# From Apologetics to Jewish Theological Affirmations

*Paul Mendes-Flohr*

## INTRODUCCIÓN

Upon completing my doctoral qualifying exams in the late 1960s, I went to Berlin to commence research on my dissertation. My thesis adviser arranged for me to meet Jakob Taubes (1923-1983), then teaching at the Freie Universität zu Berlin. At our very first meeting, almost immediately after I had crossed the threshold of his home tucked in a bucolic corner of the city, Taubes asked me what I thought of Shabbatai Tzvi, the antinomian pseudo-Messiah. Taken aback by the question, I mumbled some inane academic reply, assuming it was the beginning of a second round of my doctoral orals. My reply was met with silence. Although the conversation soon resumed with a cordial discussion of my research project, I soon realized that with his startling introductory query, Taubes did not intend to probe my scholarly credentials. Rather he sought to alert me to the existential and religious questions that preoccupied him as a Jew in self-imposed exile in Berlin.

*Keywords:* NA

*Classification:* DDC Code: 821.7

*Language:* English

Great Britain Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573358
Print ISSN: 2515-5786
Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 23 | Issue 23 | Compilation 1.0

# From Apologetics to Jewish Theological Affirmations

Paul Mendes-Flohr

## I. INTRODUICTIÓN

Upon completing my doctoral qualifying exams in the late 1960s, I went to Berlin to commence research on my dissertation. My thesis adviser arranged for me to meet Jakob Taubes (1923-1983), then teaching at the Freie Universität zu Berlin. At our very first meeting, almost immediately after I had crossed the threshold of his home tucked in a bucolic corner of the city, Taubes asked me what I thought of Shabbatai Tzvi, the antinomian pseudo-Messiah. Taken aback by the question, I mumbled some inane academic reply, assuming it was the beginning of a second round of my doctoral orals. My reply was met with silence. Although the conversation soon resumed with a cordial discussion of my research project, I soon realized that with his startling introductory query, Taubes did not intend to probe my scholarly credentials. Rather he sought to alert me to the existential and religious questions that preoccupied him as a Jew in self-imposed exile in Berlin.

The son of the chief rabbi of Switzerland, Taubes was raised as a strictly observant halakhic Jew. At the ultra-orthodox rabbinic academy (*yeshivah*) at which he studied, he was considered an *iluyi* – a Talmudic *wunderkind* – and earned rabbinic ordination in his teens. As a direct descendent of the Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, as well as revered halakhic authorities, he was duly proud of his pedigree. Yet while still at the *yeshivah*, he found himself in a spiritual no-man's land, marked by a deep ambivalence about Orthodox Jewish religious practice. Seeking theological clarification, the young *yeshivah* student attended seminars – it seems initially *sub rosa* – at the University of Zurich on Christian theology. He was captivated by the eschatological spirituality of Christianity, which he understood to have emerged from within Judaism. He would eventually leave the *yeshivah* and register as a bona fide university student, earning a doctorate at the age of twenty-four with a dissertation on *Abendländische Eschatologie (*Occidental Eschatology).[1] From the perspective of what he called "apocalyptic temporality," a liminal space between history and the *eschaton*, the end of time, he traces the crystallization of this conception of human destiny from the Hebrew Bible through the Western Church to nineteenth-century Marxism. At the very outset, he frames his study of this trajectory as intrinsically an antinomian, heretical process. "The essence of history is freedom. [...] Only mankind's answer to the word of God, which is essentially a negative one, is evidence of human freedom. Therefore, the freedom of negation is the foundation of history."[2] A crucial juncture in the eschatological journey is St. Paul's apocalyptic break with rabbinic Law, which through Augustine's theological sublation constituted foundational Christian eschatological experience as the prolepsis s of a radical negation of the world and the anguish of the flesh.[3] For Taubes Occidental eschatology, which attained its most pristine expression paradoxically with Marx and Kierkeegard, flowed with dialectical necessity from rabbinic Judaism. Hence, he insisted on the essential Jewishness of Paul. The Italian philosopher Giorgo Agamben relates that in an exchange with a Swiss New Testament scholar, Taubes is reported to have said that St. Paul thought in Yiddish,thatistosay,his theologoumena are not to be explained with reference to Hellenistic Greek thought but rather is to be

[1] Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology,* trans. With preface by David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).
[2] Ibid., 5.
[3] Ibid., 77.

