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# MENORAH



BULLETIN OF THE JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • NUMBER 2 • WINTER 1985

## REFLECTIONS ON MEMBERSHIP

by Hans S. Falck

Individualism is one of the profoundly important doctrines in Jewish and Christian life. Its expression in Judaism and Christianity differ, however, because their philosophical assumptions are not the same.<sup>1</sup> They do not share their beliefs about the purposes of life and their ultimate expectations for the fate awaiting each person after death.

This essay focuses mainly on these differing conceptions of life on earth and the afterlife which follows. These themes are, of course, connected, since our ideas about earthly existence have a strong bearing on our ideas about death and its aftermath.

Judaism reflects an essentially earth-bound conception of reality. The strong emphasis on ethical behavior and loyalty to the Jewish people, as well as its concern with family life, document its earth-boundedness. Jewish social work, for instance, is one of the major expressions of this attitude. Yet, as Jewish social work became professionalized in the 1940s and 1950s, there was resistance by many people in the Jewish community. Some thought that volunteer work—rather than professional action—to meet the needs of others was essential in Jewish life and in some danger. Not altogether wrongly, many felt the professional undermined the opportunity to do charity in the sense of justice, which is the obligation, not the choice, of every Jew. Today one rarely hears such voices because the opportunities to serve human beings in and out of the Jewish community are endless.

The Jewish concept of individualism has strong communal overtones. Jewish tradition and practice see relatively little conflict between the individual and the community, family, or group. It is not that Jews do not involve themselves in the conflicts and troubles that beset others; Judaism has no monopoly on the peaceful life. But in Judaism, the individual is the product of and contributor to community life. Judaism has known for centuries what the research on child development has demonstrated since the forties.<sup>2,3</sup> To become a person in one's own right, with grounded identity, a healthy sense of self, and the opportunity to exercise self-knowledge, one needs to be an integral part of other lives.

The Jew speaks of God in group terms: "Our Father, our King, we have sinned against Thee." The Jew

says "Grant us peace"; he or she implores God to "Give us life," "Hear us," and "Save us." This peace is to be realized in earthly life and beyond that, in the often expressed hope that after death our good deeds will live on in the lives of those we leave behind. I have elsewhere written about these thoughts by naming them the membership perspective.<sup>4</sup>

The membership perspective holds that underlying all human existence is the group, especially the family and, in the larger sense, the community. This attitude is not to be understood as a glorification of the group or society. The membership perspective recognizes that becoming a fully conscious, responsible person cannot occur unless there are others whose prior and contemporary existence is realized and valued. When the Jew says "We," he or she also says "I" and the reverse is true by definition. In Judaism there is little conflictual choice as to what is more important, the "I" or the "We." In the Jewish conception both are honored when either is emphasized since each is implied in the existence of the other.

The Christian perspective and tradition differ from Judaism in important respects. The Christian born into this world seeks the resolution of life in the hereafter. Depending on doctrinal differences among denominations, the outcome may be predestined. For example, the psalmist's lament, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (Psalm 23), is read differently by Christian and Jew. For the latter the essential outcome is on earth, for the former it is in heaven.

### SELMA AND JACOB BROWN ANNUAL LECTURESHIP ESTABLISHED



Thanks to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Brown, distinguished members of the Jewish community of Richmond, a lecture will be presented by a notable scholar each fall under the aegis of the Judaic Culture Committee.

Considerations such as these are fundamental, especially when one believes that decisions about one's existence in life are subject to a large measure of human control. If each person can find God within and is therefore capable and competent to take responsibility for his or her behavior, and if one further believes that assuming this responsibility essentially controls one's destiny on earth, then the membership perspective makes sense and has significance. If one believes that oneness with God, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the dead and everlasting life are one's ultimate future (or at least hopes that this may be the reward for suffering in this life), then it makes sense to do those things that one believes to be necessary to attain salvation in heaven. This is the Christian interpretation of individualism, and it is a lonely quest.

Christian tradition, as I see it, has been unable to work out a seamless whole in which individual and society merge into each other. The reasons are not difficult to find. Primary among them is that Christians believe in an extra- and non-social existence. They reassure themselves that if all fails on earth, there is always the possibility of heaven. For the Jew, however, there is only one basic reality, the here and now of human existences, including a decent respect for history and for the future.

