

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

TEYKU:

THE INSOLUBLE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF

LOUIS JACOBS

VOLUME ONE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
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ELLIOT JOE COSGROVE

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In modern Hebrew, it is perhaps worth noting, the word TEYKU is used to mean 'a draw' i.e. in a football match where neither side scores a goal or where each side scores the same number of goals. That is it precisely. Wherever TEYKU occurs in the Talmud the meaning is that while other 'games' will be played this particular 'game' had ended in a 'draw' and the problem must go down in history as incapable of a solution.

- Louis Jacobs, Teyku: The Unsolved Problem in the Babylonian Talmud: A Study in the Literary Analysis and Form of the Talmudic Argument, 301.

In Memory of:

Reverend Dr. I.K. and Dorothy Cosgrove
Jack Lapidus
Joseph Stern

All of whom would have enjoyed reading this thesis, but not nearly as much as I would
have enjoyed getting to know them.

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“Happy are those who fear the Lord, who follow his ways. You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors; and you shall be happy and you shall prosper. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children like olive saplings around your table. So shall the man who fears the Lord be blessed.” (Psalm 128:1-4)

As I behold the fruit of my labors—four beautiful children around my table and a wife that I adore—I humbly acknowledge the presence of a God who has brought me to see this day.

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To Deborah Anne Cosgrove - thank you. I love you. What is mine is yours. The next degree is all you.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of grandparents whom I never had the honor of knowing well. My wife’s late grandfather, Joseph Stern Z’L, was by all accounts a true intellect, and I am saddened that he and I did not enjoy the opportunity to refine my ideas together. My maternal grandfather, Jack Lapidus Z’L, would have undoubtedly been able to shed light on key people and scenes of Manchester Jewry. I hope this project brings me closer to knowing a man I never had the honor to meet. So, too, I suspect my paternal grandparents, Reverend Dr. I.K and Dorothy Cosgrove, would have been thrilled to hear of my work. My explorations into the nature of Anglo-Jewry, Jewish communal leadership and the intersection of scholarship and faith are all, in no small way, efforts to come to understand their world and highest values, values that I am proud to say have become my own. As I conclude my doctorate and first pulpit, on a path towards a lifetime of congregational work, I hope they are all smiling from above, gently nudging me forward as I carve out my own path.

Finally, I readily acknowledge that while the initial impetus behind this study may be found in doctoral work on the changing status of sacred Scripture in modernity, my interest in Jacobs has a deeply personal resonance. The manner by which Jacobs assiduously balanced the tensions wrought by critical inquiry and devotional learning, congregational work and the “ivory tower,” sophistication and plainspokenness, as well as denominational commitments, world Jewry and universal humanity—not to mention professional ambition and an abiding humility and *menschlichkeit*—have collectively served to make this project an opportunity to gain deeper insight into the challenges that confront my own being. Jacobs’s responses, though different than my own, have granted me the opportunity to refine my own questions, personally, professionally, religiously and otherwise. I am forever grateful to Rabbi Dr. Jacobs Z’L for his warmth and accessibility as this project began, his enthusiasm to see it take shape and most of all, the enduring example of his life. May his memory be for a continued blessing.

ABSTRACT

This book is the first intellectual biography of Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs (1920-2006). Beginning with his Manchester birth, this study traces Jacobs's formative influences and experiences from the Manchester Yeshiva, to Gateshead Kollel, to University College London, to Manchester's Central Synagogue, to the New West End up through his eventual move to Jews' College. The narrative of Jacobs's life not only reveals the tensions that would eventually come to be expressed in his theology, but also serves as a remarkable prism by which to trace the tectonic shifts taking place in twentieth-century Anglo-Jewish life as a whole. This biography, concluding with Jacobs's arrival at Jews' College (1959), makes use of primary documents to illuminate Jacobs's position in Anglo-Jewry leading up to the "Jacobs' Affair," thus forcing a reconsideration of past efforts in Anglo-Jewish historiography. Finally, this study seeks to understand the dominant features of Jacobs's theological achievements, revealing Jacobs's thought to be a reflection, both in its strengths and weaknesses, of the tensions wrought by his extraordinary biography.

NOTE ON SOURCES

My primary interviews with Louis Jacobs were conducted over two, week-long stays in London, England: the first during July of 2005, and the second shortly prior to his death in May of 2006. I hope the copies of these interviews, recorded and transcribed in full, will come into the keeping of the Jacobs' family as they best determine the proper institutional facility to house their father's library, writings and personal correspondence. So, too, transcripts of other interviews (Evelyn Cashdan, Summer 2005 [London]; William Frankel, Summer 2005 [London]; Raphael Loewe, May 2006 [London]; Arie Handler, Summer 2007 [Jerusalem]; Israel Finestein, Summer 2007[London]), will also be part of the part of the archival legacy of Louis Jacobs.

I am grateful to the family of Louis Jacobs for extending to me access to his letters and writing. In years to come, the Anglo-Jewish community will come to recognize its debt to Shulamit Jacobs for spending a lifetime assiduously maintaining his papers, thus ensuring the future study of both Louis Jacobs and other key figures and events of twentieth century Jewry. This treasure trove of documents, noted in this thesis, as the "Jacobs Archive," will hopefully soon find its way into a suitable institutional context for future students of Anglo-Jewish history and twentieth-century Jewish thought.

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the resources and support of a variety of archives:

- Altmann Archive:* Papers of Alexander Altmann. University College London. London.
- Brodie Archive:* Papers of Israel Brodie. University of Southampton. Southampton.
- Finkelstein Archive:* Papers of Louis Finkelstein. Jewish Theological Seminary, NY, NY.
- Kelman Archive:* Papers of Wolfe Kelman. Rabbinical Assembly, NY, NY.
- AJA:* American Jewish Archives. Hebrew Union College. Cincinnati, OH.

Abbreviations

- EJ* *Encyclopedia Judaica*
JC *The Jewish Chronicle*

Full bibliographic information for the following publications by Louis Jacobs are noted in their first usage (and subsequent bibliography), thereafter referred to in the following abbreviated form:

- AJT* *A Jewish Theology* (1973)
BRD *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* (1999)
GTI *God, Torah and Israel* (1990)
HWI *Helping with Inquiries: An Autobiography* (1989)
WHRTB *We Have Reason to Believe: Some Aspects of Jewish Theology Examined in light of Modern Thought* (1957)

GLOSSARY

Agunah (pl. agunot) A woman who cannot remarry because her husband is missing or refuses to grant her a divorce.

Aliyah (pl. aliyot) “To ascend.” A reference either to immigration to Israel, or the honor of being called up to recite the benedictions to the Torah.

Aufruf “Call up.” Ceremony of calling up the groom to the Torah prior to his wedding.

Austrittsgemeinde Independent Orthodox German Community.

Bachad Brit Chalutzim Datiim, Movement of Religious Pioneers for Palestine, the educational wing of Hapoel HaMizrachi, Manchester’s Orthodox Labor Zionist movement.

Beth Din (pl. Batei Din) Rabbinic court of law.

Av Beth Din Titular head of the rabbinical court.

Rosh Beth Din Head of the rabbinical court.

Beth Midrash House of Study.

Chametz Leavened bread prohibited during Passover, requiring its removal or sale prior to the beginning of the festival.

Cheder A “room” where Judaism is taught. The site of informal Jewish education.

Chevra (pl. chevrot) Society or fellowship of traditional Jews.

Dayan (pl. Dayanim) Rabbinic Judge.

Devekut Attachment to God.

Galut Diaspora and/or Exile.

Gemara Rabbinic commentary on the Mishnah. Part of the Talmud.

Godol (pl. Gedolim) Honorific for one great in Jewish learning.

Hacham Wise one; Honorific for Rabbinic head of the Sephardic community.

Hakhel Public reading of the Pentateuch during the Feast of Tabernacles following the sabbatical year. (Deut 31:10-13).

Hachshara Preparation towards immigration to Israel.

Halutz (pl. Halutzim) Pioneer.

Haimeshir Traditional or old world.

Hithpa'alut Ecstasy.

Hukkat Hagoyim The law or custom of non-Jews.

Habad Hasidic movement found by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745-1813). Acronym for Hebrew words *Hokhma* (wisdom), *Binah* (Understanding) and *Da'at* (Knowledge).

Halakhah Jewish Law.

Halakhist Decisor of Jewish Law.

Hasidism Pious revivalist movement founded by Israel Baal Shem Tov in eighteenth century south eastern Poland.

Ilui Talmudic genius.

Kehilla (pl. Kehillot) Community.

Kollel College for advanced talmudical students.

Lomdus Learnedness in traditional studies.

Machzike Hadath "Upholders of the Faith" Strictly Orthodox society founded at the end of the 19th century primarily through an amalgamation of central and eastern European immigrant communities.

Mamzer A child who is a product of a forbidden union, prohibited from marrying into community of Israel.

Merkaz Limmud Study center associated with religious Zionist movement.

Minhag (pl. minhagim) Jewish Custom.

Mitzvah (pl. Mitzvot) Divine Commandment.

Mensch A gentleman, decent person.

Midrash “To Inquire.” Method of rabbinic investigation into scripture in order to yield meaning or laws not apparent by plain reading.

Musar Ethical literature often associated with movement founded by Israel Salanter in nineteenth century Lithuania.

Piyut (pl. Piyuttim) Liturgical Poetry

Rosh Yeshiva Dean of a rabbinical academy.

Shaatznez Forbidden mixture of woolen and linen.

Sefer (pl. seforim) Books, often designating those with sacred content.

Sheva Brachot Festive week following a wedding.

Siddur (pl. Siddurim) Jewish prayer book.

Shabbat Goy Gentile employed in a Jewish household on the Sabbath to perform services that are forbidden to Jews.

Shiur (pl. shiurim) Class in Yeshiva or Beth Midrash Setting.

Shofar Ram’s horn sounded on Jewish High Holidays.

Shulchan Aruch “Set Table.” Authoritative sixteenth century code of Jewish law written by Joseph Karo with glosses by Moses Isserles.

Tallit Prayer Shawl.

Talmid Hacham Torah Scholar.

Tefillin Phylacteries. Leather boxes containing scriptural verses worn by Jewish male adults during weekday morning prayer.

Teshuva (pl. Teshuvot) Rabbinic opinion (responsa) on questions Jewish law.

Torah Lishma Torah study for its own sake.

Torah Shebeal Peh The Oral Law.

Wissenschaft des Judentums “Science of Judaism.” Historical school that arose in the first half of nineteenth century Germany resolved to apply critical scholarship on classical Jewish sources.

Yeshiva (pl. Yeshivot) Academy for Jewish Study.

Tosafist (pl. Tosafot) ‘Additions’ to the Babylonian Talmud; the glosses, now printed together with the text in practically all editions, produced by French and German scholars during the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries.

INTRODUCTION

‘Show me a man’s philosophy, and I’ll show you the man.’

- G.K. Chesterton

The presence of Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs (1917-2006) looms large in the Anglo-Jewish consciousness. His exclusion in the early 1960s from prominent rabbinical seminary post and pulpit—the so-called “Jacobs Affair” —is routinely referenced as the major pivot in understanding twentieth-century Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy and has been rightfully explored in monographs, popular articles and Jacobs’s own autobiography and retrospect.¹ Historians of Anglo-Jewry continue to situate the “Jacobs Affair” at the epicenter of the tectonic shifts within twentieth-century Anglo-Jewry, with provocatively entitled chapters such as “A House Divided,” “The Fracturing of Anglo-Jewry,” or “Troubled Eden,” respectively.² Case in point is Miri Freud-Kandel’s recent book length survey of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy, whose concluding three chapters are entitled “The Jacobs Affair,” “Interpretations of the Jacobs Affair,” and finally, “A Re-Interpretation of the Jacobs Affair.”³ Alternatively, a more popular metric of Jacobs’s perceived importance in Anglo-Jewry may be found in a 2006 readers’ poll sponsored by the Anglo-Jewish newspaper, *The Jewish Chronicle*, whose readership voted Jacobs

¹On the Jacobs Affair, see, Ignaz Maybaum, "Jacobs Affair: Anglo-Jewry in Crisis," *Judaism* 13 (1964): 471-477. Alfred Sherman, "The Jacobs Affair," *Commentary* 38 (1964): 60-64. Norman Cohen, "The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry," *Tradition* 8, no. 2 (1966): 40-57. Louis Jacobs, *Helping with Inquiries: An Autobiography* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1989). HWI hereafter. Louis Jacobs, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999). BRD hereafter.

²Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 371ff. Chaim Bermant, *Troubled Eden: An Anatomy of British Jewry* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1969), 239ff. Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 229-256.

³Miri J. Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913: An Ideology Forsaken* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006).

“The Greatest British Jew,” ranking ahead of such figures as Chaim Weizmann and Sir Moses Montefiore.⁴ Considering a British community known for its *theologie-angst*, it is nothing short of remarkable how prominent Rabbi Jacobs has become for Anglo-Jewry’s self-understanding.

Often explained as a drama in two acts, the “Jacobs Affair” began with Jacobs’s decision to leave his New West End pulpit for a teaching position at Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy’s ministerial training institution, Jews’ College. The move was made on the presumption that Jacobs’s would assume the principalship of the college with the retirement of Isidore Epstein (1894-1962). Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie’s (1895-1979) refusal to promote Jacobs to the principalship resulted in Jacobs and like-minded lay officers resigning in protest. Two years later, the second stage of the affair would play out as Jacobs sought to return to his recently vacated New West End pulpit. Brodie’s refusal to certify Jacobs as fit to return to his congregational appointment would result in an effort by the New West End leadership to install their old rabbi over Brodie’s objections. Brodie’s decision to dismiss the defiant synagogue board would result in the resignations of literally hundreds of members, who then sought to form a new independent congregation with Jacobs as their rabbi. Ostensibly, it was Jacobs’s progressive theological views as expressed in *We Have Reason to Believe* (1957) that was the bone of contention in the dispute.

While the particulars of the drama surrounding Jacobs’s public profile continue to be debated, there has yet to be any effort towards reconstructing the forces that gave rise to his theology. The occasional monographs and appreciations of Jacobs’s scholarly

⁴JC, March 10, 2006.

and theological achievements have largely overlooked the degree to which his intellectual attainments are a reflection of his life's journey. The present effort seeks to redress this imbalance in our understanding of Jacobs's work. As the first intellectual biography of Louis Jacobs, this thesis seeks to identify and understand the extraordinary array of influences and personalities that shaped Jacobs's profile and infused him with an unrelenting resolve to address the tensions therein. We shall see how Jacobs's quest for a synthetic theological vision reflects his personal attempt to reconcile the competing impulses present in his extraordinary life story.

Biography, History, Theology

This thesis does not fall neatly into any one category of biography, history or theology, but is rather a combination of all three. As an intellectual biography, we shall trace Jacobs's life trajectory from a working class, secular, Manchester background to his training in a traditional yeshiva associated with a Habad mode of European Hasidism to his university education under some of the most distinguished scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* of the day; we then move on to his later dialogue with an emergent coterie of rabbis, communal leaders and historians of Judaism. We will suggest that it was Rabbi Dr. Alexander Altmann (1906-1987) who served as a seminal model for his eventual rabbinic and scholarly profile, signifying for Jacobs the possibility of bridging the multiple chasms between traditional learning and *Wissenschaft*, communal leadership and scholarly pursuits and the need to construct a Jewish theology both grounded in tradition yet contemporary in ideational formulation. Finally, it was Jacobs's arrival at the New West End Synagogue—the seat of the genteel

Anglicized Orthodox tradition—that offered him the forum and freedom to formulate a theological response capable of confronting the cultural and epistemological challenges that modernity brings to traditional Jewish faith and practice.

The choice to conclude our biographical efforts with Jacobs's 1959 move to Jews' College is a decision both pragmatic and carefully reasoned. Granted length of years and a degree of celebrity, Jacobs's profile from 1960 onwards has been the subject of much study. It is the contention of this thesis that by 1959, the core ideas with which Jacobs would wrestle in the years to come were already well present. While the controversies that engulfed him may have hardened his theological positions, and the sources to which he would turn would become more varied, we shall see that the substance and tensions of Jacobs's thought was entirely shaped by the influences of the first half of his life and remained fairly constant up through his death.

In establishing Jacobs's intellectual pedigree, this thesis will inevitably cross over to social history. The intrigue of Jacobs's biography, either by accident or steadily pursued design, is that it reflects the ruptures and transformations of Jewish intellectual activity in the first half of the twentieth century. As a distinctly English theologian, Jacobs is heir to the intellectual legacies of Solomon Schechter, Israel Abrahams, Simeon Singer, Maurice Farbridge, Joseph Hertz and others. We shall see that Jacobs's language, questions and mood reflect a series of popular and philosophically minded Anglo-influences, including G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis and A.J. Ayer. The opportunity to explore Jacobs's life and writing provides a welcome opportunity to redress D. Ruderman's lament regarding the nigh-exclusive Germanocentric focus of

histories of modern Jewish thought.⁵ In identifying the distinctly “Anglo” aspects of Jacobs’s scholarship and theology, an overlooked aspect of modern Jewish thought will be retrieved for consideration.

And yet, by dint of Jacobs’s experiences at the Manchester Yeshiva, Gateshead Kollel, and his tutelage under the Continental exemplars of Rabbi Dr. Eli Munk, Dr. Siegfried Stein and Altmann, Jacobs’s theological persona was shaped by the Eastern and Central European cultural and intellectual migrations of twentieth century Jewry. We shall also see that Jacobs’s interests and questions were shaped by his Jewish theological counterparts in 1950s North America as he engaged with an array of theological efforts taking place in the wake of the Shoah and the establishment of the modern state of Israel.

Thus, Jacobs’s biography and theology serve as an extraordinary prism by which to understand the transformations occurring both in Anglo-Orthodoxy and transatlantic Jewry as a whole. The clash in Anglo-Jewry between the “native establishment” and the immigrant Eastern and Central European communities will be of critical importance in this study. The tensions caused by the arrival of refugee rabbis lacking in cultural, theological or institutional allegiances with the autochthonous Anglo-Jewish traditions (as represented by the Chief Rabbi and United Synagogue) were crystallized in the person of Jacobs. Our present efforts, though driven by a desire to understand Jacobs’s biography and theology, also serve to provide a unique window to view the intellectual and cultural transformations of twentieth century trans-Atlantic Jewry.

⁵See David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), xi-xv.

Furthermore, this study on Jacobs will hopefully serve to clarify and redirect future studies of Anglo-Orthodoxy. Indeed, the manner in which the drama of the Jacobs's affair is relayed in Anglo-Jewish histories inevitably serves as a comment on the natural condition of Anglo-Jewry as much as it does on Jacobs and his theology. While some Anglo-Jewish historians have argued that a tolerant spirit of religious meliorism represents the normative Anglo-Orthodox tradition, more recent claims have countered that such a lost golden age of progressive-conservatism, though perhaps present at the New West End and a few other congregations, was never characteristic of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy as a whole. For those arguing the former, the "Jacobs Affair" came to represent the decisive turning point when a genteel Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy was ideologically and institutionally overwhelmed by fundamentalist and foreign elements.⁶ Those arguing the latter identify the constant and clear boundaries of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy throughout, countering that the claims of Jacobs and his followers that they were reclaiming the progressive-conservatism of Anglo-Orthodoxy are rhetorically understandable but historically inaccurate.⁷ In exploring the nature of Jacobs's arrival and tenure at the New West End, his relationships with Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, the United Synagogue and other arms of the Anglo-Orthodoxy, we shall seek to clarify the precise nature of Jacobs's place in his community, thereby helping to clarify this ongoing debate amongst historians of Anglo-Jewry.

⁶See for example, William D. Rubinstein, "The Decline and Fall of Anglo-Jewry," *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 38 (2002): 13-21.

⁷See most recently Benjamin J. Elton, "Did the Chief Rabbinate Move to the Right? A Case Study: The Mixed-Choir Controversies, 1880-1986," *Jewish Historical Studies* 39 (2004): 121-151.

Finally, as a study in theology, this dissertation will offer an analytical portrait of Jacobs' writings and argue that his theological essays and ramified scholarly studies are to be regarded as a unified whole, albeit often in dialectical interaction. Jacobs's recapitulations of rabbinic theology; his studies in Talmudic logic and argumentation; the explorations of the content, history and modalities of Jewish dogmatics; treatments of Hasidism and Jewish mysticism; inquiries into Jewish law and responsa literature; works of constructive Jewish theology and appropriations of various British philosophic traditions all make him a rare, if not *sui generis* representative of twentieth century Jewish thinking. His commitment to an urbane and felicitous mode of expression, his congregational commitments, and the independence afforded to him as a *privatgelehrte*, further serve to mark his unique contribution to modern Jewish thought.

The fact that Jacobs's profile includes the varied roles of scholar, constructive theologian and communal rabbi is of critical import. It is the way Jacobs integrates the multifarious commitments of these roles that has resulted in a theological oeuvre distinct in its sustained attention to the context, concerns and demands of what he called "the Jew in the pew." We shall consider the theo-historical context that gave expression to Jacobs's theology and the manner in which his varied studies informed each other and the strengths and weaknesses therein. Thus, while this is not the first (and hopefully not the last) consideration of Jacobs's theology, it should serve to illuminate the degree to which Jacobs's theology is a window into his biography and vice-versa, thus giving application to Chesterton's maxim 'Show me a man's philosophy, and I'll show you the man.'

This study will provide an opportunity to reflect on the degree to which Jacobs's thought constitutes a viable paradigm of Jewish theological reasoning and is of continuing relevance for modern Jewish thought. As a theologian seeking to affirm both a commitment to traditional Jewish faith *and* modernity, Jacobs's career may be understood as a sustained attempt towards creating positive and varied bridges by which these tensions can be understood, moderated, or overcome. The final chapters of this dissertation will consider whether Jacobs succeeded in achieving his quest for a synthesis, and his relevance for present ventures in constructive Jewish theology.

Finally, this effort to reconstruct Jacobs's intellectual biography serves as an instructive case study of the reliability of autobiography as a historical source. In contrasting Jacobs's memoir *Helping with Inquiries* (1989) and later retrospective *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* (1999) with unpublished and hitherto unseen archival material, personal correspondence, diaries, interviews and otherwise, startling differences surface alerting us to the polemical and apologetic nature of self-fashioning narratives. At several key junctures, we shall compare Jacobs's later reflections on a given event with our own findings, to both parse out not only "what happened," but also why an alternative personal narrative emerged. Indeed, the unanticipated windfall of our efforts is its contribution to the growing awareness of autobiographical writings as "non-veridical constructions of selves."⁸

I am fortunate to have an abundance of material to draw on in my efforts. In addition to its ostensible subject matter, Jacobs's massive literary output frequently

⁸On the subject of Jewish autobiographical writing, see most recently Michael Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 3-17.

offers inter-alia glimpses into his formative influences. Jacobs's aforementioned autobiography *Helping with Inquiries* is an extraordinary gift to the present project, as is his later retrospective *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*. Hours of oral interviews conducted with Jacobs prior to his death (Summer 2005, Summer 2006) serve to fill in countless personalities and events surrounding his life. The generous counsel of Jacobs's family, colleagues and students supplied significant brush strokes towards painting the portrait of his life. So, too, a variety of archival materials (Altmann Archives, Jews' College, United Synagogue, American Jewish Archives, Jewish Theological Seminary and the Rabbinical Assembly) have proven critical in filling in elements of our narrative.

