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THEOLOGY, SOCIOLOGY, IDEOLOGY: JEWISH THOUGHT IN AMERICA, 1925-1955

When the current generation of American Jewish thinkers burst upon the scene in the decade following the Second World War, they did so with a call not so much for the *revision* of existing theology as for the very *practice* of theology which had, in their view, been notable by its absence in the previous generation. Thus Emil Fackenheim felt the need to publish an "Outline for a Modern Jewish Theology" in his view not yet outlined, let alone written, while Eugene Borowitz entitled his own effort the *New Jewish Theology in the Making*. This perception of the state of the art was quite accurate. For while there certainly was American Jewish thought—some of it on quite a high level—during the "second generation" (ca. 1925-1955), American Jewish theology was virtually non-existent, and this lacuna, moreover, was both noted and defended by those who might have rectified it. The purpose of the present essay is to attempt to explain it: that is, to account for the nontheological character of American Jewish thought during the period, and to show the functions served by the form which American Jewish thought did assume. This inquiry should in turn shed light on our contemporary theological situation, Jewish and Christian, particularly on the dilemmas posed for theology when it gives way to functionalism and to what we shall term, following anthropologist Clifford Geertz, as "religious ideology." Our focus shall be a theological question of great practical import which pre-occupied American Jews in this period as it has their ancestors in all periods: whether and in what sense the Jews are God's chosen people.

I

The conviction that the Jews are chosen has always, in the words of Solomon Schechter, "maintained in Jewish consciousness the character of at least an unformulated dogma."¹ We should pay careful attention to the word "unformulated," since the argument is often heard that Jews have almost never produced theology, i.e. a systematic formulation of that which the Jewish community holds to be true and compelling about God and His relation to them. Schechter, we should note, did not hold this view; the work just quoted is entitled *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*.

Schechter notwithstanding, however, systematic, logical exposition is a theological *form* which Jews have rarely found adequate to their needs of understanding, but, alternatively, the *substance* of theology has not been lacking: witness the tradition of reflection on chosenness. In the Bible one finds an awareness of the ambiguities and difficulties attendant on the concept: the inherent setting apart, which yet relates one to humanity; the demand for reciprocal actions on the part of the elect which both validate and, paradoxically, constitute the election; the problematic relation between, in our terms, the particular and the universal. Rabbinic thought, too, addresses all these issues in hundreds of *aggadot* (non-legal traditions), such as those which ask why Israel and not the other nations received the Torah, as well as in such halakhic (legal) questions as the rights of the resident alien (the *ger toshav*) and the status of the "Sons of Noah." More generally still, history forced the issue of chosenness on the rabbis because it offered only dis-confirmation of their claims regarding it. Again and again, therefore, the question "Why Israel?" was asked and variously answered. What Israel was to do was not an issue, for the answer—perform God's commandments—was clear. Only the meaning of that action was in doubt, and this the doctrine of chosenness was invoked to supply even if that doctrine was itself the source of the original perplexity. Throughout the middle ages, too, the "unformulated dogma" of chosenness—ubiquitous in the prayerbook and underlying every ritual—served to legitimate and explain the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, even as that separation lent meaning and compelling reality to the doctrine.²

In sum: theology was written and taught while chosenness was not only articulated and affirmed, but placed at the center of a complex of guiding ideas which included covenant, holiness, commandment, messiah and exile.

With Emancipation and Enlightenment, however, all of this changed: suddenly it seemed possible and desirable to end the separation which had served as the "plausibility structure"³ of chosenness. The values of the gentile were to be emulated rather than disparaged. Particularism became a barrier to acceptance, universalism the shibboleth of the day. Belief in chosenness also suffered from the difficulty people had in accepting its metaphysical presuppositions: that God was of a sort who could intervene in history, so as to choose; or that He would exercise favoritism even if He could. Reform thinkers in the nineteenth century re-interpreted election in terms of a Jewish mission to the nations, seizing on Deutero-Isaiah's stirring poetry to depict a particular in the service of the universal, a suffering servant bearing the word of God, uncorrupted, to humanity. Non-Reformers too picked up the theme: the orthodox thinker Samson Raphael Hirsch, for example, or Heinrich Graetz, one of the forebears of Conservative Judaism. On the other hand, Zionists

such as Ahad Ha'am attacked the mission idea as a sort of opiate which lulled Jews into reliance on supernatural protection when only their own determined efforts could save them. Yet Zionist thinkers too by and large insisted on the unique ethical standards or spirituality of the Jews, precisely the secularized variants of the traditional idea which had first been propounded by the Reformers.