Once one makes a commitment to understand life on earth as virtually without alternative, one of the painful tasks is that one must come to terms with both friend and enemy. The latter has figured heavily in Jewish history. In the most practical sense the Jew must come to grips not only with his friends and with those who tolerate him (but don't accept him), but also with those who hate him. The Jew has learned that even his enemy is human and must be dealt with—the reality principle at work. How seductive is the Christian belief that God tests men and women on earth with a greater reward in the hereafter!

One might turn the cheek to the punishing enemy, as long as the last word is spoken by God. For a Jewish society the reality principle is irreversible membership of friend with friend and enemy with enemy since both live on earth. This requires untiring effort to create a more decent and just world.

It is, therefore, important to understand something of the scope and significance that individualism and membership address. I think that they are central to thoughtful living, Jewish or Christian. The membership perspective is such that the individualism of the self-made man or woman has no place. It insists that nothing any of us does, be it noble or destructive, is the product of the individual alone. For those of us who have worked hard to get where we are, this thought is discomfiting. Hardly less so is the suggestion that we, along with the criminal and the bigot, are interdependent members of the same society, and that all of us affect what we are and will become.

Further, it is difficult to admit that doing nothing about the ills and evils that reign too often in our lives is also doing something, namely nothing. Millions of Germans, their children and children's children, are still in the middle of grasping this elemental fact. One may not be guilty of another's misdeeds; but one cannot be uninvolved. The membership of all with all has been there all along. We are only gradually allowing ourselves to discover it. It is my position and conclusion that Judaism can enhance that process.

#### Notes and References

1. There is a large body of literature on individualism. Some of the most reasoned work can be found in Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973) as well as in other essays by the same author. Lukes takes note, also, of individualism in various countries, including the United States, where, he points out, the influence of De Toqueville's definition and observations should be noted.
2. See, for example, Rene Spitz, *The First Year of Life*, New York: International Universities Press, 1965. Chapter VII contains a discussion of mother-infant communication, dyadal in nature, i.e. an example of the smallest known group.
3. Mahler, M., Anni Bergman, and Fred Pine, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, New York: Basic Books, 1975.

4. The number of studies documenting the membership concept is beyond listing. One of their characteristics is the seeming unawareness of authors that their findings contain implications of profound importance. This is the case, in particular, of psychoanalytic investigators who, while they "see" personality variables, often underestimate or ignore the social-psychological aspects of their work.

Falck, Hans S. "The Membership Model of Social Work," *Social Work*, Volume 29, No. 2, 1984.

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If you write anything, read it through a second time, for no man can avoid slips. Let not any consideration of hurry prevent you from revising a short epistle.

Be punctilious as to grammatical accuracy in conjunction and genders. A man's mistakes in writing bring him into disrepute; they are remembered against him all his days . . .

Be careful in the use of conjunctions and adverbs and how you apply them and how they harmonize with the verbs . . . Endeavor to cultivate conciseness and elegance; do not attempt to write verse unless you can do it perfectly. Avoid heaviness, which spoils a composition, making it disagreeable alike to reader or audience.

Judah Ibn Tibbon  
(c. 1120-c. 1190),  
author and translator,  
from his Testament

## DECONSTRUCTING "JEWISH CONSCIOUSNESS"

*The Springs of Jewish Life*  
by Chaim Raphael  
Basic Books, 1983

A review essay by Martin S. Jaffee

It is easy to forget that the academic study of Judaism by Jews has its origins in the struggle of European Jewry for full social and political rights in nineteenth century European society. The earliest works of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the first articulate program of modern Jewish research, were explicitly designed to serve this struggle. They did so by demonstrating, on the basis of the Jewish past, the unique spiritual resources which the Jews could bring to Europe, if only they were extended common human decency and simple freedoms. The emancipation of the Jews from medieval disabilities would liberate the historical spirit of Judaism and permit it to grace the human community with a universality of moral vision last witnessed by humankind in the age of the prophets. In the age of Emancipation, the study of the Jewish past became the field for making the case for the Jewish present and future.

If the political origin of Jewish research is easy to forget, why should we be careful to remember? To remember is to be aware that, despite the rhetoric of "disinterested research," the study of Judaism by Jews (and, all the more so, others!) is deeply rooted in the soil of the social and intellectual turmoil of Jewry in modernity. To remember is to realize that Jewish scholarship on Judaism is—no less than the ideological formulations of Reform, Orthodoxy, Yiddishism, Zionism, or Reconstructionism—a programmatic exercise in the construction of a modern Jewish "self," an attempt by the Jewish imagination to come to terms with the vast gulf that separates "modern" men and women from their vanished past.

