion of the Jewish nation: "It can be said without any exaggeration that more than the people of Israel have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept Israel."[35] However, since religious observance has no intrinsic value, there is no reason not to discard it when it no longer fulfills its function. Carrying the argument a step further, he wrote that, in his view, "our religion is national, that is to say it is a product of our national spirit, but the reverse is not true. If it is impossible to be a Jew in the religious sense without acknowledging our nationality, it is possible to be a Jew in the national sense without accepting many things in which religion requires belief."[36] Aḥad Ha'am therefore concludes that, in view of the general decline of religion and growing assimilation among Jews in the modern age, Zionism should do in the 20th century what *halakhah* achieved in the past: enable the Jewish nation to survive.

Aḥad Ha'am affirms the uniqueness of Judaism as a way of life imbued with firmly rooted belief in the principles of justice and morality. The essence of Judaism is *musar ha-yahadut,* the ethics of Judaism, which is distinctly Jewish because it was shaped and guided by the Jewish nation. He brings the so obviously dominant religious element in Jewish ethics into consonance with his retroactive exegesis by saying Jewish ethics are essentially secular because the religious element was only the means of preserving the core of this ethical system.

One of the most incisive nonreligious critics of Aḥad Ha'am was Jacob Klatzkin, a brilliant Zionist thinker.[37] Klatzkin held that on purely philosophical grounds, ethics cannot be classified as national. They are not necessarily associated with a particular people because they may be evolved and accepted by any individual or group, at any time. Agreeing with Aḥad Ha'am's rejection of the idea that religious faith is inherent in Jewish

[34]See Leon Roth, *Ha-dat we-'erkhe ha-adam* ("Religion and Human Values," Jerusalem, 1973), pp. 124–26.

[35]*Kol kitve Aḥad Ha'am* ("The Complete Writings of Aḥad Ha'am"; Tel Aviv, 1947), pp. 286–87. On Aḥad Ha'am's attitude toward religious tradition see especially Leon Simon, *"Aḥad Ha'am weha-masoret"* (Aḥad Ha'am and Tradition), *Mezudah,* London, Vol. 2, 1944, pp. 147–53.

[36]See his essay, "Flesh and Spirit," in Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea* (New York, 1959), p. 262; also pp. 256–60.

[37]Jacob Klatzkin, *Tehumim* ("Boundaries"; Berlin, 1925), pp. 17–18, 22; Hertzberg, *ibid.,* pp. 315–27; Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (London, 1972), pp. 170–71.

nationality, he argues that, if Judaism were only a faith, it would not have been a national religion. What at all times was distinctively Jewish in the national sense, he maintains, was the pattern of living created by the Jewish nation.

According to Klatzkin, ideals or faith are not elements of Jewish nationalism and are therefore interchangeable at all times. Nationality *per se* is constituted by the continuing existence of a collective form of living, or patterns of behavior, shared by a people. Ethical ideals or religious faith, on the other hand, are universal. But when individuals are moved by religion to conduct collectively their lives according to an all-embracing pattern of mitzvot, they have, in fact, constituted themselves as a nation. The contents of Jewish culture and religion are the products of Jewish nationality and may undergo radical transformation without affecting nationality. Says Klatzkin: "Hebrew existence does not mean the acceptance of religious creeds or intellectual principles. . . . The definition of nationalism has two aspects: the partnership in the past and the will to continue this partnership in the future."

Klatzkin distinguishes between values and criteria: A belief or a value may be cherished by a people, but it is not the criterion of its nationality. The content of life is a national value, but what is decisive in nationalism is the form, not the content. And since, according to this interpretation, nationality is without content, Klatzkin rejects Aḥad Ha'am's reinterpreted secular Judaism. He was convinced that the observance of the mitzvot is the quintessence of Jewish nationality. He was equally certain that religion is coming to an end. Klatzkin therefore concludes that the Jewish people cannot survive as a nation.

The Jews will then have two alternatives: assimilation in the dispersion or establishment of an independent Jewish society in the national homeland. Only that society will be able to replace the vanishing mitzvot, for it will shape new forms of national Jewish living. In Eretz Israel, the continuity of nationhood will be assured by the very fact that the Jews will live collectively as a nation, on national territory. Then the questions of content, of beliefs and values, will be irrelevant to the fact of national life. Whatever beliefs the people will hold at a particular time will be Jewish because they will be held by Jews. But they will not be intrinsically Jewish because ideas and beliefs are universal and may be held by any individual or people.[38]

[38]Klatzkin's theory of Zionism determined his very negative prognosis for the future of the Jewish Diaspora. Since the old religious bonds were bound to disappear, Jewish nationality would survive only in Eretz Israel. Elsewhere, the Jewish people would disappear by assimilation. Klatzkin further was convinced that there would be a complete break between Eretz Israel and the Diaspora.

Critique of Secular Nationalism

Yehezkel Kaufmann, Zionist philosopher, historian, and Bible scholar, rejected Aḥad Ha'am's "biological nationalism" as unfounded. In his view, national feeling is not an instinctive trait, but derives from an overriding and conscious will to be part of a national entity. That national feelings are not natural is particularly obvious in Jewish history. When the Jewish people were scattered in the Diaspora, its national uniqueness was precisely that it did not succumb to the natural pull of assimilation. Its existence in the Diaspora was thus a struggle against natural instincts.

Why then did the Jews want to survive as a nation—against nature and despite formidable odds? Kaufmann's explanation is the Jewish people's religious faith, which is closely integrated with its nationality:

> While the spiritual culture and life of the Jewish people in the diaspora does contain secular nationalistic elements . . . the element that has been the cause of the Jewish people's unique national survival in exile has been the religious element in our spiritual culture. The decisive proof is that the Jewish people in the Diaspora preserved only that part of its spiritual culture which had acquired the sanctification of religion. This fact . clearly proves that adherence to the religious elements in its culture impelled the nation to isolate itself from its neighbors, contrary to nature. Because the nation adhered to its faith, and because it wished to live by that faith even after it became separated from the other elements of its national life, it set up a barrier between itself and the rest of the world and rejected the natural process of assimilation.[39]

Religion was not used by the nation as a means to achieve survival; rather, adherence to religion impelled it to isolate itself from other peoples and thus it preserved its national uniqueness. Says Kaufmann: "The national existence of the Jewish people in the diaspora, then, is not to be explained by the force of some biological or psychological quality (there is no such basis for any national existence), or by the force of the nature of social reality (as is the case with the existence of other nations), but by the force of religion, which is the source of its national will. Recognition of this fact is fundamental for an understanding of our national life in the past and in the present."[40]

Kaufmann was aware that for nonreligious Zionists to recognize religion as the source of Jewish nationality involves far more than the academic question of interpreting Jewish history. Jewish nationality exists regardless

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[39] *Golah we-nekhar* ("Exile and Alienage"; Tel Aviv, 1929–30, 2 vols.), especially pp. 111–12; also "The National Will to Survive," in David Hardan, ed., *Sources: Anthology of Contemporary Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem, 1971), Vol. 2.

[40] On the religiosity of Jewish nationality cf. *Golah we-nekhar*, Vol. 1, pp. 204–07; Salo W. Baron, *Modern Nationalism and Religion* (New York, 1960), p. 241.

of the beliefs and unbeliefs of the Jews. As a matter of fact, the major and most influential part of the Zionist movement has been opposed to religion. As a result, the nonreligious Zionists found themselves in a dilemma which Kaufmann—who regarded himself as one of many Jews who had lost their religious faith—described as follows:

> Our situation is indeed tragic. . . . It is hard to reconcile ourselves to the idea that our nationalism derives from a faith that no longer exists in our hearts. This is why we try to find some other basis for our nationalism and devise a "natural nationalism" or a "spiritual nationalism" or other explanations. But if the fate of our nation has been ordained, shall we avert the evil of the decree by ignoring the truth? On the other hand, if relief and deliverance are to be our lot, only a recognition of our true position can show us the road we must take.

The dilemma of the unbelieving Zionist was dramatically described by the Hebrew writer Mordekhai Ze'ev Feuerberg in 1899 in his story, "Le-an" (Whither). Nachman, its hero, lives in unbearable tension between his loss of faith and his attachment to the Jewish people, which finally leads him to break with the tradition and the community in a symbolic act: he extinguishes the candle in the synagogue on Yom Kippur. The shocked community is convinced that Nachman is mad. Nachman, himself, is deeply troubled by his action. What impelled him to desecrate the most holy day?

> I am miserable . . . because I am a son of a people which has nothing in the world except religion. You have only two possibilities: to fight *for* religion or *against* religion—but I want to be a free man. The purpose of my life is not to fight for or against religion. . I sense in my heart different yearnings and I hope to do different things in my world and among my people.[41]

Religion is a problem which he wants to escape; yet tradition weighs so heavily upon him that he is compelled to face it—and work out a position that is Jewish and nonreligious at the same time.

The complexity of the situation has probably been the main reason for the popularity of Aḥad Ha'am's exegesis. By imputing to Judaism a secular "essence," he could work out a formula for a Judaism that is both traditional and ultramodern, and tailored to the secular Zionist. It provides a simple and acceptable answer for those who wish to give up religion and retain Jewish nationality. Thus, tradition can be embraced without religious commitment by preserving traditional nomenclature and secularizing content.

In Israel, traditional texts are occasionally secularized without a change in the basic wording. To cite but a few examples: During the festival of Hanukkah, the nonbelieving Israeli sings, "Who can utter the mighty acts

[41] *Ketavim* ("Writings"; Tel Aviv, 1964), p. 85.

of Israel?" instead of "the mighty acts of God" of Psalm 106. At memorial ceremonies, the religious *Yizkor Elohim* is often replaced by *Yizkor 'am Yisrael* or *Nizkor* (we shall remember). On Israel's Independence Day in the 1950s, some cities spanned their streets with festive banners announcing, "This is the day which *Ẓahal* [the Israel army] has made; we will be glad and rejoice thereon,"—a secularized version of Psalm 118, substituting "Ẓahal" for "the Lord." The famous verse in chapter four of the Book of Zechariah is often quoted, but with a slight, though significant, change. Instead of the biblical text "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, sayeth the God of Hosts," they quote: "but by the spirit." In a popular children's dance based on the last verse of the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:31) the children sing, "So perish all your enemies, O Israel," instead of "O LORD."