The American rabbis who are our subject inherited both traditions of thought on election: the normative, Biblical-rabbinic tradition, and the more or less secularized tradition which evolved in response to emancipation and modernity. Equally important for our purposes, they inherited two modes of doing theology. The traditional mode, in the form of commentary, legal decision and philosophy, was directed inwards, seeking to articulate for the faith-community that which set it apart. The newer mode, however, was outer-directed, and took the form of essays, longer expository work, and historical scholarship. It sought to convince Jews and non-Jews that a greatly altered Judaism could enable Jews to find a place in the modern world, by imaginatively depicting both a social/political order for that modern world and a Judaism which could suit it. American Jews in our period drew mainly from the secularized election tradition and the outer-directed mode of theology, taking both to new extremes. The two are related: the shift in the *substance* of thought on chosenness and other issues caused a radical shift in its *form*, to a sort of religious sociology and that reliance upon symbols and images, rather than rigorously formulated concepts, which we shall term religious ideology.

II

One can get a sense of this shift in form and substance by looking at three works which appeared in 1934, by coincidence the year which Sidney Ahlstrom has termed the *annus mirabilis* in American theology because of the Protestant outpouring which it witnessed. The first of these is Milton Steinber's *The Making of the Modern Jew*, in which he offered his readers not theology but an analysis of the "Jewish problem" in America. He portrayed a community in crisis, the factors which had ensured its survival for centuries having disappeared. Chosenness could be affirmed only half-allegorically, and so could not comfort.⁴ The second is Eugene Kohn's *The Future of Judaism in America*, which also sought to replace chosenness with a more effective rationale for Jewish survival. He proposed a "reconstruction of Jewish ideology," neither "mechanistic nor atheistic," which would serve "a different function than to substitute a comforting illusion (chosenness) for a discouraging reality." Claims to superiority which had served in the past as an "antidote to contumely" would be dropped, and Jews would instead be urged to remain loyal to

their tradition solely because it satisfied their spiritual needs.⁵ The third volume which spelt out how Judaism could be so "reconstructed" was Mordecai M. Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization*, the single most influential American Jewish book of its generation.

Kaplan, like his students Steinberg and Kohn, began with an acute analysis of the Jewish problem: the doctor would first diagnose, so that he could then proceed to cure. American Jewry, as he saw it, was rife with self-hatred, and the reason was that Jews had lost their belief in an other-worldly compensation for this-worldly ills.

Now that the aura of divine election has departed from his people, and his Jewish origin brings with it nothing but economic handicaps and social inferiority, the Jew rebels against his fate . . . (He) is maladjusted morally and spiritually as a result of losing the traditional concept of salvation. He has to evolve some new purpose of life as a Jew, a purpose that will direct his energies into such lines of creativity as will bring him spiritual redemption. That purpose will have to constitute his salvation.⁶

Kaplan hypostasized developments in the natural and social sciences which he regarded as fatal to traditional belief into a unified tendency which he called "the modern ideology." He urged that Jewry reconstruct itself in a way which would not conflict either with that "modern ideology" or with the modern political and economic orders. His proposal is now well-known: that Judaism be seen not as a religion but as a civilization, and that Jews work toward establishing and enriching the elements of which their civilization was composed: a land, a language, a religion, "folkways," arts, etc. This renewed national life, in Kaplan's words, would be "the equivalent of the traditional belief" in election and therefore its "functional revaluation." Election for the Jew had always meant "living the civilization of his people . . . utilizing the nationhood of his people as the sanction of his purposes and the directing principle of their achievement." He would now do so through Reconstructionism. Divine commands would be seen as national folkways. God, Torah and Israel would be reconceived in such a way as to "provide the necessary sanction, motive and method for the achievement of salvation as conceived in these humanistic terms."⁷

