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# MENORAH

## REVIEW



NUMBER 32 • CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • FALL 1994

### *For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

#### **A Jewish View of Christianity: Recognition Without Surrender**

by David Novak

*The following article is excerpted from the lecture presented by Dr. David Novak for the Selma and Jacob Brown Lecture held last March. The annual lecture is sponsored by the Center for Judaic Studies of Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr. Novak is the Edgar M. Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies at the University of Virginia.*

There is ample evidence that the rather new phenomenon of Jews and Christians engaged in interreligious dialogue, which is serious and mutually respectful, has already become a durable item in our cultural life. That is not to say it does not have its detractors; there are Jews, Christians and secularists who regard it as either dangerous or fruitless. Jews or Christians who believe that their own religious community possesses the only truth about God inevitably regard the recognition of the location of any religious truth anywhere else as being an unacceptable sellout of their own deepest convictions. (The recognition of this "triumphalism," as it is called, is well known to both Christians and Jews in its various Christian varieties; much less known is the fact that it has Jewish varieties as well.) And secularists who believe that religions have nothing to teach us about reality argue that the better locus of intergroup dialogue is in the political area rather than the theological one. Nevertheless, there are some Jews and some Christians today willing to brave the condemnation of the triumphalists and the ridicule of the secularists to engage in interreligious dialogue with each other. But without a foundation more rationally cogent than mere goodwill, this new phenomenon could easily turn into something dangerous for both Jews and Christians because of its religious inauthenticity and lack of depth.

For serious interreligious dialogue to

take place and be sustained, it is necessary to see what are its essential preconditions, both positive and negative. The reminder of this discussion addresses what I think they are.

The first negative precondition is the disavowal of any notion of inherited guilt. Accusations of guilt by one party against the other creates a relationship of superiority/inferiority that is inimical to the provisional equality required for any genuine dialogue. For Christians, this has meant the disavowal of the charge of deicide against Jewish people (i.e., that all Jews are inherently "Christkillers"). This disavowal is accomplished either by showing, through historical scholarship, that Jesus of Nazareth would not have been condemned to be executed by Jews if a proper Jewish trial had been conducted or by showing, through theological reflection, that all humankind is responsible for the death of the one whom Christians believe was the son of God (a point made in our own time by the Catholic theologian, Jacques Maritain, and the Protestant, Karl Barth). For Jews, on the other hand, there is the charge that all Christians are necessarily anti-Semites. Thus, Jews committed to dialogue must distinguish between Christians who base their anti-Semitism on Christianity and those who base their respect for Judaism and the Jewish people on Christianity. And they must recognize that the philo-Semitism of some Christians is more cogent on Christian theological grounds than is the anti-Semitism of other Christians. Moreover, despite the fact that Christian anti-Semitism has often been more prevalent in history than Christian philo-Semitism, Jews must remember that the Talmud teaches that children are only guilty of the crimes of their parents when they themselves choose to perpetuate their parents' evil ways but not

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when they make a sincere effort to overcome them. Surely, this latter effort is the case today with many Christians, especially some of their most prominent theologians.

The second negative precondition for this new and better interreligious relationship between Jews and Christians is the disavowal of the too easy solution to the problem of interreligious differences proposed by modern secularism. This ideology, especially as present in democratic societies such as our own, attempts to create a public realm where religious principles are considered to be invalid. Religion, then, is only valid when kept out of the public realm (i.e., in private). In this view, the peace of civil society is to be protected from religions that are seen as inherently divisive and the sources of interminable strife and oppression. However, since Judaism and Christianity have so much to teach about the conduct of public life, this secularism essentially relegates them both to the realm of the peripheral inasmuch as humans are social beings by their very nature. And no religion that demands even martyrdom, as do both Judaism and Christianity, can possibly accept for itself such a

#### **IN THIS ISSUE**

- *A Jewish View of Christianity...*
- *The Evolving Jewish West*
- *Apologia Pro Vita Sua...*
- *Biblical Perspectives on the Human Quest*
- *Book Briefings*

peripheral role for human affairs in good faith. This secularist outlook was, of course, advocated by no one less than the illustrious founder of my university, the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, and it is still advocated today (to my mind) by too many of the leaders of the organized Jewish community in America.

This does not mean that Jews and Christians should disavow the proper role of the secular realm in such areas as science and law. Indeed, such a policy would lead them both straight into the intellectual conundrum of fundamentalism. Nevertheless, Jews and Christians can only acknowledge the validity of the secular realm through the affirmation and application of their own integral religious principles that are foundational for them. Therefore, the authentic relationship between Jews and Christians in our society should not be based on affirming a secularism that makes both religious traditions ultimately peripheral. Instead, Jews and Christians must look to those aspects of their respective traditions that overlap and extend even beyond the confines of both religious communities. During this discussion, we will identify just what some of those most important points of Jewish-Christian commonality are and how such identification and affirmation do not require forgetting the equally valid identification and affirmation of those points that make Judaism and Christianity crucially different.

The third negative precondition for the new interreligious relationship is closely connected to the second. It is the disavowal of what I would call religious relativism, which is the opinion that all religions have only a very partial and incomplete view of the Ultimate Reality who is God. Therefore, in this way of thinking, all religions are equal, no one better or worse than any other. Most recently, this opinion has been put forth with great intelligence by the British theologian, John Hick. However, if this is accepted, then it would seem that one can affirm any religion to be related to God. If so, why should anyone be willing to even die for his or her own religion? Accordingly, this view, like the secularism we just examined, eventually makes religious commitment secondary to the secular realm where, in such areas as science and law, judgments as to what is true and valid (and therefore false and invalid) and good and right (and therefore bad and wrong) must be made.

The fact is that for a Jew to live with religious integrity, he or she must believe that Judaism teaches more of the truth than any other religious tradition while at the same time affirming with humility that God alone knows the whole truth. The same is the case for an integral Christian. Without this affirmation, why should one remain apart in his or her own community and its very particular tradition? Why should religious communities be so hard on those who

become apostates (i.e., leave them for some other religious community)? Why shouldn't all religions merge into one universal and universalist faith? Nevertheless, it is only fundamentalists in both communities who with great arrogance affirm that their own religious tradition possesses the only truth. There are ample theological resources in both communities to be able to recognize that the other tradition also has a vision of some of the truth and that this vision of the other can be respected and can even be illuminating. Furthermore, this does not require relinquishing the belief that one's own religious tradition is the best criterion of truth given by God in this world heretofore and, indeed, that this criterion of truth is able to recognize many aspects of truth throughout all of God's creation and even in the revelations of God's presence preserved by other religious traditions. Finally, the experience of Jews and Christians in secular democratic societies, without making secular democracy replace their respective religious faiths, has taught us in new and powerful ways that the affirmation of the greater truth of our own respective traditions need not and should not entail any kind of contempt, let alone coercion, of others. Of course, until the end of time there will be tensions and unresolved questions between Jews and Christians, yet that situation is far better than the type of relativism that removes the possibility of the claims of truth and value without which any religion fast becomes superfluous in the serious business of human life.