So the ambiguity of modern Jewish studies resolves itself into the following dilemma: it is an academic activity that, at the boundaries of its own logic, serves a fundamentally political, and even religious, end. Precisely because Jewish studies represent the labor of Jews upon the data of their own experience and memory, it remains a statement issuing *from* Judaism as well as a detached report *about* Judaism. In the latter role, the task of Jewish studies is to explain why knowledge of the Judaic tradition is critical to the interpretation of the larger cultural tradition in which the Jews are now immersed. In the former role, as a statement of Judaic self-understanding, the task of Jewish studies has been and continues to be to argue that, just as *our* interpretation of our past belongs within the total picture of the human past, so too our contemporary experience as *we* interpret it must be taken seriously by the larger community—of neighbors, confessions, and nations—with whom we come into contact and, at times, conflict.

If this complex situation, in which knowledge and rhetoric inhabit so uncomfortably intimate a space, remains the situation of Jewish studies for the foreseeable future, then the question arises: how do we establish a critical distance from interpretations of the Jewish past? How do we claim that our own judgments of "good" and "bad" in interpretation are grounded in "truth," and not simply a reflection of our own religious or political biases? This is the issue I wish to raise in response to a recent popular account of the history of Judaism, *The Springs of Jewish Life*, by Chaim Raphael of Oxford University.

Because of its clear synthesis of well-accepted scholarship on Jewish history and religion and of the deftness and urbanity with which a great deal of complex issues are discussed, I have no doubt that this volume will receive a wide audience among the general public and will even find its way, as an introductory text, into a number of college syllabi. The book, then, will be read; it is, therefore, important.

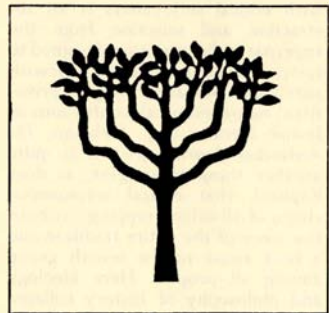
In light of the considerations raised above, I shall try to explain my objections to some of its basic premises about the Jewish past. My argument will not simply be that

Raphael misinterprets what is central to Judaism in antiquity (although I believe that this is the case); rather, I argue that the rhetoric of his analysis is grounded in a theory of contemporary Judaism that explicitly rejects central elements of the Jewish past. Raphael's convictions about contemporary Jewish policy, that is, so dominate his work that its construction of the Jewish past becomes a caricature rather than a portrait.

To clarify this point, it is necessary to focus on the introductory chapter, "The Nature of Jewish Consciousness." Here Raphael spells out the central task of his work, as he explains, to identify and trace the historical unfolding of what he regards as the unchanging structure of "Jewish consciousness," to explain "how the spirit that comes out of the Jewish will to live [was] forged in antiquity and kept alive until today" (p. 4). The question is an important one.

My problem is with Raphael's answer. His description of "Jewish consciousness" is not designed to illuminate a wide range of Jewish cultural or religious products or to serve as a model against which we may criticize our own manipulations of the Jewish past. Rather, it is formulated explicitly to serve what appears to be the author's personal appropriation of the Judaic tradition.

The flaws, perhaps, will become most clear by examining what in fact "Jewish consciousness" amounts to in Raphael's view. For him, the essential traits of Jewish consciousness are grounded in a tension between universalist ethics and particularistic loyalties to the Jewish people. In the past, this tension was reflected in explicitly theological



terms—in the Mosaic notions of election and commandment, and in the prophetic stress on the universal rule of God and the messianic unity of humanity in acknowledging His lordship. Modernity, however, has engendered a transformation of the vocabulary of Jewish consciousness into a secular mode. *The structure of consciousness is the same*—only the terminology, the ideology through which commitment gains expression, has undergone profound revision.