Our evaluation of Jacobs's life has come by way of extensive use of unpublished and hitherto unseen primary materials including personal letters and diaries in the possession of the Jacobs family. The work of this thesis has straddled Jacobs's life and recent passing, and a profound debt of gratitude is owed to so many who have helped supply the materials and support, towards composing this intellectual biography. While future studies will inevitably recover further documents or perspectives serving to refine the findings of this work, I take comfort in the knowledge that Rabbi Jacobs would have understood such reassessments not so much as indications of any shortcomings of the present project, but rather emblematic of the ongoing and elusive nature of any sincere "search for truth."

CHAPTER ONE

FORMULATING THE QUESTIONS

I am beginning to realize that R.Y. and R.G. and G.H. are of a different type to me. They have been brought up on strictly orthodox lives and consequently they view life in a totally different way to me. Quite a lot of what they do, they do either because of their fathers' training or because of what they saw and learnt at the Yeshivas they studied in abroad. I didn't study in a *Haimeshir* Yeshiva and for better or for worse I must make my own path in life as I am completely unable to model it on any known standard...

- Louis Jacobs, Diary Entry (June 13, 1943). Jacobs Archive.

A Manchester Boy

The arrival of Louis Jacobs's paternal grandparents to England from Telz, Lithuania, and his maternal grandparents from Mittau, Latvia, reflect the westward migration of Eastern European Jewry in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.¹ While Bill Williams's pioneering study documents the life of Eastern European Jewry in Manchester well prior to 1870, the dynamics of Jacobs's personal history can best be understood in the context of the immigrant arrivals between 1870-1914 when "borders were open, transportation relatively safe, fares cheap enough, and reasons to leave abundant."² It is estimated that between 1880 and 1914, the native Anglo-Jewish population of 65,000 received somewhere between 120,000 to 150,000 immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe. Jacobs's home city of Manchester nearly quadrupled

¹HWI, 1-2.

²See Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry, 1740-1875* (Manchester: Holmes & Meier, 1976). Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), 15.

in size between 1870 and 1890 to 20,000, increasing to 30,000 by 1914.³ Indeed, the manner in which this Eastern European community acculturated itself to its English environment would lead to the first (but far from the last) of the manifold confrontations that went on to shape Jacobs's worldview.

Louis (Laib) Jacobs was born in Manchester, England on July 17, 1920.

Jacobs's early religious life reflects the generational transformations and tensions present in the Mancunian immigrant working class. Rosalyn Livshin explains in her study of the period that a series of anglicizing influences both from within and without the Jewish community represented a conscious effort to transform foreign immigrants into English Jews.⁴ As evident from the popular songs and literature from that time, zealous patriotism for their new home country and/or a disdain for Yiddish, the acculturating pressures were sustained and powerful.⁵ Indeed, in contrast to the Eastern European community that Jacobs would encounter in his coming yeshiva days, the immigrant community of Jacobs's parents was marked by a desire to shed rather than retain Old World points of reference. As Livshin notes in her study of Manchester

³L. Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 214-215. See also Bill Williams, "'East and West': Class and Community in Manchester Jewry, 1850-1914," in David Cesarani, *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 16.

⁴Also particularly useful in reconstructing this period of Manchester Jewish life is Maurice Samuel's autobiography. Samuel (1895-1972), though a generation prior to Jacobs, reflects on the working class immigrant community that would become Jacobs' own: "There was no tradition of wealth even in collateral branches of these families. There was also no recollection of scholars, rabbis or saints. There have been poor Jewish communities with a high level of scholarship; ours was not of them." Maurice Samuel, *The Gentleman and the Jew* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 9. More important are Samuel's recollections of the manifold paths towards social integration and acculturation. From cricket to literature to popular penny weeklies, to identification with liberal worker causes and beyond, this community bore a deep admiration of England and her achievements.

⁵Rosalyn Livshin, "The Acculturation of the Children of Immigrant Jews in Manchester, 1890-1930," in D. Cesarani, *The Making of Modern Anglo Jewry*, 79-96.

immigrant families, “Within one generation foreigners were turned into English Jews.”⁶

Emblematic of this distinction is Jacobs himself, who never actually knew Yiddish until his later arrival at the Manchester Yeshiva, having spent his early youth culturally and religiously distant from his Yiddish speaking grandparents.⁷ Jacobs reflects:

I did not have a conventional rabbinic background. I mean, my parents were Orthodox Jews in a sort of formal way in Manchester.⁸

Though curious in its inconsistencies, the “formal” or “nominal” Orthodoxy of Jacobs’s youth is reflective of the transitional nature of his context, community and class. Thus while Jacobs’s father donned phylacteries for his daily prayers, he also took his young son to football matches on the Sabbath. Jacobs would later recall his emotional distance from expressions of Eastern European religious life in his home town. Though Jewishly identified both internally and externally, his childhood was far from strictly observant or “ghettoized.” Jacobs reflected on cordial relations between Jew and gentile, his ethnically diverse neighbors and his early enrollment at the non-Jewish St. John’s school. The combination of these social relationships, as well as his cultural points of reference of the music hall, football matches, comics and beyond, would seem to suggest a thoroughly British cultural context, allowing for a Jewish identity which was anything but insular.

Intellectually, Jacobs was always encouraged to think beyond his Eastern European origins. He recalls his mother’s British schooling, and her ability to rattle off

⁶R. Livshin, “Acculturation,” 93.

⁷Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

⁸Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

reams of Browning, Tennyson and others.⁹ Jacobs appears to have inherited both his mother's retentive memory and breadth of reading, perhaps setting the stage for the autodidactic course of his learning:

I was a Manchester boy. I mean no one would tell me what to do at home...I read very widely. And there was no censorship of our reading...So I read widely. But what I read, mainly in my boyhood were the great Edwardians, Chesterton and Belloc and George Bernard Shaw. Especially Chesterton had a great deal of influence on me because I felt here was a religious man who wrote exceptionally well.¹⁰

As Jacobs's life journey would take him into varied contexts, he maintained a lifelong love for English literature.¹¹ Serving as co-editor of the Cheetham Senior School Magazine, Jacobs and his cohorts aimed their youthful literary talents towards tongue-in-cheek commentary on the faculty and policies of their school, also a telling metric by which to appreciate the comfort level Jacobs experienced in his school.¹² This sustained contact with the outside world no doubt had an effect on how Jacobs's theological journey would be shaped. Reflecting on his voracious and indiscriminate appetite for reading, he wrote:

It may be evidence of superficiality, but I never went through any *Sturm und Drang* period, whatever religious faith I had remained undisturbed by my general reading. On the contrary, I found it fairly easy to translate into a Jewish way of looking at things. Wells's warnings about human hubris, Shaw's celebration of the life force and Chesterton's brilliant

⁹Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

¹⁰Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

¹¹As a student in an insular learning environment at Gateshead Kollel, Jacobs would make frequent use of the public library "as a rest from...Talmudic studies." HWI, 47.

¹²Jacobs' early wit is readily apparent in his satirical poem entitled "Personalities of the School." "The Head, a worthy man is he, who works from morn till night/At play he drinks a cup of tea, and canes boys with delight. The Teachers are a sturdy lot, each has a mighty arm./I once doubted that to my woe, but since am very calm." Cheetham Senior School Magazine: Manchester. Jacobs Archive.

paradoxes and defense of traditional religion, even though it was not the Jewish religion and he was rumored to be a bit anti-Semitic.¹³

As Jacobs's theological horizons developed, it was the diversity of his cultural, literary and philosophical points of reference that would offer him both the tools of his expression and open-minded demeanor. As will be made clear in the coming chapters, Jacobs's theological career is thoroughly English, linguistically and culturally. From popular to philosophical, Jacobs grew up in a generation with a deep pride in the Anglo-Cultural heritage. Moreover, with the war years looming, Jacobs's educational setting was infused with a reflexive antipathy to Continental influences. His interlocutors would thus be Chesterton not Goethe, Ayer not Kant, Solomon Schechter not Hermann Cohen. With notable exceptions, Jacobs's contact with the German intellectual tradition, Jewish and otherwise, arrived by way of its English purveyors.¹⁴

Significant, too, was the working class Manchester community into which Jacobs was born.¹⁵ Jacobs's father, an employee in a rain-coat factory, took positions of pride and leadership in worker's rights and liberal causes. The combination of his

¹³HWI, 63.

¹⁴Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

¹⁵The manufacturing of waterproof clothing was pioneered in Manchester by Charles Macintosh. The Jewish role in "Macs and Caps" industry is discussed in Monty Dobkin, *More Tales of Manchester Jewry* (Manchester: Neil Richardson, 1994), 7-9. The subject of the competing points of identification in the Anglo-Jewish worker has been the subject of some discussion. As David Cesarani has summarized "In the 1920s and 1930s, the British-born offspring of the Jewish immigrant working class were being socialized into the British working class, albeit with signification inflections due to their ethnic experience." David Cesarani, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Suburbs: Social Change in Anglo-Jewry between the Wars, 1914-1945." In "Jewish Culture and History," 1:1 (1998), 13. On the social and economic life of this immigrant community and their connection to labor unions, see V. D. Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950* (London: Watts, 1954), 104-133. So, too, Geoffrey Alderman traces the entrenchment of the immigrant community in the trade union movement. Alderman's study directs attention to the way matters of class, origin and religious observance were intertwined. Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 102ff. As we shall come to see, the socio-economics of Anglo religious life are not insignificant variables when considering the developing trajectory of Jacobs' career and impact.

father's lifetime labors and stunted academic achievements due to lack of financial resources permit us to consider the seeds for Jacobs's own intellectual explorations and desire for social mobility.¹⁶ Given his background and ongoing self-identification as a "Manchester boy" at heart, one begins to understand the attraction of a university education, continued identification with British culture and perhaps the allure of distinguished pulpits.

Jacobs's early Jewish education was marked by a succession of "varied and uncertain" *cheder* experiences.¹⁷ These sputtering beginnings came to an end with Jacobs's fortuitous enrollment in the *cheder* of Reb Yonah Balkind. Though English by birth, Balkind was a spiritual product of the Lituianian Yeshivot.¹⁸ His *cheder* was characteristic of the independent Orthodox educational institutions established in England during the 1920s as Eastern European Jewry settled into their new surroundings.¹⁹ In contradistinction to the existing Anglo- Jewish educational efforts,

¹⁶Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005. HWI, 3-4.

¹⁷Monty Dobkin offers the following description of the "uncertain" nature of *cheder* learning at the time: "The old system of religious teaching was based on the *cheder*, literally a room where classes were conducted by a teacher, the *Rebbe*. He was often, though not always, an elderly man who knew no English, and had little rapport with his pupils, all boys aged from six to Barmitzvah [thirteen]... What made Hebrew teaching so difficult to absorb was partly the resentment felt by the boys who had to spend at least two hours each weekday evening after school, and all Sunday morning, at *Cheder*. It was partly, too, that as the *Rebbe* spoke only Yiddish, he was difficult to understand, which in turn led to his use of a stick to 'knock it into them.'" See "From Cheder to Harley Street" in Monty Dobkin, *Tales of Manchester Jewry and Manchester in the Thirties* (Manchester: Neil Richardson, 1986), 27.

¹⁸HWI, 16.

¹⁹Bernard Homa describes the efforts of the eastern European newcomers towards establishing *chevras* (small religious communities) independent of the pre-existent social and ecclesial infrastructures of Anglo-Jewry. See Bernard Homa, *Orthodoxy in Anglo-Jewry 1880-1940* (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1969). Homa offers a fuller history of the spiritual and institutional infrastructure of the *Machzike Hadath*, ("upholders of the faith") whose unflinching Eastern European Orthodoxy often found itself at odds with the Anglo-Orthodoxy of the Chief Rabbinate and the United Synagogue. See Bernard Homa, *A Fortress in Anglo-Jewry: The Story of the Machzike Hadath* (London: Shapiro, 1953). Alternatively, the story of the institutional *reception* of these immigrant *chevras* (groups) and their

these *chedarim* reflected the attempt to sustain the exclusive “yiddishkeit” of the Eastern European commitment to Jewish learning.²⁰ As described in numerous histories of Anglo-Jewry, these modest learning institutions were often times at odds with the pre-existing ones under the auspices of the United Synagogue and Chief Rabbinate, precisely because “in them was sensed a barrier to the full anglicization of the coming generation.”²¹ As such, Jacobs’s enrollment with Balkind and subsequently Manchester Yeshiva marked a pivotal point in Jacobs’s education, namely a turn back towards his Eastern European roots—ironic given the anglicizing efforts of his parent’s generation.

Indeed the physical modesty of the *chedarim* and its low tuition (the ostensible draw for an impecunious Jacobs family) was more than made up in the intensity of its spiritual instruction. A gifted and creative pedagogue, Reb Balkind’s passion for Jewish learning inspired generations of “Balkind Boys” who, under his instruction and mentorship, were encouraged to matriculate into the Manchester Yeshiva.²² Jacobs

perception in the eyes of the autochthonous Anglo-Jewish community is told in Aubrey Newman, *The United Synagogue, 1870-1970* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1976). For a record of the establishment of Manchester’s independent Orthodox community see Harry Rabinowicz, *A World Apart: The Story of the Chasidim in Britain* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997), 202-206. On the mushrooming of ‘bedroom chevras’ in Manchester during this period, see V. D. Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990), 99ff.

²⁰The *kulturekampf* between the autochthonous Anglo-Jewish community and Eastern European immigrant community occurred at many levels and has been well documented. Culturally, the immigrants’ efforts to remain independent drew resentment as they were perceived to be obstacles to cultural assimilation. See B. Williams, *Manchester Jewry*, 271. Institutionally, the establishment of the Federation of Synagogues in 1887 sought to provide a structure to the religious needs of this burgeoning number of Jews suspect of the United Synagogue and chief rabbinate, a story told in B. Homa, *Orthodoxy*, 15ff. Geoffrey Alderman’s book length study on the Federation of Synagogues is the most comprehensive account on record. Geoffrey Alderman, *The Federation of Synagogues, 1887-1987* (London: The Federation, 1987).

²¹L. Gartner, *Jewish Immigrant*, 233.

²²Bloom, Raymond. “Recollections of a ‘Balkind Boy,’” *Jewish Tribune*, December 17, 1998.

described Reb Balkind and the traditional education he received there with awe and admiration, and this seminal experience conferred upon him an abiding love for *Torah Lishma*.²³ Beyond the rudimentary skills of textual analysis learned under Balkind, Jacobs attributed the “warm uncomplicated form of worship typical of Orthodoxy” and the atmosphere of the Yeshiva in the years to come as the reason for his abiding moorings in traditional faith.²⁴ Thus, from a more secularized background, Balkind’s *cheder* marked Jacobs’s formal immersion in the cultural and institutional life of Eastern European Jewry, to find full expression in the Manchester Yeshiva and Gateshead Kollel.

Manchester Yeshiva

Following his Bar-Mitzvah, Jacobs began the after school course of study at the Manchester Yeshiva. Soon thereafter with the looming prospect of leaving school for gainful employment, Jacobs was offered a full time place of study, and continued for

²³HWI, 14.

²⁴BRD, 170-1. Jacobs and Balkind would maintain a correspondence through the years. In 1947, as Jacobs and Munk strove to create a yeshiva for high school students in London, Balkind wrote to Jacobs regarding the challenge of supplementary Jewish education: “...the biggest problem (in my opinion) is how to salvage our youth – particularly after bar-mitzvah. As (again my opinion) our potentially cleverest and ablest boys are those who attend the High School—it would appear that the only alternative to *kol yom yeshiva* (all day yeshiva) is Jewish Secondary schools—which means harnessing Yiddish *cochot* [powers] to non-Yiddish culture—in order to obtain some Yiddish improvements in knowledge and practice...Our greatest authorities have always been against making a ‘shidduch’ [match] between Torah and secular studies *lehavdil* [to the contrary] and it would appear that to concentrate our best energies on such a ‘union,’ well we don’t know where it might lead to. On the other hand—when we face up to the facts, we are all trying to put in a bit of *yiddishkeit* on to whatever education and upbringing our ‘patients’ have and we dare not refuse even the worst....I am greatly interested in your opinion....” Letter from Yonah Balkind to Louis Jacobs, July 10, 1947. Jacobs Archive. Sent on the occasion of the birth of Jacobs’ daughter Naomi, this letter served as an opportunity for two religious educators to reflect on their then shared project of post bar-mitzvah supplementary Jewish education. Other correspondence reveals that even as Jacobs’s professional profile veered away from Balkind’s world, Jacobs remained ever indebted to his former teacher’s guidance. Letter from Yonah Balkind to Louis Jacobs, May 27, 1958. Jacobs Archive.

the next seven years to learn in this yeshiva stylized on the Lithuanian spirit.

Established in 1911, the Manchester Yeshiva (even more so than Balkind's *cheder*) was representative of an Eastern European Orthodoxy with altogether different moorings and points of authority than the Orthodoxy of the United Synagogue and its Chief Rabbi, Dr. Joseph Hertz (1872-1946).²⁵ Jacobs's autobiography references the annual visits to the yeshiva by a representative from United Synagogue's grant bestowing Jewish Memorial Council, "to whom we must have seemed as odd as he to us."²⁶ An illustration of the disdain the Eastern European Yeshiva had towards the Anglo-ecclesiastical leadership can be found in an oft repeated comment by one of Jacobs's teachers in reference to Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz: "If a reverend is a goy. It must follow that a "Very Reverend" [Hertz's title] is a 'great goy' (*a grosser goy*)."²⁷ Hyperbole aside, the sharp remark is illustrative of the degree to which Jacobs's Yeshiva environment understood itself vis-à-vis the pre-autochthonous institutions of Anglo-Jewry.

The two fulltime faculty members for the thirty odd students were the Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) Rabbi Moshe Yitzhak Segal and Rabbi Yitzhak Dubow.²⁸ Jacobs's reminiscences of Rabbi Segal would be filled with an abiding respect for his piety and learnedness, as well as a studied caution towards his stern, somber, and mournful

²⁵Julius Carlebach offers a timeline of Yeshivot in England. The first yeshiva was opened in London in 1903 (*Etz Chaim*), Manchester 1911; Leeds 1912; Liverpool 1914; Gateshead 1927; Glasgow 1936; Sunderland 1946). See Julius Carlebach, "The Impact of German Jews on Anglo-Jewry – Orthodoxy, 1850-1950," in W. E. Mosse, and J. Carlebach (1991). *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991), 421, n. 61.

²⁶HWI, 21.

²⁷HWI, 32.

²⁸HWI, 26-27.

approach. Segal, himself a student of Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, the *Alter* (elder) of Novaredok, was an outstanding representative of the Novaredok Yeshiva's (1896-1915) Musar tradition. This philosophy was characterized by an unrelenting series of "unusual, bizarre and even scandalous" practices aimed towards self-scrutiny and self-criticism and the defeat of one's evil passions and inclinations.²⁹ Appointed dean of the Yeshiva soon after its inception, Segal's Yeshiva served native-born students such as Jacobs, more recent Eastern European arrivals, and by 1938, the flood of refugees fleeing persecution from Europe. Jacobs eventually received his ordination from Segal in 1943 and would consider Segal his teacher par excellence until Segal's death in 1947. So, too, Segal's high esteem of Jacobs is recorded in a letter of recommendation written in 1943, in which Segal offers his assessment of Jacobs's scholarly and personal disposition:

Rabbi Laib Jacobs has been a student [of Manchester Yeshiva] for over eight years and gained his rabbinical diploma. He is a brilliant scholar with a singular capacity for learning...Rabbi Jacobs is most conscientious, pious and of a kindly disposition. And I have every confidence in recommending him for such a position with any congregation."³⁰

Even years later as Jacobs would catch the ire of the Manchester Yeshiva world, he would continue to cite his debt to Segal in his own theology. "In later life, few of us [Yeshiva graduates] interpreted Judaism in worldly or utilitarian terms. In my work of

²⁹David E. Fishman, "Musar and Modernity: The Case of Novaredok," *Modern Judaism* 8 (1988): 41-64. See also Marc B. Shapiro, *Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg* (Portland: Littman Library, 1999), 5-10.

³⁰Letter from Moshe Segal, Jacobs Archive.

Jewish theology I have been saved from any reductionist thrust by my years at Manchester Yeshiva as a student of the Rosh.”³¹

It was the other full time faculty member, Rabbi Yitzhak Dubov (1887 -1977), who planted in Jacobs a lifetime interest in the Habad-Lubavitch stream of Hasidic tradition. Born in Penza, Russia, Dubov studied in the Lubavitch Yeshivah of Tomchei Temimim.³² Jacobs describes the influence of Rabbi Dubov in his writing on Habad:

My fascination with Jewish mysticism began when my rebbe in the Yeshiva, Rabbi Yitzhak Dubov, a prominent Lubavitcher Hasid, took me and another boy, on Sabbath afternoons, through the intricacies of Habad thought, and sang the Habad melodies full of mystical yearning at the communal meal on these afternoons in the yeshiva. Although, officially, Manchester Yeshiva was a Lithuanian-type yeshiva, looking somewhat askance on mystical fervor, Rabbi Dubov’s extra-curricular activities were tolerated. I personally found these activities to be more than a welcome relief from the yeshiva’s emphasis on matter-of-fact talmudics. It all came as a breath of fresh air to an impressionable youngster.³³

Under Rabbi Dubov, not only would Jacobs read classical Hassidic literature for the first time, but would have a powerful mentoring example of unabashed religious faith.

In characterizing Dubov’s spiritual mentorship, Jacobs simply explained:

...the point is that there was warmth in it. It was religion. It was wonderful. I was on Rabbi Dubov’s choir on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, so you know I used to sing, I felt as a kid that if this is religion, this is religion.³⁴

The combination of Rabbi Dubov’s influence as well as the influence of Rabbi Yitzhak Rivkin (1869-1947), the head of the Manchester Rabbinical Court (who would also confer upon Jacobs a second rabbinic ordination) gave Jacobs the basic tools and

³¹HWI, 31.

³²H. Rabinowicz, *A World Apart*, 204-205.

³³BRD, 185.

³⁴Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

disposition for his future translations, compendiums and analytical studies of Hassidic and Habad themes.³⁵ This early entrenchment positioned Jacobs well for his pioneering scholarly efforts in Hasidism throughout his career.³⁶ Indeed, when it came to Jacobs's later efforts in constructive theology, he would readily admit that "Mendelssohn didn't ring a bell in the way in which Reb Shneer Zalman of Liady did."³⁷ It was Dubov's influence that served to situate mysticism as a sanctioned body of Jewish theological expression, not to mention Jacobs's unrelenting insistence on maintaining supernatural faith commitments.

The talmudic expertise that Jacobs imbibed in his seven years of yeshiva learning would leave an indelible imprint on his intellectual profile. Jacobs came to be wholly indebted to the analytical approach, or the Telzer method, of the Manchester Yeshiva, traceable back to the Eastern European yeshivot that produced his teachers. The Telzer movement's analytic methods of argumentation, emphasis on definition, abstraction and classification would all emerge as conscious or unconscious methodological pivots in Jacobs's work in rabbinic literature.³⁸ Indeed, as his intellectual horizons broadened, Jacobs would continue to remark on his debt to this early experience and the degree to which it granted him unique credentials in the world of talmudic scholarship:

³⁵HWI, 257.

³⁶Elliot Cosgrove, "Their Heads in Heaven: Unfamiliar Aspects of Hasidism," *Journal of Religion* 87:1 (2007): 138-140.