Kaplan's debt to Durkheim and to Dewey is evident from these brief quotations, and it is the pragmatic functionalism which he and his disciples borrowed and applied which most concerns us. We note that the traditional idea of chosenness is unacceptable because of its consequences. Its truth is not explicitly judged, although Kaplans' *descriptive* presentation of the "modern ideology" and it alone as the determinant of what needs reconstruction renders that hypostasized modernity a *normative* category as well. When a belief was destructive, it had to be replaced. Functional considerations are decisive, if only by default. This is not

coincidental. In considering the vehemence of Kaplan's repeated attacks on chosenness and his refusal to "reconstruct" the idea along with the rest of Jewish tradition, we should bear in mind that Kaplan presents his view of Judaism as a replacement for chosenness. If an original is functioning adequately, there is of course no need for a replacement. Kaplan must empty Judaism of its traditional content, in order to fill it with content of his own devising, and this is accomplished not through arguments over what is *true*, but by turning our attention to what is functional.

In *The Future of the American Jew* (1946) Kaplan proceeded to offer a more specific alternative to the doctrine of election: the idea of vocation. Were Jewish religion to enable Jewish civilization to "make for the enhancement not only of Jewish life but of the life of mankind, and thus help to render manifest the cosmic purpose of human life," and were it to enable the Jew to "live the civilization of his people in a spirit of commitment and dedication," it would enable him "to live with a sense of vocation or calling, without involving ourselves in any of the invidious distinctions implied in the doctrine of election, and yet to fulfill the legitimate spiritual wants which that doctrine sought to satisfy." The debt to the Puritan conception is clear, despite Kaplan's denial that the idea of vocation had any non-Jewish provenance.⁸ As in the Puritan understanding, all vocations are putatively equal. No longer could the chosen "kingdom of priests" elevate itself above humanity. Like the Puritan, the Jew would now practice his calling in the wider world, ordering his own particular sphere as a contribution to and model for the ordering of the larger whole. Finally, like the Puritan the Jew could see this work as God's own, for, as Kaplan saw it, God was the "force" or "Power" making for salvation. Salvation lay in meaning, and meaning in unity. God saved by introducing order into chaos, combining parts into wholes, and He did so in large measure through the actions of men and women. By developing his civilization, then, every individual could help it bring salvation to its members and perfection to the world. The Jewish nation, closer to this ideal than any other, would show the rest the way, prefiguring in its own reconstruction the saving re-ordering of the whole.⁹

The scheme is consistent in its parts, and it is ingenious. Yet no movement except Kaplan's own and few thinkers outside the orbit of Reconstructionism found the vocation idea an acceptable replacement for chosenness. The reason, in most cases, however, was *not* its avowed functionalism.

The Orthodox, who are the exception to the generalizations offered here, had no sympathy for Kaplan's position. He had, after all, denied belief in a personal God, in revelation, and in the authority of *halakhah*. Moreover, Orthodoxy was still by and large a first-generation community in this period, and thus felt no need to accommodate inherited doctrine to "the modern ideology." Chosenness found no place in the works of

Orthodox thinkers because, being as ubiquitous there as in the tradition, it needed none. One need only look at the essays of a thinker such as Rav Soloveitchik (who *has* written theology) to see how belief in Israel's election can inform every word on a page without ever once being mentioned.¹⁰

Conservative thinkers, who did devote attention to one theological issue in our period—the question of *halakhah*—were divided on the matter of chosenness. The burden of their effort, like that of all their contemporaries of whatever movement who wrote in English (including the Orthodox), was to argue the compatibility of Jewish with American values. Chosenness, insofar as it was perceived as elitist or exclusivist, was a problem. However, unlike Kaplan and the Reform movement, Conservatism professed continued adherence to *halakhah*, which of course carries with it the question of why Jewish obedience to God should take a form so different from that of anyone else. One finds internal disagreement and much equivocation with some Conservative thinkers arguing that the Jews are chosen because “every nation is,” while others diverged only slightly from Orthodoxy's position on revelation and *halakhah* at the same time as they maintained a concept of Jewish mission very similar to that of Reform.¹² What one does not find, on the matter of chosenness or *halakhah*, is a coherent theological context, setting these matters in relation to other relevant matters such as God and revelation. When the Conservative prayerbook retained traditional passages affirming election, it justified this policy on three grounds in a lengthy preface. First, the Jews had made a unique contribution to civilization. Second, election was linked to Torah and commandments. Third, the doctrine was indispensable to Jewish survival, a psychological necessity.¹³ The functionalist orientation of this self-defense is evident.