Thus far, Raphael's discussion is little more than a cliché of modern Jewish rhetoric usually designed to justify and explain the "Jewishness" of Jews for whom Orthodoxy is an impossible personal choice. It explains how Jews who no longer grasp their situation in pre-modern theological terms remain in complete—at times, even *more* complete—continuity with what is essentially Jewish than do those Jews who insist on interpreting Judaism in a frankly supernaturalist vocabulary. What it boils down to is this: Jewish consciousness, that stable structure of awareness that links all of us, living and dead, into a single community, is nothing less than an attempt to articulate "the awareness of moral absolutes, the sense of duty and responsibility, the dedication to truth, [and] the opening of the mind to powers beyond itself" (p. 7), which lies buried in the rich ethnic experience of Jewish kinship, "a unique aspect of Jewish consciousness . . . [which] is never reducible to social loyalty and always carries with it memories . . . of the stirring issues in which kinship first took shape" (p. 8).

Here we stand on the nub of the problem. It is one thing to claim, as have many sociologists of modern Jewry, that the equation of Judaism with ethical seriousness is an abstraction and selection from the supernaturalist tradition designed to foster secularist ideologies of Jewish survival as well as thoroughly privatistic, non-communal, confessions of Jewish identity (e.g., Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew*). It is quite another thing to suggest, as does Raphael, that ethical seriousness, shorn of all other trappings, is both the *essence* of the entire tradition and a trait *unique* to the Jewish group among all peoples. Here ideology and philosophy of history collapse

into unabashed and unsupportable convictions about the existence, within the Jewish people, of a moral rudder that prevents them from the excesses to which all other groups are subject.

Indeed, if Raphael had taken head-on the challenge of demonstrating in detail how the cultural creativity and moral sensibility of Jews on the margins of the Judaic religious tradition reflected genuine structures of Judaic consciousness, he would have had an interesting and useful book, even if its argument might have been unconvincing (see, for example, Cuddihy's, *The Ordeal of Civility*). I can, however, see no way in which a book grounded in such an unargued assumption can do justice either to the nobility of the modern Jewish struggle to retain connections to a vanished past or to the majesty of that past itself. "Kinship" and "aspiration" are hardly adequate conceptualizations of what "Israel"

and "Torah" have meant in any ancient or modern formulation of the tradition. Further, as categories descriptive of the consciousness of "secular" Jews, they amount to little more than ethnic self-congratulation.

Are the secular Jewish artists, musicians, poets, and scientists of whom Raphael is so justly proud (p. 8) somehow more typical of modern Jewry than are the secular Jewish athletes, business tycoons, and, yes, thugs and gangsters of which we have certainly produced our share? Why lay claim to a Heine or a Marx, both of whom explicitly rejected membership in the community of Israel, while ignoring a Meyer Lansky who, however cynically, wished to rest his old bones in Zion? Does Raphael mean to say that Jewish secularists, by some genetic miracle, have a greater share than, say, German Christians or Muslim Arabs, in a self-understanding which is "never reducible to

#### CENTAURS Yosef Yehezkel

She has centaurs in the livingroom;  
She tries to surround herself with trees.  
The chinaberry in the middle of her room  
needs trimming;  
The trunk is splitting a yard or so up  
and might snap off  
And go tell her the peepertree isn't good  
for her garden.  
After I left I thought, if the  
peepertree's uprooted she'll have to  
plant callistemon,  
Flowering bottlebrush.

The bith at the front door is good at  
driving off chance centaurs.  
In our house on the Brazos the centaurs  
came dressed in black.  
Wore beards, and ate mostly hardboiled  
eggs.  
They showed signs of prolonged wandering.  
Is any paper proof against a centaur's  
hoofbeat?

("Kentaurim," from *Nahar*, p. 33. Trans.,  
S. F. Chyet.)

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social loyalty and always carries with it memories or echoes of the stirring issues in which kinship first took shape?" If so, how? Can anyone aware of the catastrophic potential of ethnic chauvinism in modernity possibly want to make the case?

In sum, despite Raphael's often loving and sensitive portrayals of important moments in the unfolding of Judaism, his construction of "Jewish consciousness" seriously distorts what he so ably seeks to display. His work does a disservice both to the pre-modern tradition of Jewish self-expression as well as to the Jewries of modernity which have struggled, at times with banality and at times with great dignity and self-sacrifice, to embrace two apparently irreconcilable worlds. Jewish scholarship—and especially popular scholarship—owes more than this to both of its constituencies, to the questioning Jews who bring to scholarship their trust and respect, as well as to the general reader for whom the Jews may be little more than a curiosity of public life. The former reader, we hope, knows too much and the latter, unfortunately, too little, to profit them yet another episode of ethnic flag-waving in the name of Jewish humanism.