Still, there were some for whom Aḥad Ha'am's thinking was not radical enough. Among its most popular critics were the writers Joseph Ḥayyim Brenner and Micah Joseph Berdichevski, who urged Zionism to repudiate unequivocally the link between the Jewish nation and any form of Judaism.[42] In his novels and essays Brenner challenges his readers to subject Jewish life to uncompromising criticism, to hate the past, and to create a new life through Zionism.[43] Berdichevski turns Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Umwertung aller Werte* (revaluation of all values) into a challenge to contemporary Jewish life, urging a fundamental revision of its foundations: "We must cease to be tablets on which books are transcribed and thoughts handed down to us—always handed down." Jewish revival, he held, can be accomplished only by revolution. "The Jews must come first, before Judaism; the living man, before the legacy of his ancestors."[44]

Zionism fosters a pronounced historical consciousness and an enhanced sense of historic continuity; for without them the Jews' attachment to

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[42]Hertzberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 289–312.

[43]Avraham Kariv, in *Adabberah we-yirwaḥ li* ("I Shall Speak to Find Relief"; Tel Aviv, 1961), has criticized this negative evaluation of Jewish diaspora life, which is shared by other modern Hebrew writers. Kaufmann, (*Golah we-nekhar*, vol 2, pp. 411–14) characterized this aspect of Zionist ideology as *antishemiyut me-ahavah*, antisemitism arising out of love for the Jewish people. See also his "Antisemitic Stereotypes in Zionism," *Commentary*, March 1949, pp. 239–45.

[44]Aḥad Ha'am wrote a spirited criticism of the application of the idea of revaluation of values to Jewish life. See Leon Simon, tr. and ed., *Ahad Ha'am, Essays, Letters, Memoirs*, (Oxford, 1946). It is significant that this debate is reflected in the writings of the leading Hebrew poets of pre-state Zionism. Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik (1873–1934) was deeply influenced by Aḥad Ha'am, while Saul Tchernichowsky (1875–1943) was close to the thinking of Brenner and Berdichevski.

nation and land would have withered.[45] But the simultaneous urge for change and revolt against the past has continued, and, for this reason, the debate about Judaism that arose with the beginnings of Zionism continues to agitate the cultural and religious life in Israel. It not only affects relations between religious and nonreligious Israelis, but also cuts across all movements, trends, parties, and political and cultural opinion. Viewed in the context of modern Jewish history, the conflict contains a decidedly creative element: the commitment to, and search for, the contempoary relevance of Judaism. It is symptomatic of the disputants' concern for this relevance, although the discussions admittedly often deteriorate into acrimonious, even obnoxious, political wrangling.

AFTER 1948

Extremist Anti-Zionism

There are in Israel also exponents of extreme anti-Zionist positions: the religious extremists, the Neṭure Ḳarta[46] ("guardians of the city"), and the secular extremists, the Canaanites.[47] Although both are no more than tiny fringe sects, their ideas find acceptance among some religious and secular groups.[48] For the Neṭure Ḳarta, Zionism is an affliction, a shocking heresy

[45]See editor's introduction to Ḥayyim Hillel Ben-Sasson, ed., *Toledot 'am Yisrael* ("History of the People of Israel"; Tel Aviv, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 11–30; Ben-Zion Dinur, *Israel and the Diaspora* (Philadelphia, 1969).

[46]Its Aramaic name is derived from the Jerusalem Talmud, Ḥagiga 1:7, which describes the city's military guards as its destroyers, and the scholars as its true guardians. For Neṭure Ḳarta's theology, see two books by its leader, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the Satmarer rebbe, who lives in New York: *Wa-yo'el Mosheh* (Jerusalem, 1962) and *Ḳuntres 'al ha-ge'ulah we-'al ha-temurah* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1967). For a sympathetic appraisal see Yerachmiel Domb, *The Transformation* (London, 1958); Emile Marmorstein, *Heaven at Bay* (London, 1969); for a critical discussion, see Norman Lamm, "The Ideology of the Neturei Karta—According to the Satmarer Version," *Tradition,* Vol. 12, No. 2, Fall 1971, pp. 38–53.

[47]"Canaanites" was the epithet used to describe the small group of Hebrew writers who, in the early forties, advocated the view that a new "Hebrew" nation will develop in Eretz Israel, which will relate to the peoples who had inhabited the area before the advent of Judaism. In time, this group adopted the derisory name originally used by its opponents. For its ideology, see Yonathan Ratosh, "The New Hebrew Nation," in Ben Ezer, *Unease in Zion, op.cit.,* pp. 201–34. On its literary aspects, see Baruch Kurzweil, "The New 'Canaanites' in Israel," *Judaism,* Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1953.

[48]The Neṭure Ḳarta are thought to number only a few dozen families, the Canaanites about a dozen writers.

in Judaism, to be utterly condemned and given no religious legitimacy. Any possible religious or cultural influence it may have on Jews must be obliterated. Judaism and Jewish life must remain untouched by modern interferences. The Canaanites believe life in Israel is so radically new and normal that it brooks no relationship to the Jewish people in the Diaspora, now or in the past. The new "Hebrew" nation emerging in the new State of Israel comprises both Jews and Arabs and obliterates past affiliations. It is a continuation of the classic Hebrew nation anteceding Judaism. The Canaanites, therefore, reject both Zionism and Jewishness. The insistence of Zionism on the link with Jewish history and the Jewish people in the Diaspora, they hold, distorts and stunts the growth of the new and normal Hebrew nation.[49]

In rejecting Zionism, both the Neṭure Ḳarta and the Canaanites declare their determination to ignore the cultural and religious problems inherent in modern Jewish life. The Neṭure Ḳarta is doing so by repudiating the new; the Canaanites, by discarding the old. While Israelis generally oppose the extravagances of the extremists, many lend qualified support to some of their positions. What is of decisive significance is that the overwhelming majority of Israelis reject cut-and-dried polarizations, and continue to grapple with the ideologies that perpetuate the inner conflicts and tensions over the meaning of Jewishness.

Judaism as Living Civilization

Under the impact of Zionism, and particularly of the new conditions in the State of Israel, the confrontation between modernity and Judaism has taken a new turn. According to Gershom Scholem, leading expert in Jewish mysticism, Judaism is regarded not merely as a body of religious knowledge and practice, but as the living civilization of a nation. Therefore, the Jew's relationship to Judaism is both committed and critical. Judaism imposes itself upon him, but he is not bound by it.[50] Unlike Aḥad Ha'am, Scholem does not produce a retroactive exegesis. His argument is that there is no unalterable definition of Judaism; that Judaism is a living phenomenon, to be interpreted by each generation in a process of selection and rejection. The meaning of living Judaism should not be bound by the dogmatic defini-

[49]See Benjamin Eliav, *Hakkarat He-'avar* ("The Knowledge of the Past: Report of the Conference on History"; Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 140–43, 152–53, on the Canaanites' relations with Revisionists.

[50]See "Education for Judaism: Prof. Gershom Scholem Talks with Educators," *Dispersion and Unity,* No. 12, 1971, pp. 205–14; cf. also note 26.

tions of the rabbinical traditions. Even the most Orthodox are selective in that they quite often suppress what they consider undesirable in tradition.

What then should be retained of the tradition? For Scholem, this is a dogmatic question posing no real problem: "I go far in identifying myself with the past, with my forefathers, and I nevertheless do not arrive at dogmatic conclusions from that." Scholem argues that no people can exist without fostering "the feeling for tradition," but that each generation, on the basis of profound understanding of, and identification with, the tradition should evaluate it from its own vantage point.[51] Scholem advocates that Jews should not commit themselves to the traditional exegesis, but should retain open minds and hearts so that they can work out their own interpretation of Jewishness, without interference of any kind. The religious believer should accept the possibility of an atheistic Judaism, if it does not reject the Jewish heritage. This approach excludes the explicit Canaanite ideology, as well as the *hubris* of some Israelis who speak in terms of "it all begins with us here" or "we have created it all with our own hands."[52]

Kibbutz Movement

Preoccupation with the religious heritage is, perhaps surprisingly, most energetic and consistent in Israel's secular kibbutz movement. The kibbutzim were founded, and their life-style was shaped, by halutzim, members of the Jewish socialist movement,[53] who had left Eastern Europe in open rebellion against the Jewish religion.[54] Often, their rejection of religion was not based on reasoning; it was self-understood, in keeping with a prevailing

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[51]In *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), p. 312, Scholem discusses the potentially important effects of the Zionist non-Orthodox view of Judaism: "Seen from a theological point of view, it may in a quite different fashion lead to a new manner of religious inquiry which will then not be determined simply by formulas inherited from an earlier generation."

[52]Abba Kovner, poet and a member of a Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz, castigated this view as an "infantile myth," in "Mifgash me-'ever la-ḥashekhah" (Meeting Beyond the Darkness), *Yalkuṭ Moreshet,* No. 17, February 1974.

[53]Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook believed that the growth of irreligiosity among young Jews in Eastern Europe and in Eretz Israel was mainly due to social issues. See Zvi Yaron, *Mishnato shel Ha-rav Kook* ("The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook"; Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 33–52.

[54]Curiously enough, the name Kibbutz was adopted by the halutzim from the Bratzlaver Hasidim; see Judah Ya'ari, "Be-derekh ḥatatim" (On the Fearsome Road), in *Sefer ha-'aliyah ha-shelishit* ("The Book of the Third Aliyah"; Tel Aviv, 1964).

mode of looking at the world. They simply "could not understand how a young man could be religious in these times."[55]

The irreligion of the halutzim was articulate, and dominated the ideological and cultural developments of the kibbutzim.[56] And yet, it was in this conspicuously and deliberately secular atmosphere that some of the most significant grappling with Jewish tradition took place. The confrontation began in the early days of the movement, when rebellion was still strong. The kibbutz participated in an antireligious revolt, but, at the same time, it consciously gave secular form to many teachings of Judaism and patterns of Jewish living. It thus has become suffused with Jewish purpose and culture.[57] The Jewishness of the first generation of kibbutzniks did not conflict with the pronounced secularism of the kibbutz. But the second and third generations appear to be coming under the spell of a sort of Israeli-Jewish "Hansen's law."[58] While the first generation of halutzim felt the need to rebel against East European religious Jewishness, the second and third are content that the revolt has achieved its purpose, and the *sabra* kibbutznik can now tackle his Jewishness without the strain of the compelling call to rebellion. The problem of the nonreligious *sabra* is his sense of alienation from the Jewish heritage. The early halutzim broke away from something they knew intimately; the *sabra* wonders how he can fill his life with a clearly identifiable Jewish cultural heritage, from which he is estranged.

This development is by no means limited to the kibbutz movement. Urban young people in Israel have been asking similar questions. But because the kibbutz is an intensely ideological way of life, and is regarded by the Israeli public and the Zionist movement as the best and most ethical

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[55]Reminiscences of a religious halutz who came to Palestine in 1919; see Nathan Gardi, *Pirke ḥayyim shel ḥaluẓ dati* ("Chapters in the Life of a Religious Halutz"; Tel Aviv, 1973), p. 52.