Reform Jews in our period tended either to reaffirm the classical Reform view of Israel's mission to the nations or, finding that position far too elitist for egalitarian America, to reduce the meaning of the “mission” to ethical conduct in concert with all other like-minded men and women. During the war years they stressed that chosenness involved no inherent superiority, and interpreted Jewish suffering as further confirmation that Jews had been selected “by deity or destiny” to bear the brunt of the affliction of those who served God.¹⁴ Chosenness was neither affirmed unequivocally, as in Orthodoxy, or affirmed with reservations but denied a theological context, as in Conservatism, nor renounced in favor of vocation, as in Reconstructionism. Rather it was affirmed in name and drastically re-interpreted, with little attempt made to assess the impact of this now changed notion on the constellation of related concepts. Moreover, interpretations which argued that “Israel chose God as his ideal of service” rendered explanations of suffering—a traditional function of the doctrine, re-invoked here—even more problematic than

before. As in nineteenth-century Germany, ethics became the residual content of chosenness and of Judaism, that which was unobjectionable in pluralist, egalitarian America. Like Kaplan, then, Reform and Conservative Judaism could not endorse the traditional doctrine of election, yet unlike him they refused to abandon the term "chosenness" in favor of an alternative such as "vocation." His criticisms of the tradition were not found invalid so much as irrelevant; one did not need to refute them because one could work around them. For the contemporary rabbis were by and large not making truth-claims which were subject to rigorous questioning. They were rather invoking a notion long crucial to Jewish self-definition, and trusting that the images which it evoked—parental love, a sense of being at the center of things, a calling to needed work in the world—would serve to anchor Jews at a time when traditional theology was unacceptable. We should note that metaphysics—conceptual argument about the ultimate nature of God, man and the world, argument upon which any reasoned claim to chosenness must rest—was almost completely absent from these discussions, except among the Orthodox where metaphysics, like chosenness, was assumed. Proponents of the idea (with few exceptions, e.g. Simon Greenberg) provided no coherent conceptual formulation of their God-idea which could inform their discussions of His role as chooser of Israel. Kaplan, who in opposition to chosenness did offer a "god-concept," lacked a coherent metaphysics, and couched his writings about God in such purely functional terms that Steinberg, his own associate, was forced to complain that Kaplan's was "really not a theology at all but an account of the psychological and ethical consequences of having one."¹⁵ Reform rabbis spent more time discussing theological issues than their counterparts in any other movement, perhaps because, conceiving Judaism as a religion and its essence as a set of beliefs, Reform had to confer on those beliefs a richness which would enable them to bear the burden which it imposed: namely, the survival of the Jewish people. Even so, the 1937 Reform statement of principles which declares that "the heart of Judaism and its chief contribution to religion is the doctrine of the One living God, who rules the world through law and love"¹⁶ leaves the concept of that God extremely vague. We are not told if God displays law and love through His own attributes of justice and mercy, as in the traditional concept, or only depends on human law and love for His activity. Is He actually man's commander and creator, or did the authors of the statement only intend to ennoble human creativity and morality by calling them "divine"? Numerous discussions among the rabbis themselves fail to clarify these matters.

In sum, whether because of an antipathy to theology which some defended as but one more point of intersection between Judaism and the American environment, or because many simply did not believe in a

personal God and so preferred not to discuss the subject or any related to it, Jewish thinkers for the most part avoided the difficult problems (so crucial to Kaplan) arising from the claim that God had chosen Israel. Buber, Rosenzweig and Cohen were not assimilated into American thought until the post-war years, and the Neo-Orthodoxy of Barth or even Niebuhr was regarded as too pessimistic to warrant serious consideration. Thus the questions about God's nature, transcendence and justice which chosenness inevitably raises were rarely addressed. By comparison, the theological activity of the current ("third") generation is very different. One finds in Heschel, Fackenheim, Borowitz and Soloveitchik, to name only the most prominent, a renewed attention to and affirmation of revelation, messiah, covenant and a supernatural God. These thinkers identify themselves as Jewish theologians, publish in journals devoted to Jewish theology, and articulate the theological task awaiting their dedication. If we still lack a Jewish theology produced in America, it is a function of a failure to fulfill a stated program rather than, as in the previous generation, of a wholly different understanding of what the program was and should be.