London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

understood as profoundly Jewish.[4] As a pious rabbinic Jew, so Taubes argued, Paul's theology was driven by an apocalyptic and hence antinomian tension between the divinely revealed Law and the promise of Redemption.

In his posthumously published ruminations on *The Political Theology of Paul,* Taubes thus described himself not surprisingly as a "Pauline non-Christian."[5] He read Paul neither as a historian nor as a textual scholar, but rather through a phenomenological hermeneutic by asking: "How does [Paul's pronouncements] feel to a Jew?."[6] He read Paul not *sensus litterali* but *sensus allegoricus,* in accord with a life-experience, his life-experience as an erstwhile halakhic Jew.[7]

Whereas Taubes came to Paul and Christianity *from within* Judaism, the early twentieth-century German-Jews referred to in the program of this conference came to Judaism *through* a Christian-inflected German culture. In a letter Franz Rosenzweig wrote to his mother who was scandalized to learn that her nephew – Franz's first cousin - Hans Ehrenberg had converted to Christianity, Rosenzweig – still four years from his affirmation of Judaism - justified his cousin's baptism:

> I really see nothing shameful in the whole matter. It's an excellent thing, after all, to make contact with religion, ... when one has been robbed of it by early neglect. Because I am hungry, must I on principle go on being hungry. On principle? Does principle satisfy hunger? Can being non-religious on principle satisfy a religious need?[8]

And in a subsequent letter, he continued:

> We are Christians in every respect. We live in a Christian state, attend Christian schools, read Christian books, in short, our whole 'culture' rests entirely on a Christian foundation; consequently a man who has nothing holding him back needs but a slight push. .. to make him accept Christianity.[9]

Like many, if not most of his Jewish contemporaries, the music Rosenzweig enjoyed and playedasa gifted violinist, the art he admired, the literature and philosophy he read, his intellectual and spiritual landscape, were suffused with Christian motifs and spiritual sensibilities. In contrast to the denizens of the ghetto, post-Enlightenment German Jewry did not regard Christian spirituality and theology as strange and threatening. On the contrary. The power and beauty of Christianity were compellingly appreciated, even by Jews Howereless Deracinated than Rosenzweig and his family. And often, as the historian of Jewish philosophy Julius Guttmann candidly acknowledged, it was through the mediation of Christianity that modern Jews rediscovered the "personalist piety" of the Hebrew Bible that had been obscured by medieval metaphysics and the rigors of *halakhic* discipline and religious affiliation determined more by filial loyalty than by genuine spiritual convictions.[10] Those German-Jews who sought to affirm Judaism as a religious faith but free of what they regarded as the spiritual encumbrance of rabbinic law, in effect, found themselves closer to St. Paul than to Moses Mendelssohn or Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, the patriarchs of the German brand of Orthodox Judaism. They were like Taubes „Pauline non-Christians"; but unlike Taubes, who embraced the antinomian, indeed apocalyptic Paul as a fellow post-halakhic Jew and spiritual godfather, the German-Jewish *ba'alei thesuvah* (they who reaffirmed to one degree or another traditional Jewish belief and practice) were obliged to distinguish their Jewish affirmations

[4] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains. A Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, trans., Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 4.
[5] *Occidental Eschatology,* 130.
[6] Ibid., 76.
[7] Cf. Alain Gignsac, "Taubes, Badiou, Agamben. Reception of Paul by Non-Christian Philosophers Today."
[8] Franz Rosenzweig to his parents, letter dated November 2, 1909. Cited in ibid., p. 18f.
[9] Franz Rosenzweig to his parents, letter dated November 6, 1909. Cited, ibid., p. 19.
[10] Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism. The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig*, trans. David W. Silverman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 3-17, 327-329..

from Paul's Christianity. They perforce became what Arthur A. Cohen called „theological Jews."[11]

The theological turn in German-Jewish thought marked a radical departure from nineteenth-century Jewry's apologetic responses to Christian critiques of Judaism as a heteronomous religion bereft of enlightened universal ethical sensibilities. It was no less than Immanuel Kant, the *spiritus rector* of the German *Aufklärung*, who set the polemical parameters in the theological debate imposed on Jews in the course of the protracted struggle for Emancipation and civil equality. Defining the ultimate purpose of religion as „the moral improvement of human beings," he called upon the Jews to „throw off the garb of the ancient cult, which now serves no purpose and even suppresses any true religious attitude...." In jettisoning the spiritually jejune ritual laws, the Jews will not only facilitate the emergence of Judaism as „a pure moral religion" but also „quickly call attention to themselves as an educated and civilized people who are ready for all the rights of citizenship."[12]