In a statement echoed throughout the volume, Raphael notes the variety of Jewish self-description in antiquity and modernity and takes this as sufficient grounds to assert that "the Jew has become more than ever his own subject. What he makes of his Jewish heritage is now, in quite a new way, his own choice" (pp. 6-7). As a characterization of the actual relationship of contemporary Jews to the Judaic tradition and as a description of central elements of modern ideology, this statement is quite beyond argument. As the foundation of a philosophical inquiry into the nature of Jewish identity, however, it is a deeply flawed premise. By presenting Jerry's freedom from the past as a *normative* rather than a purely *factual* state of affairs, Raphael assumes precisely what he sets out to prove—that there *is* some genuine link between the autonomous Jew

of today and a Jewish tradition that found all sources of authority located not in the individual conscience but in the commanding God of Sinai.

Our situation as Jews in modernity, furthermore, remains too complicated by spiritual and political upheaval to permit us to rest in the comfortable pieties of the "heroic age" of the Emancipation struggle. Emancipated from the theological claims of the past we undoubtedly have been, although the resurgence in America and Israel of a vigorous Orthodoxy may yet prove otherwise. Emancipated from the problematic of our own conviction of election, we certainly have never been. If academic Jewish scholarship, popular or otherwise, has a role in our ongoing struggle for political and spiritual self-determination, if it is to shape our attempts to spell out how our peculiarity makes a claim upon the world and upon us, it is obliged to challenge us to more daring risks in self-understanding. It is obliged to prevent us from believing that what we find it comfortable to be is what we ought to be. Policy is one thing, the truth is quite another.

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## DEATH OF A CHARISMATIC

*What Crucified Jesus?* by Ellis Rivkin  
Abingdon Press, 1984

A review essay by Robert M. Talbert

For centuries Christians and Jews have had to struggle with the legacy of the Gospels, which traditionally have blamed the Jews for the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus.

Many books have been written on the subject but none as influential as the works by the French scholar, Ernest Renan, and the American/Jewish scholar, Soloman Zeitlin. Renan was a product of the late nineteenth century and wrote at a time when anti-semitism was rampant in Europe. Reflecting this bias, Renan declared in his *Life of Jesus* (1863) that

The spirit of the family was haughty, bold, and cruel, it had that particular kind of proud and sullen wickedness which characterizes Jewish politicians. Therefore, upon this Annas and his family must rest responsibility of all the acts which followed. It was Annas [the former high priest] who killed Jesus. Annas as the principal actor in the terrible drama, and far more than Caiaphas, far more than Pilate, ought to bear the weight of the maledictions of mankind (p. 326).

Zeitlin, an expert on the Second Jewish Commonwealth period, answered Renan's charge in his book *Who Crucified Jesus?* (1942). He had preceded his major work with a series of articles in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, so that his response was not unexpected:

Neither Pharisees nor Sadducees, nor the Jewish people as a whole, could be held responsible, even morally, for the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus was crucified by the Romans for a political offense as the King of the Jews (p. 211).

In 1984, Professor Ellis Rivkin of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion has given us, not *who*, but *What Crucified Jesus?* And although his conclusions are similar to Zeitlin's there are some differences in Rivkin's methodology. Unlike Renan and Zeitlin, Rivkin's book is directed more to a popular audience. He discusses the problems clearly but without going into much detail, giving to the non-scholarly reader the results of scholarly research and debate without leading him through the jungles of learned discussions and arguments.

Rivkin's interpretive approach is made very clear from the outset. He argues that Scribes are identical to Pharisees, that the Hebrew *bet din* of the Pharisees in Jesus' day was called in Greek a *boulé*, not a sanhedrin (there was a religious *boulé*, but a political sanhedrin); and that the writings of Josephus must be consulted in order to reconstruct the framework within which Jesus' life, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection transpired (p. 15).