III

We can readily dismiss two possible answers to the question of why so little theology was produced by the "second generation." (1) Judaism, contrary to an opinion still heard today, *does* have a theological tradition, as we have observed above. The Americans did not fail for want of precedents. (2) America, too, has produced theology. The notion that Americans are too pragmatic and unphilosophical a people to indulge in theology cannot be maintained in the face of the evidence, despite the kernel of truth in the claim. However, two other possible answers—by no means mutually exclusive—should lead us to an understanding of the forms which the religious thought manifest in the American rabbinate did assume.

First, theology is inherently particularistic. It primarily concerns a faith community and *its* relation to God. Theology thrives upon challenges from the outside, but it does so by drawing what is foreign into its own "hermeneutic circle." American Jews, fearing the charge of particularism, shied away from theology's essential concern with the communal self, and instead emphasized what could readily be projected outwards. Lacking the strength of a live tradition, they were unable to synthesize the foreign into the traditional, and could only submit to its alien dictates. When we consider that theology is also an elitist enterprise, the reluctance of the Jews to engage in it becomes still more comprehensible: especially when the object of the elitist enterprise would have been the defense of a supremely elitist vocation.

Second, and far more serious a problem, was the lack of another essential precondition for the production of theology: theologians. Rabbis and their few lay counterparts in Jewish theological circles during the period were "middle-brow" at best. They simply did not have the tools to do theology, and even those equipped to do theology were unequipped to do *Jewish* theology. As Jacob Neusner has recently pointed out, modern Jewish thinkers have tended to draw on the Bible and on modern philosophy but not on the traditional form and substance of Jewish theology—*halakhah*. One need not make the normative claim that a Jewish theology must be halakhic to note that any theology which ignores the chief component of its patrimony courts the impoverishment which was, in this respect, the fate of American Judaism. This point has a significance which goes beyond its critical application to Jewish thinkers of the "second generation." It would seem that theology is not just *halakhah* but also *aggadah*: that is, not only "life lived," as Neusner puts it¹⁷ but also life reflected upon. If the Americans did not do theology it was because they lacked both *halakhah* and *aggadah* in this sense: a defined faith community within which a certain distinct life was lived, and so could be reflected upon. The community was disintegrating, and the *halakhah* had by and large been repudiated. (The generalizations made here apply, of course, to non-Orthodox thinkers and to the laymen in their congregations. There were exceptions.) Mission proved an invaluable sermon theme in part because the word itself connotes activity, this to an audience for which Judaism meant primarily the synagogue service and the service meant primarily the sermon. Such a Judaism was therefore denied the opportunity to see itself acting out its mission. If religion seeks to assure a person that the binding cord of authority ties the acts of his or her daily life to the God who gives life, the acts must be there to be sanctified. Yet except for the Orthodox, and some among the other movements, such acts were now lacking. So, not surprisingly, was theology.

Chosenness had been the binding cord. It had sanctified daily life religiously through *mitzvah*, a regimen which had lent meaning by involving human beings in God's creation of His world. It had also ennobled daily life aesthetically, lifting it from the humdrum quotidien to the sabbath-work of bringing heaven to earth. Asserting this meaning in the face of recalcitrant historical reality, it was able to impose its own vision of events on the events, and maintain daily life unaltered. We should recall Geertz's comment that religion comes not to explain the world, but to affirm its explicability, and not to facilitate the avoidance of suffering, but to teach one how to suffer.¹⁸ Traditional Judaism, too, had faced a "Jewish problem," but had addressed it through an affirmation of its explicability, in part through theology. Lacking that affirmation, one is left only with the Jewish problem, and the attempt—never made by the tradition—to *explain* the problem and to *resolve* it. For this

one needs sociology, not theology, and that is precisely what one finds in the "second generation." In the words of Arthur Cohen, "when the Jewish vocation is abandoned, not theology but religious sociology takes over. The question of Jewish survival becomes an issue of strategems, opinion polls and community surveys."¹⁹