[56]The religious kibbutzim were established only in the 1930s, and remained a tiny minority. See Meir Orlean, *Ha-kibbuẓ ha-dati we-hitpatteḥuto* ("The Religious Kibbutz and its Development"; Tel Aviv, 1946); Aryeh Fishman, ed., *The Religious Kibbutz Movement* (Jerusalem, 1957).

[57]See Zvi Zinger (Yaron), "The Good Society," *Focus*, 1963, pp. 5–23. For a comprehensive, documented study see Shalom Lilker, *Kibbutz Judaism: A New Tradition in the Making* (unpublished dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, 1972).

[58]A theory advanced by Marcus L. Hansen regarding differences between successive immigrant generations in the United States (see reprint of his "The Third Generation in America," *Commentary*, Vol. 14, No. 5, November 1952, pp. 492–500). It describes the first immigrant generation as rooted in the culture of the country of origin; the second generation as torn between the culture of their parents and that of their native country and anxious to erase the immigrant past; the third generation as no longer feeling this conflict or the need to assimilate. Lilker (*ibid.*, pp. 88–116) has applied Hansen's law to the changing attitudes to religion in the kibbutz.

expression of the Zionist ideals, it is far more exposed to publicity, and its members carry far more influence than their number warrants. Kibbutzniks are encouraged to voice critical views, even complaints, and it is quite usual for their publications to carry articles and discussions on all aspects of kibbutz life. Interest in these statements is particularly strong because the kibbutz is assumed to have always been a hotbed of antireligious ideology and strongly negative attitude to the Jewish past.[59] Though this view is too simplistic and one-sided, it is encouraged by much of the "official" literature of the kibbutz which seeks to emphasize its secular humanist values. The average Israeli sees the kibbutznik's probing as a reflection—perhaps more intensive and articulate—of his own hopes, anxieties and doubts.

That is why *Siaḥ loḥamim* ("Soldiers' Conversation")[60] became a best-seller and one of the most argued books in Israel. It appeared at a time when Israelis were still experiencing the elation of victory after the six-day war. There was a strange disparity between that feeling and the introspective thinking of young kibbutz members who had fought in the war and were now searching for the meaning of their Jewishness. And this was by no means an isolated outburst, which may have been described as a kind of "shell-shock philosophy" or "foxhole religion." The most incisive questioning of the official kibbutz opposition to religion is continuously raised in *Shedemot* ("Furrows"), the unconventional quarterly issued by young members of all kibbutz movements. It does not herald a religious revival in the kibbutzim; it rather reflects the tension between young kibbutzniks' spiritual gropings and kibbutz ideology, as sharply indicated by a young member who chided the kibbutz founders for eradicating religion without offering a substitute, thus creating a profound feeling of spiritual emptiness.

Another collection of conversations of young kibbutzniks, *Ben ẓe'irim* ("Among Young People")[61] was published a year later, as a sequel to *Siaḥ*

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[59]Relying on their observations of the nonreligious Marxist Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim, Melford E. Spiro in *Children of the Kibbutz* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958) and Georges Friedmann in *Fin du Peuple Juif?* ("End of the Jewish People?"; Paris, 1965) wrote of the sabra's complete alienation from the Jewish heritage.

[60]Edited by Avraham Shapiro and published in Tel Aviv in 1968 by a group of young members of the kibbutz movement; abbreviated English edition: *The Seventh Day* (London, 1970). The book consists of 30 conversations with 140 young people in 27 kibbutzim of all ideologies, taped within three months after the six-day war. For analysis, see Zvi Zinger (Yaron), "The Iron in the Rock," *Jerusalem Post,* April 12, 1968.

[61]Edited by a Group of Members of the Kibbutz Movements (Tel Aviv, 1969); see Zvi Zinger (Yaron), "Kibbutz Youth Seek Themselves," *Jerusalem Post,* April 24, 1970. *Ben ẓe'irim* was preceded by *Shanah le-aḥar ha-milḥamah* ("One Year After the War"; Autumn, 1968), a 106-page mimeographed booklet of conversations with members of the Hashomer Hatzair En Shemer kibbutz.

loḥamim. It, too, aroused a good deal of heartsearching in the kibbutzim and elsewhere in Israel. But like the earlier volume, it was strong on questions and elusive on answers. The kibbutzniks condemned their parents and teachers for rejecting the religious traditions, but only few were ready to accept belief in God. Our life is empty, was the often-repeated complaint: "We live a grey life 365 days a year." They wanted to come to grips with what they called "the mystery of the existence of the Jewish people." The questions tumbled out in staggering confusion: What is the meaning and purpose of our life? Why are we hated by the Arabs? What is the point of the kibbutz? Why is Jewish history an almost unbroken string of persecution and death? Does Jewishness mean existence as such, or does it imply Jewish content and meaning? If we can't have religious faith, should we at least observe some traditional customs? Are we Jews or Israelis, or Israeli Jews? Are we Jews because we have to be Jews, that is to say because other people—Gentiles, Arabs, antisemites—regard us as Jews? Or has the fact of our being different some meaning calling for a commitment, and if so, a commitment to what, for what purpose? Or perhaps, as some argued, we need not worry about meaning and purpose: we live, we exist, and we want to continue living, and that's all. The discussions were marked by a never-ending tentativeness.[62]

Role of Bible

The heightened sense of tragedy after the Yom Kippur war of 1973 intensified discontent with the view that the existence of the State of Israel solves all problems inherent in Jewish life. There is a restlessness and a sensitive awareness that the meaning of Jewishness is eluding a generation which has become estranged from religious faith. The conviction has been growing that Israel ought to be a means for revitalizing the content of Jewish life.

It is significant that in Israel the Hebrew word *masoret* (tradition) is used to describe religion. The equation of religion and tradition persists in the Jewish consciousness, although the rise of Jewish nationalism was possible only after the religious tradition had undergone a process of secularization. A recent study of Jewish identity among young *sabras*[63] shows that the

[62]See also symposium on "Historical Continuity and Traditional Values," *Hedim* (the quarterly of the Hashomer Hatzair Kibbutzim), No. 97, May 1972; radio discussion on "Is God in the Kibbutz?", published in *Ofeḳ*, Vol. 2, Spring 1972; discussion on a humanistic *ḳaddish*, opened by Meir Ayali, a member of kibbutz Yifat and a leading Israeli educator, which was published in *Davar*, February 18, March 23, April 1, 1971.

[63]Simon Herman, *Israelis and Jews: The Continuity of an Identity* (New York, 1970), pp. 89, 115.

concept "Jewish" continues to have "both a religious and national connotation"; that they regard their Jewishness as consisting of "inextricably interwoven" national and religious elements. This is precisely why the normalized national-secular (Israeli) element is in constant friction with the traditional-religious (Jewish) one, and why this friction is not limited to the conspicuous conflicts between religious and nonreligious Israelis, but affects the inner life of almost every Israeli.

One of the most important attempts in Israel to overcome the dichotomy of revolution-tradition is to regard the Bible as the fountainhead of the state's new and normalized Jewish culture. This will enable the atheist to embrace the Bible as the source of his attachment to the Jewish people and its culture. The Bible for him is the literature of the ancient people of Israel living in its homeland, a normal and healthy nation. While the religiosity of the Bible cannot be denied, the atheist's commitment is not to its religion, but to its humanistic values. Rabbinic Judaism, in his eyes, is not suitable for the new, normal life because it developed in exile, reflecting its stunting and thwarting influence.

The Bible was seen as the exclusive source of Judaism in the initial stages of Zionist settlement in Eretz Israel in the beginning of the 20th century.[64] After 1948 the search for ancient roots in the "old-new" country spurred extraordinary public interest in archaeology, accompanied by an unabated and widespread enthusiasm for Bible study. Israel is the only country in the world where a Bible quiz is a national event; where Bible reading and commentary is broadcast daily during prime listening time. The annual Bible Conference, devoted entirely to the study of the Bible, lasts four days, and is attended by hundreds of people. Numerous Bible study circles and seminars are held in cities and in kibbutzim. Many are for women, mostly housewives, and others are for workers, clerks, and professionals. Many of the seminars are held in factory and office buildings.

This activity is firmly rooted in Jewish tradition: the religious duty to study the weekly *parashah* (pericope), read in the synagogue on the Sabbath; the reading by women of the old Yiddish *Ẓe'enah u-re'enah,* a translation of the *parashiyot* and homilectical commentary; the interpretation of the Bible for each generation by a long line of Jewish exegetes. In Israel, this tradition has taken on new meaning; the Bible is the prototype of Israel's renewed normal life. This view was vigorously stated by David

[64]See Isaac Tabenkin, "Ha-meḳorot" (The Sources) in Berakhah Habas, ed., *Sefer ha-'aliyah ha-sheniyah* ("The Book of the Second Aliyah"; Tel Aviv, 1947); also Benzion Mossinson, "Ha-tanakh be-vet ha-sefer," *Ha-ḥinnukh,* Vol. 1, 1910; and Aḥad Ha'am, "Ha-gimnasiyah ha-'ivrit be-Yafo," in *Kol kitve Aḥad Ha'am, op.cit.,* pp. 415–20.

Ben-Gurion in his many writings on biblical themes.[65] They reflect efforts to ascribe spiritual significance to contemporary events that have changed the life of the Jewish nation.[66]

In Ben-Gurion's scheme of things, the Bible is the core and essence of Jewishness, the vital force that has preserved the Jewish people. It has imbued the Jewish people throughout its history with faith in redemption and in the return to Zion. Jews prayed daily for redemption, and were confident that their prayers would be fulfilled. The Bible also taught the Jews "the essence of the teaching of the Prophets and the ethics of Judaism," which became the universal values for human behavior.

Ben-Gurion was scornful of the "clever people" who regard as chauvinistic the belief in Israel as a "chosen people." Israel is indeed a chosen people, not because God chose Israel, but because Israel chose God. The historical facts are that God was elected by the Jewish people; that the Jewish people distinguished itself from other nations in that it decided to believe in one God.

Ben-Gurion was painstakingly careful not to exclude God from this vision. Man is made not only of matter; and even matter is not purely matter. There is something great and terrible and mysterious, which we call spirit. Some people call this mystery God. But, argued Ben-Gurion, giving this mystery a name does not end the mystery. We know from the Bible how the biblical persons interpreted that mystery; they called it God. This is as close as he came to theology. It is less than what in Jewish tradition is meant by belief in God, but implies far more than the classic agnostic nonbelief. Perhaps Ben-Gurion's religion is some kind of Spinozist pantheism; for despite his repeated asseverations concerning the human origin of the Bible and of humanistic ethics, he unfailingly returned to declare his profound wonder at the ineffable.