For Jews and Christians to take one another seriously, each must be totally serious about their own faith commitment. However, the last time in history Jews and Christians encountered each with such seriousness the results were disastrous. I speak of the famous disputations in the Middle Ages when Jewish theologians were forced to debate with Christian theologians about which faith was the true one. The results were disastrous because these were occasions that further exacerbated Jewish political powerlessness in Christian regimes since they were initiated by Christians to publicly refute Judaism and thus humiliate Jews before Christian political authorities. Needless to say, they also exacerbated Jewish resentment and suspicion of all Christians and Christianity itself. Furthermore, these debates were inevitably inconclusive, especially when they involved the interpretation of biblical texts since the religious meaning of a biblical text depends on the religious tradition in which it is read, and there is no third external standard now available in this world by which to determine the true claims of which tradition is valid.

Nevertheless, this is another experience of contact (usually only literary) that comes out of the Middle Ages. It is one where at least Jewish theologians were will-

ing to affirm important commonalities between Judaism and Christianity. These commonalities are threefold. First, as was emphasized by the 12th century French Jewish theologian, Rabbenu Tam, Christians do worship the same creator God as do the Jews, and he acknowledged their right to do so in quite different ways from those of the Jews. Second, as was emphasized by the 12th century Spanish Jewish theologian, Maimonides, Christians affirm that the full text of the Hebrew Bible is the authoritative word of God even though they differ on a number of significant points of interpretation. Third, as was emphasized by the 14th century Provencal theologian, Menahem Meiri, Christians (and Muslims) too are governed in their moral life by a divinely revealed law that Jews can respect.

The common affirmation of these three points constitutes the necessary positive precondition for an authentic interreligious relationship between Jews and Christians. In our time, in the conditions of the democratic society in which we live together in peace, Jews and Christians now have a unique opportunity to draw on sources that have been only literary heretofore and make a real contribution to the spiritual and moral content of our culture. It is a challenge both daunting and attractive.

## The Evolving Jewish West

*Jews of the American West*  
edited by Moses Rischin and  
John Livingston  
Detroit: Wayne State University

A Review Essay  
by Steven F. Windmueller

Moses Rischin and John Livingston, both historians of note, have brought together a collection of nine essays designed to focus on the unique characteristics of Jews living in the West. The book, which derived much of its content from a conference devoted to Western Jewish history that was held in 1986, begins to set out some of the parameters that give description to this community.

As a recent arrival to the "left bank" of America, I found the text to be both personally informative and professionally useful. There is a quality to this part of the world that defies the traditional patterns of definition and organization. A number of factors seem to contribute to this phenomenon. The relative isolation for long periods of time distanced the Jewish communities in the West from their sister communities of the East and Midwest. The generally creative, open at-

mosphere that accompanied the migration westward replaced custom with a type of make-shift process of community organization.

The essays in this book tend to suggest that there were a number of additional factors that contributed to the special nature of Western Jewry. The first contention is based on the impact of the economic and social environment effecting the flow of Jewish life in this region. The second factor points to the relative absence of the role of Eastern European Jewry in the process of developing the West. As a result, such movements as Jewish Socialism, Zionism and religious Orthodoxy had far fewer adherents. A third theme suggests the relative absence of anti-Semitism as a factor in the evolution of Jewish life on the West Coast.

Of the many essays that accompany this text, I was particularly struck by several. Fred Rosenbaum's fascinating chapter on the issue of Zionism and anti-Zionism as played out on the streets of San Francisco represented one such intriguing example. Here we are treated to the developments surrounding the rise of the American Council for Judaism and its efforts to impact the Jewish political scene in San Francisco, which represented one of the few communities in America where the message of dual loyalty seemed to strike a vibrant chord. The author, in part, attributes this to the particular characteristics of the San Francisco Jewish community and to the generally weak infrastructure of Zionist elements in that city. He notes: "No Jewish community in America was more removed geographically, of course, from Europe and its horrors..." He concludes that the themes of "freedom, toleration and prosperity" left the leadership of the Bay Area "incapable of adequately assessing the needs and desires of the rest of the world Jewry."

Another such example of both thoughtful and useful writing comes with the chapter prepared by Earl Pomeroy. Titled "On Becoming a Westerner," we are exposed to a fascinating analysis of the process of assimilation and integration that accompanied the Jewish westward movement. Three conditions appear to define the uniqueness of the immigration movements to the Western states: "cheap land, geographical isolation and the predominance of rural over urban populations." For European Jewry, the alluring opportunities that were represented by these promises gave rise to the early movements of Jews to areas west of the Rockies. Pomeroy's data remind us of the high profile that Jews would play in such fields as government, journalism and business. Further, his analysis points to the rapid process of assimilation by which all minorities tended to blend into the fabric of the new Western culture.

The book, *Jews of the American West*, joins an emerging collection of literature

specifically dedicated to the story of the Jews of the West. I am frequently asked by visitors to this coast, what are the distinctive behavioral and social patterns of Jewish life in this culture? Five basic factors tend to dominate the Jewish experience in this Western setting. The first, as reflected in this review, shows a new kind of openness for the experimentation of ideas and institutions. The success of such movements as, in the past, the American Council for Judaism or the more recent growth and impact of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, may suggest examples of this type of innovation.

A second force that needs to be reckoned with is represented by the high rate of assimilation, as mentioned before. This, in turn, contributes to higher rates of marriage outside the Jewish religion and the marginalization of Jewish life for many who have come to these shores to break with their past.

Yet a third phenomenon revolves around the notion of isolation and separation. As if the Rockies were somehow not only a physical barrier but a psychological one as well, the Jews of the West seemed far more alienated and distanced from the New York Jewish establishment. Weary of the ways and traditions of Jews in New York and profoundly confident that all wisdom does not rest on the banks of the Hudson, these communities have forged, on more than one occasion, their own institutional responses to the Jewish agenda.

Another significant component of life in the West is reflected in the higher mobility factor of this population. Citizens of the West move more frequently than their counterparts elsewhere in the country, thereby weakening the ties to community. This has a particularly profound impact for Jews who are constantly in search of building community. Finally, we are witness to the special emphasis on individualism that has given rise in this part of the continent to the higher profile of individual leaders with specific and defined constituencies. As a result, rather than speaking in terms of the collective will of the community, in the parlors of the Western Jewish culture, a great deal more emphasis is placed on the particular leader and his/her institution, a quality not particularly identified elsewhere in American Jewish life.