³⁷Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

³⁸For a discussion of the context, personalities and methods of the Analytic School, see Norman Solomon, *The Analytic Movement: Hayyim Soloveitchik and His Circle* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

...you see my novelty...was in talmudics. Because my yeshiva background gave me the necessary equipment to deal with Talmud. Most of the people I knew [in London] were scholars but they had had no notion of Talmud, They didn't know the first thing about it. There were also *lomdim* [those learned in traditional texts] in London, but they didn't know anything about scholarship.³⁹

Throughout his life, the giants of the Lithuanian yeshivot continued to hold a mythical place in Jacobs's imagination, and he would always remain committed to bringing their emphasis on Talmudic argumentation, logic and definition to the scholarly community. Jacobs's later attempts to combine the study modes of the academy with the Telzer analytic approach would be Jacobs's claim to originality in Talmudic studies.⁴⁰ Indicative of Jacobs's reverential attitude towards the Telzer movement was his frustrated attempt in the late 1930s to travel to Lithuania, a scheme fortuitously left unrealized due to the outbreak of World War II.⁴¹ Just as Dubov's influence would secure Hasidut as a subject for Jacobs's future pursuits, so too Segal's analytical approach to talmudic study. Despite his photographic memory, Jacobs's commitment to the acute analysis of classical Jewish texts ensured he would never allow himself to become merely "a study engine," passing over the breadth of Jewish learning.⁴²

Later in life, Jacobs's accomplishments in the Manchester Yeshiva would still be remembered by his peers. Having long since broken ranks with the world of his youth, Jacobs would occasionally receive pleas from his former classmates to "return"

³⁹Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

⁴⁰Louis Jacobs, *The Talmudic Argument: A Study in Talmudic Reasoning and Methodology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984), ix-x.

⁴¹HWI, 37-38.

⁴²Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism. First Series* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911), 331-332. See also M. Shapiro, *Between the Yeshiva World*, 10-11 for further context on the institutional and ideological nexus of the Musar movement and Analytic School.

from his wayward path. One such correspondence from a childhood friend, Sholom Dresdner, offers an intriguing portrait of Jacobs's days at Manchester Yeshiva:⁴³

Who does not remember “Leibel” the genius boy, who rose in a couple of years from start at the Yeshiva to become one of the top talmidim [students], who often had a queue of boys at his side waiting patiently for ‘p’shat’ on their Gemara!⁴⁴

No mere nostalgic reminiscence from an adoring colleague, the significance of Dresdner's letter is that it was crafted from across the ideological divide. Dresdner's memory confirms Jacobs's prodigal status in the heart of this Anglo site of Eastern European learning. The few remaining notebooks of Jacobs's Yeshiva and Kollel years, all written in Hebrew or Yiddish (and worthy of further study) serve as ample testimony of his intense entrenchment in the breadth and depth of rabbinic literature and learning.⁴⁵

Thus, from Talmudic analysis to Hassidism to Mysticism to his lifelong fascination with *responsa* literature, the broad horizons of Jacobs's theological repertoire were already taking hold.⁴⁶ Given the illustrious roots of his teachers, Jacobs's autobiography traces his rabbinic pedigree backwards with the closing rejoinder:

For what this show of vanity is worth (not very much), I can thus claim to be linked, as it were, to both the Hasidic and Mitnaggedic leaders, though I suppose my subsequent career has made the links tenuous.⁴⁷

⁴³On the childhood friendship of Dresdner and Jacobs, see HWI, 22-23.

⁴⁴Letter from Sholom Dresdner to Louis Jacobs, February 3, 1998. Jacobs Archive.

⁴⁵A few notebooks are in the keeping of the Jacobs Archive.

⁴⁶HWI, 27.

⁴⁷HWI, 62.

As we shall come to find in analyzing Jacobs's thought, such linkages are neither tenuous nor vain, but rather useful markers that can help identify the shaping forces behind his writing.

Gateshead

The establishment of a Jewish community in the small industrial town of Gateshead on Tyne is a narrative that has, in a very short time, developed its own mythological status.⁴⁸ The “Yavneh” or “Oxford” of Anglo-Jewry, Gateshead Yeshiva would open in 1929 hoping to facilitate “the realization of a dream of those scholars who had seen their own yeshivot in Europe destroyed in pogroms.”⁴⁹ Like the Manchester Yeshiva, Gateshead was driven by an aim to establish an educational facility protected from the assimilationist forces of modernity and “the progressive conservatism” of the Anglo-Jewish establishment.⁵⁰ Under the leadership of Reb Dovid Dryan, over 600 refugee students were received between 1933 and 1939. The *Kollel* was established in 1941, seeking to give refuge to the ever growing number of eminent

⁴⁸For histories of the Gateshead Yeshiva and its Jewish community, see Arnold Levy, *The Story of Gateshead Yeshivah* (Taunton: Printed for private circulation at the Wessex Press, 1952). Miriam Dansky, *Gateshead: Its Community, Its Personalities, Its Institutions* (Southfield: Targum, 1992). Yonason Rosenblum, *Rav Dessler: The Life and Impact of Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler the Michtav M'elياهو* (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 2000).

⁴⁹EJ 7:334.

⁵⁰For the tensions between the Gateshead community and the Chief Rabbinate, see See Homa, *Orthodoxy*, 33ff.

rabbis and students fleeing Nazi Germany in search of a facility to save their lives and the Torah they held dear.⁵¹

First in distinction was Rabbi E.E. Dessler (1881-1954), a Russian graduate of the Musar Academy of Kelme and the Slobadka Yeshiva who brought with him the administrative, educational and spiritual leadership necessary to direct this institution aimed at preserving the cultural heritage of a doomed European Jewry.⁵² It was here that some of the fortunate fleeing immigrants engaged in an intense course of study modeled after the Lithuanian Yeshivot: eight tractates of the Talmud, two per year, over four years. Neither degree nor rabbinic ordination was intended; the point of learning being learning itself.⁵³

It was into this charged environment of scholars and teachers into which Jacobs, a “local product,” matriculated into the *Kollel* world. Jacobs was well aware of his unique status amongst his learned international luminaries:

When I joined the Kollel, soon after its inception, the other members had all studied at one or other of the famous Lituianinan Yeshivaot (sic) – Telz, Mir, Slabodka, Kamenitz, Baranowitz, Grodno and Radin... I had obtained my small amount of *lomdus* (learnedness) from books. They had sat at the feet of the great masters...⁵⁴

⁵¹In his treatment of Gateshead, J.Carlebach notes that the institution “Owes its existence and importance to a happy combination of Eastern European Jewish tenacity and German Jewish talent for Organization.” J. Carlebach, “The Impact of German Jews,” in *Second Chance*, 421.

⁵²Lewis Olsover, *The Jewish Communities of North-East England, 1755-1980*, (Gateshead: Ashley Mark, 1981), 242-243.

⁵³For a series of biographical portraits, see HWI, 47ff.

⁵⁴HWI, 43.

Though Jacobs's stay at Gateshead was a short one (one year), his sharp and prodigious learning was readily apparent to Dessler. In a correspondence praising the high level of studies at the Kollel, Dessler writes:

You...cannot imagine the value of this Kollel. In it are gathered the great exemplars of the country, who have fled having learned in the great Yeshivas, and...amongst them are numerous true greats...There is one young man, a product of Manchester (he is the only native [Anglo] product), and it is no exaggeration for me to say that hitherto, I have never seen an *ilui* [Talmudic genius] of such depth together with the other strengths in any one...he is a truly great one...able to plumb the depths of thought.⁵⁵

Jacobs's personal relationship with Dessler, though relatively brief in years, had a profound and lasting impression on Jacobs.⁵⁶ For Jacobs, many of Dessler's ideas "especially those regarding this world as a preparation or school for life in the next, found a permanent home in our hearts and minds to influence our religious lives..."⁵⁷ Indeed, it was under Dessler that Jacobs and others began to identify the frontiers for sophisticated theological thought. He writes: "It was exhilarating to hear ideas such as these expounded by the master and the ease with which he was able to refer to Einstein, Freud, Marx and Darwin."⁵⁸ Jacobs would forever credit Dessler with his ongoing interest in drawing traditional Jewish categories of thought into conversation with the intellectual coin of the day.

⁵⁵Elijah Eliezer Dessler et al., *Mikhtav Me-Eliyahu* (Yerushalayim: *Yotse la-or al yede hever talmidav*, 1963), 166. (Hebrew)

⁵⁶Dessler attended Jacobs wedding in 1942 and left Gateshead for Israel by the late 1940's. In his autobiography, Jacobs would reflect: "Although I was never officially his pupil, he was in many respects, my teacher par excellence." HWI, 59.

⁵⁷BRD, 182.

⁵⁸Ibid., 182.

Beyond the rigorous formal course of Talmudic study, the Gateshead curriculum and culture, even more so than the Manchester Yeshiva, was infused with the Musar spirit. Jacobs would later reflect on the Musar spiritual exercises of Gateshead with mixed emotions. To a greater degree than Jacobs had experienced in the Manchester Yeshiva, these exercises involved intense private recitation of Judaism's literature of severe ethical discipline including works by authors such as Moses b. Jacob Cordovero (1522-1570), Moses Hayyim Luzzato (1707-1746) and Naphtali Hirtz Wessely (1725-1805).⁵⁹ Jacobs later reflected on the experience as follows:

...there's a saying...the difference between the Musar approach and Hasidut is both Hassidut and Musar stress that this world is nothing and the next world is everything. The difference is, Hassidism places the stress on the next world is everything, whereas Musar places the stress on this world is nothing. So...with Novaredok and the general Litvisher [Lithuanian] approach, I found it off-putting to be frank. I enjoyed the Talmud and the general atmosphere. And I came from a nominal orthodox background. But this was a new exciting world to me.⁶⁰

Thus, while appreciative of the rigorous learning and always exhilarated at Dessler's depth of thought, Jacobs found himself uneasy with "the public baring of the soul" and daily expectation of "self reproof." Notably, in the intense spiritual and intellectual Gateshead environs, Jacobs continued to read widely and independently, borrowing books from the public library and discussing them with his study partner "as a rest from our Talmudic studies."⁶¹ Despite his voracious love of learning, Jacobs could never fully acclimate himself to the world of Gateshead. With an admixture of gratitude and discomfort, and perhaps not entirely of his own choosing, Jacobs would soon bid

⁵⁹EJ 12:536.

⁶⁰Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

⁶¹HWI, 47.

farewell and return to his hometown of Manchester. In a letter drafted shortly following his departure, Jacobs would offer a glimpse into the nature of his departure, explaining his inability to attend a former classmate's wedding:

Please forgive me my friend that I am unable to participate in the wedding festivities, but since I left the Kollel around Shavuot [Festival of Weeks] I do not have permission to go again. Believe me at the enormity of the longings within me.⁶²

While Jacobs would continue contact with his teacher Rabbi Dessler and other colleagues beyond his time at Gateshead, his departure signaled the limitations of the experience. As we shall come to see, Jacobs's ambivalence to the intensity of his Kollel and the world it represented would soon serve to shape his future decisions, and eventually his life work.

Back to Manchester

From receiving rabbinic ordination to his courtship and marriage to Shulamit Lisagorska (1922-2006) to the first stirrings of his theological vision, Jacobs's time in Manchester prior to his departure for London in the late spring of 1945, though brief, would prove to be a hugely significant turning point. Jacobs returned from Gateshead and arranged a course of study to receive private ordination from the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva Moshe Segal. Given its ideal of "Torah study for its own sake," neither the curriculum, nor spirit of the Yeshiva actively encouraged students towards the "practical rabbinate," with Jacobs himself noting an implicit antagonism towards such endeavors. Nevertheless, Jacobs along with three of his contemporaries would persuade

⁶²Author's translation from Hebrew original. Draft of letter from Louis Jacobs to Samuel Alexander. June 17, 1942. Jacobs Archive.

Rabbi Segal to prepare them for ordination, which they would eventually receive in the spring of 1943.⁶³ Later that year, Jacobs received a second degree of ordination from Rabbi Rivkin, the head of the Manchester Rabbinical Court.⁶⁴

Jacobs's idyllic existence of Torah study involved learning three hours a day with his friend and colleague Rabbi Judah Segal, the son of his teacher, who himself would go on to succeed his father as Dean of the Manchester Yeshiva.⁶⁵ As far as gainful employment, Jacobs taught throughout the community in an eclectic array of classes including Hebrew classes at the Higher Crumpsall Synagogue, the *Mercaz Limmud* (to be discussed) and a weekly *shiur* (class) at the right wing *Machzike Hadat* community. Jacobs's ease and access throughout the various arms of the Manchester Jewish community would assure him a steady stream of teaching opportunities.

It was in one such teaching context, *Bachad's Mercaz Limmud*, the educational wing of Manchester's Orthodox Labor Zionist movement, which provides the backdrop for Jacobs's introduction to his bride-to-be, Shulamit Lisagorska. The main aim of *Bachad* and its sister organizations such as *Bnai Akiva* and *Torah V'Avodah* was to stoke the Zionist yearnings in the historically Zionist city of Manchester and encourage youth towards *aliyah* (immigration) to Palestine.⁶⁶ Too young to serve in the war effort,

⁶³HWI, 60. Jacobs's certificate of ordination from Rabbi Segal is dated March 23, 1943. The communal celebration of the four ordinees took place the following week with Dr. Alexander Altmann, the communal rabbi as guest of honor. Assorted newspaper clippings, Jacobs Archive.

⁶⁴HWI, 61. Certificate dated December 2, 1943. Jacobs Archive.

⁶⁵HWI, 66.

⁶⁶A good summary of British Zionist activity during this time with attention to the Manchester community may be found in W. D. Rubinstein, *A History of the Jews in the English-Speaking World: Great Britain* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), 162ff. On Manchester's most famous Zionist product, Chaim Weizmann, see Reinharz, Jehuda. *Chaim Weizmann, the Making of a Zionist Leader*. (New York:

these aspiring kibbutzniks such as Lisagorska, under the leadership of Arie Handler (b. 1915) amongst others, served as “Jewish Land Army girls,” a wartime job. *Hachshara* (preparation) towards becoming a Zionist *halutz* (pioneer) began in earnest for Shula on April 5, 1942 at Kibbutz Shivat Zion (Avencroft College).⁶⁷

The educational efforts of the *Mercaz Limmud*, of which Jacobs’s teaching was one such effort, was under the supervision of Rabbi Joseph “Hans” Heinemann.⁶⁸ A graduate of Poland’s Mir Yeshiva, Heinemann was then in Manchester completing his MA thesis and would go on to be one of the foremost authorities on rabbinic literature of his day.⁶⁹ Other teachers included Rabbi Sperber, remembered by his students as a uniquely inspiring teacher, and Rabbi Dr. Alexander Altmann, the communal rabbi of Manchester, a figure to whom we shall return at length. The watchword of *Bachad* and its sister movements was *Eretz Yisrael Le’am Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael*, (“The land of Israel, for the people of Israel according to the Torah of Israel.”) Recited at every meeting, these words signaled commitments to the group’s devotion to Jewish nationhood and strict Orthodox observance, alternatively understood as the ideals of

Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Chaim Raphael, “The Manchester Connection,” *Commentary* 82:3 (1986): 48-54.

⁶⁷Shulamit Lisagorska’s unpublished diary recollections from this period, “Kibbutz and Cocoa,” provide a remarkable record of the inner workings of this Anglo-Zionist effort and, fortunately for the present study, her first recollections of her husband to be.

⁶⁸Undated clippings note Jacobs teaching to a variety of religious Zionist youth organizations including Bahad, Mizrahi and Bnai Akiva. Other teachers included Rabbis Altmann, A. Feldman (London), Heinemann, Sperber and Mr. J. Herbstamm.

⁶⁹Arie Handler was responsible for bringing Heinemann and many others to England during the 1930s from Germany. (Interview with Arie Handler, Summer 2007). See also HWI, 64. Later in life, Jacobs would reflect on Heinemann as follows: “I knew Joseph Heinemann well. He was a strictly Orthodox Jew but realized that biblical criticism and modern rabbinic scholarship – Heinemann was himself a distinguished practitioner of the latter – do seem to pose severe problems for Orthodoxy.” BRD, 104.

halutzit (Zionist work ethic) and *lamdanut* (Jewish learnedness).⁷⁰ The group, a burst of youthful Zionist energy, understood its mission well within the framework of Orthodox Judaism. Their activities—philanthropic, educational and religious—took expression at the local kibbutzim, in their publications (*Torah v'Avodah*, *Chayenu* and the national *Jewish Review*) as well as at the frequent social gatherings shared between these enthusiastic idealists.⁷¹ Even so, in the eyes of the Manchester Yeshiva and its spheres of influence, the activities of these enthusiastic religious Zionists were perceived to be beyond the pale of the Eastern European model and points of authority.⁷²

Through the social engineering of her brother-in-law, Yankel Rosen, Lisagorska was introduced to Jacobs in December 1943 upon one of her brief visits home from the Kibbutz. During this visit, Jacobs and Lisagorska were introduced, courted and engaged to be married three months later on March 28, 1944.⁷³ A diary entry from Lisagorska, admittedly through the rose-colored lens of a wooed woman, does provide an intriguing portrait of Jacobs at the time:

During the walk all I can say is I was absolutely enthralled being entertained by my head being filled with magical Chassidic tales and the like. I must have appeared quite ignorant in opposition to his brain, but it did not seem to worry him at all. Suddenly, here was a Yeshiva

⁷⁰Letter from Mr. Asher Harris, October 17, 2006.

⁷¹With its mix of social, religious and programmatic articles and announcements, any edition of *Chayenu* during these years provides a snapshot of the wide ranging activities of these inter-related religious Zionist organizations. See for example, Jerrold Roston, “Bachad in Anglo-Jewry,” *Chayenu*, December (1946).

⁷²Interview with Arie Handler, October 18, 2006.

⁷³Reconstructed from diary entries from a Thursday night arrival back to Manchester; Jacobs met Lisagorska Saturday evening and by Tuesday had declared his intentions, pleading with her to stay, and she received congratulatory wishes on her engagement that very week.

Bochur, a Rabbi, and I always thought of Rabbis in terms of dull, pious and old in ways, not knowing anything modern, was just the opposite. Together with a tale for every question, joked and seemed like a normal Manchester English young man. He wasn't pompous; certainly did not parade his religiousness. Talked of literature and poetry and he even liked jazz! (Well, I was not so sure about that). He was refreshing to talk to, and yet he gave me the impression of being the spiritual type, which I admired anyway and seemed to me right away that he was Mr. Right!⁷⁴

In Lisagorska's eyes, by December 1943, Jacobs not only represented the depth and breadth of Yeshiva education and piety but also the ideal of "a normal Manchester English young man." Given the varied cultural commitments that both Jacobs and Lisagorska held, their home was a remarkable snapshot of the diverse forces at work in Anglo-Jewry in the early 1940s. Their wedding itself reflected a "curious blend of Lithuanian Yiddish and Western English customs," a balancing act that would extend not just through the nuptial festivities, but in the months and years that followed.⁷⁵

The significance of Jacobs's marriage to Lisagorska is of far more import than a mere romantic footnote to our study's subject. The fact that Jacobs married "out" of the yeshiva world would in no small way shape his institutional and epistemological commitments in the years to come. With his only points of reference being his nominally observant home and the strict observance of the yeshiva and Gateshead, Jacobs had never really conceived of an observance pattern otherwise. For instance,

⁷⁴Shulamit Jacobs, Diary entry, 295-296.

⁷⁵HWI, 65. A diary entry from Jacobs wedding also provides an opportunity for a reflection on some cultural points of difference amongst Jacobs' yeshiva teachers: "Rabbi Dubov objected to my wearing a buttonhole because of *Hukkat Hagoyim* (the law/custom of the non-Jews) but Rabbi Dessler ridiculed the idea or appeared to do so. This incident typical of their different points of view." Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, March 28, 1944. Even the festive week following the wedding (*sheva brochos*) hosted by their community observed by the recently married couple, are themselves, a reflection of the worlds from which Laib and Shula came. Jacobs recounts the various nights, some celebrated amongst the yeshiva community and others in the religious Zionist community. Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, March 30-April 2, 1944.

shortly after their marriage, Jacobs reflected on the observance patterns of his new wife in regards to family purity laws:

I was surprised to hear from Shula that ordinary English Jewesses who move in neither Yeshiva nor Machazkei Hadas circles yet keep the Dinim. Agreeably surprised.⁷⁶

Shula introduced her husband to the possibility of religious observance outside of the Eastern European Yeshiva world. So too, it would be through her *Bachad* credentials that her yeshiva-trained husband would find ready acceptance (and eventually leadership) in the Zionist circles of Manchester. From their very beginnings, the new young couple would exist in the orbits of Jacobs's yeshiva community, the Manchester community of Jacobs's birth and the ongoing spheres of Zionist activity. With financial assistance from Shula's brother Yankel, the Jacobs's family settled into their new home, with Jacobs studying full time at the yeshiva, a peripatetic and increasingly popular teacher throughout the community.

Jacobs's autobiography provides an important, though as we shall see, incomplete portrait of these idyllic years of the newly married couple in Manchester and the multiple worlds in which he functioned:

I certainly enjoyed it [daily Talmud study] immensely and I believe that they [Machzikei Hadas] did too, even though I was suspect because I was clean-shaven and worse, wore my hair long in front, which is utterly wrong in Hasidic eyes both because it is said to be evidence of arrogance and vanity and, more especially, because long hair in the place of the head tefillin is said to act as an interposition. For all that, I was tolerated because they liked the way I taught, and, perhaps, because they were amazed to find an ordinary boy with a working-class background sufficiently familiar with the Talmud to teach it at a Hasidic synagogue and whose wife, born in England, wore a sheitel."⁷⁷

⁷⁶Louis Jacobs. Diary entry, May 12, 1944.

⁷⁷HWI, 67.

Jacobs's autobiography goes on to offer an assessment of the pragmatic pressures that prompted him to turn away from learning for learning's sake towards a practical rabbinate, culminating in the move to London:

My parents were astonished that, instead of pursuing University studies to equip me for a rabbinic career, I was content to be supported by my in-laws without thought at all for the future. My father, in particular, found it contrary to his working-class principles. He called me a lazy bounder (he used a rather stronger word).⁷⁸

In retrospect, Jacobs identified his working class family ethic and demands for self sufficiency and university education as the impetus for moving forward with his education and career.⁷⁹

While the above familial and sociological pressures were no doubt central to Jacobs's decision-making at the time, his diary entries from this period suggest a more complex picture of the social and intellectual forces guiding his career choices. Jacobs's willingness to teach in a variety of contexts was not as seamless as he would later recall. Shortly after his wedding, Jacobs logs the following reflection on his *shiurim* (teaching sessions) to the Zionist (*Bnai Akiba*) and ultra-orthodox (*Agudah*) communities:

On Pesach said shiur at Bnai Akiba. Everything was all right.. On same day I spoke to the Agudah. G.H.⁸⁰ [Godel H] I am told remarked with

⁷⁸HWI, 67.

⁷⁹Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005. Shula's diary reveals her own misgivings regarding Jacobs's life of learning purely for its own sake: "Laib did teach considerably more when we were married, but for him it was the learning, more and more. I thought this was not right and I kept pressing for him to give, to teach others and not to keep it all for himself." Shulamit Jacobs, Diary Entry, 298.

⁸⁰Due to Jacobs's shorthand and lack of contextual information, not all of the figures referred to in Jacobs's diaries are easily identified. R.D., R.Y, presumably refer to Rabbi Dessler, Rabbi Yudel (Yehuda Segal) etc. G. denotes Godol, literally "great/large" a respectful term signaling someone great in

severe disapproval of my teaching at the Bnai Akiba. It is so very difficult to be a “Yid” [Jew] with everyone and I see no reason to try to do so. I suppose that according to our Torah every man should do “what is right in his own eyes” and not care for what others ‘think.’ On the other hand I don’t know if it is very wise for me in my present position to awaken the distrust of the ultra-orthodox elements. Perhaps it would be more prudent and far more wiser to watch my step especially when people like G.H. are about, but on the other hand I don’t know.⁸¹

Jacobs, caught in the pull of the complex tapestry of Manchester Jewry in the 1940s, provides extraordinary insight into the fault lines between its constituent communities.