The apparent incompatibility of secular disbelief and the realization that the Bible is in some sense beyond the human experience has kept alive the tension affecting attachment to the Bible. The Israeli atheist, therefore, must confront the Bible's religious character. In theory it is, of course, possible to study the Bible in a purely scholarly and scientific manner, treating it as a collection of ancient texts and subjecting it to modern philological meth-

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[65] *'Iyunim Ba-tanakh* ("Studies in the Bible"; Tel Aviv, 1969); English translation by Jonathan Kolatch, *Ben-Gurion Looks at the Bible* (London, 1972).

[66] Cf. Zvi Yaron, "Redemption: A Contemporary Jewish Understanding," *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2, April 1973, pp. 169–79. On Ben-Gurion's role as influential ideologist see Avraham Avi-hai, *Ben-Gurion: State Builder: Principles and Pragmatism* (New York, 1974).

ods of textual analysis. Although this is the rationale for the curriculum of the Bible faculties at Israeli universities, no one tries to deny that the Israeli concern with the Bible stems from a profoundly spiritual commitment and a deeply ingrained "nonscientific" conviction that the Bible is quite unlike any other book.

"GODLESS" BIBLE

In 1952 a leading nonreligious kibbutz educator published a book of Bible stories which deliberately omitted any mention of God.[67] He argued in the preface that the Bible should be treated as manifestly human literature; that the nonreligious educator should have "the courage to restore, as far as possible, the Bible's secular texture." Since the Bible is man's faith and deals with "human pathos," Bible stories should contain no reference to the divine.

The book created somewhat of a sensation in educational circles. Some of the angriest protests came from other nonreligious teachers, who were aghast at the thought that anyone should tamper with the ancient and hallowed text of the Bible. They were, of course, aware that the idea of the godless Bible followed from the consistent application of their conviction that man was the measure of all things and that religion was man's projection of human nature into the beyond. But they thought it futile to try to solve the problem of their attachment to what was obviously a religious book by rewriting the Bible and eliminating all mention of divinity.

HUMANISTIC APPROACH TO BIBLE

While the godless Bible was soon forgotten, the underlying issue of nonreligious commitment to the Bible is very much alive. For if man is entirely on his own and if nothing transcends experience, there is a serious difficulty in the biblical assertion that God addresses man and that man responds to God. A leading Israeli Bible scholar, Professor Shmaryahu Talmon, raises this question in an essay, "The Bible in Contemporary Israeli Humanism."[68] Talmon admits that the Bible is "the cornerstone of the Jewish national-cultural heritage." However, he argues, the present generation needs a logical justification for the esteem in which the Bible is

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[67]Mordecai Segal, *Sippurim min ha-Miḳra'* ("Stories From Scripture"; Tel Aviv, 1952). Cf. passage on "our attitude to the Bible" in Ze'ev Levi, "On Religion and Coercion," *Hedim*, January 1965. For the Israeli Chief Rabbinate's condemnation of Segal's book, see *Kol Torah*, Vol. 6, Nos. 5–6, 1952, p. 26.

[68]*Judaism*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter 1972, pp. 79–83.

held in Israel, since the nonreligious Israeli embraces "humanism without God and without faith and yet yearns for a return to the historic sources of Jewish culture and strives to determine a place for the Bible in his own world of ideas." Talmon's solution is for nonbelieving Jews to have a purely humanistic approach to the Bible by emphasizing objective study and research, and to abstain carefully from "identifying" with it. The Bible should have a central role as the primary source of the early history and the beginning of the faith of the people of Israel, and as the foundation of the Hebrew language and literature. Talmon also suggests that normative values be drawn from the Bible. In this way, he holds, "The subjection of the will of the individual to the essential goals of his society, which is characteristic of biblical thought, may become a formative factor in the solidification of the Israeli society and a force which unites it with the Jewish people at large." Thus, nonreligious Jews can find in the Bible a theory of man and society "which can serve as a basis for a new Jewish humanism." Although Talmon then confesses that it may not after all be possible to work the Bible into a secular pattern of thought, he expresses the hope that an approach of "intellectual enlightenment" may yet enable convinced atheists to discover in the Bible "the bases of a humanistic faith."[69]

That this question is of primary concern to nonreligious Israelis who study the Bible was pointed out by Professor Shelomo D. Goitein.[70] When he asked his students to indicate their chief concern about teaching the Bible, the usual reply was what to do about God in the Bible. In a chapter significantly entitled "Beruaḥ ha-ḳodesh" (In the Spirit of Holiness), Goitein attempts to persuade all of them, no matter what their convictions, not to ignore God in teaching the Bible. It is, he states, impossible to excise God from the Bible; teaching the Bible without God would be an educational travesty. Teachers, even the unreligious, should talk about God with understanding and veneration, and emphasize that God speaks to us through the Bible. For those who do not believe in the existence of God there is "educational meaning" in learning about the biblical God and valuable humanistic experience in reading the Bible and listening to the "God of the Bible."[71]

The religious person is bound to reject this approach. Abraham Joshua

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[69]For surveys of the problems of biblical studies see Menahem Haran, *Ḥeḳer ha-Miḳra' ba-lashon ha-'ivrit* ("The Study of Scripture in the Hebrew Language"; Jerusalem, 1969); Benyamin Uffenheimer, "Some Features of Modern Jewish Bible Research," *Immanuel,* Summer 1972, pp. 3–14.

[70]*Hora'at ha-Tanakh* ("Teaching the Bible"; Tel Aviv, 1957); cf. Zvi Adar, *Humanistic Values in the Bible* (New York, 1967).

[71]This bears strong similarity to Reconstructionism; cf. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask* (New York, 1956), pp. 82–85.

Heschel repeatedly insisted on the need for a radical decision: either God exists, or the Bible is a scandal. In his view, the Bible "is primarily not man's vision of God but God's vision of man," as the Prophets claimed to have perceived it. If their claim is false, we should condemn them as impostors. "The Bible has either originated in a lie or in an act of God."[72] But in Israel the Bible is not only an issue of religious faith. It has become an issue of personal value commitment and of identification with the Jewish past. The people's attitude toward the Bible is thus inherent in the cultural and religious dialectic of the Zionist preservative revolution.

Religious vs. Nonreligious Establishment

As the almost total engrossment with *mamlakhtiyut,* statehood,[73] in the early days of Israel's existence began to give way to emphasis on the content of Jewish nationality and a growing willingness to infuse culture and the patterns of living with Jewish tradition, even with its religious aspects, public friction caused by religious issues became more frequent and acrimonious.

Two distinct views prevail on anything related to religion, Jewishness, or tradition. These are discussed and worked out among the Orthodox religious on the one side, and the non-Orthodox on the other, with no dialogue between the two. The Orthodox discuss problems related to Orthodoxy, the non-Orthodox are concerned with the questions of Jewishness in an ostensibly secular culture. In the main, the two sides debate with each other only the divisive religious issues affecting public and political life. The non-Orthodox concentrate their arguments on religious coercion, freedom of individual conscience, and separation of religion and state, and say almost nothing about why they oppose religious faith.[74] The result is that Israelis never hear of the purely religious aspects of the issues involved, only of those that are conspicuous in public life and therefore inevitably affect both the Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Even the question of the Reform and

[72]Abraham J. Heschel, *Man is Not Alone* (New York, 1951), p. 129; and *God in Search of Man, op.cit.,* pp. 235–47. In his address at the World Ideological Conference in Jerusalem, August 1957, Heschel said: "If there is no God, then Israelite prophecy is the most terrible scandal in history" (*Ḥasut,* Vol. 4, 1958), p. 316.

[73]Before the establishment of the state, it was yishuvism, which emphasized the predominance in Zionism of the *yishuv,* Eretz Israel's Jewish community.

[74]In "Beri'at ha-bore'" (The Creation of the Creator), *Al Hamishmar,* November 7, 1965, Dov Bar-Nir urges people to study antireligious thought, for, he complains, "Many people in this country, and in particular young people, are no longer aware that there is a philosophy which negates the principles of religion."

Conservative movements is raised not in terms of their claims as alternatives to Orthodoxy, but solely in reference to the legal and public recognition of their rabbis and congregations.

The character of the dispute is determined by a consensus that religious belief is definitely not at issue; for the Orthodox and non-Orthodox have the same view of the character and essence of Judaism. They oppose each other only on whether to accept or reject it. The consensus derives from the fact that religious life and thought in Israel have been shaped largely by East European and Middle Eastern communities. The influence of these groups is evident in the composition of the rabbinate, and in the prevailing conception of the rabbi's role in the community. It is equally apparent in the general view of religious education, which in practice favors the inclusion of secular studies, but in principle opposes synthesis. Most religious Israelis accept academic training as professionally necessary, though they have not yet integrated it into the religious scheme and are uneasy about "worldly education."

Orthodox Jewish life of Eastern Europe was wholly oriented to the spiritual and was contemptuous of *di velt,* the worldly aspects of life.[75] This philosophy does not totally reject the sciences and secular knowledge, but regards them as outside the religious sphere. They are relegated to that large neutral realm of things necessary for earning a living and remaining healthy, thereby combining a pragmatic formula for living with traditional disdain for the "worldly."

East European religious thinking is well suited to the Israelis of the Oriental Sephardi communities. They came from countries where Jews did not experience the complex confrontation that affected European Jews. They either remained strictly within the Jewish fold or assimilated to the non-Jewish culture. Only in Israel have they begun to face the modern Jewish dilemma—the confrontation between traditional religion and a secularism with intense national consciousness. However, opposition to religion moved neither the Oriental Sephardim nor the East European Jews to engage in noteworthy philosophical debates. The main argument of the nonreligious is that religion is outmoded and superfluous, of no value in the contemporary world of science and enlightenment. This type of anti-religion could not produce a religious reform movement, for such a movement can only arise from *religious* dissatisfaction with Orthodoxy. The total negation of religion by the East European Jew, and by some Middle Eastern

[75]Cf. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's* (New York, 1963), pp. 95–97.