No successful theology ignores the functional dimension; each must, after all, in some way address the needs of its faith-community, in that community's historical situation. Theologies which lose this ability to speak to the faith-community are altered or discarded. These sorts of functional considerations were not newly discovered by the "second generation". What was new was the importation by many rabbis of the sociologist's functionalist perspective into the practice of religious thought. If a particular belief or practice could be explained by the function which it had once served, and no longer served, one could legitimately replace it with another which did serve that function. This is the logic of Kaplan's "functional revaluation" which, as we have seen, was widespread. Other considerations, such as the thinker's ability to believe in the truth of the propositions affirmed, were by no means absent. They had, however, ceased to be decisive. (This is so even in the Conservative prayerbook's affirmation of the traditional doctrine, noted above.) If what mattered most to American rabbis was not the metaphysical truth of things, nor even an evolving tradition of speculation on that truth, but rather a diagnosis of and cure for Jewish ills, one turned not to theology but to the best diagnosis, which in this case seemed to be a functionalist sociology. The change was the product of two confluent forces. On the one hand, there was the gravity of the perceived threat to the Jews, and, on the other, the rabbis' own distance from their tradition's affirmations of faith. In short, when the inherited method of coping with crisis fails (a method which "coped" in quite a different way than by problem-solving) one turns to whatever works.

What "worked" for the rabbis of the second generation was not the systematic articulation of traditional concepts—hardly possible anyway, for reasons we have noted. Neither was functionalist sociology—attention to what would work—a sufficient answer to the rabbis' most urgent task, which was to address in the most effective way possible the needs of their congregants for meaning and reassurance in that traumatic time. If theology was not the rabbis' principal tool, we should recall in their defense that it has not been the predominant means by which the world's religions, including Judaism, have engaged the awesome questions which threaten human meanings in any time and place. Other, more powerful resources have been available—less discursive and more imaged, less conceptual and more symbolic, less a logical set of ideas than a series of pictures for the instruction of the mind. On these the rabbis drew as well. While this set of distinctions is not without its own problems—concepts, indeed

words, are certainly symbols—I think that they serve us well in describing the language of the rabbis.

We should note, first of all, that the rabbis' words must be labelled as *rhetoric*: speech, in Cicero's classic definition, that is "designed to persuade".²⁰ The forms which encased this rhetoric in the "second generation" were many, but all were designed explicitly to persuade: sermons, debates, apologia, polemics and tracts. The rabbis often attempted, for example, to convince Jews and non-Jews alike of the Jews' legitimate place in America, by appeals to values, e.g. "democracy", and indeed to ideas and symbols, e.g., "chosenness", which were the joint patrimony of all concerned. Such appeals to "identification" on the part of a speaker with and to an audience constitute, according to literary theorist Kenneth Burke, the principal weapon in the rhetorician's armory. By linking the audience's "you" to his own "I" the speaker persuades them that his cause and interest are theirs.²¹ We noted above that Reform rabbis attempted to imbue their congregants with a sense of purpose in their Jewish identity through appeal to a mission that Jews carried out simply by being and doing what they would have been and done in any event. This too, writes Burke, is a traditional rhetorical device, evoking an "elation" wherein the audience feels as though it were not merely receiving, but were itself creatively participating in, the poet's or speaker's assertion.²² Mordecai Kaplan's attentiveness to the function of religious language, and his insistence on the primacy of symbols over propositional statements, led him to describe all religious thought as that species of rhetoric known as ideology. We have, in turn, adopted that term in its everyday usage—"a partial, hence to a degree deceptive, view of reality, particularly when the limitations can be attributed to 'interest-begotten prejudice'"²³—in order to describe the particular denominational interests served by Kaplan's elimination of the idea of election and its replacement by the idea of vocation.

Then again, Kaplan's stress upon the symbolic nature of religious language points to still another usage of the term "ideology" as formulated by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Ideologies, Geertz writes, "transform sentiment into significance" through their use of hyperbole, symbol, imagery and even self-contradiction. They are thus able to "grasp, formulate and communicate social realities that elude the tempered language of science." They are able, moreover, to guide us through "problematic social reality" at times of stress when the normal "maps" provided by tradition are inadequate.²⁴ The second generation was such a time, and "chosenness" was such an ideology. It remained indispensable because of and not despite the contradictions which it embodied, permitting the rabbis to address questions which lay outside the circle of their beliefs. Chosenness, through the very resonances of the word—parental or divine love, a place at the Center, the precious ability to serve—permitted the

rabbis to contain rhetorically the contradictions which had demanded their response. The resonances of election continued to hold Jews, even when the beliefs upon which the idea of election rested, such as God, revelation, etc., no longer enjoyed their assent.