Nearly a year later, Jacobs would be able to clearly identify the points of tension embedded in his hometown:

...Or take again the case of the Mizrahi. This movement and its sister movements, particularly the Bachad, is doing wonderful work among the youth of today. Indeed, they are really the only movement to do anything at all for Yiddishkeit yet they are either completely ignored by our great Rabbonim or in many cases vigorously attacked, usually behind their backs. This is a very great and difficult problem.⁸²

It is evident from the above recollection that Jacobs’s relationships with the Manchester Zionist Organizations, both now and in the years ahead would have a profound impact on his thought. More than Zionism itself, which (as we shall see) play only a minor role in Jacobs’s theological corpus, Jacobs’s theological spirit owes a debt to the Zionist institutional structures then present in Manchester Jewry. Not altogether unlike Martin Buber’s relationship with the Bar Kochba Association in Germany of the 1920s, the Manchester Zionist organizations of the 1940s and 50s permitted Jacobs a forum to interpret Judaism and Jewish spirituality with a sophistication and spirit that was not

Talmudic learning. In this case, the unidentified *Godol’s* last name would seem to begin with an “H,” most likely Godol Hailpern.

⁸¹Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, March 31-May 12, 1944.

⁸²Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, February 13, 1945.

overly beholden to an Orthodox formulation of Judaism.⁸³ Jacobs was fortunate to be part of a coterie of rabbis and scholars whose primary consideration was to articulate a dynamic Judaism rendered vital both by dint of its sophistication and its relevance to young Jews living in the wake of the Shoah and the frenzy of activity surrounding the establishment of the modern state of Israel.

A rather important and representative example of the Manchester community and its effects on Jacobs can be found in diary notes on a book discussion led by Jacobs's colleague from the Manchester Yeshiva, Rabbi Raphael Margolies:

The discussion went on for quite a time and I noticed that Altmann tried and succeeded to monopolize the discussion. He certainly knows his stuff. He mentioned that certain Yiddish writers in America write and advise a "Return to Ghetto Life" - they advocate isolation as far as humanly possible. He said that a man like the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva agreed with this view and he admires him for it. He however thinks that for a man with a liberal education this attitude towards life is a sheer impossibility. He asked me to read a paper on *Toldot Halakha* by C. Chernovitz (sic).⁸⁴

The above reflection is Jacobs's first documented exchange with Rabbi Dr. Alexander Altmann (1906-1987), a formidable community presence whose influence on the impressionable Jacobs would grow significant in the years to come. Altmann, the Manchester Communal Rabbi, was a graduate of the Hildesheimer Rabinerseminar and the University of Berlin, and represented an altogether different brand of Orthodoxy than the Eastern European ilk of the Manchester Yeshiva. Altmann's cautious remarks regarding the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva and his insular world view are remarkable for

⁸³On Buber and the Bar Kochba Association, see Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity*, The Culture of Jewish Modernity (Detroit: Wayne State, 1991), 84.

⁸⁴Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, March 31 – May 12, 1944.

the insight they suggest as to the religious politics present between the Central European Altmann and the Yeshiva world.

Even more significant would be Altmann's reading suggestion to Jacobs. More than a history of the codification of Jewish Law, the work, *Toldot Halakha* (The Development of Jewish Law) by Prof. Chaim Tchernowitz, is a sustained exploration of the degree that Jewish law has been shaped by its historical context. Jacobs's future studies on the historic development of halakha would in many respects build on the work of Tchernowitz, a debt that Jacobs would make explicit in the first few pages of his extended study of the subject. As will become evident, Jacobs's central thesis—that *halakha*, far from a closed interpretive system, is subject to the context and temperaments of the legislators of every age—owes a profound debt to Tchernowitz, by way of Altmann.⁸⁵

In fact, on the same day as the abovementioned presentation by Margolies, Jacobs went home to jot down his own reflections on the influence of historical context on *halakha*. Jacobs writes:

I thought a lot about the theory of the development of halakha and have found one or two proofs in *Kiddushim* and *Shabbat*. One in *tosefot* at the beginning of *perek sheni* about *ketana bizman hazeh* and one in *Shabbat* in *bameh madlikin* about *ner hannukah bizman hazeh* and also *Rama* [Rabbi Moses Isserles] about *daluka b'shabbat*.⁸⁶

Although Jacobs's diary notes do not permit us an airtight reconstruction of his thought process, the common thread shared by the three cited references indicate that they

⁸⁵Chaim Tchernowitz, *Toldot Ha-Halakhah* (New York: Hava'ad Le-hotsat Kol kitve Rav Tsair, 1934). (Hebrew) Louis Jacobs. *A Tree of Life: Diversity, Flexibility, and Creativity in Jewish Law*. (Oxford: Littman Library, 1984), 1-3.

⁸⁶Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, March 31 – May 12, 1944.

served in Jacobs mind as representative examples of Tchernowitz's thesis, namely, the manner by which the "conditions of the day" shaped Jewish law. For example, the third proof of "*daluka b'shabbat*" (*Shulchan Aruch, Orech Hayyim 336:26*) refers to a gloss of the sixteenth century Polish codifier of law Rabbi Moses Isserles (1525-1572), who modified aspects of Sabbath observance due to the fact that his community, unlike that of the codifier of law Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488-1575), existed in a predominantly non-Jewish society. So too, the proof concerning Hanukkah candles (b. Shabbat 21b) serves as an example of changes in Jewish practice as cultural conditions context insist. Under normal circumstances, the Hanukkah candles were to be placed visibly in the window of a home, thus fulfilling the commandment to publicly proclaim the Hanukkah miracle. However, in times of danger (*sha'at ha'sakanah*), namely when the condition of the Jewish community was more precarious, an allowance was granted to place the kindled lights well within the home.

We are on far more secure ground in unpacking the issue at hand in regard to the first *Tosafot*⁸⁷ mentioned (b. Kiddushin 41a), also referring to a modification in Jewish law "due to the times." In fact, Jacobs makes explicit the import of the passage concerning *ketana bizman hazeh* (a minor girl in these times) over forty years later in his *Tree of Life*:

The Talmud is opposed to child marriages, that is, to a father exercising the biblical right of marrying off his minor daughter before she is old enough to choose for herself the man she wishes to marry. This, too, French Jewry ignored. Here the defense by the tosafists is to admit that child marriages are unlawful, though valid if carried out. Yet in the

⁸⁷Tosafot – "'additions' to the Babylonian Talmud; the glosses, now printed together with the text in practically all editions, produced by the French and German scholars during the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries." Louis Jacobs, Encyclopedia entry, Louis Jacobs, *A Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 565-566.

harsh conditions of the time, the tosafists postulate, it is essential that such marriages be allowed. If child marriages were outlawed, the opportunities for marriage might not later arise and poor girls would remain unmarried all their lives.⁸⁸

All these examples, from the time of the Talmud through the *Shulchan Aruch*, illustrate that changes in law were sanctioned due to changing environmental conditions.

Whether or not Jacobs considered the impact of social conditions on *halakha* prior to this fateful day will never be known. Yet with only a little hyperbole, the events described in Jacobs's diary that day represent an extraordinary pivot point of his intellectual and theological development. With the sanction of the Communal Rabbi, Jacobs was encouraged to reconsider the very guiding philosophy of the entire *halakhic* enterprise. In his own, later words:

...*halakhah*... far from being entirely self-sufficient and self authenticating, is influenced by the attitudes, conscious or unconscious, of its practitioners towards the wider demands and ideals of Judaism and by the social, economic, theological and political conditions that occur when the ostensibly purely legal norms and methodology are developed.⁸⁹

It is no wonder that Jacobs entitled the day's diary entry: "Important Things."

Given the multiple identities that Jacobs claimed and the context that encouraged him to consider the conflicting implications of these identities, it would not be long before Jacobs would be prompted to reflect on these tensions, thus taking the first steps towards constructing an epistemological and vocational ideal capable of negotiating the forces brewing within him. A diary entry speaks directly to Jacobs's emergent identity crisis:

⁸⁸Louis Jacobs, *Tree of Life*, 113.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

The other day I had a long discussion with R.Y. [Rabbi Yehuda Segal] on the subject of the necessity of Talmidei Chachomim [traditionally learned students] in this country having a good general education which can only be obtained by a university degree. In the end he admitted that it was a most necessary thing but he said “der kin dos ton” [*you can do it*] A not very valid objection. I am beginning to realize that R.Y. [Reb Yehuda Segal] and R.G. [Rabbi I. Golditch] and G.H. are of a different type to me. They have been brought up on strictly orthodox lives and consequently they view life in a totally different way to me. Quite a lot of what they do they do either because of their father’s training or because of what they saw and learnt at the Yeshivas they studied in abroad. I didn’t study in a *Haimeshir* [traditional / old world] yeshiva and for better or for worse I must make my own path in life as I am completely unable to model it on any known standard - the standard of the Yeshiva being notoriously low. Thus the only possible way for me is to try my very best to keep the Torah but it is quite obvious that I must fall into the mistake of supposing that everything they don’t do I shouldn’t do or vice-versa.⁹⁰

For the first time, Jacobs gives private expression to his inability to compartmentalize the diverse forces embedded within him. Despite his lifetime gratitude for his Yeshiva training, Jacobs readily understood its limited intellectual horizons, the Manchester Yeshiva being a weak version of the old world yeshivot. Jacobs’s consternation lies both in his insatiable intellectual appetite and his growing recognition of the degree to which his cultural points of reference differ from those of his yeshiva peers. For Jacobs, the answer to both problems would be found in exploring higher secular education, and not surprisingly, it is in this very diary entry in which Jacobs writes of his decision to try to study for a University Degree. Within the month, he would replace his three hour daily study with Rabbi Yehuda Segal with intense preparation for the special entrance exam at the University of London.

Soon thereafter, the opposing forces within Jacobs and his objection to compartmentalizing them would grow more acute. It would be these tensions more than

⁹⁰Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, June 13, 1944.

the outside pressures of his father that would prompt Jacobs to look beyond Manchester. Indeed, his diary from this time records multiple conversations that Jacobs had with his teachers seeking to ease his angst. Particularly poignant would be an exchange with his beloved teacher, Rabbi Dessler:

I had a discussion some time ago with R.D. [Rabbi Dessler] as to how far we are bound to the ideas and outlook of life of the *gedolim* [Talmudic Giants] of Lithuania and Poland. It seemed to me that although they were the great Hachamamim, many of their ideas (or at least the interpretation that we in England have of those ideas) are rather unpleasant and unsatisfactory. For example their attitude to secular studies...I know from personal experience that one can get a great deal of sound common sense, a more vivid outlook on life and a greater appreciation of the depth and wonder of life, not to mention a guide of perception from secular studies. The outlook of many of the *gedolim* as expressed to me is altogether too naïve and unsophisticated for the twentieth century world. The term “narrow minded” has been much abused but I cannot help feeling that their outlook fails to enhance every aspect of life and it seems to narrow everything down to the four amos [cubits] of halakha. I know of course of the saying of the rabbis “Eyn l’kbh Eleh Arbah Amot Shel Halakha”[To God exists only the four ells of Halakha]...but I feel that this has some other, wider interpretation that that of such men as R.S. [Rabbi Segal] or even R.D.⁹¹

Why it would be that only now Jacobs would begin to find fault in his Eastern European forbearers is not altogether clear. Perhaps simply being newly married and ordained, Jacobs’s thinking would become increasingly independent. After all, it was only a few years earlier that Jacobs had unsuccessfully sought to study at the very feet of those whose ideas he would now find so unsatisfactory. Despite his profound respect and admiration for his teachers, Jacobs began to chafe at the limitations of their world view and the world from which they came.

A noteworthy record of Jacobs’s defense of tradition is retained in an exchange of letters in the Anglo-Zionist publication *Chayenu*. The Anglo-Jewish historian, Cecil

⁹¹Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, February 13, 1945.

Roth's article on "The Ninth of Ab in Jewish History," enumerates the major tragedies associated with this day throughout Jewish history, noting "Of course, there are certainly legendary associations with the day which may be dismissed as purely fictional. Thus for example, rabbinic phantasy [sic] asserted that it was upon the Ninth of Ab that the divine decree went out against their forefathers in the wilderness of Sinai that all should die without seeing the Promised land..."⁹² Attacked in the following edition by letter writer Joe Winter for making a statement challenging the historical and sacred nature of rabbinic literature, Roth replied, "The writer of this letter [Joe Winter] is of course, welcome to accept this statement of history as he pleases, and those of Rabba bar Bar Hanna as geography."⁹³ Roth, by invoking the fantastical and hyperbolic accounts of the Talmud's seafaring adventurer of Rabba bar Bar Hannah, signaled the minimal historical value he placed in such rabbinic accounts.⁹⁴ The inference to be drawn from Roth's comment is that both the calendrical and geographical accounts retained in rabbinic literature are of equal, and it would seem, negligible historical worth.

Jacobs's follow up letter to the Roth/Winter exchange is noteworthy, both for his defense of the historicity of the rabbinic accounts and the cautious tone he uses in his defense:

As I see it, an Orthodox Jew is obliged to accept all statements of the Gemarah as being literally true unless they offend against common sense

⁹²Cecil Roth, "The Ninth of Ab in Jewish History," *Chayenu*, August (1944), 3-4.

⁹³C. Roth, Letter to the Editor, *Chayenu*, September, 1944.

⁹⁴For a collection of "Traveler's Tales" concerning Rabbah bar Bar Hanah, see Hayyim Nahman Bialik, Yehoshua Hana Rawnitzki, and William G. Braude, *The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 784-786.

and reason if they are so taken. *Iyen B'Rambam b'hakdmato le'perek helek* [see Rambam's introduction to perek helek]

The Rabbah bar Bar Hannah stories were obviously not intended to be taken literally, but we have no grounds for assuming this of the Gemarah in Mesichta Taanis concerning the Ninth of Ab.

In any case, such terms as “rabbinic Phantasy” or “myth” would give offence to an Orthodox Jew even if they were said of the stories of Rabbah bar bar Hanna. The Orthodox Jew believes with the Rambam that such stories contain the *Sodot Hatorah* [esoteric meaning of the Torah] and to dismiss them as myths is to lose sight of their containing a hidden esoteric meaning. There is, for the Orthodox Jew, nothing in common between the strangest “Agadots” [legends] of our Rabbis and the Arabian nights' entertainments, and Rabbah bar bar Hannah was not an ancient Commander Campbell.⁹⁵

Given the admixture of rabbinic, medieval and Anglo points of reference, the import of this exchange may be easily lost. Jacobs is cautiously seeking to steer a course between the Scylla of scriptural literalism and Charybdis of “rabbinic phantasy.” On the one hand, Jacobs insists (in keeping with his citation of Maimonides) that not only are the historical accounts of the Ninth of Ab to be considered factual, but that the “Rabbah bar Bar Hannah” stories also contained a “hidden esoteric meaning.” No mere entertainments, the Orthodox Jew insists on the enduring truth embedded in such accounts, independent of their actual historical referents. Nevertheless, Jacobs makes clear that the tales of Rabbah bar Bar Hannah were decidedly not to be taken literally, in no way analogous to the real life adventures of the Royal Navy Commander, A.B. Campbell (1881-1966).⁹⁶ Given the context in which Jacobs lived, it is not at all remarkable that he should take offense at attacks on the truth claims of rabbinic literature. What is noteworthy, however, is the manner in which he insists on qualifying

⁹⁵Louis Jacobs, Letter to the Editor. *Chayenu*, November (1944).

⁹⁶On Campbell, See Anne Pimlott, "Campbell, Archibald Bruce (1881–1966)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

such a defense by the claims of “common sense and reason.” The youthful Jacobs, it would seem, was stumbling to formulate a hermeneutic attuned to the competing impulses of the authority of sacred texts and the historical worth of their contents, a task that would occupy him for quite some time.

Throughout it all, however, Jacobs would always recognize that there was no place better than a yeshiva when it came to acquiring the skills of textual analysis and the “fear of God” essential to any interpretation of Judaism. Jacobs’s first eponymous article (under the name “Ben-Zvi”) would actually be a spirited defense of the yeshiva world against its detractors in the rest of the Anglo-Jewish world.⁹⁷ The first half of Jacobs’s article reconstructs the thoughts of “ordinary English Jews” and their objections to yeshivot as citadels of extremism and training facilities with no apparent vocational goal, arguments that we can presume Jacobs did not have to reach far to reconstruct. For Ben Zvi/Jacobs, the *Talmidei Hakhamim* produced by the yeshivot more than justified their existence. In addition to serving as authoritative decisors of Jewish law and ritual, the yeshiva “products” were central to the ongoing vitality of Anglo-Jewish life:

...if there is to be a religious future for Anglo Jewry the English Jew has got to learn not to be satisfied with a weak, diluted, shallow and spineless Judaism but he must return to the vigorous, energetic, stern, vitalized Judaism of tradition – and only the Talmud Chochem [sic] can lead in that return.⁹⁸

As will become evident, Jacobs’s considerations regarding his own education would always find expression in his recommendations for Anglo-Jewry as a whole. Jacobs

⁹⁷“Son of Zvi,” Jacobs’s father’s Hebrew Name.

⁹⁸Louis Jacobs, *Torah V’Avodah*, 1944.

would formulate the strengths and weaknesses of his own training as vocational recommendations for all Anglo-Jewry to consider. Thus, while recognizing his Yeshiva debt when contemplating the decision to pursue a University Education, Jacobs clearly recognized the necessity of such a project if he would be able to address the needs of the aforementioned “English Jew.” Again, reflecting in his diary:

If I allow myself to concentrate on God and Gemorrah alone I must be inextricably bound with the foreign type of Jew and almost completely cut off from the English Type. No one knows more than I do the supreme advantages of a “haimesher” Yiddishkeit with its English counterpart but my nature does not allow me to become part and parcel a 100% “haimesher” Yid...even if assuming that I would be a mere mediocrity in secular subjects but together with my knowledge of Torah I would be something different from the common run of reverends and also different from the old school of rabbonim and who knows if apart from enabling me to get a good job this won't help me to do something to higher the state of Yiddishkeit in this country.⁹⁹

In considering Jacobs biography, one is inevitably faced with the question of what prompted a yeshiva-trained rabbi to pursue a university degree. The reasons were manifold and will always remain a bit elusive. And yet, it is clear that in Jacobs's own reflections such a course of study represented a critical cultural point of access. To put it plainly, for Jacobs, a university education was a tool towards bridging the cultural tensions present in Anglo-Jewry and the necessary diploma to get a job serving the “English type” of English Jew. Jacobs had never considered the implications that critical inquiry would have on sacred text study; indeed the very purpose of the degree was to provide him with the professional credentials to serve a “Torah-true Judaism” to a wider English community, something a yeshiva-trained rabbi seemingly could not do.

⁹⁹Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, July 9, 1944.

Thus, Jacobs's first published letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* may be understood as his earliest public step towards articulating a vision of rabbinic education that could mediate the competing needs and demographics of Anglo Jewry:

...May I respectfully suggest that what our community really needs is not a new Jews' College but a modern Yeshiva. Every sane-minded person will readily admit the importance of many of the ideals that the College stands for. It is most important that our Ministers should possess a good secular education. It is also important that they should be capable of delivering inspiring sermons. But these things are good only when backed with sound Torah knowledge. It is here that Jews' College fails; it has succeeded in producing a new type; modeled on the parson and parish priest, but in the process it has robbed us of our Talmudim Chachamim and Lomdim. It has divested the Jewish leader of his "Charifus" [sharp intellect] and "Bekeeus," [breadth of learning] it has stripped his Lomdus [learnedness] from him and has given him in their stead a charming manner, a certain energy and way of getting things done, and ignorance of real Torah. It is not only Jews' College that is at fault. Our English yeshivas have been guilty though in lesser degree. The Yeshivas have refused to recognize the facts that their exclusion of everything except Torah could not possibly succeed in the England of To-day. England is a land where, as Chesterton pointed out, "a breach of good manners is looked upon with more abhorrence than a breach of morals"; people are less shocked at the man who doesn't believe in G-d than at the man who eats peas with his knife. The Yeshivas blind their eyes to this. They go on trying to instill a love of Torah and Yirat Shamayim in their pupils without giving them a practical philosophy of life. They turn out, in modern England, people who have practical education, fitting them for a life in a Polish "Klain Shtettel." If we can be forgiven the irreverence, we may say that the English Yeshivas provide the Cheshire cat without its cheerful grin. Jews' College provides the grin without the cat. The time is surely ripe for a new institution, one that will combine the deep piety and love of Torah Lishmoh of the Yeshiva with the polish, the modern methods, and the efficiency of the Jews' College.¹⁰⁰

Referencing this letter, Jacobs's later autobiography expresses regret at his youthful lack of politic in publicly critiquing his alma matter and potential future employer. And yet in suggesting an institution that combines the methods of both, Jacobs believed

¹⁰⁰JC, July 28, 1944.

himself to be merely expressing the need for Anglo-Jewry to conceive of an educational setting designed to produce religious leaders capable of serving Anglo-Jewry, a responsible if not altogether necessary desideratum. Jacobs recorded in his diary his delight and trepidation at seeing his first piece of writing in print in the *Jewish Chronicle*:

My motive in writing this letter was not purely altruistic but was mainly occasioned by a desire to “get on” and in particular to get known.... I am slightly apprehensive of the reception that my letter will receive. The main reason for my fear is that I may be *ohver* [liable], on *Miberah d’shatah beh...* [One should not sully the well from which one drinks...] After all the Yeshiva has been very good to me and it may seem irresponsible and unfair way repaying their kindness. On the other hand there are my earnest opinions and I will have to publish them sooner or later so I may as well do so now. Anyhow the die is cast and I have yet to see the results.¹⁰¹

Given Jacobs’s lifetime of public writing, it is noteworthy to observe his awareness that the popular press could serve as a vehicle for career advancement. Jacobs’s enthusiasm for writing is recorded in one of Shula’s diary entries when she noted: “Laib stayed up in the night with ideas for writing, he wants to be a bit of a journalist too.”¹⁰² Given his gift for clear expression and the ease by which he could place popular English cultural and literary idiom into conversation with Jewish sources and ideals, Jacobs’s writing would, beginning with this letter, forever find a warm reception in the Anglo-Jewish press.

As Jacobs’s theological and vocational angst would urge him to “get on,” he turned his sights to London. Jacobs applied for the position of lecturer in Bible and Talmud at Jews’ College, a position that undoubtedly would have allowed him not only

¹⁰¹Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, July 28, 1944.

¹⁰²Shulamit Jacobs, Diary entry, August 25, 1944.

to earn a living while pursuing university studies, but also afford him the chance to put his own imprimatur on the very institution whose curriculum and product he had just publicly critiqued. Yet with no training or education beyond his rabbinic ordination, it is not surprising that the application of this young yeshiva graduate was rejected.¹⁰³ It would be less than twenty years before Jacobs would once again be brushed back from Jews' College. This time, the dynamic between Jacobs and Jews' College will have shifted so dramatically that he would be rendered ineligible to teach Bible, ironically because his insistence on applying the methods of critical inquiry was deemed unacceptable within the parameters of the institution responsible for training the Anglo Orthodox rabbinate.