To advance both their political emancipation and liberation from the shackles of the Law, Kant urged the Jews to adopt a new biblical hermeneutics. In interpreting the Scriptures, which he specifies as the „Torah *and* the Gospels," they should „distinguish the way in which Jesus spoke as a Jew to Jews, from the way he spoke as a moral teacher to human beings in general." Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher of a new, ethically elevated humanity was, indeed, a Jew. The acknowledgment by Jews and non-Jews alike that Jesus was a Jew would, Kant held, promote the integration of the Jews – that is, individuals of Jewish provenance -- in the creation of a universal ethical commonwealth.

Nineteenth-century Liberal Protestants heeded Kant's appeal to highlight the ethical vision of Christianity and thus distinguish between Jesus the moral teacher from Jesus Christ the Savior (who, of course, was the focus of St. Paul's teaching). Hence, on face of it, the votaries of Liberal Protestantism would seem to have been amenable to accepting Jews, at least „educated and civilized" Jews as their partners in affirming the universal fatherhood of God as the ontological ground of the brotherhood of man and the establishment of the moral-ethical Kingdom of God on Earth. The Jewish neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen once told a German colleague, "What you call Protestantism, we call Judaism." His colleague was, alas, not impressed. For there was a hitch: Supersessionism. Even the most liberal of Christians held that God's election was transferred from the Children of Israel to the Church. Even the magnanimous Kant's appeal to Jewry to acknowledge that Jesus spoke to them as a fellow Jew was premised on what he called rather ominously the „euthanasia of Judaism and its ultimate„ disappearance"ina in a universal Church in which „there will only be one shepherd and one flock." Liberal Protestants would regard themselves as the vanguard anticipating the realization of that Church.

On the cusp of the twentieth century this view gained popular expression by Adolf von Harnack in his volume of 1900, *Das Wesen des Christenthums*,[13] which was issued in English under the title, *What is Christianity*? The translation, however, obfuscates a key-term of the German title, *Wesen* (essence), which signaled both the thesis and method of the then most esteemed Liberal Protestant scholar. The pristine essence of the Gospel of Jesus, Harnack argued, was obscured and misconstrued in the process of translating ofJesus's teachings into the conceptual universe of Hellenistic culture, a process initiated by the apostolic fathers, and which gained momentum with the theologians of the Roman Church. To uncover the original immutable essence of Christian faith, Harnack employed the critical historical method in order, as his colleague

[11] Arthur A. Cohen, *Natural and Supernatural Jew. An Historical and Theological Introduction*. 2nd, revised edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).

[12] Kant, "The Euthanesia of Judaism" (1798). Idem, "The Conflict of the Faculties," in idem, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 274f.

[13] Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1900).







London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Ernst Troeltsch put it, „to overcome history with history“ -- and thereby free one's cultural and religious heritage from historical accretions recognized to be relative to a given time and place. Harnack deemed it his task to identify those accretions as alien to the essence of Jesus's teaching. Winnowing the historical chaff, Harnack thus arrived at the essence, namely the Gospel of Jesus–„the founder [of the Christian faith]who himself was what he taught.“[14] As opposed to the Hellenized religion *about* Jesus the Christ, encased in a skein of dogma spun with „metaphysical hocus-pocus,“ Jesustaught „something simple and sublime; it means one thing and one thing only: eternal life in the midst of time, by the strength and under the eyes of God.” [15] Accountable before God, we are to seek salvation – eternal life – not beyond the temporal flow of life but rather in the here and now with our hearts set upon the realizing within the mundane order the ethical kingdom of God. To underscore the originality of Jesus' teaching, Harnack distinguished it from the religious views and practices of Jesus's fellow Jews, beholden as they were to the Pharisees, who „imagined God as a despot who stands watch over the ceremonial tasks of His household… .They saw Him only in His law, which they made into a labyrinth of gullies, erroneous paths, and secrete texts.“[16] The pristine ethical faith *of* Jesus marked a radical break with his ancestral religion.