The story of the Jewish West continues to evolve. As additional research and data are brought to bear on this subject, a broader understanding of the different characteristics of this Western culture will help provide scholars and communities alike with a better picture of the fascinating image of this saga of American life.

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## Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Confessions of a Conservative Scholar

*Peshat & Derash: Plain and  
Applied Meaning in Rabbinic  
Exegesis*

by David Weiss Halivni  
New York: Oxford University  
Press

A Review Essay  
by Peter J. Haas

On first glance, David Weiss Halivni's most recent book would appear to be a history and analysis of Jewish Biblical exegesis. After all, the terms "peshat" (simple meaning, whether literal or allegorical) and "derash" (eisegesis, reading in what is not obviously there) are traditional technical terms for different levels of Rabbinic readings of the Biblical text. Yet on closer examination, it turns out that this book is really about something else entirely. Its agenda is hinted at already in the subtitle: "Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis" (my emphasis). The point is that the book is not so much about the diverse levels of Rabbinic exegesis as it is about the relationship between our historically determined understandings of the plain meaning of the Biblical text (peshat), on the one hand, and the halacha that is associated with that text by Rabbinic hermeneutics (derash) on the other. Through this book, Halivni wants to make the point that while these two spheres of exegesis are intrinsically related, they are not absolutely linked. In other words, no matter how much our understanding of the Biblical text or the hermeneutical enterprise might vary over time, the application of the text to everyday life, as spelled out in halachah, remains stable. In short, and this is the bottom line of Halivni's argument, there is no contradiction in being committed both to the rigorous scientific study of ancient Jewish texts (peshat) and, at the same time, to the transcendent inviolability of traditional halachah (derash). In the end, then, the book is an "apologia" for Halivni's own career as a scholar in the Conservative movement, a scholar who can engage in critical text work, on the one hand, while staunchly resisting change in the halachah on the other.

As if to illustrate his point, Halivni has organized the book in a way that mirrors the argument he is setting forth concerning the relationship between peshat and derash. The book is divided into two sections that, while referring to each other, are nonetheless largely self-sustaining. The first section is devoted to an examination of the historical

development of the concept of peshat. Here Halivni shows that the idea of peshat has changed over time and so is contingent on a number of time-bound factors, including its own history. The second section is devoted to an analysis of derash, and while it is related to the immediately preceding discussion of peshat, it is not intrinsically dependent on it. The effect is to demonstrate that while the traditional rabbis entertained a variety of views about the character of the Biblical text as illustrated by their diverse peshats, they nonetheless held to a single vision of the derash; that is, of the Torah's halachic application. Let me say a bit about each section in turn.

The bulk of Part One is devoted to writing a history, as it were, of the peshat. Halivni's main concern here is to demonstrate that the Rabbinic exegesis from Tannaitic times to the present has shown an overall development away from interfering with what to us seems like the plain meaning of the text and toward a concern with what we would regard as the original authorial intent. There are four periods that Halivni identifies in this regard. The first period, that of the Mishnah, Halivni sees as a period of "reading in." That is, the early rabbis of this period were dedicated to determining the proper wording of texts and so felt free to emend the texts they received. In the second period, that of the Amoraim and Stammaim, Rabbinic authorities by and large accepted the texts as fixed by earlier generations and moved on, instead, to thinking through all the possible implications of the individual texts at hand. Although the text itself was left unchanged, all sorts of implications and meanings were read in, some of which seem far removed from what the source could have had in mind. These explorations of all possible implications of individual texts led to the third period, from post-Talmudic times to the 18th century, which for Halivni comprises the period of harmonization; that is, of reading each text in light of all other texts. Then the meaning of a text was affected by the meanings imputed to all other texts deemed to be contiguous in time or topic. This approach placed some limits on the flights of fancy that characterized the second age in which logical implications were spun out without restraint. Now the possibilities of what a text might mean were restrained either by other related texts or, as in the case of pilpul, the grammar and syntax of the text itself. Finally, we enter the fourth, modern period in which the integrity of each text in and of itself comes to the fore, a period described by Halivni as "uncompromisability of peshat." Here we look primarily for what we would term authorial intent. Rabbinic exegetes today, Halivni asserts, respect the plain, explicit meaning of the text more than any other generation.

It is important for Halivni's overall point to remember that in all these instances, the

exegetes are still involved in what he would label the peshat. The implication of this historical survey is that the meaning of the term "peshat" has shifted over time, that what the Talmudic masters regarded as peshat and what we regard as peshat are somewhat different things. This Halivni works out in Chapter Three, "The Meaning and History of the Noun Peshat." In essence, Halivni shows that in its Talmudic context, "peshat" meant context. The dictum that no text can be deprived of its peshat thus means that no text can be given a meaning that ignores the context in which it is found. The notion that peshat only means the literal meaning of a text is a development of the Middle Ages. Halivni shows that the major exegetes of the time—Rashbam, Ibn Ezra and Maimonides—all preferred the plain meaning of the text and so redefined peshat in that way so as to distinguish it from more fanciful interpretations.

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*...there is no contradiction in being committed both to the rigorous scientific study of ancient Jewish texts (peshat) and, at the same time, to the transcendent inviolability of traditional halachah (derash).*

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At this point, Halivni turns from his attention of the peshat to the derash. We already know that he holds the derash to be more historically monolithic and so much less text-bound than peshat. If the hallmark of peshat is historical variability, the hallmark of derash is transcendent logical coherence. Or, to put matters in a slightly different way, we can expect the results of peshat to change over time because we know that the conception of peshat changes; derash, being less text-bound, can respond to a more transcendent logic. This leads to a "double-verity" truth in which the rabbis are open to new peshatic interpretations, on the one hand, while at the same time clinging to unchanging patterns of behavior derived through derash on the other.

This notion of a two-headed truth leads Halivni to speculate on the nature of the divine revelation. It would seem that if there was but one revelation, then all truth must derive from it. How is it then that we can regard the changing character of peshat to be part of the revelation? To account for this, Halivni suggests that Judaism presupposes a sort of *zimzum* of the divine revelation to be at work. That is, rather than delivering all truth to humankind, the deity has left room open for human contribution. It is for this reason, to fill in the space left by the partial revelation, that we accept the notion that the rule of the majority is binding law equal to that given at Sinai. To be sure this human

component is fallible and, so, always leaves some opportunity for change and correction. That is why, Halivni argues, the Talmud argues over the correct halachah and so often preserves the minority opinions alongside the majority ruling. Since the majority opinion always holds sway in halachah, there is no reason from a halachic point of view to record the minority opinion. We do so, Halivni suggests, only because this minority view may contain some nugget of intellectual truth. For that reason, it is accorded its own bit of validity beyond that of practical halachah.