Finally, it should not be missed that it was during these months that the Jacobs's family would expect a first child. A job and a university education represented self sufficiency. Jacobs's well-to-do and religiously fervent brother-in-law, Yankel Rosen, supported the Jacobs family, believing that in doing so he was not merely extending kindness to his sister and her family, but helping sustain a 'Torah True Judaism' as represented by the yeshiva world and one of its finest products. Jacobs's diary records "Yank's" dubious reaction to his plans to go to University:

When I mentioned this idea to Yank he gave me a lecture "as a brother" on the greatness of sitting down and learning. Well, first even if I could become really great – through just sitting down here in Manchester, I would still prefer to earn my own living – "a small thing no doubt, but

¹⁰³On the position, see the job posting in the *Jewish Chronicle*, December 15, 1944. The draft of Jacobs's letter of application is kept in his personal notes, with the following self description: "I have studied for a long period in the Manchester Talmudical College and of recent years I took a course in advanced Jewish Studies at the Institute for Higher Rabbinical Studies. This year I attained my rabbinical diploma." Jacobs Archive. Notification to Jacobs of receipt of his application to Jews' College is dated December 19, 1944. Correspondence dated January 17, 1945 informs Jacobs that the College regretfully will not make use of his services. Jacobs Archive.

my own.” I don’t want it be *Neheme Dkisufa*¹⁰⁴ ...but apart from all this if the position is what I imagine it to be – a position that has plenty of scope for a capable man – then I can advance by means of this position...

Despite Yank’s council, Jacobs’s desire for self sufficiency and growing ambition to become a paradigm of yeshiva-trained rabbinic leadership capable of serving the English Jew, all encouraged him to look beyond his hometown of Manchester. Indeed, his professional ambitions and intellectual strivings were increasingly at odds with the stifling context of his present position, prompting the young couple to seize upon a job opportunity in London as assistant to Rabbi Eli Munk (1901-1978):

Shula says that this is “*besher*” and she thinks that it is the chance of a lifetime so I wrote to him to arrange a meeting. I feel that I would very much like to be on my own feet and earn my own living especially as the work is the kind of work I always wanted to do and Munk writes that it is not too demanding. I have dreams of starting new movements, magazines, shiurim and so on and I hope that something comes of them.¹⁰⁵

Jacobs would accept the position with Rabbi Munk. The prospect of being self sufficient, immersing himself in secular studies, remaining committed to traditional learning and living away from the parochial tensions produced by his profile in both the religious Zionist and the yeshiva world were more than enough to draw him to London. Jacobs could sense that new horizons of Jewish leadership could only be realized through the freedoms and opportunities that lay beyond Manchester. One month and a

¹⁰⁴*Neheme Dkisufa*, ‘bread of shame.’ A kabbalistic concept that Jacobs learned from Rabbi Dessler. Here it is employed by Jacobs’s reference to the satisfaction derived from that which is earned through self sufficiency, as opposed to “unearned bread.” As Jacobs explains in various writings, this doctrine is used to explain the point of the probationary period of this world, given the eternal bliss of the world to come. Man, created by God with an independent spirit, “prefers to eat the morsel of bread [*Neheme Dkisufa*] that he has earned and is his own [this world] to all the good food and choice wines given to him as a gift at a rich man’s table [the world to come]. Cf. HWI, 57, BRD, 182-184.

¹⁰⁵Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, February 13, 1945.

day following the birth of his son, Jacobs began his rabbinic duties in London and, a few days later, sat for entrance exams at London University.¹⁰⁶

London and the German Jewish Tradition

In the spring of 1945, Jacobs began to work as Rabbi Eli Munk's assistant at the Golder's Green Synagogue, London.¹⁰⁷ Munk, and to a greater degree Altmann after him, represent a critical series of Central European influences upon Jacobs, altogether different to what he had experienced in Manchester. The son of Rabbi Ezra Munk of the Berlin Adas Yisroel Congregation in Koenigsberg, Eli Munk was the *talmid haviv* (favored student) of Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman (1843-1921) at the Hildesheimer *Rabbinerseminar* in Berlin.¹⁰⁸ Upon receiving his rabbinic diploma from the *Rabbinerseminar* and a doctorate on the poetry of Wordsworth from Marburg University, Munk arrived in London for a temporary position. As his entrenchment in Anglo-Jewish life grew and the clouds over German-Jewry gathered, Munk's temporary position turned permanent, and he went on to create the Golder's Green Beit Hamedrash. "Munk's Shul," was "composed in the main of refugees whose backgrounds were predominantly the great Orthodox communities in Germany."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶Ivor Jacobs was born March 30, 1945. Jacobs began his duties in London one month later on April 30, registering at the University shortly thereafter. Shulamit Jacobs, Undated Diary notes.

¹⁰⁷The search committee had narrowed itself to two promising young rabbis, Jacobs and Immanuel Jakobovits, the future Chief Rabbi. Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

¹⁰⁸Shischa, Adolf, *The Blessings of Eliyahu* (New York: Ktav, 1982), 20.

¹⁰⁹J. Carlebach, "Impact of German Jews," in *Second Chance*, 420-421.

Unlike the Manchester models of a socially and intellectual insular Yeshiva world, or nominally Orthodox working class, Munk's community was Jacobs's first exposure to a classical brand of German Orthodoxy that sought to maintain both Western values and traditional Jewish learning.¹¹⁰ Derived predominantly from the *Austrittsgemeinde* of the German Orthodox communities, Munk's community sought to express the Hirschian ideal of *Torah and Derekh Eretz* (Torah and secular learning). This independent congregation established by a "group of orthodox refugees, eschewing the extreme orthodoxy of Aath Yisroel or the liberal reform communities" was marked by a "neo-Prussian emphasis on decorum, discipline and liturgical completion and exactitude."¹¹¹

More than the particulars of congregational practice, the significance of Munk's personality and congregation lay in what Jacobs saw as the attempt to balance the ideals of Judaism and western thought and civilization.

¹¹⁰W. Rubinstein's study of German Jewry's immigration and reception in Great Britain, estimates that central European immigration during these years increased the size of Anglo-Jewry from 380,000 in 1935 to 440,000, with London itself receiving as many as 30,000 to 40,000 Jews. See Rubinstein, *A History of the Jews in the English-Speaking World: Great Britain*, 364. As was the case of Eastern European immigrants, the influx of Jewish lay and rabbinic leadership to England was to have an enduring impact on the character of Anglo-Jewry. For example, Bernard Homa in his study of Anglo-Orthodoxy, notes that these refugees fortified the entire range of British Jewish life from the strictly Orthodox to the Liberal. See B. Homa, "Orthodoxy," 38. As far as rabbinic leadership was concerned, under the chairmanship of Otto Schiff, the Advisory Committee of the Admission for Jewish Ecclesiastical Officers admitted more than 30 Orthodox Rabbis in the 1930's. While many of these rabbis found positions in existing pulpits (Felix Carlebach – Hendon/Manchester, Wolf Gottlieb – Glasgow), some, like Rabbi Munk, established their own synagogues. See J. Magonet, "Refugee Rabbis who changed Anglo-Jewry," *JC*, Sept. 1, 1989. The ambivalent relationship between the more severe form of German Orthodoxy to the native orthodox institutions and leadership, inevitably served to pull Anglo-Orthodoxy, already weary from Eastern European pressures, further to the right. The Golder's Green Beth Hamidrash (GGBH) expressed this ambivalence to Anglo-Jewry in various forms. For example the name of Munk's congregation itself, which by designating itself as a place of study and not a "congregation," the GGBH could not or would not joint the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Administratively, however, Munk accepted the primacy of the Chief Rabbinate on matters such as marriage registration. See *Blessings of Eliyahu*, 33.

¹¹¹B. Homa, *Orthodoxy*, 38.

Among the congregant's were renowned lawyers, university teachers, scientists, writers and other well educated Jews who yielded to none in their scrupulous observance to Jewish law. Rabbi Munk had obtained a PhD in Germany on Wordsworth, thus providing a link with Englishness, which for obvious reasons, he was glad to foster after the Holocaust. In many ways Dr. Munk would have qualified as a Modern Orthodox rabbi, the sense of one who accepts that European literature, art and music are good in themselves, although in function and to some extent in outlook he belonged to Haredism, otherwise known as ultra orthodoxy.¹¹²

Weary of the Manchester models he was accustomed to, Jacobs found in Munk “a successful combination of loyalty to Orthodox Judaism in all its ramification and the adoption of Western culture and values.”¹¹³ The community ethos and elegance made a sizeable impression on the young rabbi and his wife:

Every Sunday afternoon, the congregation's intelligentsia would meet for philosophical discussions on Judaism at the home of Abba Horowitz...The discussions ranged far and wide. I did not know at what to be more astonished and admiring: their erudition, their simple faith or their thorough acquaintance with Western mores. It was an experience for Shula and me in beautiful homes to be served tea poured from silver tea-pots and delicious kosher pastries from exquisite china services.¹¹⁴

More than just serving as his first pulpit experience, Jacobs's reflections on his tenure at Munk's shul would indicate that they opened the door to a social and intellectual world, hitherto unknown to him. No longer beholden by the Yeshiva world's resistance to secular education, Munk's community served to encourage Jacobs in his university pursuits, albeit not necessarily in what would become his eventual area of interest – Semitic studies. Indeed, it is critical to point out that the western educated ideal of this community infused by the ideal of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* precluded studies which

¹¹²Louis Jacobs, "Four Rabbinic Positions in Anglo Jewry," in *The Jewish Year Book*, ed. Stephen Massil (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000), 76-77.

¹¹³HWI, 70.

¹¹⁴Ibid, 70-71.

would be at odds with traditional faith. In other words, whereas Munk's work on Wordsworth was altogether commendable, Jacobs's studies in Semitics and biblical criticism were decidedly not.

In addition to his congregational duties, Jacobs's tenure with Munk involved administration and teaching duties as Rosh Yeshiva (dean) of the Golder's Green Yeshiva, which would go on to become the short lived Yeshiva, "Shaarei Zion." This effort served ostensibly as "bridging academy for those whose command of Hebrew and whose general background were not equal to the approach and rigor of the traditional yeshiva, but who wanted to further their Jewish education nevertheless."¹¹⁵ Under the auspices of Munk, the Federation of Synagogues, and the financial support of Ashe Lincoln,¹¹⁶ this learning venture begun in the summer of 1946, holding its gala opening on January 19, 1947 with the stated mission:

After one to two years, he [the matriculated student] is expected to have acquired a good working knowledge and to learn on without assistance. Studies in the Holy Scriptures, Law, Ethics and History are designed to enrich his Jewish outlook and guide his conduct. He will leave the Yeshivah to embark on his career, whatever be his calling, with a consciousness of his task as a Jew.¹¹⁷

Careful to express its mission without entering into competition with the established yeshivot or Jews' College, the new Yeshiva had the more modest goal of creating a learned laity in England. Indeed, the social agenda of Munk and Jacobs's Yeshivah was to serve an Anglo-Jewry possessing commitments both in and out of the Jewish world.

¹¹⁵E. Munk, *Blessings of Eliyahu*, 47.

¹¹⁶The philanthropist, Ashe Lincoln QC, though a member the genteel Anglo-Orthodoxy often referred to as the "cousinhood," financed many of Munk's learning ventures, "The Lincoln Institute" being one such example. Interview with Rabbi David Lincoln, August 24, 2006.

¹¹⁷Cited from yeshiva application materials. Jacobs Archive.

Given Munk's effort to target "English speaking youth," not surprisingly the language of instruction was to be English. After all, how better to acculturate an immigrant Jewish community to Anglo-Jewish life than a yeshiva with instruction in English as opposed to the Yiddish of the Old World? The opening ceremonies of the Yeshiva served to highlight the cultural issues at stake by this learning venture. The speeches themselves, as reported in the Jewish press, were given in both English and Yiddish. Jacobs, in his opening remarks (in English) reportedly addressed the objections of the advocates for Yiddish as the language of instruction:

Yiddishists declared that the light of the Torah had been kindled and maintained for centuries by Yiddish in Russia and Poland. He [Jacobs] did not deny that either. But why could not the Torah take root in England by means of the English language, which was, at least quite as flexible as Yiddish? Torah was Torah. It could be learnt in many languages. To give it expression in England though the medium of a foreign language was not tenable. It was quite possible, when giving instruction in higher Jewish learning, usefully to employ illustrations from many sources of English literature, such as Shakespeare, Shaw, or even Sherlock Holmes.¹¹⁸

For Jacobs, the language of instruction represented far larger questions of acculturation. As with his earlier experiences in Manchester, Jacobs knew that religious education was never merely a matter of erudition and mastery of texts, but a vehicle towards fostering a Jew's integration into the Jewish community, past, present and future. For Jacobs, educational efforts aimed at serving Anglo-Jewry had to consider the English points of reference for its would-be student body in order to effectively communicate the insights and relevance of sacred Jewish texts in a contemporary context.

Dayan Yehezkiel Abramsky (1886-1976), the Chief of the London *Beth Din* (rabbinical court), reportedly took the podium following Rabbi Jacobs's remarks, and in

¹¹⁸JC, January 24, 1947.

Yiddish, commented “unfavorably” on Rabbi Jacobs’s reference to the use of quotations from Sherlock Holmes. It was a minor exchange, but given the issues and personalities at stake, prescient of things to come. Years later in Jacobs’s autobiography, he would reflect that this controversy had nothing to do with his “later theological views;” merely the language of instruction.¹¹⁹ While this recollection may indeed be true, Jacobs’s autobiography misses the cultural issues at stake in his exchange with Abramsky. Indeed, the short lived efforts of Munk and Jacobs (the Yeshiva closed after the second course), reflected rather bold efforts to bridge the gaps present in the complex mix of Central and Eastern European populations in post-war London. Their insistence that English be the language of instruction reflected a desire to construct a pedagogic model aimed at creating a Jewry thoroughly English and Orthodox in its leanings and loyalties.

University College London

Considering the model of Munk and the sophistication of his congregation, Jacobs’s concurrent studies at University College were viewed both by him and those around him as a means towards enhancing his intellectual profile. Jacobs’s enrollment as an external student in the BA course in Semitics propitiously occurred during the post-war years when the University sought to reconstruct its bomb-damaged campus. So, too, these years witnessed the remnant of German Jewish scholarship seeking to reconstitute itself on and throughout England. The vast institutional infrastructure aimed at rescuing these refugees during the war gave preference to certain age,

¹¹⁹HWI, 73-74.

economic or occupational considerations, with the greatest beneficiaries being German Jewish academics.¹²⁰

Jacobs arranged a private course of study with one such refugee, Dr. Siegfried Stein, a young graduate of the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin. A student of the great *Wissenschaft* scholar of Jewish history and literature, Ismar Elbogen (1874-1943), Stein went on to complete his thesis on heresy in Medieval German Literature at Heidelberg.¹²¹ Stein's exacting scholarly disposition was ever present in his teaching as well as in his own research, producing definitive studies on topics such as the Maccabean context of the Hanukkah liturgy, and most authoritatively, the influence of Graeco-Roman custom and literature on the Passover Seder. As the only tutor for the course in Semitics at University College London, it was incumbent upon Stein to privately and comprehensively give his students a thorough grounding in his craft of critical scholarship. Thus, Jacobs and other young students—refugees and

¹²⁰The most comprehensive study of Britain's policy towards refugees is Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1988). See also Norman Bentwich's treatment of the Exodus, reception and distribution of German Jewish refugees Norman De Mattos Bentwich, *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars: The Story of Displaced Scholars and Scientists, 1933-1952* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1953), 176-177. Bentwich relates the total number of academic refugees was 2541, over 600 of who arrived in England. Bentwich, *Rescue and Achievement*, 39. Other such international enterprises include the New School for Social Research (Est. 1934) and Princeton's Institute of Advanced Studies (Est. 1930). Ibid. 48-52. Raphael Loewe provides the most comprehensive list of Judaic Scholars of German origin to arrive in Britain, "The Contribution of German-Jewish Scholars to Jewish Studies in the United Kingdom" in W.E. Mosse and J. Carlebach. *Second Chance*. Of course, as Loewe's article makes clear, German-Jewish studies had arrived in the United Kingdom prior to these years, though in a far more rarified form. From Michael Friedlander's (1833-1910, doctorate from Halle) forty plus years as Principal at Jews College, to Moses Gaster's (1856-1939, Breslau Seminary) role as the *Hacham* (senior Rabbi) of the London Sephardi community, to Solomon Schechter's (1847-1915, Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums) arrival at Cambridge via the patronage of Claude Montefiore, there had long been some English expression of German scholarship. Jews College itself had continued to be under the principalship of Dr. Adolf Büchler whose investigations into the social, economic and religious life of first century Jewry drew upon the critical methods and techniques of the highest scholarly model. See B. Marmorstein, "Adolph Büchler: Principle of Jews' College 1906-1939." *Jewish Historical Studies* XXX(1987-1988), 219-226.

¹²¹Siegfried Stein, *Die Unglaublichen in der Mittelhochdeutschen Literatur von 1050 bis 1250*. (Dissertation: Universität Heidelberg, 1933).

Anglo-born alike (e.g. Nahum Sarna, Alan Miller and Jakob Petuchowski)¹²² — began their immersion in scholarly discourse under Stein and the auspices of University College, affectionately dubbed “the godless college of Gower street,” founded as a counterweight to the church-sponsored colleges.

Jacobs’s formal course of study towards his honors degree involved coursework in ancient Semitics, Hebrew Bible, medieval Hebrew poetry, Jewish history and medieval and modern Jewish philosophy. The close relationship between Stein and Jacobs (which was more a private tutorial than part of a university curriculum) culminated in 1947 when Jacobs received a degree in Semitics with Drs. Stein, Isidore Epstein (1894-1962, Jews’ College) and Herbert Danby (1889-1953, Oxford) as examiners.¹²³ Soon after, Jacobs’s was offered the appointment of “Part-time assistant in the Department of Hebrew,” a position that would allow Jacobs to begin formulating his doctoral work and serve as Stein’s assistant and officemate.¹²⁴

Given his range of interests and expertise, Jacobs considered writing on various spiritual heroes of his, including Zecharia Frankel and Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav.¹²⁵ Jacobs’s eventual doctoral topic, “The Business life of the Jews in Babylon from the 3rd to the 6th Century” was chosen for a combination of intellectual and pragmatic reasons.

¹²²Jakob Petuchowski, though a student in Psychology with a minor in Philosophy, would study with Stein prior to his departure to the States in 1948. Letter from Mrs. Elizabeth Petuchowski, November 5, 2006. In Petuchowski’s published reflections, he recalls that after receiving his BA degree, he studied Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac and North-Semitic Epigraphy with Stein, who also introduced him to the study of medieval liturgical poetry, a he returned to over the years. Jakob Josef Petuchowski, *Mein Judesein: Wege Und Erfahrungen Eines Deutschen Rabbiners* (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 57.

¹²³HWI, 76-77. Archival Papers, University College London, Faculty of Arts.

¹²⁴University College London Correspondence July 4, 1947. HWI, 76.

¹²⁵Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

Jacobs's topic represented the classical *Wissenschaft* tactic of using ancient texts to reconstruct a particular historical and social context—in this case using the Talmud to consider the general economic conditions in the Sassanian Empire. Furthermore, with Jacobs soon leaving London in the spring of 1948 to return to Manchester (discussed in the following chapter), Jacobs sought a doctoral topic on a subject he knew well enough to work with independently, one of sufficient magnitude without derailing his growing professional commitments.¹²⁶ Even from his introductory methodological remarks, it is clear how Jacobs's thesis played to his strength in rabbinic literature:

The method of research has been to go carefully through the whole of the Babylonian Talmud for references to trade, commerce and handicraft. The Mishnah, Tosephta, the Palestinian Talmud the Midrashim and the other rabbinic works have not been neglected... care being taken to distinguish whenever possible between statements referring to Babylon and those referring to Palestine; between legend and fact; and between pure academic passages and those reflecting actual conditions, in all the above sources.¹²⁷

Jacobs's thesis would be written upon his return to Manchester in the years ahead.¹²⁸

¹²⁶Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

¹²⁷Jacobs's thesis, which remains unpublished and in the private possession of the Jacobs's family, found expression in at least one later article, both of which provide insight into his subject matter and methodology, see Jacobs, Louis. "Economic Conditions of the Jews in Babylon in Talmudic Times Compared with Palestine." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 2:4 (1957): 349-59.

¹²⁸Though registered as a doctoral student in 1947, Jacobs's eventual thesis subject would not be formally approved until December 1950, with his PhD examination in 1951, and the eventual Doctorate of Philosophy received in the Spring of 1952. Letters from University of London to Louis Jacobs, September 22, 1948, April 24, 1951. On April 26, 1952, Jacobs received advanced word from Stein that he and Epstein had approved his thesis for the Ph.D. degree. The letter intimates that there will be "no further difficulties." It is altogether unclear what these difficulties were. Raphael Loewe suggests that Jacobs's doctoral thesis was first under consideration by Jews' College and was rejected because it shed light on non-conformity or non-observance in talmudic culture. Interview with Raphael Loewe, May 2006. While a tantalizing possibility, neither Jacobs's recollections, nor the content of the thesis, nor the relevant correspondence with Stein serve to corroborate Loewe's claim.

Jacobs's long term relationship with Stein introduced him to the world of critical scholarship and "the need for accuracy and objectivity in the study of Jewish sources."¹²⁹ Having never heard of the historical approach in his Yeshiva days, Jacobs would later write on the "shock that you could talk quite freely of Deuteronomy being post-Mosaic."¹³⁰ For example, Jacobs discussed the effect of this experience on one area of proficiency, Jewish mysticism:

I was advised to read Gershom Scholem's classical work, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, by my teacher at University College, Dr Siegfried Stein. Scholem's historical approach came like a shocking and at the same time invigorating cold shower. Scholem and his school showed that Kabbalah arose in Provence in the twelfth century and was a series of purely human speculations rather than, as I had innocently assumed in my yeshiva days, a series of communications by God regarding His true nature. Here, once again, I came to see that when the historical critical methodology was applied, while it did not necessarily create havoc for faith, any theological position on the role of mysticism in Jewish life could not ignore the results of scholarly research into its origins.¹³¹

Thus, for the first time in Jacobs's life, the historian's critical tools of inquiry raised questions for his hitherto untested faith. Unlike Munk's scholarly pursuits, Stein encouraged the application of scholarly method on the sacred texts of the tradition. Stein urged Jacobs to read widely (invoking Steinschneider's biblical pun "The beginning of wisdom is bibliography"), and Jacobs, ever the autodidact, took full advantage of the resources of University College.¹³²

¹²⁹HWI, 78.

¹³⁰Interview with Jacobs, Summer 2005.

¹³¹BRD, 186-187.

¹³²HWI, 78. Raphael Loewe, a life time colleague of Jacobs, suggests that more than Stein, it was during these years that "Jacobs found his way by reading." Interview with Raphael Loewe, May 2006.

In fact, given the unavoidable challenge such a course of study would have on Jacobs's untrammelled faith, Stein prescribed to Jacobs a regimen of reading that included the works of Leopold Zunz, Nahman Krochmal, Zecharia Frankel, Louis Ginzberg, and other luminaries of the nineteenth century school of *Wissenschaft*, to quell his growing inner turmoil.¹³³ A quiet anecdote from this time reflects the worlds Jacobs bridged sociologically and epistemologically:

Stein said I should read Krochmal. And I remember going home from Stein's house on the underground and I had Krochmal [‘s Moreh Nevuchim Hazeman] in my hand and I met Rabbi Dessler. So I hid it.¹³⁴

The above incident provides a stunning social and human context for the epistemological shifts taking place in Jacobs's life during these years. Jacobs did not enter the University seeking to have his faith questioned, only to achieve a degree that would provide him a credential and polish for a rabbinate serving the English community. In fact, it would seem his choice of Semitics was more pragmatic than anything else (he already had a background). Nevertheless, as the above scene more than amply illustrates, Jacobs was already far removed from the traditional Manchester community where he had been the prize pupil just a few years prior. In hiding his copy of Krochmal, Jacobs was well aware, both then and in retrospect, what was at stake in his growing bibliography.