Sephardim, is possible only when religion is considered not important enough to warrant reform.[76] Faced with this onslaught, Orthodoxy shored up its defenses against secularization by conducting a virtual battle against all inroads and innovations.[77]

The Rabbinate

The absence of dialogue between the opposing groups is also reflected in Israeli religious literature. Despite a considerable annual output of homiletic writings, less than half a dozen recently published books indicate awareness of the nature of the current challenges to religious faith. The rabbis ignore the problems that concern young religious Israelis who study science, read literature, listen to the radio, go to the movies, and, above all, mingle in the army with other young people of the most varied backgrounds. With few exceptions, the attitude of the rabbis is one of aloofness from the spiritual upheavals of our time and the encroachments of modern culture on tradition. This is reflected in the rabbinate's almost complete preoccupation with practical *halakhah,* with "conspicuous" religion, particularly the public observance of kaskrut and the Sabbath, and with marriage and divorce. It is almost completely silent on matters of thought and rarely speaks out on social problems. There is an old joke that an Israeli who is a vegetarian and gets along with his wife will never need a rabbi.

Of the 400 practicing rabbis in Israel, only a handful are university graduates. Moreover, Israel is the only free country with a large Jewish population that has no rabbinical seminary. An attempt, in 1934, to transfer the Orthodox Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary from Berlin to Jerusalem was successfully opposed by the rabbinate.[78] And when Bar Ilan university was established in 1954, the rabbinate exacted a promise from the founders that it would not have a department for the training of rabbis, although it was originally modeled after Yeshiva University in New York, which has a rabbinical school.

There is a glaring lack of communication between the rabbinate and Israeli society, the modern Orthodox as well as the nonreligious. The rabbinate, which thinks and lives in the past, is unaware of the complexities of

[76]See Albert Memmi, "Does the Jew Exist?", *Commentary,* Vol. 42, No. 5, November 1966, and his *The Liberation of the Jew* (New York, 1966).

[77]Opposition to all novelty was summed up in a catch phrase, *ḥadash asur min ha-Torah,* anything new is prohibited by the Torah. See Meir Herschkovitz, *Rabbi Z. H. Chayes* (Jerusalem, 1972), pp. 75, 143.

[78]Rabbi Leo Jung, "Rabbiner-Seminar für das orthodoxe Judentum," *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

contemporary issues, and its unsophisticated attempts at solutions are irrelevant. Instinctively, its initial reaction is to oppose innovation, a stand it frequently is forced to revise after further consideration of a particular case. No wonder that the so-called "religious establishment" is turning inward and is avoiding what must be a painful confrontation with modern realities.

Opposing the rabbinate is an equally authoritative "nonreligious establishment" which has no interest in religion, yet is intent on retaining a fairly large measure of Jewish tradition in national life and culture. It accepts the distinction between Orthodox-religious and nonreligious as an unalterable division. If the establishment Orthodox are convinced that the only true Jewishness is in Orthodoxy, the establishment nonreligious are persuaded that religion is irrelevant to modern life.

State of Belief

It would, however, be incorrect to conclude that the religious situation is one of polarization between the Orthodox and nonreligious establishments. It is vastly more complex, involving numerous divisions and subdivisions in opinions and beliefs among both the religious and nonreligious that are inherent in religion, but are particularly pronounced in Israel as a result of the tensions of the Zionist preservative revolution.

The complexity of the situation is heightened by the difficulty of understanding the Hebrew terms used to describe the extent of religious belief, or opposition:[79] *ḥilloni,* translated as secular; *dati,* as religious; and *masorati,* as traditional. The meaning and implications of these terms are far from simple. Although a *ḥilloni* is secular, it does not necessarily follow that he does not believe in God; he may even occasionally attend synagogue. *Dati* is usually confined to the Orthodox. A *masorati,* or traditional Jew, may light Sabbath candles or refrain from eating nonkosher food; he also may pray regularly and observe *mitzvot,* though usually selectively.

There is a good deal of overlapping. A person who thinks of himself as *ḥilloni* may also describe himself as *masorati.* And an Orthodox Jew may correctly be defined as *masorati.* At the same time, any person may rightfully define himself as *masorati,* arguing that no culture is without tradition. Some people may hesitate to define themselves as *ḥilloni* because of its

[79]Cf. Herman, *Israelis and Jews, op. cit.,* p. 32; Sinai Oko, "Havharat musagim" (Clarification of Concepts), *Shedemot,* No. 51, Spring 1973, pp. 122–24.

possible atheist connotation. And there are some religious persons who prefer to describe themselves as *masorati.*[80]

More than half of the Israelis can be accurately described as *masorati,* in the sense that they are not fully observant but are traditional with regard to some beliefs, or certain mitzvot and customs. Many observe kashrut in varying degrees; observe some of the Sabbath mitzvot, attend synagogue services more or less often, and want to be married in a traditional religious ceremony. According to a "Pori" poll of July 1973, over 70 per cent of the respondents said they eat only kosher food; among the Orientals the percentage was 87 (*Ha-arez,* September 2, 1973). There are no figures on Sabbath observance. The question of civil versus religious marriage—whether the state should give legal recognition to civil marriages—has become a political issue, and the polls deal exclusively with this aspect.

Outside of Israel, the confusion is even greater. For example, when Israelis speak of *dati,* they clearly think of Orthodox religious only. Elsewhere, the translation of the term as "religious" is understood as referring to all religious movements in Judaism.[81]

The common usage of *dati* is annoying to Israelis who are consciously religious, but not Orthodox. They maintain that their opposition to the observance of the unchanged *halakhah* should make them non-Orthodox, but by no means *ḥilloni,* secular and nonreligious.

The question of the definition of religiosity is, of course, of primary importance to the Reform and Conservative congregations in Israel in their quest for full legal and public recognition. These congregations, offering Israelis new religious alternatives, began to make an impact only in the 1960s; of the 6,000 synagogues in Israel in 1974, 11 were Reform and 13 Conservative.[82]

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (Reform) stresses its dedication to a "renewal of Jewish tradition to meet the needs of our time; respect for the past; inspiration for the present and creative openness for the future; rights for women, who participate as equals in the services; relating

[80]A public opinion poll, conducted by Diwwuaḥ we-Sikkur Institute in Jerusalem and published in the daily *Yedi'ot Aḥaronot* (May 11, 1973), pointed up this confusion and overlapping.

[81]The misunderstanding caused by David Ben-Gurion's use of *dati* is discussed in Avi-hai, *op. cit.,* pp. 237–38.

[82]While the first Conservative congregation was established in 1937, the Conservative movement began to function only in 1960. The first Reform congregation was founded in 1957. A *Mevakshe derekh* (Seekers of the Way) congregation, established in Jerusalem in 1962, is neither Orthodox nor affiliated with any of the non-Orthodox movements.

Jewish values to contemporary issues of Israeli society." The United Synagogue of Israel (Conservative) uses in its appeal to the public a phrase from the writings of the late Chief Rabbi Kook: "To renew the old and sanctify the new."[83] The continuing numerical weakness and religious isolation of these movements emphasize the over-all identification of religion with Orthodoxy. By 1974, neither the Conservative nor the Reform had been significantly active in educational and cultural work. The general impression remains that, unlike Orthodoxy, they are not indigenous to Israel.

However, despite formal labels and organizational definitions, religious beliefs and observances in Israel are not only Orthodox. The situation is comparable to that in Britain, where the establishment religion and the majority of formal synagogue affiliations are Orthodox and most Jews identify religion with the Orthodox tradition, but where there is considerable variation in religious faith and practice. A large number of Israelis work out their religion in terms that elsewhere would clearly be defined as Reform or Conservative. Many who describe themselves as *ḥilloni* are actually indistinguishable from American Reform, Reconstructionist, or left-wing Conservative Jews. There are, too, the basic differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, which are by no means limited to *nusaḥ* (text of prayers) and ritual observance; they are quite distinct in religious outlook and the treatment of religious problems.[84]

"Jewish Consciousness"

The most important debate on the subject of Jewishness and its religious implications began when the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1959 introduced a program of *toda'ah yehudit,* "Jewish consciousness," into the nonreligious-school curriculum. The English translation does not transmit the deeper commitment implied by the Hebrew phrase. It means, above all, that much more should be taught about Judaism. For example, children should learn the religious significance of festivals, not the secularized meaning. They should become familiar with synagogue procedures; know the prayers and religious laws, and even study talmudic literature.

The purpose of this program, an official directive of the ministry ex-

[83]Yaron, *op.cit.*, p. 172; see note 53.

[84]One point of difference has been a general tendency among Sephardi rabbis to be more lenient in halakhic decisions than most Ashkenazi rabbis. (See the responsa, *Mishpete 'Uzzi'el,* of Rabbi Ben-Zion Me'ir Hay Ouziel [1880–1953], the late Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel.) Of late, this has changed, apparently because of public pressures by religious extremists.

plained, is "not to adopt a historical approach to the subject, but rather to treat Judaism as capable of contributing to contemporary issues." The program's sponsors always carefully pointed out that its aim was not to achieve the pupils' actual commitment to religion, but to familiarize the young generation with religious thought, the mitzvot and customs, and generally to "develop a sympathetic understanding for the traditional forms of Jewish life."

The program was initiated to alleviate the worry of parents and educators that nonreligious-school children were becoming estranged from the Jewish heritage. It was also meant to deal with a specific problem: the relationship between the young *sabra* and Diaspora Jews, which, educators felt, had been undermined by the new state's strong emphasis on the purely territorial aspect and Zionist criticism of diaspora life. Without roots in the past and attachment to the Jewish people everywhere, it was feared, the *sabra* may come very close to the Canaanite ideology. The issue was of such importance that the government coalition agreement (after the election of the third Keneset) in 1955 devoted a special clause to it:

> In primary, secondary, and higher education the Government will endeavor to deepen the Jewish consciousness of Israel's youth, to enable it to become rooted in the past of the Jewish people and its historical heritage, to strengthen its moral attachment to Jewry through an appreciation of the common destiny and the historic continuity which has united Jews the world over, in all generations and all countries.[85]

Strong opposition to the program came from the antireligious minority, which argued that Jewish consciousness was in fact a program of religious education. It was supported in the Keneset by almost all members of all parties, except Mapam (Socialist) and Aḥdut Ha-'avodah (left-wing Labor). Speaking in support of the program, the writer Yizhar Smilansky, member of Mapai (Labor), argued that any possible conflict arising from a confrontation with Jewish tradition can only be fruitful.