This indictment of Judaism as antithetical to the essence of true religion, as embodied in Jesus's teachings and person, and re-valorized by Liberal Christianity, deeply offended Jews. Liberal Jews in particular could not remain indifferent to the negative portrayal of Judaism in such an enormously popular book – sold in the tens of thousands of copies and said to have been translated in nigh-as-many languages as had the Bible. Fearing that many modern Jews who had embraced the liberal ethos were so estranged from the sources of Judaism would arrive at a Jewish self-understanding though Harnack's critique, the organized Jewish community endeavored through lectures, essays, and conferences to correct Harnack's representation of Judaism. By 1907 at least a dozen monographs on the „essence of Judaism” d were written by Jewish scholars. One of most trenchant Jewish critiques of Harnack's virulent assessment of Judaism was penned by a twenty-seven-year-old Liberal Rabbi Leo Baeck. At the time unknown, Baeck published in 1901 a review of Harnack's book in the premier scholarly German journal of Jewish studies, which was soon issued as a widely distributed as a separate pamphlet. A greatly expanded version of the essay was published in 1905 as a book under the title *Das Wesen des Judentums*.[17] The young Baeck unhesitatingly faulted the venerable Harnack on methodological and factual grounds. Baeck notes that in his eagerness to highlight the transhistorical perduring significance of Jesus, Harnack detaches him from the historical context that nurtured his thought and ethical sensibilities. Hence, Baeck reasoned, Harnack permits himself observations that reflect either abysmal ignorance or a tendentiousness unbefitting a scholar of his stature. One such error of judgment cited by Baeck is Harnack's remark that „it is highly improbable that [Jesus] was educated in the schools of the Rabbis; nowhere does he speak like someone who had adopted their technical theology and artfulness of learned exegesis.“[18] Regarding this statement, which is meant to underscore that Jesus had nothing in common with the „Pharisees,“ Baeck comments that Harnack either simply does not understand Judaism or is unaware that in addition to law (*Halakhah*), the rabbis developed a rich and spiritually nuanced homiletic tradition: „Mr. H. would be right in his assertion if it were true that there existed no religious thinkers and poets among the Rabbis. But whoever knows anything about them immediately recognizes that Jesus's words are [in] the spirit of their spirit. Every one of his sayings, every one of his parables, every one of his words of consolation reveal him as a disciple of the Rabbis… Whoever judges the way Mr. H. does knows nothing about a large domain

[14] Harnck, *What is Christianity*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 7.
[15] Ibid.,
[16] Ibid., 33.
[17] Leo Baeck, *Das Wesen des Judentums* (Berlin: Nathansen und Lamm, 1905).
[18] Ibid., 20-21.

of Jewish spiritual life at the time – or is forcing himself not to see it."[19] Willfully or not, Baeck concluded, Harnack ignored Jewish background of Jesus's life and thus failed to appreciate the Jewish inflections of his teachings.

Indeed, Baeck argued, Jesus can only be properly understood within his Jewish context. So understood, „Jesus is a Genuine Jewish personality; his strivings and actions, his sufferings and feelings, his speech, and his silence – all bear the stamp of Jewish idealism, the best that there was in Judaism ... at the time. He was a Jew among the Jews ... In no other people would he have found apostles,who believed in him. Harnack has chosen to ignore the mother soil of Jesus's personality."[20] For Baeck Jesus was a fellow Jew not only by virtue of his evident skill in aggadic discourse of the rabbis but preeminently because of his moral passion – an ethical passion he shared with the Pharisaic sages. For Jesus as for the rabbis, Baeck explained, the ethical act was the fulcrum of religious life.

Baeck's *Essence of Judaism* is typical of the apologetics that characterized nineteenth-century German Jewish thought. In defending the integrity of Judaism as compatible with the prevailing Kantian ethical theology of Liberal Protestantism, the celebration of Jesus as son of Israel was pivotal. As Susannah Heschel notes in a seminal study on Jesus in German-Jewish thought: "A crucial image for modern Jewish thought is the figure of Jesus as a pious, loyal Jew... [T]he modern Jewish understanding of Christian origins is not merely a matter of Jews wishing to 'set the record straight.' Rather, it demonstrates the Jewish desire to enter the Christian myth and thereby claim the power inherent it." Understood in Foucaudian terms – and here I am elaborating upon Heschel's observation -- the power sought by embracing Jesus as a fellow Jew is not just mythic, that is, by the inclusion of Judaism in the myth or the meta-narrative of liberal Germany, was also if not primarily a political act, for it would provide emotive leverage to advance the cause of Jewish emancipation.