Once introduced to the practitioners of the historical school, they would go on to become Jacobs's model, both theologically and stylistically. Though conversant in German scholarship, Jacobs later reflected that in spite of Stein's Continental

¹³³BRD, 241.

¹³⁴Interview with Jacobs, Summer 2006.

background, his intellectual coming of age occurred in a period (the 1940s) when a deep animosity existed between the Anglo-community and German scholarship. In viewing himself in the line of the Anglo-intellectual tradition (Schechter, Montefiore, Israel Abrahams, Simeon Singer, Herbert Loewe etc.), it would be these voices (and their eventual English speaking American counterparts) that would come to shape the tactics and topics of Jacobs's career.¹³⁵ Though of varied religious temperaments, they shared a common earnestness to introduce rabbinic literature to the English speaking world.¹³⁶ As David Starr has noted, their essays in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* were modeled on larger trends in nineteenth-century English expression, explaining "It is surely no accident that Abrahams and Montefiore named their creation the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, calling to mind their grander English counterpart [*The Quarterly*]."¹³⁷ More than simply an attempt to translate rabbinic literature to a lay English speaking public, these efforts sought to transmit the cultural legacy of the rabbis into contemporary English cultural categories. The medium of the review essay, the choice of topics, the

¹³⁵Although recent studies have brought to light early enlightenment Jewish English thinkers, (e.g D. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought*), Jacobs's writing shows no engagement with any Anglo-Jewish thinkers prior to Schechter and the coterie of scholars surrounding him. See also Loewe's treatment of pre-Schechterian era Jewish Scholarship in Raphael Loewe, "Jewish Scholarship in England." V. D. Lipman, *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History: A Volume of Essays* (Cambridge: Published for the Jewish Historical Society of England by W. Heffer, 1961), 125-148.

¹³⁶The *Jewish Quarterly Review*, founded in England in 1888 by Israel Abrahams and Claude G. Montefiore, sought to be an English (both linguistically and culturally) version of Frankel's *Montasschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Akin to the *Kulturverein* of German Jewry decades earlier, through their meetings and writings, this group of scholars including the likes of I. Abrahams, M. Gaster, J. Jacobs, C. Montefiore, A. Neubauer, S. Schechter, L. Wolfe, I. Zangwill, all sought to establish and further *Wissenschaft* onto English soil. For a portrait of the personalities and pursuits of this coterie of scholars see Dalin, David. "America- Bound: Wissenschaft in England," In Moses Rischin and Raphael Asher eds. *The Jewish Legacy and the German Conscience: Essays in Memory of Rabbi Joseph Asher*, (Berkeley: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 1991), 99-114.

¹³⁷David B. Starr, "The Importance of Being Frank: Solomon Schechter's Departure from Cambridge," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94:1 (2004), 104.

lucidity and literary eloquence of these writers and the “prismatic power” by which they rendered ancient concepts to a contemporary audience¹³⁸ were aimed at the “Jewish professional and middlebrow middle classes.”¹³⁹ Their gift of expression and blend of “English restraint and humor with Hebraic earnestness”¹⁴⁰ would be a model for Jacobs in all his future scholarly endeavors.¹⁴¹

Jacob’s ultimate assessment of Stein is one of guarded appreciation. As correspondence well into the 1950s indicates, Jacobs and Stein, though initially student and teacher, would maintain an ongoing and eventually collegial relationship. Jacobs would always maintain an abiding gratitude to Stein for opening up new horizons of critical inquiry. Whereas Munk may have offered a model of observance and secular scholarly pursuits, it was Stein who first opened Jacobs’s eyes to the possibility that the critical method could have application on sacred texts themselves, a difference traceable back to the ethos of the *Hochschule* and *Rabbinerseminar* that produced Stein and Munk respectively.¹⁴² Nevertheless, given Stein’s unwillingness to apply the findings

¹³⁸On the stylistic strengths of Montefiore see Harvey Warren Meirovich, *A Vindication of Judaism: The Polemics of the Hertz Pentateuch* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1998), 24.

¹³⁹D. Starr, *Importance*, 104.

¹⁴⁰Norman De Mattos Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter, a Biography* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938), 5.

¹⁴¹On the limited reception of Schechter’s circle see: Israel Finestein “The New Community 1880-1918,” in V.D. Lipman, *Three Centuries*, 119ff. On Schechter’s dismal assessment of Anglo-Jewish intellectual life in his missive to the Anglo Community upon leaving for America. See S. Schechter, “Four Epistles to the Jews of England” in S. Schechter, Alexander Marx, and Frank Isaac Schechter, *Studies in Judaism. Third Series*, 183ff.

¹⁴²For a discussion of the diverse nineteenth century German efforts and attitudes towards *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see Ellenson, David, and Richard Jacobs. "Scholarship and Faith: David Hoffman and His Relationship to Wissenschaft Des Judentums." *Modern Judaism* 8: 1 (1988): 27-40 and especially, Mordecai Breuer’s “*Hochmat yisrael – shalosh gishot ortodoxiyot*” [*Wissenschaft des Judentum – Three Orthodox Approaches*], in *Sefer yovel l’ichvod moreinu hagaon rabbi yoseph dov*

of his scholarship towards his totally observant Jewish lifestyle, Stein would come to represent in Jacobs's mind the severe limitations of a "two truths approach." Stein counseled Jacobs to physically (and thus metaphysically) "remove his Yarmulke" when engaged in critical scholarship, wholly unbothered compartmentalizing one from the other.¹⁴³ In fact, it was Stein's bifurcation of scholarship and faith that would prompt Jacobs to search for alternatives to the untenable proposition embodied in his mentor that while "the world of critical scholarship was...incompatible to Jewish observance...one somehow had to meet the demands of both."¹⁴⁴

Years later, Jacobs's objections to Stein's compartmentalization of critical inquiry and observance would erupt as Jacobs's persona took on a public and controversial profile. Jacobs found himself at odds with his former teacher, who had co-signed a letter of Jewish scholars critical of the *Jewish Chronicle's* advocacy of Jacobs's candidacy for the principalship of Jews' College.¹⁴⁵ While Jacobs's letter to Stein is not extant, years later he would still recall the hurt of seeing his former teacher publicly side with Jacobs's ideological adversaries:

I wrote to Stein...I could understand the others because they're not really involved, but you were my teacher and I...knew the...view [critical method] because of you, so how could you do this?!¹⁴⁶

halevi soloveitchik, 2 Vols. [Jubilee Volume in Honor of Rabbi Joseph Dov Halevi Soloveitchik] (Jerusalem and New York, 1984), 2:856-865. (Hebrew).

¹⁴³Alternatively, Raphael Loewe recalls the troubled way Stein would administer exams. For example, when offering a Bible exam, Stein would organize the exam to allow students from Orthodox backgrounds to avoid answering a question which may offend their religious fidelities. Questions on biblical criticism would always be offered as a choice of one of several questions so as to allow a student the opportunity to opt out of answering it. Interview with Raphael Loewe, May 2006.

¹⁴⁴HWI, 77.

¹⁴⁵JC, June 15, 1962.

¹⁴⁶Interview with Jacobs, Summer 2005.

Stein wrote back to Jacobs enumerating the reasons for his letter; the last two in particular are significant to this study:

7) It is needless to say that I insist on a scholarly i.e. non-fundamentalist approach to all literary documents of the Jewish legacy and that I do not wish to exclude Bible, Talmud, Midrash or Philosophy from free and independent investigations. *v'kol ma'amari yonicheynu* [as all my utterances attest].

8) I am also aware of the fact that most of the right-wing partisans of the campaign do not understand our perplexities and the seriousness of the problems, with which we are confronted. Ultimate loneliness and isolation are perhaps the necessary accompaniments of every genuine quest for truth, but I am sure you will understand that I must maintain an Erasmian rather than a Lutheran attitude to our past.

Lest you think that I am sarcastic or provocative, may I end by saying *zacharti lach hesed ne'urayich, lechtech aharai bemidbar*. [“I account to your favor the devotion of your youth...how you followed me in the wilderness...” paraphrase of Jeremiah 2:2].¹⁴⁷

By seeing himself as the Erasmus to Jacobs's Luther, Stein made clear that he was not willing to allow his theoretical findings to have programmatic effect on his religious observance. Resigned to the “ultimate loneliness and isolation” accompanying his “quest for truth,” Stein was decidedly resistant in bringing to bear the implications of his scholarship on traditional observance.¹⁴⁸ Later in his life, Jacobs could always forgive—or at least understand—his yeshiva teachers' unwillingness to confront the claims of critical scholarship. No matter how objectionable, they were at least consistent in their fundamentalism. Stein, however, had no such excuse. The personal

¹⁴⁷Letter from Siegfried Stein to Louis Jacobs, June 19, 1962. Jacobs Archive.

¹⁴⁸Stein had signaled the tension of scholarship and faith years earlier in his congratulatory letter to Jacobs upon receiving his doctorate: “I well know that it is difficult and bitter to find a resolution between our ancient culture and the demands of our time. But this is our task in the strong and overwhelming spiritual war that we fight.” (Author's translation from Hebrew original). Letter from Siegfried Stein to Louis Jacobs June 9, 1952. Jacobs Archive.

sting from his esteemed teacher's later betrayal would be palpable in Jacobs's tone through his final years.

The extraordinary achievements and the impact of these few years between 1945 and 1948 on Jacobs's life cannot be overestimated. It is breathtaking to consider all the various roles Jacobs played during this "stint" in London, from serving as Munk's assistant to building a yeshiva, completing his BA, functioning as Stein's assistant, beginning his doctoral work, not to mention the continued growth of the Jacobs family with the birth of a second child, Naomi in June of 1947. More significantly, it was his intellectual development that took shape during these years as Jacobs found himself in a whirlwind of new modes of thinking. Munk, though an exemplar of learning, piety and rabbinic leadership, could not serve as a model given the limitations he placed on critical inquiry. Stein, Jacobs's intellectual mentor, was far too committed to the ivory tower for the tastes of Jacobs's communally minded sensibilities. He, too, avoided what Jacobs would come to understand as the critical questions concerning the nexus of critical faith and scholarship. Jacobs continued to search for a model capable of negotiating the competing claims of traditional faith and intellectual integrity, a model that would ignore the claims of neither, recognizing attempts to compartmentalize one from the other as lacking the "matter of fact" integrity at the core of this plainspoken 'Manchester Boy.' Eventually, Jacobs would have to find his own model.

CHAPTER TWO

MANCHESTER 1948-1953: THE PERSISTENT QUESTIONER

How well I recall the old days in Manchester when you introduced us poor benighted Lancastrians to the profundities of Jewish thought and opened up for us exciting new vistas of Jewish learning. All the lectures you gave, the sermons you delivered, I was privileged to hear and are still fresh in my memory. I am more than grateful for the influence it has had on my life.

- Letter from Louis Jacobs to Alexander Altmann on the occasion of Altmann's 70th birthday (April, 1976). Altmann Archive.

Attending the funeral of his former teacher, Rabbi Moshe Segal, Louis Jacobs was approached to apply for a vacant rabbinic position in his hometown of Manchester.¹ With a second child, increasing financial obligations and the attraction of the city of his youth, Jacobs left University College London for Manchester's Central Synagogue in April of 1948.² This move came to the dismay of Jacobs's academic mentor, Siegfried Stein, who correctly sensed Jacobs's professional trajectory veering away from the ivory tower to the draw of Jewish communal work. Though Jacobs would go on to complete his doctoral thesis in 1952, producing a steady stream of scholarly articles and books throughout his life, it would be the "Jew in the pew" that would ultimately define the professional and intellectual commitments Jacobs bore throughout his career.

Jacobs's Mancunian roots and Yeshiva learning were well suited to serve the generational layers present in the membership of the Central Synagogue. For

¹HWI, 82.

²Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

example, while Jacobs's daily Talmud class (*shiur*) was taught in Yiddish, his sermons to the larger community were always delivered in English. His duties ranged from the traditional functions of a Rabbi to *pasken shaalos* (rendering legal decisions) to serving on inter-religious communal councils.³ Rabbi and doctoral student, Jacobs maintained cordial relations with the diverse spheres of the Manchester community, Jewish and otherwise.⁴ His blend of working class roots, yeshiva education and university training were just right for this community, itself a blend of old Lithuanian traditions and upwardly mobile Manchester civic pride.

Jacobs's return to Manchester came at a propitious moment of civic growth and Zionist ferment. As Bill Williams has noted in his studies of Manchester Jewry, this period saw "unprecedented social mobility and demographic change."⁵ The rise of working class wages, suburbanization, and the newly-enacted slum clearance policies of this proud industrial city in the wake of the German "Blitz" all marked this period as a time of social and economic

³For example, archival records document Jacobs's participation on a panel on the subject of "The Problem of Toleration: Racial and Religious" hosted by the Manchester University Council of Christians and Jews, (February, 1953). Jacobs Archive.

⁴At the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Manchester Yeshiva, Jacobs continued to identify and be identified with his yeshiva, preaching the Sabbath Sermon in honor of the yeshiva (*Manchester Jewish Telegraph*, July 5, 1952). Jacobs also co-chaired an "old students union" that amongst other activities, undertook to raise funds on behalf of the yeshiva, a financial commitment that Jacobs maintained at least through the late 1950s. *Manchester Jewish Telegraph*, undated clippings. Jacobs Archive.

⁵Bill Williams, "Rescuing the Anglo-Jewish Heritage in Two Nations," in *Two Nations: British and German Jews in Comparative Perspective*. Eds. M. Brenner, R. Liedtke, D. Rechter. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 467-477.

transformation.⁶ Jacobs's rabbinic leadership during this remarkable period of post-war reconstruction in one of England's largest provincial cities would position him well as a rising voice in Anglo-Jewry.

Jacobs's installation as rabbi of Central Synagogue fell one month prior to the May 1948 establishment of the state of Israel. As previously noted, Manchester, long a hotbed of Zionist ferment, would continue to play a critical role in defining the terms of Anglo-Zionist efforts. As its name implies, the Central Synagogue, while neither the largest nor most prestigious of Manchester synagogues, held a vital role in the lifeblood of Manchester Jewry, Zionist activity included. From the induction of the *Rosh Beth Din* (head of the rabbinical court) Dayan Yitzhak Yaakov Weiss (1902-1989), to the welcoming of Israel's Chief Rabbi Herzog, the Central Synagogue served as the meeting place for community affairs. Jacobs's rabbinic position, his ongoing leadership (by his own merits and those of his wife) as chair of Manchester Mizrahi, and honorary principal of the *Bachad* Institute for Jewish Studies, would collectively ensure Jacobs a significant voice in the unfolding community conversation.⁷

Inevitably, the combination of Jacobs's qualifications and ambition would extend his profile well beyond the confines of the Central Synagogue. Aside from his congregational duties, Jacobs became a favorite speaker to the Jewish students' societies, soon being elected vice-president of the Manchester

⁶Williams has also traced the neglectful loss of the Manchester legacy, be it architecture, archives or otherwise, impeding efforts to reconstruct elements of England's second largest Jewish community. See also William's treatment of the subject in Tony Kushner, *The Jewish Heritage in British History: Englishness and Jewishness*. (London: F. Cass, 1992), 128-146.

⁷Letter from Bachad Leadership to Louis Jacobs, May, 12, 1949. Jacobs Archive.

University Jewish Student Society.⁸ The ensuing “orgy of public speaking” would take Jacobs to Leeds and Liverpool, and from campus to Yeshiva to Zionist organization to non-Jewish audiences.⁹ Lacking transcripts of these speeches, the content of Jacobs’s speaking engagements comes second hand by way of newspaper reports.¹⁰ Fortunately, Jacobs’s knack for translating a lecture topic into a popular article provides us with several glimpses into his emerging voice during these years. At a fairly steady pace, Jacobs’s writings began to appear in Anglo-Zionist publications such as *Manchester Torah V’Avodah*, and *Chayenu*, national Jewish papers such as the *Jewish Chronicle* and the *Jewish Review* and non-Jewish publications such as the *Journal of Sex Education*,¹¹ or even across the Atlantic to publications such as the New York based *Jewish Spectator*.¹²

Jacobs’s coming of age as a community leader occurred in a post-war era as the newsprint ration was increased and the layout and content of the Jewish print media were updated, reformatted and expanded. For example, The *Jewish Chronicle* (JC), under the editorship of J.M. Shaftesley, would become increasingly receptive to new features and fresh voices, and Jacobs quickly

⁸Letter from the Student Society to Louis Jacobs, May 3, 1950. Jacobs Archive.

⁹HWI, 95.

¹⁰Gifted as an extemporaneous speaker, Jacobs only rarely wrote out his sermons and speeches.

¹¹Louis Jacobs, “The Jewish Attitude to Artificial Insemination,” *Journal of Sex Education*, February/March, 1950.

¹² Louis Jacobs, “‘Organic Growth’ Vs. ‘Petrification,’” *Jewish Spectator*, November 1952.

became one of them.¹³ Whether it was his felicitous prose, prodigious output or his novelty as a tolerant traditionalist, Jacobs was invited by Shaftesley in 1951 to join the JC's rotation of seven regular (anonymous) sermon writers.¹⁴ By 1952, Shaftesley had begun to invite Jacobs to write articles in response to specific matters of Jewish interest, or alternatively, provide a Jewish angle on a news item in the general press.¹⁵ This mutually beneficial relationship, even once Shaftesley's editorship had concluded, would continue to serve the intersecting needs of both parties in the years ahead.

Rabbi Dr. Alexander Altmann

As Jacobs sought his path in communal leadership, Jewish scholarship and the nexus between the two, his guide would be Rabbi Dr. Alexander Altmann (1906-1987). With the increasingly precarious circumstances of German Jewry, Altmann arrived in Manchester in September 1938 to become the first, and to date only, Communal Rabbi of Manchester.¹⁶ An alumnus of both the Hildesheimer Rabinerseminar and the University of Berlin, Altmann received not only a

¹³On the *Jewish Chronicle* during post-war Reconstruction see David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University, 2005), 196-203.

¹⁴Jacobs had been invited to submit material by Shaftesley as early as February 1950. Given the lack of attribution, it is impossible to know precisely which sermons belonged to Jacobs. Some, retained in Jacobs own files, can safely be attributed to him the earliest of which being, "The Sense of Guilt" JC, April 2, 1950. Jacobs's formal invitation to join the JC sermon rotation is found in a personal correspondence from Shaftesley to Jacobs on February, 1, 1951. Jacobs Archive.

¹⁵Many of Jacobs's articles begin with a reference to news stories of ecumenical interest, e.g. his discussion on the Jewish view of abortion "Mother or Baby," or "The Place of Dogma in Judaism," both of which were prompted by pronouncements by the Pope.

¹⁶JC, April 16, 1971.

rigorous training in classical rabbinics, but went on to write his doctoral thesis on the metaphysical phenomenology of Max Scheler (1874-1928). Intellectually and programmatically, in Germany, Manchester, and eventually, the United States, Altmann's commitment to affirming scholarship and faith, traditional learning and open inquiry would remain a remarkably consistent feature of his life work, one which would have significant impact on the impressionable Jacobs.

Altmann's years of rabbinic leadership in England, though initially a vehicle for refuge from the Nazi threat, stand in retrospect as a veritable flurry of leadership activity. Despite being considered for the position of principal of Jews' College (which would go to Rabbi Isidore Epstein),¹⁷ and Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue (which would go to Rabbi Israel Brodie),¹⁸ Altmann's impact in England would ultimately be as Communal Rabbi of Manchester and

¹⁷Correspondence from Sir Robert Waley Cohen to Altmann dated June 28, 1945. (Altmann Archive). How close Altmann actually was to being appointed is unclear. Cohen writes "With this impression vividly before us, we proceeded to the task entrusted to us by the Council of Jews' College of considering in the light of all the circumstances of these difficult times the problem of the appointment of a Principal. We reached the conclusion that the time has not yet come when it would be right to make this appointment and we have decided to recommend to the Council accordingly. At the same time, we all felt that it would be of great benefit to the College and indeed to the future of the Anglo-Jewish Community, if you and the Council could mutually find a way by which you could associated with out work, and I was asked by my colleagues to invite you to tell me privately whether you would permit us to suggest to the Council an invitation being issued to you to accept a position on the teaching Staff of the College as one of its Professors." Given the fact that Rabbi Epstein took up office three days later on July 1, 1945, the council either ignored Cohen's counsel on delaying the appointment of a principal, or more likely, Cohen sought to communicate the news to Altmann of his not receiving the principalship with a softer hand. For the institutional history of Jews' College see A. M. Hyamson, *Jews' College, London: 1855-1955*. (London: Jews' College, 1955)

¹⁸Chaim Bermant chronicles the choice of Brodie over Altmann and Rabbi Koppul Rosen. Despite Altmann's credentials, his central European background precluded him from the premier leadership position in Anglo-Jewry immediately following the Second World War. See Chaim Bermant, *Troubled Eden: An Anatomy of British Jewry*. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1969), 196-197. An alternative explanation has recently been proposed by Freud-Kandel who argues that Altmann, "refused to grant ultimate halakhic authority to Dayan Abramsky and it was this that thwarted his application." See M.J. Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism*, 98-99.

the ongoing achievements of the Institute of Jewish Studies. Altmann taught throughout the Manchester community, literary and Zionist Societies, and represented the Jewish community in civic and inter-religious functions, directing the activities of the *Chug Rabbonim* (Manchester Rabbinic Organization), and serving as the head of the Manchester *Beth Din* (rabbinical court) giving close attention to matters of divorce, conversion, *kashrut* supervision and much more – all the while writing for both popular and scholarly audiences.¹⁹ It would be during these years that Altmann established Manchester's Institute of Jewish Studies and its Journal of Jewish Studies, surrounding himself with a circle of scholars committed to promoting a critical understanding of Judaism, its sources and history.

While specific issues of content may forever remain elusive, the basic contours of the intellectual relationship between Altmann and Jacobs may be reconstructed during these years through an examination of the public and private records of their activities.

As noted previously, Jacobs knew Altmann from afar as a young graduate of the yeshiva and later as a university student in London. Though duly impressed by Altmann's learning, later in life Jacobs would recall the disdain that Manchester's Eastern European community initially had for Altmann's scholarly disposition:

¹⁹Letter from Altmann to R. Barrow Sicree, Chairman Communal Rabbinic Committee, May 23, 1945. Altman Archive. See also introduction to: Alexander Altmann, Siegfried Stein, and Raphael Loewe, *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History: Presented to Alexander Altmann on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (University, Ala.: Published in association with the Institute of Jewish Studies, London, by the University of Alabama Press, 1979), 1-12.