However, the program suffers from theoretical and practical difficulties. The state schools do not have enough teachers with the knowledge to teach Jewish subjects. And those who can teach Jewish traditional texts and ritual feel ill at ease when they are inevitably drawn into a consideration of belief in God, revelation and *halakhah.* (For example, the prayerbook is so replete with religious meaning that no one can study it without taking a personal position for or against prayer). Teaching the Jewish heritage is particularly difficult in the high school where students do not respond to an emotional

[85]Cf. Eliezer Goldman, *Religious Issues in Israel's Political Life* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1964), pp. 84–94.

and sentimental appeal that can be used with younger children.[86] The real difficulty, some educators suggest, lies not in the program contents, but in the outlook and attitude of the teachers:[87]

Whatever the immediate results of the program, the fact remains that it has become part of the school curriculum and, if nothing more, its very existence is bound to raise the issue of Jewishness with both pupils and teachers. Its main significance may well be in the ongoing discussions regarding its effects, successes, and failures. The program is frequently amended, and this requires seminars for its teachers and the availability of literature. In 1974 the ministry of education introduced courses emphasizing the values of the Jewish heritage, and special seminars on the subjects were arranged for high-school students.[88]

The most important and thoroughgoing study of Jewish self-identity among youth in Israel, conducted by Simon Herman, shows that "the majority of Israelis see themselves linked to the Jewish people and to its past," but that religious and traditional beliefs or unbeliefs are decisive in determining their attitude to the question of historic continuity: "There are Israeli *Jews* for whom the Jewish element is primary, and Jewish *Israelis* with whom the Israeli component is dominant."[89] Herman points out that a large measure of overlap exists in most Israelis between the "Jewish and Israeli subidentities," which are mutually reinforcing; that the patriotic attachment of the *sabras* to their homeland is strengthened and deepened when it is given a Jewish perspective. On the other hand, "An Israeliness divorced from Jewishness has dangers for a country which wishes to be a land of immigration and not of emigration."[90] But Herman is optimistic about the continued Jewishness of Israeli society:

> The thread of historic continuity has not been snapped; it still runs strongly through the new forms of Jewishness made possible by the return of a people to its ancient homeland. The new molds of Jewish life in Israel have not yet been firmly nor finally cast. But into the making of Israeli society there enter a number

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[86]Herman, *op.cit.*, pp. 234–35.

[87]*Petaḥim*, Nos. 21 and 22, 1972.

[88]In Jerusalem, a group of educators established the Society for Jewish Humanistic Education and held a conference for which a program entitled *Ḥinnukh humanisṭi yehudi* ("Jewish Humanistic Education"; Jerusalem, 1974) was issued.

[89]Herman, *op.cit.*, pp. 197, 202.

[90]*Ibid.*, p. 204. The connection between the Jewish-Israeli identity and the desire to emigrate to a more affluent country is clearly shown in Rina Shapira and Eve Etzioni-Halevi, *Mi attah ha-sṭudenṭ ha-yisre'eli?* ("Who Are You, Israeli Student?"; Tel Aviv, 1963), p. 162.

of ingredients which remain essentially Jewish even if in the new context they inevitably undergo transformation.[91]

State of Orthodoxy

Over the years, attempts have been made to collect data that would have given an indication of the proportion of Orthodox and non-Orthodox in the population. A number of surveys were conducted, but these did not probe attitudes toward religion. As a rule, pollsters see religion in terms of related political issues, with the result that they concentrate on behavior and political activity on behalf of religion. The underlying assumptions are that, a) the Jewish religion is contained in the political programs of the religious parties (p. 83); b) Judaism is a religion of practice.[92] Questions generally deal with whether the government should be concerned with conducting public life in accordance with the Jewish religion, never with belief in God and revelation, the divince source of mitzvot the need for reform in religious observance, the rabbinate, or religion's confrontation with modern science. Still, the surveys are useful because they do furnish some solid data. They are also instructive in that they clearly show the ambiguity of the religious situation.

Sabbath and Festival Observance

Attitudes toward the Sabbath and festivals are determined by the public character of their celebration. They are the legally recognized days of rest in token of a general commitment to Judaism.[93] Offices, factories, shops, and most public transportation are at a standstill. No newspapers are published. Most cinemas and theatres are closed. Harbors and airports are shut down. On the other hand, taxis do a brisk business. Many private cars and special touring buses are on the roads, for many Israelis consider *ṭiyul* (touring the country) a favorite Sabbath and holiday pastime. Beaches are crowded during the summer months. Radio and television operate. Football matches and other sports activities are held mainly on the Sabbath. Yom Kippur is the only day on which all such activities are suspended.

One indicator of the extent of Orthodoxy is the use of radio and television

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[91]Herman, *op.cit.*, p. 197.

[92]Israeli social scientists have been chided for their ignorance of what religion means to the religious. Himmelfarb, *op.cit.*, pp. 339–41.

[93]*Dat u-medinah ba-ḥakiḳah* ("Religion and State in Legislation"; Jerusalem: Ministry of Religions, 1973), pp. 191–204; Menahem Elon, *Ḥakiḳah datit* ("Religious Legislation"; Tel Aviv, 1968), pp. 14–18.

on the Sabbath. According to several polls,[94] more than 90 per cent of the Jews in Israel regularly listen to the radio; some 75 per cent of them do so on the Sabbath. The respective percentages for regular television viewers are just under 90 and 73 per cent. In evaluating these figures account must be taken of two factors: 1) some Orthodox Jews object in principle to television viewing and radio listening, and therefore were not included in the survey;[95] 2) a considerable percentage of those who consider themselves religious view television on the Sabbath, most of them of Asian and North African origin.[96] No doubt, the overwhelming majority of those who use neither radio nor television—at least 25 per cent of all Israeli Jews—are Orthodox.

More than half of the non-Orthodox Israelis object to the public observance of the Sabbath: 61 per cent want public transportation to be available; 69 per cent want cultural centers to be open; 53 per cent want to have the opportunity to go to the theatre or to concerts; 43 per cent to go to the cinema. It is striking that even in rejecting the *halakhah*, they continue to differentiate between cultural activities (cultural centers, theatres, concerts) and more ordinary pursuits (cinema). This is in keeping with the expressed desire of the majority of Israelis of all ages to retain the typically Jewish style of the Sabbath.

The survey findings indicate, however, that even those describing themselves as *lo'dati* (not religious) observe some rituals, or favor certain public traditional behavior. Only one-fifth of all Israeli Jews, or fewer, are totally opposed to any form of religious observance in their personal lives or in public manifestations. The overwhelming majority identify with the traditional meaning of Yom Kippur. For the nonreligious, it has acquired national meaning as their personal affirmation of dedication to the continuity of the Jewish people. Only 16 per cent claim the day has "no meaning" for them. Purim has become a very popular festival, far more so than in the Diaspora. Passover, which has been given a nonreligious interpretation in modern Israel, continues to retain religious meaning for 47 per cent of the

[94]Findings for 1970 were corroborated by the April 1971 to September 1972 survey; see Central Bureau of Statistics, *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, May 1973; Elihu Katz and Michael Gurevitch, *Tarbut ha-penay be-Yisrael* ("The Culture of Leisure in Israel"; Tel Aviv, 1973).

[95]No figures are available. When television was introduced in Israel in 1968, a religious anti-television campaign was conducted. The anonymously published *Kuntres hasbarah* ("Treatise of Information"; Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 260–61, warned that "Every household which possesses a radio is a dwelling of *ṭum'ah*" (uncleanness). Some Orthodox also object strongly to newspapers.

[96]Michael Gurevitch and Gila Schwartz, "Television and the Sabbath Culture in Israel," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 13, No. 1, June 1971, pp. 65–71

population.[97] But regardless of attitude toward the holiday's religious aspect, few Israelis do not participate in some form of the Seder, ranging from the traditional to the innovative.

On Sukkot a large number of booths can be seen on balconies and roofs, and in gardens and courtyards. Simḥat Torah is widely celebrated in the synagogues and, on the evening after the festival ends, by public dancing with Torah scrolls in the streets of the cities. Festivities in some of the religious kibbutzim are attended by members of neighboring nonreligious settlements. During Hanukkah, menorahs are lit on all public buildings.

On Tish'ah be-Av, the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple, all places of entertainment, cafés, and restaurants are closed. Since the liberation of East Jerusalem in 1967, tens of thousands of Israelis have been going to the Western Wall on that day to recite *kinot* (dirges). Unlike Tish'ah be-Av, the official memorial day for the victims of the Nazi holocaust has not yet become a personal day of commemoration. It is a public *Yom ha-sho'ah weha-gevurah* (Day of the Holocaust and Heroism), fixed by the Keneset as the 27th of Nisan, to fall between the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and Independence Day. A special law provides that all places of entertainment be closed on this day, which is marked by public meetings in the cities and settlements, mainly at the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem and in the kibbutzim Yad Mordekhai (Mordecai Anielewicz was the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt) and *Loḥame hageṭṭa'ot* (founded by survivors of the Jewish resistance against the Nazis). The rabbinate ruled that Kaddish be said for those whose date of death is unknown on the 10th day of Ṭevet (the traditional fast). Many people treat Tish'ah be-Av, the day of mourning for all Jewish suffering throughout history, as the personal and national commemorative day for the victims of the holocaust.

Yom ha-Aẓma'ut (Independence Day) is, of course, a public festival; but on account of its newness and theological and halakhic controversies, it has not yet been universally accepted as a religious festival.

A striking illustration of the ubiquitous character of traditional behavior is the almost universal custom to celebrate bar-mitzvah for boys and bat-mitzvah for girls. It is significant that, with the exception of a tiny minority, bar-mitzvah is celebrated in Orthodox ceremonies in the synagogue, or, since 1967, at the Western Wall.

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[97]Katz and Gurevitch, *loc.cit.*, pp. 297–303; see also Elihu Katz, "Culture and Communication in Israel: The Transformation of Tradition," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 14, No. 1, June 1973, pp. 5–21.

Whether the ambivalence in observance is misinterpreted by the religious press as a sign of *teshuvah,* or by nonreligious journalists as being of no significance, the fact remains that the attitudes of the non-Orthodox Israelis (who are not antireligious) are marked by changes and shifting nuances in beliefs and behavior.

Religious Education

Aside from observance of mitzvot, an important index of the extent of Orthodoxy is the percentage of children attending religious schools. Israel's State Education Law of 1953 established one state educational system, administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture, which is divided into state *(mamlakhti)* and state-religious *(mamlakhti-dati)* schools.[98] The Agudath Israel runs its own state-recognized religious school system *(Ḥinnukh 'Aẓma'i).* Over the years, the proportion of children attending religious primary schools has been between 30 and 35 per cent of the total school population.