In the chapter, "Render unto Caesar: In Rome's Imperial Grip," Rivkin provides an overview of Judean history from the appearance of Pompey's legion in 63 B.C. to the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26-36). It was a

period of excitement as the Jews welcomed the appearance of Rome's mediator to settle a dispute between the two Hasmonean competitors. But what the people had hoped would be a brief visit from Rome went on for more than 200 years. And during this time, Rome tightened her grasp on the affairs of the tiny state and would not let up even in the years following the crucifixion of Jesus (p. 23).

Three-quarters through the reign of Augustus Caesar (27 B.C. - A.D. 14) the emperor decided that Judea would not be ruled by a puppet king as had been done under Herod (37-4 B.C.). He reduced Judea to a Roman province with direct Roman rule through prefects/procurators in A.D. 6. These Roman authorities in Judea would, from now on, have full authority over the law even if it involved inflicting the death penalty.

When Pontius Pilate assumed his procuratorship in A.D. 26, he took charge of a country that had been racked by strife and violence for more than 50 years. Part of the violence had been brought about by the emergence of what Josephus calls the Fourth Philosophy (the first three being the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes). Rivkin's identification of Josephus' Fourth Philosophy with the *sicarii*, an extremist group who swore allegiance to no one but God and would kill even their own if they saw apostasy being committed, is a methodological feature of both Rivkin and Zeitlin. While most historians of the period would identify the Fourth Philosophy with the Zealots and place the Zealot group on Masada in A.D. 73 and 74, Rivkin and Zeitlin would have the *sicarii* there.

Pilate immediately reconfirmed Caiaphas as High Priest, thus the high office of the Romans became fused with the high office of the Jews. And as Rivkin rightly points out, this was not something new, for high priests had been serving puppet kings and procurators for some time in direct violation of the laws of the Pentateuch (p. 31). Caiaphas thus became the eyes and ears of his procurator and must have done a commendable job; he kept his position for ten years while serving two procurators. The line of authority went from the emperor to the procurator to the procurator's procurator, the high priest.

After providing this background,

Rivkin applies the first of his two major methodological principles. The first actually belongs to Zietlin, while the second is Rivkin's original contribution to the Second Jewish Commonwealth period. Zeitlin had been successful in extracting from the Tannaic sources and the writings of Josephus the existence of two sanhedrins in the time of Jesus. The first legislated and ruled on religious issues only. The second, which was used by high priests and procurators, dealt only with political matters. But the two were made to appear as one in later tradition (Zeitlin, 68f.).

Thus Caiaphas and Pilate, as high priest and procurator, could call a political sanhedrin or council, whether for arbitrary whims or not, but never a court of law which dealt with religious matters. Or, as Rivkin states, "the Hebrew *bet din* of Jesus' day, which was later called in Greek a *boule*, dealt only with religious matters" (p. 35).

Rivkin's second major methodological principle involves the Scribes-Pharisees issue and was more fully developed in his monumental work on the Pharisees, *A Hidden Revolution*,

*The Pharisees' Search for the Kingdom Within* (Abingdon Press, 1978). For Rivkin the Pharisees were a scholar class dedicated to the supremacy of the twofold Law, the Written and the Oral, who opposed the Sadducees (exponents of the sole authority of the Written Law) and who ultimately made the twofold Law operative in Jewish society (Pharisees, p. 41-2). The Pharisees had emerged as a group following the Hasmonean revolt (ca. 167 B.C.). By the time of Jesus they had gained authority as "interpreters of the Law" and enjoyed the support of the masses. This same group called themselves *soferim* or scribes but never "Pharisees," "separated ones," since this was a derogatory term coined by their archenemies, the Sadducees. There were, apparently, no doctrinal differences between Scribes and Pharisees, and the Gospel writers frequently use the words interchangeably. Consequently, it appears that Scribe equaled Pharisee and vice versa.

If Rivkin is right on this point, he has seriously weakened one of Zeitlin's main arguments in regard to the trial of Jesus. Zeitlin had argued that the Synoptics never implicated the Pharisees by name in the trial (p. 170). But scribes are implicated by the writer of the first three gospels.

Drawing heavily on Josephus, Rivkin paints a vivid picture of the religious scene at the time of Jesus. Rome saw the religion of the Jews as "a mosaic with three inlays"—Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes (p. 39). But that was only because she made no effort to understand the Jewish religion. What might superficially have appeared as a single entity was, in reality, three forms that were mutually exclusive of one another. Their differences were more numerous than their similarities. But Rome paid no care as long as everyone paid their taxes and did not get out of order.