The first lecture he gave was on Oswald Spengler and *The Decline of the West*. ... I was a young boy. He knew English. His English was very good. So all the old boys in the various Litvisher synagogues in Manchester, they said ‘Shpengler, Shmengler,’ we want our old speaker....²⁰

Altmann’s Central European mode of Orthodoxy, philosophical training and sympathy with the critical modes of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* represented an altogether different outlook from the learning and authority of the Manchester Yeshiva.²¹ The following anecdote, as told by Jacobs, demonstrates how these two streams of Jewish life and learning fused, conflicted and came to accommodate each other:

For example, it was announced that Altmann, the new communal Rabbi, was going to give a series of lectures...it didn’t say *shiurim*, [rather] a series of *lectures* on the Talmud. So, one was on preparations for Shabbat....so, it was like a sociological thing...But he must have got wind of this [communal objections], so next time, he said he would give a halakhic discourse on [the Talmudic concept] Bereira.²² [Italics added]

The import of Jacobs’s remembrance is found in the fundamental difference between a “shiur” and a “lecture,” a difference in genre that in many ways encapsulates the differing world views of Altmann and his Eastern European

²⁰Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

²¹Altmann’s idealized conception of the rabbinate can be derived not only by his own rabbinate, but also by his own nostalgic reflections on the “distinct and sui-generis” rabbi-scholar profile of pre-war Germany. Altmann characterized a rabbi to feel native to both German culture and Jewish tradition, *Bildung* and *Wissenschaft*. In his own words “The modern German rabbi, who was essentially *Seelorger* (curator of souls) and preacher, felt the urge to recapture some of the lost glory of the rabbinate by engaging in the strict and precise discipline of historical research, of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In so doing and in acquiring the reputation of a scholar he rose above the level of a mere preacher. By contributing works of enduring valued to the sum total of *Wissenschaft*, the rabbi gained the satisfaction of knowing that he was a participant in what Hegel called the “objective spirit.” Preaching alone would have been only an expression of the “subjective spirit,” something ephemeral attuned to the fleeting hour, *hayye sha’a* as against *hayye ‘olam*.” Alexander Altmann, "The German Rabbi: 1910-1939," *Leo Baeck Yearbook* 19 (1974).32.

²²Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

Manchester counterparts. While the former sought to explicate the particulars of a Talmudic concept, Altmann's scholarly leanings sought to situate Jewish practice in its sociological context. Altmann's years in England would always be marked by tensions with the Eastern European forces of his Manchester community. While much is known about his pursuits prior to and following his Manchester years, Altmann's achievements during his twenty years in England, both scholarly and rabbinic, have yet to be fully examined and understood.²³ For present purposes, his manifold efforts may be understood as a sustained effort to translate the German Jewish institutions and ethos so dear to him into what would eventually be deemed an inhospitable Anglo-community. Despite his leadership position in the community, Altmann would never fully acclimate himself to English Jewry, an exemplar of the Yiddish notion of "*in golus bay yidden*" (in exile amongst Jews). Nevertheless, as a product of multiple worlds, with professional and epistemological commitments to Jewish communal life and scholarship, Altmann's learning and strength of character received ready admiration from Jacobs.

Inducted by Altmann at the Central Synagogue in April 1948, Jacobs would repeatedly turn to Altmann's scholar-rabbi model as he sought to construct a distinctively English model of the same ilk. During his years at University

²³See Paul Mendes Flohr's Introduction "Theologian before the Abyss," in Alexander Altmann and Alfred L. Ivry, *The Meaning of Jewish Existence: Theological Essays, 1930-1939*, Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series 12 (Hanover: Published by University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1991), xii-xlvi. Jacob Katz's insights in memoriam are particularly useful in setting the tone in which Altmann recalled his Manchester years. See "Alexander Altmann Z'L – Kaviim Lidmuto" in Paul Mendes-Flohr, ed., *Le-Zikhro Shel Alexander Altmann: 1906-1987* (Jerusalem: ha-Academyah ha-leumit ha-Yisraelit la-madaim ve-ha-Universitah ha-Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim, 1990), 7-12. (Hebrew).

College London, Jacobs heard Altmann deliver occasional visiting lectures on Jewish philosophy to the student body.²⁴ Jacobs, now with a pulpit of his own and a doctoral degree in progress, found himself with points of contact with Altmann—rabbinic, scholarly and personal. Jacobs served as chairman of the Association of Rabbis and Ministers for Manchester and District while Altmann functioned as honorary chairman. He attended study sessions in Altmann’s home, served on the *Beth Din* under Altmann’s authority, substituted for Dr. Altmann when necessary,²⁵ and tutored Altmann’s son.²⁶ Though Jacobs would always refer to the dignified Altmann as “Dr. Altmann,” the two quickly found themselves closely intertwined, seeking modes by which to synthesize their shared admixture of traditional, scholarly—and in the case of Jacobs—Eastern European and British roots.

A variety of anecdotes recorded in Jacobs’s autobiography, supplemented and corroborated through interviews and archival material, points to the critical role Jacobs’s contact with Altmann would have on his emerging intellectual and professional profile. In a system seemingly designed to cause tension, Manchester’s Communal Rabbi Altmann served as *Av Beth Din* (titular head of the rabbinical court) with Dayan J.J. Weiss (who would later head the ultra-

²⁴Letter to author from Dr. Elizabeth Petuchowki November 5, 2006. Petuchowksi, recalling Altmann’s lectures on Philo of Alexandria states: “These lectures, drawing a huge audience, far beyond the student body-and I do not know who the official sponsors were. I attended them all and I found them clear, well organized and memorable.”

²⁵When Altmann took ill on a lecture commitment entitled “Freud and the Jews,” the press reports that in his stead, Jacobs spoke on “Is the Bible out of date?” reportedly teaching, “great truths were expressed symbolically in the Bible. Its stories were not always to be taken literally.” Undated clipping, Jacobs Archive.

²⁶Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer, 2006.

Orthodox *Edah Haredit* in Jerusalem) functioning as the *Rosh Beth Din* (head of the rabbinical court) of that self-same body of rabbinic authority. As a young rabbi, Jacobs often served as an alternate in the *Beth Din* when another dayan was otherwise unavailable. Jacobs recalls finding himself drawn (or pulled) to function under Altmann's more moderate Orthodoxy, often at odds with Weiss' more rigid religious leadership. On multiple occasions, Jacobs and other moderately inclined Orthodox rabbis were called on by Altmann to quietly facilitate the completion of a conversion, with Jacobs later joking that Altmann "got [him] to be the *shabbos goy*."²⁷ One can imagine that Jacobs, with his credentials from Manchester Yeshiva, was a rather useful protégée for Altmann, himself subject to recriminations from his Eastern European counterparts throughout his Manchester tenure. What better mouthpiece for Altmann's Central European Orthodoxy than a native born, Manchester Yeshiva-educated, doctoral student anxious to make a name in the Anglo-Jewish community?

In a story recounted in Jacobs's autobiography, one particular public eruption within Manchester Jewry provides a useful marker regarding the relationship between Altmann, Jacobs and the nature of Manchester Jewry. At a 1952 joint meeting of the Manchester Association of Rabbis and Ministers and the Association of Cantors, a series of steps were suggested with the goal of improving the decorum of the High Holiday services. The recommended modifications included fixing the number of people called up to the Torah, an alphabetical register to facilitate the smooth calling up of would-be honorees, an

²⁷Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer, 2006.

allowance for the recitation of an English prayer on behalf of the Royal Family, and suggestions for communal versus silent recitation of prayers. In Altmann's estimation, the steps were entirely cosmetic in nature and well within the bounds of traditional liturgical practice.²⁸ Nevertheless, dogged by the right wing elements of Manchester Jewry, Altmann was accused of seeking to "liberalize" and "reform" services. A small but highly vociferous group, "The Committee to Fight Reform," canvassed Manchester with leaflets protesting the "reforms" and refusing to accept them. It was left to Jacobs, the vice-chairman of the Manchester Association of Rabbis and Ministers, to draft the defense of the Communal Rabbi to the public. Jacobs's statement as published in the *Jewish Chronicle* "deplores the unwarranted attacks" on Altmann, explaining that the proposed changes bear "no trace of Reformism," and in actual fact, merely affirm the ongoing practice of United Synagogue under the Chief Rabbi's authority. Furthermore, Jacobs's statement clarifies that the guidelines are recommendations, the implementation left to the discretion of each synagogue.²⁹

Such disputes, while seemingly of strictly parochial interest, may be unlocked in their meaning to reveal sociological anxieties of deeper concern.³⁰ Altmann himself was well aware at the time of the larger significance of what

²⁸"Synagogal Rule for the Guidance of Readers and Wardens of Synagogues." Undated meeting notes, Jacobs Archive.

²⁹JC, August 29, 1952.

³⁰See, for example, Todd Endelman's study on ritual slaughter practices as an example of how such "intra-Jewish brawls" serve as useful indicators of the passions and shifts present in Britain between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Todd Endelman, "'Practices of a Low Anthologic Level': A Shehitah Controversy of the 1950s," in *Food in the Migrant Experience*, ed. Anne J. Kershner (London: Ashgate, 2002).

would otherwise seem to be a rather innocuous episode. Asked by the North American monthly the Jewish Spectator to comment on the incident, Altmann again would designate Jacobs to draft a public response. Prior to recommending his younger colleague to the American publication, Altmann revealed his own thoughts on the entire incident to the monthly's editor, Trude Weiss-Rosemarin:

There exists an indisputable need for raising the whole tone of our religious services, but certain extreme groups within orthodoxy seem determined to nip in the bud any attempt at improving our religious position even if such attempts are made within the strict limits of Halakha. The campaign that has been waged against our proposals bears all the features of medieval fanaticism, and it should be of great interest to place this whole local incident within the wider context of the contemporary Jewish situation.³¹

Altmann and, by extension, Jacobs, were well aware of the sociological rumblings beneath the surface of the Anglo-Jewish community. The influx of Central and Eastern European Jewry into Manchester resulted in the inevitable ideological struggle on the nature of Orthodoxy in its new environs.

Jacobs's subsequent response article bears the tantalizing title "Organic Growth vs. Petrification," making clear that when it comes to matters of Jewish law, his preference was for the former over the latter.³² Jacobs identifies the central question as follows:

The point at issue is this: can there be change in Judaism or does loyalty to Orthodoxy commit us to a petrification of our religious life?

³¹Letter from A. Altmann to Dr. Trude Weiss Rosmarin, October 2, 1952.

³²The very use by Jacobs of the term "Petrification" may reflect Altmann's own notion of petrified legalism (*gesetzesstarre*). See, for example, Alexander Altmann, *Jewish Studies: Their Scope and Meaning Today*, (London: Hillel Foundation, 1958), 4.

Upon reviewing the particulars of the case at hand, Jacobs reiterates the defense of his earlier public statement. Given the opportunity, Jacobs goes on to situate these reforms as well as others (e.g. the recitation of *Hallel* - the traditional festive psalms of praise on Israel's Independence Day), reasoning "every thinking person must protest against the attitude which bids us to relinquish the project [of change in Judaism] merely on the grounds that we of this generation have not the merit to take an important step unknown to our ancestors." Jacobs's final image, far from being a vigorous defense of tradition, reveals what may very well be his first published statement on the effects of historical consciousness on legal interpretation:

A year or two ago a process was discovered by means of which the paintings of the old masters in the National Gallery could be cleaned. At first there were shocked outcries of "sacrilege." Many of those who protested seem to have considered the very grime that had accumulated through the ages to be an essential part of the pictures. The protest went unheeded, the pictures were cleaned, the grime removed, and new beauties formerly obscured, were revealed to the eye. We should keep this in mind in our approach to the renewal of Jewish life. We must never identify the dust of the ages with the living Jewish faith; but as traditional Jews, while attempting to remove this dust, we must ever be on our guard not to wreak irreparable damage to the picture of Judaism by removing its paint with our too vigorous cleansing.

It is in this context that Jacobs sets the mood that would come to be the hallmark of his approach to Jewish law. In pointing out the difficulties of the road ahead in the renewal of Jewish life, Jacobs concludes his article reflecting:

This is no easy task. The way of moderate traditionalists can never be without difficulties. The prayer of such

moderates is that attributed to an English admiral who prayed: “Dear God, give us strength to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed. Give us courage to change the things that can and should be changed. *And give us the wisdom to distinguish one from the other.*”³³

Far from the particulars of the instigating moment, or for that matter, Altmann’s increasingly politicized role within Manchester Orthodoxy,³⁴ Jacobs used the opportunity to give voice to his own views, with English inflections and points of reference (e.g. National gallery, the English Admiral) on the historic tolerance if not insistence of Jewish law towards change, growth, and under certain circumstances, reform.

More than his distinct profile as an academic or communal rabbi, it was Altmann’s ongoing attempts to consider the claims of one upon the other that left a lasting impression on Jacobs. Indeed, through his departure from England to Brandeis University in 1959, Altmann’s professional oeuvre may be understood as a sustained attempt to integrate his commitments to the academy and piety, torah-loyal Judaism and modern *bildung*.³⁵ In fact, upon arriving in England, he called on his new Jewish community to create a “Society for Jewish Faith and

³³Louis Jacobs, “‘Organic Growth’ Vs. ‘Petrification,’” *Jewish Spectator*, November, 1952, 17: 9-11.

³⁴That same year, a *Cherem* (ban of excommunication) was proposed against Altmann by the same “Committee to Fight Reform.” Press clippings from the *Jewish Chronicle* seem to indicate the group claimed the ban was at the directive of the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Rabbi Z. R. Bengis. *JC*, November, 6, 13, 20, 1953.

³⁵Cf. Daniel Swetschinski, “Alexander Altmann: A Portrait” in Alexander Altmann et al., *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies ; No. 5 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982). Altmann, A., J. Reinharz, et al. (1982), 3-14. See in particular Paul Mendes Flohr, “Theologian Before the Abyss,” in Alexander Altmann and Alfred L. Ivry, *The Meaning of Jewish Existence: Theological Essays, 1930-1939*, xiii-xlvi.

Life,” identifying the mandate of Jewish education as “interpreting Judaism in the language of our age, in relation to the problems of our age.”³⁶

Altmann’s programmatic response repeatedly recommended the tactic of “synthesis.” Describing the methods of his short-lived *Rambam Lehrhäuser* in Berlin, Altmann asks a rhetorical question that he remained committed to for the next twenty years in England and beyond:

Why should it not be possible to forge a synthesis out of the synoptic, supra historical old method of learning together with the historical mode of interpretation, on the basis of genuine piety?³⁷

Altmann’s commitment to a hermeneutic that integrated a desire to affirm scholarship and faith, traditional learning and the rigor and openness characteristic of a critical philosopher remained remarkably consistent throughout his European tenure.³⁸ Judaism must be enthused by a theological vision, “guided by the rigors of philosophical reasoning.”³⁹ His writing and speaking

³⁶A Plea for the Forming of a “Society for Jewish Faith and Life.” Undated lecture, 4. Altmann Archive. Given its attention to the “grave hour of history,” this speech appears to have been given in the very early 1940s. Indeed, after arriving in Manchester, Altmann sought to reconstitute the learning of his Berlin Rambam Lehrhaus. Altmann would eventually succeed in opening an academic institute for higher Jewish education in 1941, a precursor to what would become the Manchester (then London) Institute of Jewish Studies. Cf. “History of the Institute of Jewish Studies, London, during its first 40 years, 1954 -1994: Its contribution to the history of Jewish Scholarship.” in Alexander Altmann et al., *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism* (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 21 -32. On the failed attempts to move Berlin Seminaries to England and Altmann’s peripheral role, see Christhard Hoffman and Daniel R. Schwartz, “Early but Opposed - Supported but Late: Two Berlin Seminaries Which Attempted to Move Abroad,” *Leo Baeck Institute* 36 (1991). 267-304.

³⁷Alexander Altmann, “The Teaching Methods in Lehrhäuser.” In A. Altmann, *The Meaning of Jewish Existence*, 92.

³⁸Cf. P. Mendes Flohr “Theologian before the Abyss” in A. Altmann, *The Meaning of Jewish Existence*, xiii-xlvi.

³⁹*Ibid.*, xxxiv.

consistently called upon lay, rabbinic and scholarly audiences alike to consider their obligation to construct viable theological reasoning, infused by the panorama of theological resources at the disposal of the modern Jew. From Crescas to Kierkegaard to the Kalam, the breadth of Altmann's scholarship positioned him to consider Jewish theology in the most sophisticated terms. Drawing on Jewish mysticism, medieval philosophy, Hassidism and otherwise, Altmann earnestly placed traditional categories of Jewish theology into conversation with contemporary modes of philosophic discourse, Jewish, secular and otherwise, a tactic that would become Jacobs's to continue.⁴⁰

The differences between Altmann's views of Orthodoxy and the existing Anglo-Jewish educational efforts are recorded in the reports of his 1949 address at Jews' College Speech Day. Invited to address the question "What is Orthodoxy?" Altmann used the opportunity to identify three shortcomings with Anglo-Orthodoxy. First, he deplored the "absence of a serious effort to create a

⁴⁰A brief review of Altmann's speaking topics and popular articles during these years affirms his sustained commitment to placing traditional Judaism into conversation with the sophistication of philosophical discourse. As early as 1943, Altmann was employing Freud, Scheler Weber and others to argue for the need of religious traditionalism in contemporary society. See A. Altmann, "Religion and Modern Civilization," *Chayenu*, March 1943. Altmann's address at the Ninth Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers (1951, London) analyzes the contours of Jewish faith vis-à-vis Pragmatism, Anthropology, Freudian and Jungian Psychology, Phenomenology, Existentialism and beyond. Unpublished Address, Altmann Archive. In a 1951 Hapoel Mizrahi weekend retreat chaired by Altmann (in which Jacobs also participated), Altmann chose the topic "Faith and Reason in the Modern World." (JC, April 6, 1951). At the University of Manchester his topics ranged from "The Role of History in the Shaping of Judaism" to "The Formulation of Dogmas" to "Rational Interpreters of Revelation." (University of Manchester announcement: 1952-53. Altmann Archive). Delivering the Dubnow memorial lecture in 1952, Altmann took on the subject of "Various Approaches to Jewish history," comparing ancient approaches to that of *Wissenschaft* scholars such as Zunz, Krochmal and others. Altmann concluded with a plea to "Return to the religious interpretation of Jewish history, which alone...could impart future meaning to the existence and destiny of Israel." The JC reports that Altmann "While in full sympathy with the scientific approach...felt that historiography was incapable of illuminating the mystery of Israel and stood in need of faith as a means of arriving at a profounder level of understanding." JC, May, 23, 1952. See also "The Philosophy of Faith," JC, April 24, 1953.

philosophy of faith, lamenting that while in the field of *halakha* (Jewish Law) we [Orthodox Jews] have made great strides throughout the centuries, in theology and philosophy we are at a very primitive level.” Second, Altmann bewailed the lack of historical inquiry in Orthodoxy, believing that “the employment of their critical faculties and the application of a sense of historical inquiry to their problems was not alien to the spirit of Jewish tradition.” Finally, he noted the lack of spirituality amongst Orthodox Jews, warning that “unless Orthodoxy grows in spiritual stature...a golden opportunity for the deepening of the Jewish faith will be missed.” Altmann’s charge to consider models of Jewish life guided by philosophy, theology and spirituality, spoken in the company of the Chief Rabbi and the leadership of Jews’ College, received front page coverage in the JC. The JC reports that Chief Rabbi Brodie took umbrage with Altmann’s characterizations and recommendations responding to Altmann as follows:

Not every person could be a philosopher and appreciate the need for a philosophy of life expressed in philosophical terms. He [Brodie] thought what was required in their community was first a sense of discipline, and secondly a respect for authority.⁴¹

It would be a dozen years later that Jews’ College would become the site of a much more impassioned discussion on the intersection between historical and philosophical investigation, rabbinic authority and rabbinic training. Indeed, Altmann and Brodie’s exchange over the place of critical scholarship in Orthodoxy at Jews’ College prefigures the battle lines between Jacobs and Brodie.

⁴¹JC, May 27, 1949.

Assessment of Altmann's Influence

Years later, Jacobs would continue to identify his intellectual, personal and professional debt to Altmann. It should also not be missed that Altmann owed a debt to Jacobs-his industriousness, his willingness to serve as Altmann's native-born Yeshiva-trained junior colleague, and as will be discussed in Chapter Five, his role as a key player in the successful transfer of Altmann's Institute of Jewish Studies from Manchester to London. Altmann and Jacobs continued to correspond regularly not just during Jacobs's tenure in Manchester, but also as Jacobs moved to London and Altmann to Brandeis. Representative of their mentor/protégée relationship is the following missive received by Jacobs from Altmann upon his long awaited award of a doctoral degree:

I just received an invitation from your synagogue to preach a special service in honor of your Doctorate. I shall, of course, be only too pleased to associate myself with your congregation's desire to honor you in a befitting way. Yet it strikes me a bit incongruous to style the occasion a 'special service' seeing that the conferment of a secular degree does not call for a religious celebration. I think a word from you will prevent what would otherwise be regarded as in bad taste. My suggestion would be a kiddush and reception after the Sabbath morning service – without calling it a special service. I personally would like to speak at the kiddush and suggest you preach the sermon.⁴²

Altmann's tone, warmth, and discretion are indications of not only the pride that he felt for Jacobs's academic achievements, but also the esteem he held for his junior colleague in Jewish communal affairs. The letter also serves to signal a not insignificant difference between the two men, one that would later be identified

⁴²Letter from A. Altmann to L. Jacobs. August, 7, 1952. Jacobs Archive.

by Jacobs as a limitation of Altmann's influence. It would seem that the request of Jacobs's congregation saw no conflict between Jacobs's academic and rabbinic achievements. Altmann's response, for all its graciousness, draws a line: namely, the conferment of an academic degree upon Jacobs, while a personal and intellectual achievement for Jacobs, bore no religious significance, and a special service with Altmann officiating would be incongruous, if not inappropriate.

Years later, Jacobs would reflect more clearly on the limitations of Altmann's mentorship, most of which revolved around the way Altmann navigated between his scholarly and rabbinic roles:

...Dr. Altmann was more of a philosopher, and philosophy strangely enough was for Dr. Altmann a safe subject. You know...you can discuss the influence of neo-Platonism on the Kabbalistic doctrine of the sephirot...without it raising the question should you keep the shabbos, why not, what's it got to do with that?⁴³

Ironically, although Jacobs's rabbinic persona took shape in a far more insular yeshiva environment, in Jacobs's estimation it was Altmann who fell short in the application of the very critical methodology he championed. Altmann, a product of German neo-Orthodoxy's bifurcation of scholarship and faith, would maintain that certain areas of inquiry were off limits. For Altmann, the sophisticated application of a historical sensibility and critical method on sacred texts found its limits at the Bible, which always remained a *noli me tangere*. As Jacobs would later argue, if the critical methods were to be accepted, then intellectual integrity insisted that they find application wherever they led, even if that meant the Bible itself. Altmann, despite being the lifetime paradigm of a "scholar-rabbi," would

⁴³Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

never allow himself to embrace the full implications of critical scholarship on his faith.