Although this account of revelation explains why human action is necessary to complete halachah, it does not explain why so much variation is tolerated in peshat and not in derash. The explanation Halivni finds in the great watershed in Israel's reception of the revelation, its final acceptance in the generation of Ezra. It was at that time the community completed revelation, as it were, by fully and unconditionally accepting the Torah. The text it accepted, however, was by this time already corrupted by the sins of Israel so the text and its peshat can never be regarded as fully inerrant. Even Ezra himself saw the need to introduce some scribal emendations and corrections in the text. On the other hand, however, Ezra introduced as part of the final act of revelation the oral, halachic tradition and so the parameters of all later derash. These parameters are revelatory and so remain fixed, even as the peshat changes. The derash then has a truth and reliability in a way that peshat can never have. In the end, then, the traditional Jew can recognize the fluctuations in peshat over time and can engage in critical study of Scripture without questioning the reliability of the derash, the halachic tradition.

As one would expect from a scholar such as Halivni, this argument turns a good deal on the meaning and use of technical terms in the Rabbinic literature. It is at this level that the true genius of Halivni as a textual scholar comes to the surface. For example, his interpretation of "ein mikra yotze middei peshuto" as meaning "no text may be deprived of its context" (peshat meaning "extension") is both compelling and laden with significance in his history of the peshat. But Halivni goes on to illustrate the subsequent development of the Rabbinic theory of exegesis by tracing the different ways in which this saying was understood over time. It is hard to imagine who else could tease out the implicit hermeneutic theory expressed by the phrase two Amoraic term "hakha bemai askinan" (what case are we dealing with here), namely that we are assuming the fixity of the text (what), as opposed to period one, and yet are staying within the boundaries of the text here and its immediate context ("here"), as opposed to the harmonization of period three? As one final example of Halivni's sensitive ear for



the implications of a phrase, I can point to Appendix I in which Halivni argues that there is a slight but significant difference in meaning between "mikan samkhu Chakhamim" and "asmakhta be'alma." For Halivni, these are not merely stylistic variations, they reflect subtle but real differences in Rabbinic attitudes toward the texts.

Despite the brilliant treatment of Rabbinic technical terminology, and despite Halivni's obvious familiarity with modern scholarship, shown in his extensive notes and his discussion in Appendix II, "Midrash and Modern Literary Theories," there is a strange sense of two-dimensionality in the book. One never gets the sense that a larger intellectual and cultural world is out there to which Jewish scholarship is responding. For instance, his discussion of pilpul places that rhetoric entirely within the evolution of Rabbinic attitudes toward the texts. Although there are notes to some modern scholars of pilpul such as Chaim Dimitrovsky, there is no apparent awareness that pilpul can be related to broader theories of textual criticism brought on by the renaissance and the rediscovery of Aristotelian psychology, such as D. Boyarin has pointed out. Or to take another example, the modern (Orthodox) approach to peshat is seen as the logical development of earlier Rabbinic tendencies *vis-a-vis* the text and not as responses to the new intellectual trends of the Enlightenment and enlightenment Judaism. In this regard, the book is more of a sectarian envisioning of Rabbinic history than a critical outside history of Rabbinic exegetical traditions.

At the same time, it has to be conceded that Halivni makes a compelling case within his own framework of the assumptions behind Rabbinic exegesis. It is impossible after reading this book to turn back to the texts and regard their technical terminology as merely stylistic. There are assumptions

and presuppositions at work behind what each generation of rabbis are doing, and Halivni is unsurpassed at teasing these out and making us aware of them. In the end, Halivni's rereading of Rabbinic literary history may be largely derash, but it is derash based on a sensitive and tightly controlled peshat.

*Peter J. Haas is professor of religious studies at Vanderbilt University and a contributing editor.*

## Biblical Perspectives on the Human Quest

*Semblance and Reality:  
Messianism in Biblical Perspective*  
by Chaim Nussbaum  
Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV Publishing House

A Review Essay  
by Matthew B. Schwartz

"All the rivers flow to the sea, yet the sea is not full." New books on the Hebrew Bible are always appearing, and the work of interpretation and understanding goes on so that each generation and each individual can find the progress of his own life written in those ancient pages. *Semblance and Reality*, a pithy, insightful study of the progress of humanity as presented in the Hebrew Bible, has an unusual history of its own. In the 1930s, author Chaim Nussbaum, ordained at the Telshe Yeshivah and holding a master's degree in theoretical physics from the University of Leiden, published an essay, in Holland, which was to serve as introduction to a book-length study on messianism in

Judaism. However, Nussbaum lost the longer manuscript while in flight from the Nazis through Eastern Europe and Asia to Singapore. There, he joined the Dutch Army, was captured by the Japanese and spent several years as a prisoner in the camp on the River Kwai. The manuscript was lost but the ideas were not and 50 years later, after events unparalleled in Jewish history, Nussbaum has rewritten his book as *Semblance and Reality*.

This book offers two major accomplishments. One is its main theme—a Jewish-Biblical view of human history and progress in clarifying and distinguishing between semblance and reality. Second, a great number of detailed insights into Biblical characters and stories based on a careful and masterful reading of the text. This latter Nussbaum calls *p'shat*, in the sense that the insights are derived from careful attention to the text itself. Nussbaum knows deeply and used the perspective of Rabbinic literature, but his interpretations are original and are fed from both his literary sensitivity and his love of science.

The drive toward the clarifying of semblance from reality in human affairs is the story of man's ethical and spiritual progress described in the Biblical narrative. God created man as a very special being with a body formed of the dust of the earth and with a divine spark of life. In the original creation, semblance and reality were undivided. What seemed to be good, in fact, was good. But man, although after all made in God's image, became confused and began to see reality not as obedience to God's command but as trying to come closer to Him by his own devices—to wit, by eating the forbidden fruit. This introduced an element of duality into the world. Good and evil now became intermingled, and life was no longer the same. Man was beset by a confusion that he would seek gradually to lighten during the long course of his history.

The man and woman in the garden sought to fulfill their purpose by emulating God but, when they ate the fruit, they only became more aware of how unlike God they really were. They now felt more like animals, hiding naked among the trees in the garden. It was God who helped the people on their first steps back to clarity by providing them with garments of skin, thus making them seem different from animals and showing that he had not abandoned them. Yet, man had changed his own life so that the natural world is no longer in harmony with him but gives him a mixture of useful and useless, edible food with thorns and thistles, wheat with chaff. He must seek to bring *berur*, clarification and separation out of the confusion. This process will lead to man's redemption, to a messianic world in which he will achieve a clear insight that enables him to distinguish truth from falsehood.