Baeck differed from nineteenth-century Jewish apologetics in his insistence that Jesus's place within the landscape of Pharisaic Judaism cannot be adequately discerned merely by a delineation of rabbinic teachings as a system of ideas and principles divorced from the life-experience of the Jews that gave expression to those teachings. Rabbinic doctrines, Baeck argued, did not evolve purely as a rarified intellectual exercise of reasoned argumentation; rather they were grounded in the foundational experience of the Torah as the bonding of the Jew's life to God.

Baeck's methodological stipulations that ideas are to be examined in the light of the life-experience that they express reflects the influence of the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. It was under Dilthey's supervision that Baeck a doctoral dissertation, which he submitted to the University of Berlin in 1895,[21] three years before Martin Buber came to Berlin to study with Dilthey. To the very end of his life, Buber would refer to Dilthey as „my teacher." Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie* left its mark on all of Buber's work, even when he emended his teacher's concept of *Erlebnis* (life-experience) as the life of dialogue. Accordingly, in the debate with Scholem on the interpretation of Hasidism, Buber defended his approach by stating that the movement is not to be understood as a system of ideas but rather regarding the *life* of the Hasidim, expressed in the tales and anecdotes they told one another.[22]

Buber had also evinced an affectionate affinity to Jesus, who he exuberantly hailed as „a great son of Israel."[23] „From my youth on," he candidly wrote, „I always experienced Jesus as my big brother. ... My own fraternity to him has grown ever stronger and clearer."[24] He made this claim

[19] Baeck:"Harnack's Vorlesungen über das Wesen des Christentums."Monatsschrift für Wissenschaft *des Judentums*, 45 (1901):110.
[20] Ibid., 118.

[21] Baeck, *Spinozas erste Einwirkungen auf Deutschland* (Berlin: Mayer und Müller, 1895).
[22] P. Mendes-Flohr, "Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem on Hasidism: A Methodological Dispute." *Sammelband: Mystik*, ed., Christoph Markschies (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2020): 68-76.
[23] Buber, *Two Types of Faith,* trans., Norman P. Goldhawk (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 9.
[24] Ibid.,, 12.

not as an apologist on behalf of organized Judaism, however. His writing on Jesus and Christianity are markedly autobiographical. In the wake of his parents' precipitous separation occasioned by his mother's affair with a Russian officer, he was raised since the age of three in the home of his paternal grandparents, traditional East European Jews who strictly observed the precepts of Orthodox Judaism. Upon leaving home at the age of eighteen to commence his university studies in Vienna, he deliberately distanced himself from Judaism. His break with Jewish tradition and practice was not an episodic expression of sophomoric generational rebellion. Duetofamilycircumstances, he found the Judaism of his grandparents already as a youth oppressive, an importunate imposition associated with the pain of being abandoned by his mother. In this respect, his rejection of traditional Jewish practice and later relation to Jesus and Paul differed fundamentally from that of Taubes. Whereas for Taubes, the engagement with Pauline Christianity was, as noted, from *within* Judaism and bespoke of an existential-theological tension inherent in the faith experience of halakhic spirituality, for Buber his identification with Jesus and profoundly ambivalent attitude toward Paul were, in the first instance, indicative of his re-appropriation of a Jewish spiritual identity consequent to the bitter estrangement from the Orthodoxy of his youth. Over the course of the years, his conception of Judaism and religious faith crystallized as a distinctive religious anarchism, which rejected any authority other than one's dialogical encounters within a given situation, encounters which are best understood as meta-nomian. Parenthetically, one may note that in his philosophical poem of 1923 which inaugurated his philosophy of dialogue, *I and Thou*, Buber only mentions three Jews: Jesus, Paul, and Peter!