In Jesus' day the Pharisees "sat in Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:2). They interpreted the Law and set the religious standards for public and private worship. Even the Sadducees in the Temple bowed to the religious prescriptions of the Pharisees. But it had not always been that way. The Pharisees were Johnnys-come-lately who had appeared since the Hasmonean revolt. The Sadducees' ancestors, the Aaronide priests, had had their turn earlier—now it was the Pharisees'. Beside, the Pharisees had proper cre-

## METAPHYSICAL KNOT

Carol Adler

"When the Messiah comes, he will no longer be necessary." Kafka

Yesterday  
when the Messiah came  
I was out looking for him

so he left a note  
"I am here  
where are you?"

But since by the time I  
returned he had taken  
the world with him

he already knew.

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dentials too. They traced their authority to Moses (Pentateuch), then to Joshua, then to the elders, then to the prophets, and finally, to themselves. There was no reason for Pharisees to challenge the right of a Sadducee to be high priest as long as he was willing to abide by the oral law. The third "insert" in the mosaic, according to Josephus, consisted of the Essenes. Professing to see God in everything, this group was closest to the Pharisees in doctrine but kept aloof from the masses.

Despite their differences, these mutually exclusive groups had learned to coexist peacefully with one another, to "live and let live" (p. 53). As long as Rome did not declare their religious systems invalid and they were not made to worship the emperor as a god, they perceived no reason for opposition to the golden eagle and the power which it symbolized.

In Jesus' day (as in ours) there was an obscure or grey area in the line of demarcation between the realm of Caesar and the realm of God. As far as the procurator and high priest were concerned, God and Caesar had gotten into the act and drawn the same line. What constituted rebellion against Rome? The radical *sicarii* of the Fourth Philosophy were bent on the overthrow of Rome and were obviously liable to repression. But how was Rome to deal with the prophet-like characters who went around the countryside preaching repentance and declaring the Kingdom of God was at hand?

Josephus' vignettes of John the Baptist (A XVIII: 116-19) and James, the brother of Jesus (A XX: 197-203), are gems. Both were put to death because Rome could not delineate the religious from the political. Josephus, a Pharisee, makes it very clear where his sympathies lay. These were good men who were not calling for the overthrow of Rome but had been looking for souls for the kingdom of God. But, because Rome made no distinction, revolutionaries and "charismatics," to use Rivkin's term, were alike because they did not fit into the mosaic as Rome viewed it. Charismatics were especially dangerous because they attracted crowds, and when crowds gathered anything could happen (p. 63).

Taking Josephus as a source, Rivkin reconstructs a framework for a life that might have lived in Jesus' day. In the section, "In the Likeness of the Son of Man," Rivkin projects a portrait of a hypothetical "charismatic of charismatics" who lived in the days of a Caiaphas and a Pilate. What kind of qualities would such a person have to have? Would he be a wonder-worker, a visionary, and a teacher of the Law, enveloped into one? He would, at least, have to cause large crowds to be drawn to him (p. 75). And just how would Rome react to a crowd-pleaser such as this? The high priest would call his privy council to keep a close eye on him and to report back all that was said and done. When he was told that this charismatic excited crowds and that there had been talk of a possible Messiah and King, then serious steps would have to be taken. Whoever he was, he would have to be arrested and brought to trial before the high priest and his sanhedrin, leading inevitably to a sentence of death by the procurator. It had to be this way once the crowds started gathering; two jobs were at stake.

In his penultimate section, Rivkin takes the charismatic, which he has projected from Josephus, and places him in juxtaposition to the historical Jesus of the Gospels. The pieces slowly begin to fit. Jesus of the Synoptics had identical features with the hypothetical charismatic from Josephus, except that Jesus' followers claimed that their leader had been resurrected. But the pieces do not fit when compared to John's Gospel. But then, John's Gospel does not fit with the Synoptics either. Some have always seen the Gospel of John as a sort of maverick among the Gospels. Zeitlin thought, "the Synoptic Gospels were directed to Jewish Christians, while John was written for Gentile Christians" (p. 111). He dates the Gospel later than A.D. 100 and claims his theory is well supported both by the general contents of the Gospels and by the expressions found in them. Rivkin feels that since John does not seem to know of any religious authority other than the Pharisees, "the Gospel was written after the destruction of the Temple (A.D. 70) and in the Diaspora" (*Pharisees*, 102).