The proportion of religious-school enrollment does not really reflect the size of the Orthodox adult population, since not all parents who send their children to religious schools are Orthodox, and religious families have a higher birthrate than others. And all surveys and population statistics show that birthrate is an important factor in evaluating the strength of religion. Nearly 50 per cent of the immigrants from North Africa and Asia are religious and have a higher birthrate than any other sector of the Jewish population. The strength of the state-religious schools derives to a large extent from the Oriental communities. In recent years, their enrollment has declined from 110,887 (29 per cent) in 1968 to 99,288 (24.7 per cent) in 1974.[99] The decline should be ascribed to the fact that, whereas the 1950s and 1960s saw the mass influx of religious Sephardim, the more recent immigrants are generally not religious.

A recent development among young Orthodox *sabras* is to the point. There appears to be a new intensification of religiosity among them. Many of them carry their religion with pride, and with a certain amount of ostentation in what seems to be a deliberate display or emphasis for the benefit of the nonreligious and secular. A phenomenon called *dor ha-kippot*

[98]The principle of two types of education and culture, general and religious, goes back to 1902, when it was adopted at the conference of Russian Zionists in Minsk as a compromise between the nonreligious and religious Zionists.

[99]The decrease in Agudah schools has been slightly less; see Chaim Ṭuviyahu's articles in *Ha-ẓofeh,* July 30, 1973, and August 19, 1974.

ha-serugot, generation of knitted yarmulkes, refers to the small skull-caps seen in the streets of Israel. And yet, there has been a visible erosion in the number of religiously observant youth, particularly, but by no means exclusively, among native-born children of North African and Asian immigrants. This erosion is probably reflected in the decline of the state religious schools.

Religion in Politics

Significantly, contemporary opposition to religion in Israel continues to be influenced by an intrinsic connection between Jewish nationality and the Jewish religion. It is too complex to be interpreted only in terms of a church-and-state conflict, though political power evidently is an ingredient. The roots of the problem are so ramified and interlocking that no one-cause theory can suffice. Dissension is not along clearly demarcated lines, between the Orthodox and the nonreligious; it cuts across all variants of religious commitments. Although usually focused on topical issues, the debate basically centers on the purposes of Zionism and the Jewishness of the state—the role of Judaism in modern Israel.

The majority of Israelis agree that Israel should be Jewish in population, as well as in life-style. The findings of a 1969 public-opinion poll leave no doubt about this. Eighty-eight per cent of religious-party, 19 per cent of Ma'arakh (Labor), and 29 per cent of Gaḥal voters want Israel's public life to be conducted according to religious tradition. Eighty-three per cent of religious-party, 33 per cent of Ma'arakh, and 39 per cent of Gaḥal voters are against the separation of religion and state. Only 37 per cent of Ma'arakh and 32 per cent of Gaḥal supporters definitely favor separation of religion and state. But on the issue of "public life according to religious tradition," 49 per cent of Ma'arakh voters and 38 per cent of Gaḥal voters declared their opposition.

A comparison of the 1968 poll with a similar one conducted in 1962[100] indicates a decline in the percentage of Orthodox from 30 to 26, an increase of traditionalists from 46 to 48, and a rise of the nonreligious from 24 to 26 per cent. These differences are clearly too small to indicate possible directions of development in religiosity. (A 2 per cent discrepancy in poll findings is generally considered a reasonable margin of error.) Any evaluation will have to take into consideration the ambiguity involved in a self-definition of *dati* and *masorati.* The fact that the surveys were conducted

[100]Aaron Antonovsky, *Ammot,* June-July 1963. The survey is also quoted in Antonovsky and Asher Arian, *Hopes and Fears of Israelis* (Jerusalem, 1972); see also Himmelfarb, *op.cit.,* pp. 339–41.

within the context of a general questionnaire about political attitudes intensified the ambiguity.[101]

It is the consensus regarding the principles of Judaism that sharpens the polemics over the content and expressions of Jewishness. Occasionally feelings become aggravated, and polemics degenerate into spiteful or violent acts by extremists, which assume highly exaggerated importance in the reporting of the communications media. Quite typical are two items carried on the same day by Israeli newspapers. One reported that young men in the religious Me'ah She'arim quarter of Jerusalem threw stones at officials collecting census data, because they considered them in violation of a biblical injunction against taking a census (Exodus 30:12; cf II Samuel 24 and I Chronicles 21), although the Chief Rabbinate had ruled that the prohibition did not apply to the contemporary population census. The other item told of the invasion of a section of the Tel Aviv beach reserved by the municipality for religious people who disapproved of mixed bathing by a group of antireligious men and women, who declared they would do all they can to prevent the "theft of the beach from the nonreligious public."[102]

The exclusive emphasis on violent acts distorts the real picture and misrepresents the much broader scope of the religious problem. Still, the marginal incidents are important in pointing up the feelings of annoyance and frustration that are shared by many Israelis.

The injection of religion into Israeli politics has historical precedents. They range from ancient times, when the Prophets in the market places became involved in social and political issues,[103] to 19th-century Eastern Europe that saw the politicization of the bitter dispute over Judaism between the protagonists of Haskalah and their religious opponents, and 19th-century Germany where a good deal of political wrangling characterized the struggle between the Reform and Orthodox movements in the organization and leadership of the Jewish communities. What is new in Israel is that a debate essentially dealing with religion and its practices has assumed the characteristics of a political conflict.

This is highlighted by the very existence of religious parties, which, some believe, have utterly politicized religion in the state. Some of their extreme

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[101]Neglect of the specific Israeli and Jewish subtleties in meanings of terms probably were responsible for the *Time*-Harris poll findings that 13 per cent define themselves as religious, which is less than the voting strength of the religious parties; 40 per cent as nonreligious, and 47 per cent as traditionalists (*Time*, April 12, 1971).

[102]In *Ha-arez* and *Ma'ariv* on May 22, 1972.

[103]Cf. Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 74–77; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, 1962), pp. 363–64.

opponents have accused the parties of being so politically conscious, even power-drunk, that they have suspended the purely religious dimension in their party activities. But criticism of the parties should not obscure the fact that underlying the political manipulations are the polemics about the meaning and validity of Judaism.

Religious Parties

Like most of the other parties in Israel, the religious parties have their roots in the political divisions which existed in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, solidified in the early 1900s as political parties within the World Zionist Organization, and remained active in all major bodies of the organized *yishuv*. Israel's political parties perpetuate the early intense ideological differences, but they now are part of the governing process and are therefore Israeli in character.

It is in the light of this evolution that the policies and tactics of the religious parties—and their concentration on issues (education, "Who is a Jew?", Sabbath) which are not exclusively "state" affairs—can be understood.

The factors that led the religious parties to participate in politics are similar to those that have produced the involvement of religious parties in the politics of other countries.[104] The most fundamental is the conviction that society should be governed by the principles of religion. For religion is concerned with the relationship of all individual and social activities of men to the religious principles of behavior and therefore is bound to consider politics as its sphere of interest.[105]

Religious parties usually spring up when there is widespread belief in the religious sector of society that a) the existing nonreligious political parties are a serious threat to religion and b) that only a religious party can successfully defend "the religious interest." In other words, the existence of a religious party is always predicated on a conflict situation which is believed to require the defense of religion. This is, of course, true of the religious parties in Israel.

The religious disputes, and policies and tactics of the religious parties, must be viewed in the context of the national consensus on the Jewishness of Israel, as expressed in basic law. It is clearly stated in Israel's Proclama-

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[104]Cf. Michael Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe 1820–1953* (London, 1957); Walter James, *The Christian in Politics* (London, 1962).

[105]For a contemporary view of the all-embracing concerns of Judaism see Samuel Ḥayyim Landau's idea of Torah and Labor, in Hertzberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 434–39.

tion of Independence, which is steeped in Jewishness and yet utterly neutral on religion. Its concluding passage, "With trust in the Rock of Israel," was intended to satisfy both religious and antireligious Jews, for while the traditional meaning of the term is God, it can also mean "national spirit of historic Judaism."[106] It is restated in the 1952 law on the status of the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency, according to which the State of Israel "regards itself as the creation of the entire Jewish people." Its most striking expression is the 1950 Law of Return, which proclaims the right of every Jew to immigrate to Israel, but remains ambiguous on the definition of Jewishness. This ambiguity has given rise to the perennial issue of "Who is a Jew?" and has frequently triggered religious-political disputes.[107]

PARTY IDEOLOGIES

Israel's religious parties reflect the major trends in Orthodoxy, except for Neṭure Ḳarta, which rejects participation in the political life of a state it regards as sacrilegious. Mizrachi, the religious Zionist party, was founded in 1902 as a faction in the World Zionist Organization with the aim of establishing "the people of Israel in Eretz Israel according to the Torah of Israel." Hapoel Hamizrachi, the Labor religious Zionist party, was founded in 1922 to build Eretz Israel according to the principles of Torah and Labor. The two merged in 1956 to form the *Miflagah datit le'ummit* (abbreviated Mafdal; National Religious party), the leading religious party and a partner in almost all coalition governments.

Agudath Israel, the leading non-Zionist religious party, was founded in 1912 to promote the unity of Orthodox Jews for the advancement of Torah in Jewish life. It modified its initial strictly anti-Zionist attitude in the late 1930s, has been active in Israel's political life since the inception of the state, and was represented in the government from 1949 to 1952. While Agudah has not embraced Zionist ideology, it recognizes the fact of Jewish statehood. Its declared chief interest is to maintain traditional religious life. A Labor Agudah party, Po'ale Agudat Yisra'el, founded in 1922, has over the years evolved an ideology that is close to Zionism. While it never joined the World Zionist Organization (WZO), it received WZO aid for the establishment of settlements in Israel and for its Zionist-oriented youth movement. Its relations with the parent party have varied. They currently are separate

[106]On discussions about the wording of the Proclamation of Independence see Zeev Sherf, *Three Days* (London, 1962).

[107]See Baruch Litvin, comp., *Jewish Identity: Modern Responsa and Opinions* (New York, 1965).

parties, but join forces in the Torah Religious Front for political purposes.

In the election campaign for the first Keneset (January 1949), the four parties united in the Religious Front and received 12.2 per cent of the vote, obtaining 16 out of total 120 seats. In the elections that followed, the Zionist religious parties polled variously between 8.3 and 9.9 per cent of the vote, and the Agudah parties of the Torah Religious Front, between 3.7 and 5.6 per cent. The combined vote for the religious parties is rather low in view of a 1969 poll finding that Orthodox-religious voters, obviously the mainstay of the religious parties, constitute 26 per cent of the Israeli electorate. Ninety-two per cent of those voting for the religious parties consider themselves religious.[108] However, the polls indicate that, altogether, the religious parties represent little more than half of the Orthodox Israelis. They constitute 18 per cent of Ma'arakh (Labor Alignment) supporters and 27 per cent of those voting for Gaḥal (Herut and Liberal).