Buber's friendship with Rosenzweig, which took shape in the early 1920s, served not only to clarify his conception of Judaism and religious faith, but also his relationship to Christianity. They would share a profound apprehension about the gnostic turn in Protestant theology attendant to the crisis of faith that took hold of Germany with its ignominious defeat in World War One. Out of the vortex of a protracted and tragically senseless war, followed by political revolutions, and economic and social dislocations, emerged a bewildered Germany. For many the war put the lie to the liberal, humanistic presuppositions of the nineteenth century.Virtually every sphere of intellectual and imaginative life was affected by a sense of despair. The expatriate American poet Ezra Pound, then living in Great Britain, wrote an apocalyptic verse that evoked the miasmic feeling of his generation that the Great War had marked the convulsive end of Western civilization:

> Daring as never before,
> wastage as never before,
> Young blood and high blood,
> fair cheeks and fine bones;
> fortitude as never before
> frankness as never before,
> disillusions as never told
> in the old days,
> hysterias, trench confessions,
> laughter out of dead bellies.
> There died a myriad,
> And of the best, among them,
> For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
> For a botched civilization.[25]

In the realm of theological reflection, especially in German-Protestant circles,this despair was marked by a manifest shift from Kantian-inspired ethical theology – which placed emphasis on the Christian's moral responsibility for the social realm– to an affirmation of the soteriological vision of the New Testament and the promise of individual salvation through Christ. In contrast to its previous focus on the ethical teachings of Jesus, Christian theology was now recast with a distinctively Pauline resonance, highlighting humanity's fallen state and utter dependence on God's grace and deliverance. The emerging religious mood thus suggested that human initiative is of little avail; humanity's only hope is divine salvation.

[25] Ezra Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* (1920), Part One.

The Protestant theologian Karl Barth was the first to give this disposition sustained articulation. In his monograph of 1919 on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he voiced a devastating critique of liberal theology, which he charged had blurred our dependence on divine grace and thereby encouraged human hubris. Barth insisted that not only human will but also reason were vitiated by the Edenic Fall. As mortal, incorrigibly sinful beings we stand in need before a transcendent, otherworldly God.

This dramatic departure from the worldliness and optimism of Protestant ethical theology can also be discerned in the post-World War One writings of Adolf Harnack. In 1921 Harnack (the author of the Liberal Christian manifesto, *The Essence of Christianity*) published a magisterial study on Marcion, the second century Christian heretic. Regarding himself a disciple of Paul, Marcion elaborated the apostle's distinction between Law and Grace with a far-reaching gnostic twist: The God of the Old Testament – the God of Creation – is not the true God, who is alien to this fallen world and is revealed and present only in the person of Jesus the Christ.The God of the Old Testament – the God of Israel –Marcion contended is the God of law and the inherently illusory concept of earthly justice; the God of the New Testament is the God of love and salvation. Marcion urged the Church to dissociate itself from the Old Testament and its delusive concept of Divine Creation, and to cling to the one and true God, Jesus the Christ. Harnack did not hesitate to endorse the heretic's theology:

> In the second century, the rejection of the Old Testament would have been a mistake and the Great Church rightly refused to make this mistake; its rejection in the sixteenth-century was due to the power of a fateful tradition from which the reformation was not yet able to withdraw, but its conservation as a canonical book in modern Protestantism is the result of a paralysis of religion and the church.

In a letter he wrote to a colleague discussing his book on Marcion, Harnack restated this thesis more explicit and decisive terms:

> Is it not so that the Ancient Church was not aware of the fact that truth too develops? ... I did not find it difficult to cause my children to accept the teaching that the Old Testament is now antiquated and only in certain parts still appealing and valuable. It is the law and history of the Jews; our book is the New Testament.[26]

Rosenzweig was quick to detect Harnack's fascination with Marcionan an ominous development. He read Harnack's monograph not simply as a scholarly treatise, but as indicative of an acute crisis in Christianity and an incipient gnostic attitude encouraging not only a rejection of the Old Testament and the God of Creation but also contempt of the people to whom this God first revealed Himself. In a letter of July 1925 to Martin Buber with whom he was then working on their translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into German, Rosenzweig wrote:

> It should be quite clear to you that the situation for which the neo-Marcionites [e.g. Harnack] have striven to achieve on the theoretical plane in actuality has already been obtained [in practice]. ...When the Christian speaks of the Bible, he means only the New Testament, perhaps together with the Psalms, which then he mostly believes already belongs to the New Testament. Thus in our new translation of the Hebrew Bible we are becoming missionaries.[27]

The Buber-Rosenzweig translation of the Hebrew Bible – which Christian supersessionists call the Old Testament – was not simply another translation, but rather an attempt to capture in German its primordial voice as refracted through the cadences, semantic inflections, and the phonological texture of the Hebrew and thus quicken anew for both Jew and Gentile the power of the Word spoken by God to Israel. Accordingly, through this what Buber called a „colometric"

[26] Harnack to Karl Holl, cited in William Pauck, *Harnack and Troeltsch. Two Historical Theologians* (New York, 1968), 38-39.