One could of course overdo this dichotomy. Every corpus of religious thought includes both more conceptually rigorous and systematically articulated elements of *theology* as well as the symbolic images and resonances of what we should term *religious ideology*. One can distinguish in Judaism between the system of Maimonides and the less disciplined imaginings of *Midrash*. However, one can also distinguish between the rabbinic Midrash of the Talmudic period—grounded in a carefully worked-out system of life and thought—and the sermons of American rabbis which are not grounded in any such larger frame of reference. The latter, I believe, practiced a mode of religious ideology unprecedented in the history of Judaism. Only Kaplan, more attentive than any other contemporary thinker to the symbolic nature of religious language and the ideological function of religious thought, refused to go along. Thus, paradoxically, the one thinker who called his own work ideology came the closest of any of the major figures concerned to the practice of theology in its traditional form.

IV

The choice of religious ideology as a mode of religious discourse is not without relevance to our own period, particularly in those instances when the four factors seen to be at work in the "second generation" are still operative. Commitments to pluralism, it would seem, continue to pose dilemmas for particularist affirmation. Few are adequately equipped for theological work, and those who are lack a communal *halakhah* on which to reflect. Distrust of inherited answers continues to render functional criteria decisive, by default, regarding what is deemed true or at least important. Finally, ideological symbols continue to move men when rational creeds and systems (themselves, of course, "cultural systems" of symbols) cannot. The "second generation," then, may well prove more instructive in its failure than the "third" despite its good intentions; that is, theology may be precluded by the very conditions which, to those of faith, render it so necessary. In the meantime, religion in America (and not merely Judaism, for these factors are not restricted to it) will likely continue to rely on imperfect religious ideologies, a far better vehicle given the compromises and contradictions inherent in its position than theologies in which all is worked out to the last detail. Theology may simply leave too little room for the evasions in which life must sometimes be lived and commitments negotiated: ideology can procure a measure of meaning and a modicum of continuity—no more, but no less—when no more than these are possible.

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NOTES

1. Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York 1969), p. 57.
2. Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York, 1973), pp. 3-23.
3. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, 1969), pp. 45-47.
4. Milton Steinberg, *The Making of the Modern Jew* (New York, 1934), pp. 121-123, 177-179, 246.
5. Eugene Kohn, *The Future of Judaism in America* (New Rochelle, 1934), pp. 141-167.
6. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York, 1934), p. 15.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258.
8. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew* (New York, 1948), pp. 226-229.
9. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York, 1937), pp. 25-26.
10. Joseph Soloveitchik, "Ish ha-halakhah." *Be-sod hayaḥid ve-ha-yahad*. (Jerusalem, 1979), [Hebrew].
11. For example, Ben Zion Bokser, "Doctrine of the Chosen People," *Contemporary Jewish Record*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (June 1941), pp. 243-252.
12. For example, Simon Greenberg, "Some Guiding Principles for a Conservative Approach to Judaism." *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America*, 1957, pp. 106-124.
13. Robert Gordis, "A Jewish Prayer Book for the Modern Age." *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (October, 1945), pp. 1-20. See also the preface to *The Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* (New York, 1946).
14. For example, Frederic A. Doppelt, "Are the Jews a Chosen People?" *Liberal Judaism*, Vol. 9, No. 6 (February, 1942), pp. 6-8.
15. Milton Steinberg, "The Theological Issues of the Hour," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America*, 1949, p. 378.
16. *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, 1937, pp. 98-99.
17. Jacob Neusner, "The Tasks of Theology in Judaism: A Humanistic Program." *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (January, 1979), pp. 71-82.
18. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), pp. 104-8.
19. Arthur Cohen, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (New York, 1964), p. 281.
20. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley, 1969), p. 49.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-29.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
24. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *op. cit.*, pp. 207, 210, 220.