The process of *berur* versus *irruv*, clari-

## PSALM

I have nothing but praise for You God  
For you have kept me too often from what seems natural and justified  
Checked me more than once  
From giving in to an insatiable emptiness that rages through my being  
My being bitterness trapped by time or some fixed whim  
My passion selflessness that seems too often self-induced  
I do not blame You for that God  
For You are not as human as I and my ambition is nothing to You

You Who plan whole seasons and set out enough world for each of us  
You whose chief counsel is time and Whose benevolence by nature for exceeds itself

If only I could be satisfied with my share  
If I could find in it some strength stronger than fear

Maybe it's Your fault after all God  
Maybe if You agreed to keep Your plan from me  
I would suffer enough courage to reaffirm my need and find in it more than the wilderness of being willed.

—Carol Adler

fication versus confusion, goes on through Biblical history. God's interest in man continues so that even when all seems lost, man emerges better than before. Sometimes his fears arise from his confusion over a frightful semblance that he can perceive and a more promising reality that he does not understand until later. The stories of Judah and Tamar as well as of Lot and his daughters exemplify this. King David's judgment is sadly obscured in the incident with Uriah the Hittite. Yet, even in this moment of *irruv*, David's deep and sincere repentance restores the movement of history onto the path of *berur*. Centuries later, when the Jews return from the Babylonian Exile to build the Second Temple, idolatry has been almost totally eradicated from Jewish life. This was brought about by achieving a higher degree of clarification between semblance and reality, becoming a major step on the path toward the messianic world.

This view of the world, in terms of *irruv* and *berur*, sheds a new light on certain non-Biblical ideas that are beyond the immediate purposes of this slender volume. It is close, in a sense, to Plato's concept of Higher and Lesser Realities, which he discussed in the last book of his *Republic*. Both Nussbaum's and Plato's approaches hold an existential interest in seeing reality in its clearest form. However, there is also a profound difference. Plato's philosopher can find a Higher Reality only when his soul separates cleanly at his death from the prison of his body and when he no longer perceives by using his physical senses. For Nussbaum's Biblical man, progress toward *berur* will come in this earthly life, and human history is meaningful and not a futile Sisyphean burden.

A second idea, too, is implicit in Nussbaum's concept of semblance and reality. Often, it is in the nature of man to go through life seeking some higher meaning and satisfaction. Sometimes this quest leads to productiveness and personal satisfaction but all too often the quest is misguided and unrealistic and the seeker hurries to self-destruction. *Semblance and Reality* describes a Biblical sort of quest that differs from many quests in general world literature. Perhaps we may speak of three types of quest. First, Don Quixote tilts with windmills (and, in his 1960s rebirth, he dreams impossible dreams), his movements motivated from a psychological imbalance ending in collapse. The confused if not sociopathic knight-errant ends up circling on a windmill, an act of the utmost futility. This is a confused mixture of good and evil in the strongest sense of Nussbaum's terms of semblance and reality. Or alternatively, the hero can, like Sir Galahad, devote himself to searching for a Holy Grail and, when he finds that ultimate symbol, can only lie down and perish. Such a quest seems to have as its purpose only the attainment of self-destruction and ultimate nothingness.

A second sort of quest is typified in Frederick Jackson Turner's American frontier thesis and was recently revived in the new movie production of James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*. The American frontier hero does not tolerate the bonds and limitations of so-called civilized society. He seeks freedom from restraint and repression. In the movie, a British officer harangues a group of frontiersmen about their duties as subjects of King George. Hawkeye responds that he does not call himself "subject to much at all." In a sense, this is a healthy rebellion against the philosophy of the builders of the Tower of Babel, who were dedicated to making themselves a name as well as to avoid being scattered and separated from each other (see Nussbaum's fourth chapter). The end of the American quest is at its best not self-destruction but "settling down" with a piece of land and a family of one's own. The search for a

harmonious utopia on the frontier occupies many important chapters in the annals of American social history.

There is a third type. The Jewish quest, of which Abraham is a paradigm, goes a step beyond Cooper's frontiersman. Abraham too sought a land and the building of a family, sometimes avoiding settled areas (see Nussbaum's fifth chapter). Yet, his quest goes farther. He leaves his land, his birthplace and his father's house to seek a close relationship with God, and his life is dedicated not only to what he can gain or accomplish but to making himself a blessing for all mankind (Gen. 12:2). Is it this spirit that has prompted the Jews to make so many contributions to science, human knowledge and society?

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## BOOK BRIEFINGS

*Editor's Note: Inclusion of a book in "Briefings" does not preclude its being reviewed in a future issue of Menorah Review.*

***The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah.*** Translated and edited by Mark R. Cohen. Princeton University Press. Modena was a complex personality, famous among contemporary European Christians and Jews. His autobiography documents, in poignant detail, the turbulent life of his family in the Jewish ghetto of Venice. This translation provides a wealth of material about Jewish family life in that period, religion in daily life, crime and punishment, and the influence of kabbalistic mysticism. The commentary places the work in historical and literary context.

***The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan.*** Edited by Emanuel S. Goldsmith, Mel Scult and Robert M. Seltzer. New York University Press. This is the first comprehensive study of Kaplan since his death in 1983. Contributing authors approach the study of his life and work from a broad range of perspectives. Essays explore his ideas on philosophy, ethics, metaphysics, theology, history, education, social work and liturgy. Also discussed are his attitudes about Reform, Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, the role of women in Judaism, his interpretation of Zionism, and his conflict over the challenge of Marxism. This volume provides the reader with a valuable portrait of Kaplan's thought and personality.

***Rachel's Daughters: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women.*** By Debra Renee Kaufman. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press. Kaufman writes about "baalot teshuva"—women who have returned to Orthodox Judaism, a form of Judaism often assumed to be oppressive to women. She addresses many of the most challenging issues of family, feminism and gender. She interviewed and observed 150 baalot teshuva and uses their own stories to show how they make sense of the choices they have made. They speak of searching for shared meaning and order and finding it in orthodoxy. Although most baalot teshuva reject feminism or what they perceive as feminism, they maintain a gender consciousness that incorporates aspects of feminist ideology and often use feminist rhetoric to explain their lives. The book provides a fascinating picture of how newly Orthodox women perceive their role in society as more liberating than oppressive.

***The Books of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources.*** By Mark Verman. Albany: State University of New York Press. The earliest medieval Jewish mystical writings, or "kabbalah," date from the late 12th and early 13th centuries. This is the first book to focus on the most prodigious group active at that time—the "Circle of Contemplation." The "Circle" generated a mystical theology that differs radically from mainstream kabbalistic theosophy. A meticulous and systematic study of these writings forms the core of this book. The author concludes that these writings were a product of 13th-century Spain, not France, as claimed by Gershom Scholem. His conclusion engendered a critical evaluation of Scholem's historiography of early medieval Jewish mysticism.

***Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism.*** By Alexander Stille. New York: Summit Books. Stille illuminates the paradoxes of Jewish life during the Fascist period, recreating in powerful and moving prose the experiences of five families and the texture of their everyday lives. Focusing on the particular and making full use of interviews, letters and diaries, he sheds light on the diverse political, socioeconomic and geographic circumstances that shaped the actions and reactions of Jews throughout Italy. His portraits serve as essential counterpoint to linear historical studies of the Holocaust. These stories bring into sharp relief the most profound moral and existential questions of our time.

***The World of Biblical Literature.*** By Robert Alter. New York: Basic Books. Alter steps back from the formal traditional theories to address larger issues of considering the Bible as great literature. By recognizing such vital qualities as the absence of context for the author of the Bible and the artful playfulness of the literary impulse that drives the narrative, Alter opens up the critical text as sexual comedy and the ever-changing gender of the voice and perspective of the work. The author provides a captivating look inside the world's most familiar stories and insight into the general nature of literature as a force that both follows and informs human culture.

***Jewish Profiles: Great Jewish Personalities and Institutions of the Twentieth Century.*** Edited by Murray Polner. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc. The editor of this volume has created what is surely a historical document that will allow future generations to look back and understand some prime movers of our times. Taken from the pages of *Present Tense* magazine, each chapter is an opportunity to get a glimpse of significant people and institutions.

***In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Second Generation.*** By Aaron Hass. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. What are the effects of growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust? Drawing on interviews and survey materials, Hass provides a vibrant account of the experience of survivors' children. Now in their thirties and forties, these men and women describe their relationship with their parents and offer their perceptions of the impact of the Holocaust on their families. They give voice to memories and feelings about which some of them have never spoken before. The range of responses is vast in this honest and compassionate book.

***A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person.*** By John P. Meier. New York: Doubleday. In this volume, Meier uses the techniques of modern historical research to probe the "hidden years" of Jesus' childhood, adolescence and adulthood, examining the linguistic, educational, socioeconomic, religious and familial influences that molded the Jesus known to us through his public ministry. There result is a significantly revised portrait of the historical Jesus—a man from a particular time and place, whose human circumstances must be understood if we are to understand his ministry and the influence he has had on our world. Meier's work is an invaluable, readable treatment of the historic Jesus.

***Biblical Poetry Through Medieval Jewish Eyes.*** By Adele Berlin. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. At no time in recent history has literary theory been taken more seriously by Biblical scholars or has the Bible been given more attention by literary scholars. As a result, there is now much common ground between these two disciplines. It is at the juncture of Biblical and literary studies that this book has its place, for it seeks to present to members of these disciplines material that, for different reasons, should be of interest to both—namely, medieval and Renaissance Jewish writings on Biblical poetry and poetic theory. The first part consists of an extended essay on medieval and Renaissance views of Biblical poetry and rhetoric. The second part presents translations of individual excerpts.

***The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany.*** By Marion A. Kaplan. New York: Oxford University Press. This innovative social history shows how Jewish women created and maintained German-Jewish cultural, familial and communal life in Imperial Germany. Using lively stories from memoirs and other sources as diverse as newspapers, novels and cookbooks, Kaplan probes the interrelationships among Jewish women, Jewish life and German society. This book reconceptualizes German-Jewish history by focusing on women. It will appeal to students of German, Jewish and women's history.

***The Oxford Study Bible.*** New York: Oxford University Press. Scholars are expanding their understanding of the Bible to include knowledge of the world in which it was created and the influences of the different cultures that shaped its final form. The *Oxford Study Bible* is the first authoritative resource to embrace this new approach. It begins with a 200-page article section connecting the Bible with the history, literature, religions and culture of its time. The articles present in terms accessible to every reader an authoritative compilation of information previously available only through university and seminary courses. It also includes completely updated textual annotations, detailed maps and charts. The text clearly explains the most important aspects of the new, more expansive view of the Bible, showing how the origins of Scripture are intricately bound with the traditions of other peoples.

***Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry.*** By Samuel Heilman. New York: Schocken Books. This is an unprecedented look at fundamentalism in Jewish life and culture in Israel. The author has observed ultra-Orthodox communities for more than 20 years and has opened up a fascinating world of the ultra-Orthodox Jews. He takes us behind appearances and shows us how they see the world. This first in-depth portrait shows us what makes a contemporary fundamentalist community "tick" from the inside. While the ultra-Orthodox Jews of Israel may seem an anomaly to most, including the majority of Israel's mainstream population, the "haredim" (literally, "those who tremble at God's word") are gaining a more powerful influence in Israeli politics. The author uncovers a community with a fervor to maintain what they believe to be authentic Jewish life. The book is at times funny and inspiring, unprecedented in its concise and lucid description of the "haredim."

***The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books.*** Edited by Barry W. Holtz. New York: Schocken Books. This book helps general readers find their way through the maze of Jewish books in the marketplace. The reader's guide takes a wide-ranging view of many different subjects as it recommends the key books in each field and shows the beginner where to begin. A variety of experts guide us through topics such as Bible, Talmud, Jewish history, the Holocaust, contemporary Israel, religious life and customs, mysticism, Hebrew and Yiddish literature, and feminism. Most American Jews, religious or not, are insecure about the level of their Jewish education. This indispensable, illustrated guide highlights the current issues in each subject area and gives readers the means to acquire a Jewish education in adulthood on par with their secular learning.

***The Midrash of Proverbs.*** Translated by Burton L. Visotzky. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. *Midrash Mishle* is a watershed in midrashic literature, for it marks the point at which broader forms of classical Midrash on the Scriptures gave way to verse-by-verse commentary. It is unlike most earlier Midrash in that it regularly pays attention to context, relates verses to each other, provides comments on apparently simple meanings of verses and philologically considers the meaning of specific terms. Visotzky's volume is illuminating for the scholar and non-specialist alike in a prose translation that mirrors the style of the original. His introduction sets it in the wider context of Jewish hermeneutics of the Bible.

continued, page 8



**Wisdom of the Kabbalah.** By Alexandre Safran. New York: Feldheim Publishers. This book gives a basic, comprehensive understanding of Jewish mysticism. Safran has written a concise, and eloquent description of the fundamental concepts and doctrines of Kabbalah such as Devekut, Tikkun and Sefirot. The author also presents an eloquent description of the literature of Kabbalah. In this book, as Elie Wiesel has said, "opulent treasures are revealed."

**Slow Fire: Jewish Notes From Berlin.** By Susan Neiman. New York: Schocken Books. When she left Harvard to spend a year in Berlin finishing her philosophy dissertation, Neiman discovered that history has a way of intruding into the most private moments. She remained six years and wrote a book describing how Germans confront their past and the Nazis. With the mixture of irony and poignancy unique to Berlin itself, this book provides an intimate look at Berliners a generation after the war. In writing this remarkable memoir, she has composed an unforgettable ode to the city that, for better or worse, emblazons its century like no other.