But with the Synoptics, Josephus' charismatic is right at home. The words and deeds of his charismatic are in keeping with the Synoptic ac-

counts of the historical Jesus. A look at the performance record of Jesus shows his confrontation with Pharisees who, when they saw their own authority being undermined, would have to expose him as a fraud. But this charismatic was no easy foe, for he could joust with the best of them. At times he was even bewildering, for when he spoke to a Sadducee he sounded like a Pharisee (Matthew 22:23-4). On other occasions he rejected the authority of the Pharisees outright. His authority came from within and was not collective. And the eloquence with which he expressed it was starting to attract crowds. But the Pharisees did not haul him before any religious body because they saw him as no threat. They would have just as soon brought the high priest, a Sadducee, before their *bet din ha-gadol* (Great Boulé) because he held stranger beliefs than the charismatics (p. 102).

The Gospels, the chief sources on the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, portray the high priest and procurator as doing exactly as would be expected, particularly in light of what happened to charismatics in Josephus. Caiaphas moved silently at night against Jesus so as not to attract any crowds. Since his office had become part of the political system of Rome, he could call his privy council, the sanhedrin, to interrogate Jesus. Claims of messianism and kingship were serious, seditious acts against Rome. This was a job for the procurator, and he knew how important it was to keep a tranquil society. Besides, Romans crucify—not Jews—and this would be a good object lesson for any future crowd-pleasers. And so it happened that day during the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, "the charismatic of charismatics," was placed on a cross.

Such then is a religio-historical framework for the Jewish people from the first appearance of Pompey to the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate. Rivkin and Zeitlin are similar and yet dissimilar: similar in that the major theses in *Who Crucified Jesus?* and *What Crucified Jesus?* are twofold. First, the office that had once been the papal chair of Judaism had become so corrupt that it was hard to distinguish it



from the Roman system itself. And secondly, that although the Jews in Jesus' day had, within their own system, the means for carrying out the death penalty, the Jews did not. The sanhedrin was part of the Roman system of governing Palestine, and it was the Romans who crucified Jesus. Rivkin is more specific when he says, "It was the Roman imperial system that was at fault, not the system of Judaism" (p. 117).

The two scholars are dissimilar in two ways: First, Rivkin has the Pharisees and the synagogue emerge following the Hasmonean revolt (ca. 167 B.C.), while Zeitlin is content having the Pharisees, as a group, develop during the restoration period when the theocratic state emerges following the Exile. Secondly, Rivkin wants to identify Scribes with Pharisees and Pharisees with Scribes (hence Scribes-Pharisees). Zeitlin would not agree with this equation, and, besides, it would weaken one of his major arguments.

Some Christians may strongly react to the first of the two premises that are alike in Rivkin's and Zeitlin's works, namely, that a corrupt high

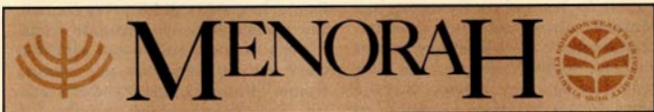
priest and a cruel Roman procurator worked in collusion so that both could keep their jobs. Are not Rivkin and Zeitlin stretching the truth beyond reason in order to exonerate the Jews? But the sources speak for themselves. High priests in Jesus' day were political appointees in direct violation of Pentateuchal law. This was the highest corruption in itself.

What will be the reaction of most readers to *What Crucified Jesus?* Most will come away asking the question, "Could it have happened this way?" The book offers Jews a novel and more sympathetic look at the life and teachings of Jesus. The Christian reader will be more eager to learn about the people that produced a Jesus, a Peter, and a Paul. Both great religions will see that which each has in common; there is only one creator God of all mankind, who seeks justice and righteousness among His children. This is the true spirit of *What Crucified Jesus?*

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## NEW VCU COURSE OFFERED

In the spring 1985 semester at VCU, a new course will be offered: RST 491, Modern Jewish Thought. A syllabus prepared by Dr. Jack Spiro, course instructor, covers over 50 selections of twentieth century Jewish thinkers. These essays address the significance of religion in human life with emphasis on the religious perplexities of our time and the meaning of Jewish existence in the life of the contemporary Jew. All members of the community are invited to register for the course, to be offered at 5:30 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, beginning January 15.



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