The elections were fought over issues which divided not only the religious from the secular parties, but also the religious parties from one another. The deep-seated division continues between religious Zionists, for whom the State of Israel has religious meaning, and the religious non-Zionists and anti-Zionists, who view it as a secular political reality. The dissension also reflects the rift between the "closed" view of Orthodoxy, which disdains novelty, and the "open," dynamic interpretation of Orthodoxy, as represented by the Agudah and the religious Zionists, respectively.[109]

One of the basic issues dividing the Mizrachi from the Agudah in principle and in practice is the relationship with non-Orthodox and secular Jews. Unlike the Mizrachi, Agudists believe in separate organizations for the Orthodox; and although this principle is not consistently applied in Israel, it nevertheless profoundly colors their aims and tactics. They find it extremely difficult to participate actively in the government of a state which is deliberately Zionist, and prefer to maintain an opposition which is radical in purely religious matters and accommodating on political issues.[110]

Over the years, the political work of the religious parties has largely been in religious legislation, which can be divided into a) laws providing religious services and facilities, such as religious education, for Israelis who wish to avail themselves of them and b) laws imposing religious norms on all citizens, regardless of belief, especially the marriage and divorce law, and

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[108]Asher Arian, *Ha'am ha-boḥer* ("The Choosing People"; Ramat Gan, 1973), pp. 58–70.

[109]For a full treatment of this question see my discussion in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1973: Events of 1972*, pp. 306–309.

[110]Isaac Breuer, *Concepts of Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1974).

giving the rabbinate and the rabbinical courts exclusive jurisdiction over this aspect of personal life.[111]

The legal framework for this legislative activity is the system of religious laws as it existed in Eretz Israel under Ottoman rule. This system was preserved under the British Mandate, and taken over, in principle, by the State of Israel.[112] Israel follows the British Mandate system in granting all religious communities full religious autonomy. On the other hand, Israel is a Jewish state, and its Jewishness is clearly stated in the legislation. But this is national Jewishness; no Israeli law recognizes Judaism as the state religion. Discussions on the separation of religion and state, therefore, generally deal with religious legislation that is imposed on Jews, who are thus treated by the law as members of the Jewish religious community. However, as indicated before, the issue of separation is complicated by the question of the "Jewishness" of Israel, since even ostensibly religious matters have throughout Jewish history acquired the characteristics of a national culture and have thus become integral to the national consensus.[113]

Religious-Party Arguments

In the continuing polemics, the religious parties most frequently use the argument that religious laws are necessary not only for reasons of religion, but also for the survival of the Jewish heritage and national unity. In this way, they attempt to persuade the public and the secular parties of the national and cultural validity of these laws.[114] Their first important involvement in a political struggle occurred in 1949 and 1950, when they accused the government of antireligious coercion by denying religious education to children of religious families in the immigrant camps.[115] They used the

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[111]See Elon, *Ḥakikah datit, op.cit;* Goldman, *Religious Issues in Israel's Political Life, op.cit.* note 85, for political and ideological aspects.

[112]Cf. Yehoshua Freudenheim, *Government in Israel* (New York, 1967), pp. 85–96; Goldman, *op.cit.*, pp. 15–46.

[113]Cf. Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Hafradah ben dat u-medinah: Sismah we-tokhen" (Separation of Religion and State: Slogan and Content), *Molad,* Nos. 25–26, August-September 1972, pp. 71–89; also Eliezer Goldman, *Ha-halakhah weha-medinah* ("The Halakhah and the State"; Tel Aviv, 1954) and his *Religious Issues.*

[114]See Uri Milstain, *Religious Argumentation in the Legislative Process in Israel* (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1972); Goldman, *Religious Issues.*

[115]The Orthodox religious organizations in the Diaspora actively supported the religious parties, as they did in other controversies, particularly the one over "Who is a Jew?" See Charles Liebman, "Diaspora Influence over Religious Policy in Israel: The Immigrant Camp Education Controversy, 1949–1950," *Niv ha-midrashiyah,* Vol. 11, 1974.

antireligious coercion argument again in the conflict over the autopsy law, which imposed on religious grounds practices repugnant to many Israelis.[116]

Generally, however, the religious parties state their positions in hortatory sermons rather than in persuasive arguments—probably out of their thorough conviction that their demands carry divine authority—and therefore tend to ignore the convictions of their opponents. The failure to communicate is reinforced by the strong influence of the rabbinate on the religious parties and its deliberate policy of cultural isolation, which sets up a barrier between the parties and the rest of the community.[117]

Religious-Coercion Argument

Although there is frequent talk about the constitutional principle of the separation of state and religion, the controversy is usually over specific issues that agitate the public at a particular time. These have ranged from education to television on the Sabbath, from kashrut to autopsies, with opposition to religious legislation mainly concentrated on the marriage and divorce law.[118]

The preferred argument of the opponents of religious laws is that they infringe on freedom of conscience and thus constitute religious coercion. There doubtless is a tactical element in the use of this emotionally charged argument in preference to a discussion of the law itself. However, its predominant use indicates that many Israelis feel at least some of the religious laws to be coercive and thus infringing on personal rights and liberties. Some object to the lack of public transport on the Sabbath; but most chafe under the rabbinical laws on marriage, divorce, and conversion.

The religious-coercion argument implies that any law motivated by religion is coercive and inimical to civil liberties. However, even the critics of the religious legislation agree that the legislator has the right, and the duty, to enact freedom-infringing laws about days of rest and marriage and divorce. The essential dispute is therefore not about coercion *per se*, but about the particular religion-motivated laws. But it is the argument of

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[116]See *Pesaḳ din* ("Halakhic Ruling"; Jerusalem, 1966), on autopsies, by the rabbis of Israel; Immanuel Jakobovits, "The Dissection of the Dead in Jewish Law: A Comparative and Historical Study," *Tradition*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 1958, pp. 77–103.

[117]See Goldman, *op. cit.*, pp. 65, 79–80, 100–101.

[118]See Joseph Ben-Menasheh, "Ha-ra'shut ha-shofeṭet we-dine ha-mishpaḥah" (The Judiciary and Family Law), *Keshet*, No. 16, Summer 1974; also Milstain, *op.cit.*

religious coercion which is predominant in the religious controversies. Clearly, the popularity of this argument and its polemical effectiveness do not depend on logic and legal soundness. It has become a "persuasive definition," one that gives a new conceptual meaning to a familiar word without substantially changing its emotive meaning, and which is used with the conscious or unconscious purpose of changing, by this means, the direction of people's interests.[119]

Power Politics of Religious Parties

As a political tactic the religious parties occasionally resort to defending the *status quo* of time-honored agreements on religious matters. Many of these agreements go back to decisions made in Zionist Congresses and were later reformulated in Keneset legislation and municipal by-laws to constitute the system of laws and regulations on matters affecting religion in Israeli public life. But whatever their origin and authority, past agreements can have abiding political force only to the extent that the religious parties have sufficient political power to ensure their continued enforcement.

Although always a minority, the religious parties have been able to wield political power by virtue of the consensus of most parties on the Jewishness of the state, and their leverage in coalitional politics. But the sole dependence of governments on the religious parties for a parliamentary majority has decreased over the years. Agudath Israel has not been in the government since 1952. And while the National Religious party's role as a coalition partner has remained important, its main political impact does not derive solely from this role; it largely rests on the consensus among most parties regarding the Jewishness and the traditional cultural character of Israel. The *status quo* argument has been persuasive for the same reason.

It has become evident over the years that the religious parties have gone beyond their original goals; that they have acquired a built-in momentum and vested interests as political parties. In their daily bid for power, they have had to resort constantly to pressure tactics and political threats that make it impossible for them to pursue their aim of using politics exclusively in behalf of religion. As a result, religion has become politicized. There is undue emphasis on public religious behavior, at the expense of the religious faith and observance of the individual. A piece of legislation has become

[119]Charles Leslie Stevenson, "Persuasive Definitions," *Mind*, Vol. 47, 1938, pp. 331–50. Cf. Eliezer Goldman, "Kefiyah datit" (Religious Coercion), *'Ammudim*, October 1964, pp. 31–43, and his *Religious Issues, op. cit.*, pp. 50–52.

more important than an attempt at the rational and persuasive interpretation of Judaism. In the politics of the religious parties the Keneset overshadows the *bet ha-keneset*, the synagogue.

A paradigmatic expression of the legalistic emphasis fostered by the religious parties is the issue of "Who is a Jew?". According to the *halakhah*, it has two aspects: There is the biological question on which the *halakhah* rules that Jewishness is determined by the mother. And there is the question of the voluntary commitment implicit in being a Jew, the individual's acceptance of "the yoke of the kingdom of heaven." The chief consequence of the "Who is a Jew?" agitation has been to emphasize only the legal-biological aspect and to ignore almost completely the question of voluntary commitment.

Religion in politics is certainly plausible, and may even be necessary. No one can debate the right of religious parties to exist, for in a democracy people who feel strongly enough about any issue can organize themselves to further their aim. However, there has been increasing doubt in Israel, even among members of the religious parties, whether, in the long run, politicization is conducive to strengthening religious faith.[120] Religious Israelis must raise the question in the context of their faith. Even if they are convinced that religion needs defense against a pervasive secular culture, they must decide whether a political party is the best vehicle for promoting their religious aims. This is not a question of politics, but one of religion.

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There is no shortcut to resolving the religious problem in Israel. It exists because modernity has made for a wholly paradoxical situation in Jewish life—the intensive rise of Jewish nationalism, which has led to the creation of the Jewish state, and the simultaneous erosion of religion. Whatever the political and legislative development, the "preservative revolution" and its inherent tensions will continue to prevail in Jewish life and in Israel. Debate can help bring about a more profound understanding of the problem, clarifying the issues and sharpening the perception of opposing sides. Strife, on the other hand, may exacerbate feelings, distort the democratic process, and caricature faith. A tense situation makes for temptation to cast about for emotional slogans, and probably for greater difficulty in promoting *ahavat Yisra'el*, the love for all Jews. There is need for the moral strength to view Jewish nationality as the "oneness" of the Jewish people, regardless of

[120]Cf. Moshe Unna, *Yisra'el ba-ummot* ("Israel Among the Nations"; Tel Aviv, 1971).

schisms and divisions. An admonition by the late Chief Rabbi Kook is very relevant today. According to the Talmud, he said, the Second Temple was destroyed because of *sin'at ḥinnam,* causeless hatred. Now that we are rebuilding our independent state, we must promote *ahavat ḥinnam,* causeless love.[121]

[121]Cf. Yaron, *Mishnato shel ha-Rav Kook,* p. 368, note 53.