**The Last Selection: A Child's Journey Through the Holocaust.** By Goldie Szachter Kalib. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press. This haunting memoir records the experiences of a young Jewish girl forced to confront the horrors of the Holocaust. Her account begins with an arare portrait of Jewish life in a small Polish town in the 1930s. She details the events that shattered the world of her youth, beginning with the Nazi invasion and occupation of her hometown, Bodzentyn. She hid with a family of Polish Christians until the suspicions of neighbors forced her to leave. Eventually, she and her entire family were sent to Auschwitz where her parents, two brothers and 24 other members of her family perished.

**The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore.** Edited by Alan Dundes. Madison: The University of Wisconsin

Press. Dundes demonstrates how folklore can influence thought and history. According to the Blood Libel Legend, Jews murdered Christian infants for blood to make matzah. Dundes has gathered the work of 12 leading scholars who examine the varied sources and elaborations of this legend. Collectively, their essays constitute a forceful statement against this false accusation. These case studies provide a comprehensive view of the complex nature of the legend.

**The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions.** By Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon. New York: The Free Press. The authors describe the historical roots of Boston's Jewish inner-city community and life along its central strip, Blue Hill Avenue. They trace the early phases of integration to the point where tensions both within and outside the neighborhood produced a rash of violence. The authors show that 90,000 Jews was displaced within a few years, and a long-standing Jewish community was destroyed. Their story holds important lessons for those concerned with the ongoing struggle to balance self-determination with racial harmony in today's urban communities.

**The Bride Price.** By Grete Weil. Boston: David R. Godine Publisher Inc. In this remarkable work of fiction and autobiography, Weil interweaves a Biblical tale with her own story as a woman who survived the Holocaust and now must endure her own isolation and aging. So the aging Michal, in danger of being murdered by Bathsheba, struggles to understand the purpose of suffering and loss as well as her continuing devotion to a man who was capable of killing his own son to protect his throne. In brilliant counterpoint, Weil tells her own story, daily confronting death and aging in present-day terms, in memory and in the more permanent records of history and literature. Her prose fuses the war-torn Biblical landscape with the devastated emotional landscape of a survivor. The result is a unified tale of bravery, loss and hope.



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# BOOK BRIEFINGS

A Supplement to Menorah Review

Fall 1994

**Editor's Note:** Inclusion of a book in "Briefings" does not preclude its being reviewed in a future issue of Menorah Review.

**Nine and One-Half Mystics: The Kabbala Today.** By Herbert Weiner (revised and updated). New York: Collier Books. This is an exploration of the hidden treasures of the Kabbala, the spiritual and mystical tradition in Judaism. Since its original publication in 1971, the book has enjoyed many printings. The new edition includes an extensive chapter about Menachem Schneersohn and his messianic movement with Lubavitchers around the world. It also includes another afterword that highlights a recent interview with Schneersohn and offers insights about current developments within the movement. In thoughtful, compelling prose, Weiner intertwines the actual teachings of the Kabbala with interviews he had with the teachers themselves. This book is a fascinating journey for anyone interested in the ways of mystical religion today.

**Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil.** By Hyam Maccoby. New York: The Free Press. For more than 2,000 years, the figure of Judas has exerted a peculiar fascination. Strangely, both attractive and repulsive, he has always been the darkest and most interesting figure in the story of Jesus and the Apostles. Maccoby asks who the real Judas was and seeks to show how he became the archetype of the betraying Jew. He begins by asking why an irrational suspicion of Jews has persisted in the modern world. He argues that one must return to the sources of Christianity to see how a perverted image of the Jews as a figure of evil came to be ingrained in the psychology of Christian Europe. In the earliest Christian texts, Judas is not singled out as a betrayer. Only in successive later versions of the story does he slowly emerge in this repugnant role. He traces the evolution of the myth against the rich historical background of the 1st century A.D. when the young Christian church was struggling to dissociate itself from the Jewish nation. He also shows how this malignant myth reverberates through history, branding the Jews as the people of evil and helping to justify 2,000 years of genocidal persecution.

**From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology.** By Maurice Casey. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press. The deity and incarnation of Jesus have been part of orthodox Christian belief for centuries. Casey sheds new light on the Myth of God Incarnate debate by applying new theory to the central problems of the New Testament. This lucid, cogently organized achievement proposes a new way of analyzing the origins and development of New Testament Christology based on the work Jewish scholars have done in analyzing modern Judaism. This is the first book in the field of Christian origins to make serious analytical use of the concept of identity. Using both original sources as well as established and recent scholarship, Casey presents a convincing argument to support his Christological framework. It includes new discussion and explanation of early Christian belief in the Resurrection, the virgin birth and other elements of Christian dogma.

**The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian and Classical Reflections on Human Nature.** By Solomon Schimmel. New York: The Free Press. The author maintains that "the seven deadly sins" are

alive and well and deadlier than ever. Greed, envy, lust, pride, anger, sloth and gluttony are a permanent part of human nature. Yet the waning of the great religious traditions has left us in the perennial struggle with our flawed and "fallen" nature. Psychology appears to be inadequate to this task. What else but this inadequacy can explain the proliferation of self-help groups and a multitude of therapies? The problems of modern man can be better understood and therapeutically addressed within the context of traditional religious and moral teachings about sin and virtue. These traditions are a neglected mine of psychological wisdom and advice, which Schimmel judiciously calls in an attempt to enhance our diminishing understanding of our inner moral selves. Drawing widely on the classical, Jewish and Christian traditions, he explores their different visions of each deadly sin, contrasts them with the vision of secular psychology and tells us something of the necessary virtues that contribute to self-mastery and happiness.

**The Jewish Roots of Christian Liturgy.** Edited by Eugene J. Fisher. New York: Paulist Press. The crucial issue in the Church's dialogue with Judaism is the conviction that the Jewish religion is not extrinsic but intrinsic to Christianity. One clear example of this is that Christian forms of worship developed from the Jewish liturgy. The liturgies interact even today. There is a profound relationship between Christians and Jews not shared with any other religion. This book is both an extended meditation on this bond and a practical handbook for understanding how Christian liturgy began. This series of articles treats both the ancient Jewish roots of Christian liturgy and a contemporary Jewish-Christian perspective on life, marriage and death, Sabbath and Sunday. It is an invaluable volume for anyone interested in Jewish-Christian dialogue.

**Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy.** Edited by David B. Ruderman. New York University Press. The essays in this volume are divided into two distinct eras of Jewish communal life: at the height of Jewish settlement during the Renaissance (c. 1450 through c. 1550) and during their enclosure in ghettos, roughly coterminous with the Baroque period and beyond it (c. 1550 through the 17th and much of the 18th century). The focus of this important collection is the history of culture as reflected primarily in learned society.

**Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue.** Edited by Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society. This book explains women's involvement in and around the synagogue from its antecedents in the Biblical period to contemporary times. The role of women in the synagogue is one of the most timely but potentially divisive issues within all branches of Judaism. Orthodoxy is deeply concerned about the innovation of women's prayer groups. Conservative Judaism is facing its greatest challenge from within as a result of its decision to ordain women. The Reform and Reconstructionist movements are struggling with the inclusion of a feminine element in traditional male-oriented liturgy and non-male references to God.

The contributors to this volume, drawn from the entire

spectrum of Jewish affairs and affiliation, deal with all these issues—from the rich perspective of history, anthropology, sociology, medieval studies, women's studies, Jewish law, the Bible, the Talmud and Rabbinic thought. New realities are examined to glimpse the religious life of Jewish women in the future.

**Jewish Polemics.** By Arthur Hertzberg. New York: Columbia University Press. This collection of essays presents the author's provocative views on the problems that concern American Jews in relationship to themselves, to other Americans and to Israel. Hertzberg challenges and examines such topics as the policies of Menachem Begin during his tenure as Israel's prime minister, Christian-Jewish relations, the future of American Jewry, the Arab-Israel conflict and the Holocaust as well as defends his position on Zionism. Striking a balance between the personal and the political, this is a book of moral outcry expressed in argument—with politicians, with notions of right and wrong, with oneself—linking past experiences as well as religious and cultural upbringing to one's view of the world. The author calls on thoughtful citizens worldwide to take on and strive to solve the political and social crises of our time.

**Immediacy and Its Limits: A Study in Martin Buber's Thought.** By Nathan Rotenstreich. Philadelphia: Harwood Academic Publishers. This book focuses on a major problem in the philosophy of Martin Buber. This is the topic of immediacy that is presented in terms of the contact between human beings, on the one hand, and man and God on the other. The basic theme throughout is whether the I-Thou relation refers to immediate contact between human beings, as Buber saw it, or whether that relation is something established or aspired to. This is an important study that should be consulted in any future discussion of Martin Buber's thought. At the same time, it raises critical issues for recent European philosophy. Students of philosophy as well as religious and social thought will find its critical exposition extremely helpful.

**Jewish Women in Historical Perspective.** Edited by Judith R. Baskin. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. By gathering significant studies of Jewish women's history from some of the foremost scholars on the subject, Baskin furthers our knowledge of the diversity and richness of Jewish women's pasts. While the growth of women's studies as a field of scholarly endeavor has led to increased academic study of women in Judaism and individual Jewish women, few recent works have attempted to illuminate contemporary dilemmas and concerns by scholarly investigations of the lives and experiences of Jewish women of previous eras. This volume provides such a historical perspective.

**System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig.** By Stéphane Moses, translated by Catherine Tihanyi. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. Jewish philosopher Rosenzweig questioned the whole of Western philosophical tradition and tried to find a "new thinking" based on the Jewish-Christian concept of Revelation. This volume, the first contemporary, comprehensive analysis of Rosenzweig's thinking, describes his philosophy as it is presented in his major work, *The Star of Redemption*, and highlights its relevance to post-modern thinking. Emphasizing the conceptual structures of Rosenzweig's philosophy, its references to cultural and historical data, as well as the implicit tensions that undermine the systematic coherence of this thinking, Moses underlines some of the most fundamental speculative gesture's in Rosenzweig's thought. The author looks at Rosenzweig's place within the history of contemporary philosophy through an analysis that is part exposition, part commentary and part interpretation.

**Yeshayahu Leibowitz: Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State.** Edited by Eliezer Goldman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Since the early 1940s, Leibowitz has been one of the most incisive and controversial critics of Israeli culture and

politics. These hard-hitting essays cover the ground he has marked over time with moral rigor and political insight. He considers the essence and character of historical Judaism; the problems of contemporary Judaism and Jewishness; the relationship of Judaism to Christianity; the questions of statehood, religion and politics in Israel; and the role of women. This translation brings to an English-speaking audience a much needed, lucid perspective on the present and future state of Jewish culture.

**Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach.** by Ilana Pardes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. In this eye-opening book, Pardes explores the tense dialogue between dominant patriarchal discourses of the Bible and counter female voices. Her findings lead to reassessments of patriarchal traditions and of current feminist critiques. The formation of the Hebrew Bible, she demonstrates, entailed not only a concern for unity but also, on occasion, an irresistible attraction toward countertraditions. For her analysis, she draws on feminist theory, literary criticism, Biblical scholarship and psychoanalysis. Her discussions of Eve as name-giver, Rachel's Drea, the Song of Shulamite, Zipporah's magical act and a critique of Job's wife open new lines of thought for feminist critics, literary critics, Biblical scholars and all readers of the Bible.

**A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity.** By Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers. This book challenges the often unquestioning attitudes we have toward suicide and traces the evolution of these attitudes from the time of Socrates to the present day. Droge and Tabor reveal the extraordinary fact that early Christians and Jews did not absolutely condemn suicide but, instead, focused on whether or not it was committed for noble reasons. In fascinating detail, the texts and traditions presented here make clear that the decision to take one's life, or allow it to be taken, was not considered a sin but a noble choice, provided there was sufficient justification for the act. This volume illustrates how strongly we share the early attitudes toward voluntary death. But the very attempt to find a consensus indicates how the decision to die could be a conscientious one. Intensely relevant to the contemporary debate, the authors take the reader on a challenging and instructive journey to the surprising origins of Western culture's thoughts on voluntary death.

**In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity.** By Jose Faur. Albany: State University of New York Press. This book focuses on the Iberian Jews and conversos, Jews who converted to Christianity. It explores the idea of the "other" in both Jewish and Christian traditions, the differences between the perspectives of the "persecuted" and the "persecutors," and the vision of modernity among some Iberian Jews of the period. Special attention has been devoted to da Costa and Spinoza, offering a new perspective on the Jewish history of ideas. Faur combines extensive text-historiographic research with penetrating philosophic analysis and then presents his conclusions in the context of a bold speculative vision of the "telos" of modern Jewish and modern Western thinking.

**Despair and Deliverance: Private Salvation in Contemporary Israel.** By Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi. Albany: State University of New York Press. The author examines the varieties of religious and secular salvation that have recently appeared in Israel as evidence for Israelis' willingness to embrace private salvation in the face of immense cultural upheavals. Drawing on interviews, field observations, clinical data and media reports collected over 10 years, Beit-Hallahmi surveys four roads to private salvation: the return of Judaism, new religions (sects or cults), psychotherapy movements such as est and occultism. These dramatic forms of conversion are unique to Israeli society, and the author provides an illuminating history and psychology of this transformation.