[27] Rosenzweig to Buber, July 25, 1925. *Briefe und Tagebücher*, ed. Rachel Rosenzweig-Scheidmann (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 2: 1055-56.

translation, the perduring, trans-temporal Voice of God – and His ever renewed relation with the world of His creation – is addressed to all humankind. For Buber and Rosenzweig, the God of the Hebrew Bible is not merely the God of Israel – as Marcion and the likes of Harnack contended. He is indeed the God of Creation, and thus marks the shared destiny of *all* the world. In retaining the „Old Testament" despite Marcion's gnostic exhortations, Rosenzweig and Buber observed, Christianity in effect acknowledged that salvation as a universal promise must be grounded in Creation. In an epistolary exchange with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, a Jewish convert to Christianity, Rosenzweig noted that the Church following a period of „gnostic naivete, "came under the sapient tutelage of Augustine who realized that without the concept of divine creation the universality of the promise of salvation and thus of the Church and its power over history are deprived of their ontological basis and compelling authority.

The Old Testament and thus also the Jews remain integral to the Church's self-understanding. To be sure, as Rosenzweig ironically put it, the Jews have remained part of Christian consciousness in a most ambivalent manner: Christianity's appreciative indebtedness to the Jews as custodians of the *Old* Testament – emphasis on the adjective *Old* -- has been catechized as the dogma of „Israel's stubbornness." But this „dogmatic"ambivalence, asRosenzweig beseeched his epistolary partner to acknowledge, was no mere theological dictum, for it cannot but engender contempt of the Jews. „In actual practice...the theological idea of the stubbornness of the Jews works itself out [as] hatred of the Jews."

Rosenzweig regarded this ambivalence as intrinsic to the Church's historical and theological relation to Judaism. Christian supersessionism cannot but engender an ambivalence; nonetheless actual contempt can be contained if the church would acknowledge that it needs the „synagogue" in reconciling human history and divine creation. Hence, the title of Rosenzweig's philosophical *cri de coeur, The Star of Redemption*.

Buber accepted Rosenzweig's vision of their Bible translation as a „mission to Christianity. „Although I am a radical opponent of missionary work," he confessed, „I Allowed myself to accept The the mission, for it [ultimately] appertains neither to Judaism per se nor to Christianity per se, but rather the shared primal truth [*Urwahrheit],*on whose rehabilitation the future of both depends." The neo-Marcion attempt to discredit the Old Testament and the God of Creation, Buber averred, strikes at the very heart of Western civilization and its humanistic foundations, namely, the fundamental belief that the triumph of the Good is the realization of terrestrial justice through human agency. The nullification of this belief breaks open the floodgates of cynicism and nihilism that gain expression in the gnostic and Marcion disdain for the mundane order. Indeed, Buber maintained that Western humanism is rooted not in Greek *sophia* but in the biblical concept of creation. Hence, the struggle against neo-Marcionism is eminently more than a question of securing the dignity of Judaism and the honor of the Hebrew Bible; it is rather a struggle on behalf of Western civilization, on behalf of giving shape to a more just and compassionate human order. Humanism as rooted in the Hebrew Bible thus holds that „the world is not something which must be overcome. It is a [divinely] created reality." It is a reality, however, that warrants the affirmation of Genesis 1:31 – „behold it was very good" – and mandates human partnership in God's work. It is a reality that is „created to be hallowed. Everything created has a need to be hallowed... Hallowing enables the [world] to fulfill the meaning for which it was created. The meaning with which Creation informed man, informed the world, is fulfilled through hallowing." In contrast to Pauline Christianity – which Buber viewed as a dialectical anticipation of Marcionism and its gnostic de-sanctification of the world – Judaism seeks neither to re-constitute the world into something „wholly spiritual" nor to „overcome" it by spirit. „The spirit does not embrace the holy world, rejoice in its holiness, nor does it float above an unholy world, clutching all holiness to itself." Rather, the spirit „produces holiness, and the world is made holy."

Although the church did not follow Marcion, Buber noted, his teaching remained for Christains a compelling alternative, albeit formally denied and repressed. Hidden within the breast of the Christian, however, Marcionism persisted as an abiding tension that in post-World War One Germany burst the bounds of Christian conscience and led to the renewed interest in Marcion and his gnostic doctrine, even among such reputable theologians as Adolf von Harnack, who, Buber emphasized, was not in the least an anti-semite. But every Christian should know, Buber cautioned with prophetic intonation, that „the extrusion of Judaism from Christianity means an extrusion of the the divine demand and concrete [this worldly] messianism: its separation from the divine calling for fulfillment [in this world]."

Why twentieth-century Christianity was particularly vulnerable to gnostic- Marcion temptations, Buber did not explain. It was only after having fled Nazi Germany and settled in Jerusalem in 1938, did he begin to address the question and adumbrate explanation.Published just after World War Two under the title *Two Types of Faith*, his analysis reached back to the ambiguous beginnings of the modern world, accompanied from the very start by incipient sense of alienation and cultural bewilderment. This mood continuously deepened and became especially manifest with the debacle of World War One, which had brutally exposed the spiritual faultlines of the modern project. Increasingly Christians gave expression to the „dark feelings"of civilizational collapse by turning to St. Paul, who was – Buber acknowledged -- acutely aware of the horror and torment of our unredeemed world. Thus, „the strength of the Pauline tendencies in present day Christian theology is to be explained by the characteristic stamp of the times... in which the contradictions of human life, especially of man's social life so mount up that they increasingly assume in man's consciousness of existence the character of doom (*Verhägnis*)." To be sure, Pauline Christians maintain a commitment to the struggle for a more just world, but cowering before "the threatening clouds" of the time, they place their faith and hope in Jesus the Savior. Soteriological hope replaces the concrete, quotidian messianism of the rabbis – and Jesus. Paul himself bravely resisted the allure of „the ever-approaching Marcionite danger." Notwithstanding his quest for otherworldly salvation, Paul realized that a victory for Marcion – and the sundering of the Savior from the Creator God of the Hebrew Bible – would spell the destruction of Christianity. Yet, in Buber's judgment, „Marcion is not to be overcome by Paul."

Numbed by the „impenetrable darkness" of existence, Paul no longer trusted the world and the eschatological promise of history. His nigh-single focus of the salvation of the soul, Buber held, placed a severe, perhaps insufferable strain on the Christian's dedication to a concrete – that is, social and historical – messianic vision. In contrast to the Christian, Buber insisted, the Jew tenaciously retains trust in the Creator God and *ergo* the prophetic promise of a this-world redemption. This existential affirmation of the ontological ground of life as good is not to suggest that the Jew does not know the all-too frequent horror of existence. For, indeed, the Jews seem destined to suffer „every misery."[28]

Buber held that,indeed, it is not fortuitous that the Pauline mood of the present era was most poignantly expressed by a Jew, Franz Kafka. For Buber, the author of *The Trail* and especially *The Castle* was the archetypal Jew of his time, an unprecedented tormented time in which Kafka (the Jew) was „its most exposed son." Kafka finds himself in a world governed by capricious, cruel forces; in the „thick vapors of a mist of absurdity" that envelop this world of these troubled times God Himself is „removed into impenetrable darkness," but for Kafka there is no Savior. Yet Kafka is not bereft of hope, or trust, in the world. „For the Jew, insofar as he is not detached from the origin of the world (that is, divine Creation), even the most exposed Jew like Kafka, is safe. All things happen to him, but they cannot affect him."[29]

[28] *Two Types of Faith*, 169.
[29] Ibid., 168, 166, 168.






London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

„In spite of all" of his woe, Kafka – the Jew – resolutely refuses the Pauline promise of personal salvation. He refuses not because of spiritual obduracy. His abiding trust in the God of Creation, as hidden as He may presently be, does not allow Kafka to relinquish the conviction in the ultimate victory of justice as a blessing for *all* of the inhabitants of a world created by a Just and Loving God. Buber cites Kafka as testifying „we were created to live in Paradise, Paradise was appointed to serve us. Our destiny has been changed; that this also happened with the appointment of Paradise is *not* said." But, as Buber comments, Kafka gently and shyly affirms that the inequities and absurdity of our existence *need not be*. „Without disowning reality, Kafka – the Jew – preserves his trust in the God of Israel – the God of Creation and Justice. Accordingly, Kafka describes, from innermost awareness, the actual course of the world; he describes most exactly the rule of devilry which fills the foreground: and on the edge of the description, he scratches the sentence:"Test Yourself on humanity. It makes the doubter doubt, the person of belief believes."[30]

[30] Ibid., 168.