Jacobs also would find himself frustrated with Altmann's approach to matters of Jewish law. Again, in later years Jacobs recalled:

...I said okay Dr. Altmann...I never called him by his first name because he was very aloof. So I said, okay, Dr. Altmann, I can understand what seems to be your attitude ...because he once...said that in his view, it isn't what the mitzvah [commandment] originally meant. This was a very important remark which I always remembered and has influenced me. It isn't what the mitzvah originally meant, like the origin of the mitzvah, it's what it became. So you don't need to, you don't need to go too much into how did the Sabbath laws come about. You don't have to say every detail was given by God at Sinai. It's how it became...and...produced and I remember he used the word "atmosphere." That was the "atmosphere." And we used to meet, the younger rabbis used to meet at his home to discuss these things. I once said to him: Okay, Dr. Altman this I understand. And I can buy this. But what do you do with a question like the *Agunah*?...The poor woman can't get married. So you know what he said? He said: 'Why should she get married?' You see. And I thought that was a bit cruel really. The answer was unsatisfactory.⁴⁴

Beyond serving as a noteworthy statement on the tone of Jacobs's interpersonal relationship with his mentor, Jacobs's reflection on Altmann is altogether significant for the insight it offers towards distinguishing the differences in approach between Altmann and Jacobs. Years earlier, Altmann had constructed a remarkably similar statement concerning the impact of historical study on ritual observance. In outlining the teaching methods of the Berlin *Lehrhäuser*, Altmann

⁴⁴Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

had used the Sabbath as a paradigmatic example of how one coordinates historical and suprahistorical interpretations and considerations:

It will also be important to consider the spiritual-historical points of contact of the Jewish Shabbat with the Babylonian Sabbatu or the Stoic-Roman concept of Saturnalia. The point of this is not to construct a dependence of the Jewish Sabbath upon the Babylonian, based upon models taken from foreign sources not well-disposed toward us; but rather to show how, in an environment having a certain spiritual-historical character, the Jewish Sabbath expressed something totally new and totally different. The meaning-structure of the Jewish Shabbat cannot be shown any more clearly than in such a comparison with its environment.⁴⁵

Altmann's fidelities to both the worlds of scholarship and traditional observance located the Bible within and above history. The Jewish Sabbath, though bearing remarkable points in common with its ancient analogues, also bore a spiritual character distinct from anything else. For Altmann, it would be the "atmosphere" or "environment" that gave sanction to Jewish law, not necessarily its origins. Nevertheless, Altmann's historical insights had no impact on matters of Jewish practice—again, a compartmentalization that Jacobs would come to find problematic.⁴⁶ The inability of Altmann to employ his historical sensibility

⁴⁵A. Altmann, "The Teaching Methods in Lehrhäuser," in A. Altmann, *Meaning of Jewish Existence*, 92.

⁴⁶A few years prior to the opening of the Lehrhäuser, Louis Ginzberg in his assessment of Zecharia Frankel used strikingly similar language to describe the findings and contradictions of Frankel and the historical school: "We may now understand the apparent contradiction between the theory and practice of the positive-historic school. One may, for instance, conceive of the origin and idea of Sabbath rest as the professor Protestant theology at a German university would conceive it, and yet minutely observe the smallest details of the Sabbath observances known to strict Orthodoxy. For an adherent of this school the sanctity of the Sabbath reposes not upon the fact that it was proclaimed on Sinai, but on the fact that the Sabbath idea found for thousands of years its expression in Jewish souls. It is the task of the historian to examine in to the beginnings and developments of the numerous customs and observances of the Jews; practical Judaism on the other hand is not concerned with origins, but regards the institutions as they have come to be."

towards alleviating the plight of the *aguna* was, for Jacobs, a “bit cruel.” Jacobs, as we shall come to see, would insist that Jewish law always acknowledges the “humanity” of the observant Jew. Altmann, despite understanding himself to be a champion of “synthesis,” was in Jacobs’s mind unwilling to synthesize the findings of the historical school with matters of legal observance.

As Jacobs’s intellectual profile matured, one can not help but feel the presence of Altmann in Jacobs’s writing. As we shall explore, Jacobs’s forays into Jewish mysticism, dogmatics, popular articles on Judaism and psychology, all could trace their pedigree to Altmann’s writings. Altmann would urge his younger protégés towards certain spheres that inevitably extended from their own.⁴⁷ More than the topics, Jacobs’s methodological tactics were both indebted and in reaction to Altmann’s legacy. While Jacobs would go on to seek to forge the same “synthesis” that Altmann sought, he would do so more aggressively, and as we shall see, progressively.

The fullest statement of Altmann’s “synthetic approach” can be found in a 1956 address entitled “The Task before Anglo-Jewry,” where Altmann identified four tensions within Anglo-Jewry, and in each case, recommended a “synthesis”

Louis Ginzberg, *Students, Scholars and Saints* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1928), 206.

⁴⁷Many topics from Altmann’s public lectures would later become areas of Jacobs’ inquiry. For example, clippings from these Manchester years record Altmann speaking on “Freud and the Jews,” “Psychology and Religion” Alexander Altmann, “Psychology and Religion” (paper presented at the Winter Programme: October to December 1952, Manchester, 1952). Jacobs would pick up the topic of psychology and faith both in print (JC, May 8, 1953) and later, almost verbatim in Louis Jacobs, *We Have Reason to Believe: Some Aspects of Jewish Theology Examined in the Light of Modern Thought* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1957). Hereafter, WHRTB.

towards accommodating the competing forces faced by a modern Jew.⁴⁸ First and foremost, the multiple “streams of civilizations...our precious Jewish heritage and the British tradition.” Altmann critiques the “revival of ghettoism” in his midst and suggests that in every age and context “the greatness of Judaism consists precisely in its ability to absorb and assimilate the fullness of the world’s spiritual harvest.” Second, Altmann recommends a synthesis between “tradition and individual consciousness,” lest “we land ourselves in either a blind traditionalism or anarchic subjectivism.” Third, Altmann encourages a synthesis between “action and contemplation” lest our spiritual leaders become so entrenched in their organizational and institutional commitments that they neglect “the theological side of Judaism.” Finally, Altmann recommends a synthesis between the universalist and nationalist trends within Judaism,” asking that his generation understands that “by fulfilling Judaism we do not step out of the bounds of our common humanity but express it in the deepest way possible to us.” It is striking to consider the extent to which these tensions appear in Jacobs’s unfolding work. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that of all the tensions enumerated, Altmann does not encourage a synthesis between critical scholarship and faith. Up until his departure from England, Altmann’s public writings on the status and study of

⁴⁸Alexander Altmann, “The Task before Anglo-Jewry,” Address delivered at the Anglo-Jewish Association 1953/1954 Winter Series. Excerpts reprinted in *Jewish Affairs*, January, 1956, 28-30.

Sacred Texts would never broach the topic of the implications of critical studies on traditional faith.⁴⁹

Case in point is Altmann's most extended reflection on the impact of scholarship upon traditional faith delivered in 1957 to the Hillel Foundations Jewish Students Union. In what would become his valedictory speech to Anglo-Jewry, "Jewish Studies: Their Scope and Meaning Today," Altmann champions the historical orientation of *Judische Wissenschaft*:

Historical study should facilitate a sympathetic understanding and evaluation of the strata of the past which in some mysterious way are embedded in our own present. The analytical method is not an end in itself but a means to a new synthesis. The Jew who delves in to the recesses of the Jewish past need not emerge bewildered and confused but should be able to form a more or less unified vision of Jewish reality in all its ramifications and with all its defeats as well as its triumphs.⁵⁰

Altmann's remarks stand as a profoundly impassioned defense of the methods and spiritual yields of the historical-philological approach. And yet, despite Altmann's sympathetic understanding of such endeavors and its vital role for contemporary Jewry, he never once addresses the obvious challenges posed by a synthesis of critical inquiry and traditional faith.

⁴⁹For example, a two-part article Altmann penned for the *Jewish Review* "On Studying the Torah" (July 23 and August 6, 1954), while outlining in some depth the spiritual qualifications necessary to study Torah and the spiritual boon to the participant, never once validates or even mentions any critical approaches.

⁵⁰A. Altmann, *Jewish Studies*, 14-15. See Paul Mendes Flohr's treatment of Altmann's sympathetic understanding of the Jewish past in "Jewish Scholarship as a Vocation," In A. Altmann, *Perspectives*, 33-47.

The same year Altmann made the above remarks, in what would become Jacobs's most celebrated and controversial work, Jacobs's famously advised a similar unifying synthesis:

A true Jewish apologetic, eschewing obscurantism, religious schizophrenia, and intellectual dishonesty, will be based on the conviction that all truth, 'the seal of the Holy One, Blessed is He,' is one, and that a synthesis is possible between the permanent values and truth of tradition and the best thought of the day.⁵¹

Jacobs's quest for a "synthesis" may be linked directly to Altmann. While it is striking to note the common intonations, vocabulary and project shared between Altmann and his student Jacobs, it is perhaps even more important to consider the differences: namely, the degree to which Jacobs went on to squarely face the challenges of Biblical criticism. Jacobs's refusal to compartmentalize the claims of faith and scholarship may be viewed as a reaction to Altmann, and for that matter, Stein and Munk as well. Indeed, when considering the influence Jacobs's teachers had on him, one must factor in the degree to which Jacobs embraced and rejected the models, worlds and choices they represented. For all their influence, Jacobs's mentors—from the yeshiva to Altmann—were consistently understood as representing something "other" than that which Jacobs perceived to be his own identity and vocation. This awareness, combined with Jacobs's ability and interest to construct his own voice in Anglo-Jewry, ensured that Jacobs's theological vision would come to represent a dialectic of

⁵¹WHRTB, 11.

assimilation and self assertion. Thus, while being fed by many sources, Jacobs begins to stand as original and unlike anything that preceded him.⁵²

A final lingering query regarding Altmann and Jacobs's place in Anglo-Jewry may be asked. For if, as the above survey would indicate, Altmann and Jacobs's calls for a "synthesis" had so much in common, how was it that the latter encountered the wrath of Anglo-Orthodoxy, while the former, though not without his critics, escaped such attacks? Part of the answer inevitably lies in the growing voice of the Eastern European expressions of Orthodoxy following the Shoah in the 1950s. Further, as a home-grown product of English yeshivot, one may imagine that Jacobs's heretodox views *from within* were perceived as far more threatening than the views of Altmann, who would forever remain something of an outsider to Anglo-Jewry. Finally, Altmann's sentiments were expressed as a mild rebuke to the community that he was leaving, while Jacobs voiced his theology as a rising star in Anglo-Jewry. As Altmann would move away from Jewish communal leadership and Anglo-Jewry as a whole, his scholarly claims did not carry the same import as did those of Jacobs. It would be these differences in their public personae, far more than any ideological ones that would be the determinative differences in the reception of their shared quest for a "synthesis."

The two men would continue their relationship for years to come, recognizing their common theological agenda in the face of divergent career paths. Altmann would write to Jacobs in 1964:

⁵²See Amos Funkenstein, "The Dialectics of Assimilation," *Jewish Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (1995), 11.

Many thanks for your letter. I am glad to hear that the new congregation is safely established and that you feel fortified by the loyalty of your members. I am sure the congregation will play a constructive role in the religious life of Anglo-Jewry. The fact that you lay claim to being considered Orthodox (i.e. in the sense defined by the Constitution of the United Synagogue) will allay fears of a possible line-up with the Conservative movement in the United States, and should make a *modus vivendi* with the Chief Rabbinate possible. I appreciate your remark concerning the conciliatory effect my presence in England might have had. It is, of course, difficult to speculate what might have happened but I would most certainly have tried to be helpful, provided I would have managed to remain *persona grata*. If you think that I can be of any assistance at this particular juncture, please do not hesitate to call on me.⁵³

As we shall come to explore in Chapter Five, Altmann's decision to leave for North America would indirectly serve as a significant factor in Jacobs's own career path. Here, both Jacobs and Altmann rightly understand the "conciliatory effect" that Altmann's authoritative voice would have had if he stayed. Indeed, while it is Jacobs's legacy that guides our present efforts, perhaps the real "what if" lies in the possibilities that Altmann's appointment to the chief rabbinate in 1948 would have meant for Anglo-Jewry. More simply stated, the following remark was made by M. Behrson in the JC on the occasion of Altmann's 65th birthday:

Rabbi Dr. Alexander Altmann as Britain's Chief Rabbi remains one of the great might-have-beens of Anglo-Jewish History.⁵⁴

⁵³Letter from A. Altmann to L. Jacobs, May 28, 1964. Jacobs Archive.

⁵⁴JC, April 16, 1971.

A Time for Searching

With formative influences such as Altmann, it is no wonder that Jacobs would come to characterize his years in Manchester as “a time for searching.”⁵⁵ As his congregational duties, academic interests and communal profile grew, he would inevitably ask how each sphere informed the other. It would be during these years that Jacobs would find his own voice, which while traceable to his formative influences, would come to have a distinctive resonance of its own. Fortunately, at this stage we begin to have a steady record of Jacobs’s public speaking and writing. Although it is impossible to separate the spheres in which Jacobs functioned (the very point being that each informed the other), if for no other reason than organization, we shall proceed by exploring Jacobs’s congregational, academic and communal activities. It should also be noted that Jacobs’s voice, as with any educator or communal leader functioning in such varied contexts, takes on different intonations based on the context in which he functioned.⁵⁶ With these fields considered, we will then be positioned to consider the emergent voice and vision he would take to the next stage of his career.

⁵⁵Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

⁵⁶Despite the consistent subject matter of the condition of Jews and Judaism, a congregational rabbi, academic or community leader will inevitably adopt a different “voice” based on the audience to which s/he is addressing. Often times these modifications occur in somewhat counterintuitive ways. For example, as a congregational rabbi, Jacobs’s concerns may be of parochial interest, geared to a level suitable to the day to day spiritual needs of his parishioners. And yet as any congregational rabbi knows, the security afforded to a preacher communicating to his own community often times permits an increased confidence to push theological limits. So too, while public lectures and articles may call for sophistication and intellectual rigor not necessary for a typical Sabbath sermon, comments made and disseminated in the public domain are almost always framed more cautiously than “in house” theological reflections.

A rather basic but telling metric that marks Jacobs's intellectual development in his congregational context are his synagogue bulletins and preserved sermonic materials, however limited in number. For example, every year the Central Synagogue High Holiday bulletin would contain notes on the festival season authored by Jacobs. In his first two High Holiday seasons at the Central Synagogue (1948 and 1949), only the times of services were listed with no extended remarks from Jacobs. In 1950, Jacobs's written greetings provide rather traditional and standard explanations concerning blowing the *shofar*, scriptural readings and High Holiday liturgical practices.⁵⁷ By 1952, Jacobs's insights had grown decidedly more sophisticated. His discussion of "the binding of Isaac" included references to the archeological findings of Canaanite dwellings and the remnants of child sacrifice. His comment on the theological drama of the Days of Awe is entitled "The God Idea," a reference to Rudolf Otto made explicit in a *Jewish Chronicle* article written that same festival season.⁵⁸ Peppered with citations from Emerson, Arnold Bennett and "negro preachers," Jacobs's rabbinic voice had come to embrace a far more varied group of interlocutors.

It is in this same parochial publication that one also senses that Jacobs is caught by the spell of Solomon Schechter's historical school. In a spirited discussion of finding a balance between the competing values of "cohesion" and "variety" in the Jewish world, Jacobs writes:

⁵⁷Louis Jacobs, "New Years Message and Notes on the High Festivals. Times of Services," Manchester: Central Synagogue, 1950. Jacobs Archive.

⁵⁸JC, September 19, 1952.

Judaism in this respect is like great art. The poetry of Milton is quite different from that of Wordsworth, the music of Beethoven has a different quality from that of Mozart, the paintings of Rembrandt are of a different kind to those of Constable, but all these men created masterpieces because they observed certain rules which had to be observed if their work was to be dignified with the name of art. So it is with Jewish life. The adventuresome person need not fear that Judaism seeks to deprive him of his individuality. It seeks rather to make use of his individuality, to shape and direct that which is his own particular approach to religion. That is why the Judaism of Maimonides was different to that of Rashi, the faith of the Vilna Gaon different to that of the Baal Shem, the outlook of Samson Raphael Hirsh to that of Rabbi Isaac Elchanon of Kovno, and yet despite all their variety and diversity they all worshipped at the same shrine and their different contributions were all made in the name of Judaism.⁵⁹

Jacobs gracefully employs the series of freedoms and restraints encountered by a master artist to capture the diverse modes of Jewish expression over the years.

Just as the masters of every age were able to give expression to the full scope of their individuality in spite of the constraints of their craft, so too the ritually observant Jew. Jacobs's comments signal the influence of Solomon Schechter, who in one of his most famous addresses, "The Seminary as a Witness," used strikingly similar language in an effort to highlight the unifying spirit of Jews throughout the ages:

Lord John Morley, in his essay on Emerson, relates that while the New England mystic was lecturing, one of the audience asked his neighbor: "Can you tell me what connection there is between that last sentence and the one that went before, and what connection it all has with Plato?" "None, my friend, save in God!" If I were asked what connection is there, say, in order to except present company, between Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, of Cordova (known as

⁵⁹Louis Jacobs, "New Year's Message and Notes on the High Festivals: Times of Services," Manchester: Central Synagogue, 1952. Jacobs Archive.

Maimonides), and Solomon ben Isaac, of Troyes (known as Rashi), I would say, “None, save in God and His Torah.” The one lived under a Mohammedan government; the other under a Christian government. . . . The one spoke Arabic; the other French. . . . But as they both observed the same fasts and feasts; as they both revered the same sacred symbols, though they put different interpretations on them; as they both prayed in the same language. . . . as their ultimate hopes centered in the same redemption – in one word, as they studied the Torah and lived in accordance with its laws, and both made the hopes of the Jewish nation their own, the bonds of unity were strong enough even to survive the misunderstandings between their respective followers.⁶⁰

There are, to be sure, subtle differences between Schechter and Jacobs. One of the most elegant English language apologetes for the historical school, Schechter employs the figures of Rashi and Maimonides to reconcile the diverse contexts and common strivings across Jewish history. Slightly different is Jacobs, for whom Rashi and Maimonides serve as exemplars of how the strivings of every religious soul may be validated if not amplified so long as it is done within the observed ritual framework. Nevertheless, both Jacobs and Schechter seek to steer a path that reconciles the varieties of Jewish expression alongside the trend and goals of unity. Beyond the content itself, the common stylistic tactics (Rashi/Maimonides, interweaving secular and religious language) make clear that already at this stage, Jacobs had found in Schechter a usable theological trope.

As for Jacobs’s sermons during these years, his ability to speak extemporaneously with a minimum of notes, however extraordinary, leaves us at

⁶⁰Solomon Schechter, *Seminary Addresses & Other Papers* (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1960), 50-52.

a marked disadvantage in seeking to reconstruct his early homiletical record.⁶¹ A few recovered sermons do direct attention to the broad scope of Jacobs's theological thinking during these years. For example, an undated Sabbath sermon preached on the scriptural reading "Genesis" at the Central Synagogue reflects a remarkably open theological posture. Introducing the reading, Jacobs asked, "What can a modern city dweller learn from the story of Abraham, living his simple, nomadic, life, with his cattle and his sheep amid the primitive conditions of his time?" In what would become Jacobs's signature rhetorical tactic, he posited and then rejected two possible responses, with the aim of adopting a third seemingly inevitable middle position. In this instance, Jacobs rejected the options of 1) ignoring the gulf between the time of the ancients and present day conditions; or 2) dismissing the literature as ancient and of little edification. Jacobs adopted a third tactic that merits full citation:

There is however, a third view and it is this that I want to describe this morning. This view has it that we cannot apply the lesson of these stories directly. We have first to place them in their proper background, to recognize the primitive elements in theme and having done that go onto apply the message taught to the very different conditions in our day. We have to recognize, in other words, that the Genesis stories are biography and history *written with a purpose* [underline in original],⁶² that purpose being to show how men and women, of different temperament and character,

⁶¹Jacobs would later credit Altmann with the practical advice of not speaking from a manuscript, counseling "...once you have got it down on paper freshness and spontaneity are lost; but it is recognized that adequate preparation is essential for every type of preaching. A sermon falls somewhere in between a casual talk and a lecture, every detail of which is present before the ascent of the podium." Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Preaching: Homilies and Sermons* (London; Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004), 9.

⁶²Jacobs had initially written "...the genesis stories are not so much history but prosaic accounts..." The carefully worded final draft retains both the historical element of the biblical narratives and their edifying purpose.

strove against evil, sometimes with success, sometimes without success, in their efforts to obey the dictates of their consciences and the word of God.⁶³

In a manner characteristic of the historical school, Jacobs's sermon insisted on maintaining an eye to both the ancient features of the narratives and the eternal truths communicated therein towards continued "guidance, encouragement and inspiration."⁶⁴ This posture, infused with the historical approach, betrays a familiarity with the *Wissenschaft* school of Leopold Zunz, Zecharia Frankel and like-minded scholars who understood their task to "...take into consideration the opposition between faith and conditions of the time."⁶⁵ Jacobs's attention to the continuities and discontinuities between the past and the present, mark him as a willing participant in the historical school's project.

More remarkably, Jacobs is entirely open to, if not advocating, the notion that engagement of sacred texts is not contingent on accepting their literal or historical truth. Consistent with this view is an undated press clipping of a lecture Jacobs delivered as a last minute substitute for a flu-stricken Dr. Altmann. Jacobs addressed the question of "Is the Bible out of Date?" reportedly claiming that "...great truths were expressed symbolically in the Bible. Its stories were not always to be taken literally."⁶⁶ These records make it rather clear that during these years Jacobs maintained a rather open and unflinching engagement with matters

⁶³Louis Jacobs, "Bereshith: 'The Stories of Genesis,'" Unpublished Sermon. Manchester: Central Synagogue. Jacobs Archive.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Zecharia Frankel translated and excerpted in Mordecai Waxman, *Tradition and Change: The Development of Conservative Judaism* (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1958).

⁶⁶Undated Press Clipping. Jacobs Archive.

pertaining to the historicity of the biblical text. It would not be for another ten years that such questions would provoke the wrath of the institutional arms of Anglo-Orthodoxy. Indeed, the most striking thing about Jacobs's comments is the lack of response that his inquiries seem to have elicited in the public sphere.

Academic Profile

As Jacobs's doctoral work progressed towards completion, so too his intellectual pursuits and scholarly profile would begin to develop. With Altmann as the Chair of Manchester's Institute of Jewish Studies and its *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Jacobs's academic interests were encouraged and found warm reception. It was during these years that Jacobs would form long-term friendships with a coterie of scholars committed to promoting a deeper understanding of Judaism in all its scholarly and religious potentialities. The enthusiasm of the likes of Altmann, R.I.Z Werblowsky, A. Steinberg, and Joseph Weiss was contagious and had its effect on Jacobs.

Specifically, it was Jacobs's friendship with Joseph Weiss (1918-1969) that would profoundly impact Jacobs. Weiss, a student of Gerson Scholem, had trained at the Breslau Jewish Theological Seminary and the University of Budapest. He arrived in England in 1950 to research at Leeds and Oxford, eventually joining the Hebrew Department at University College, London.⁶⁷ At Weiss's urgings, Jacobs had contemplated writing his doctoral thesis on Nahman

⁶⁷J.G. Weiss and David Goldstein, *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1985).

of Bratzlav as opposed to the more staid topic of “The Business Life of Jews in Babylon.”⁶⁸ Beyond their common love for Jewish mysticism, these two junior colleagues of Altmann shared their mentor’s project of integrating traditional modes of learning with the tools of critical scholarship, towards creating a new paradigm of Jewish learning.⁶⁹

Moving within these fortuitous circles and supported by his ongoing credentials in the Manchester Yeshiva and congregational world, Jacobs began a stream of translations, publications and articles that would continue unabated throughout his lifetime. His background in traditional learning and his clarity of expression led Jacobs to translation projects of traditional texts under the publishing auspices of Soncino, and Phillip Blackman’s Mishna Press.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

⁶⁹For an exploration of the themes and methods common to both Weiss and Jacobs, see E. Cosgrove, "Their Heads in Heaven: Unfamiliar Aspects of Hasidism." *Journal of Religion* 87, no. 1 (2007): 138-140. Numerous pieces of correspondence document Altmann’s “guiding hand” in the topics that Weiss and Jacobs chose. For example in the summer of 1954, Altmann invited Jacobs to deliver a public lecture for the Manchester Institute. Jacobs submitted a list of topics, two of which Altmann explained “were suitable from our point of view.” On July 20, 1954, Altmann approved Jacobs choice of topic: “I am very happy indeed to give my consent to your choice of the subject of “Tzimtzum,” especially in view of the fact that Mr. Weiss has signified his readiness to advise you...I am sure that Teitelbaum has not exhausted the subject.” Soon after Altmann would follow up, writing: “I gather that Mr. Weiss suggested taking in the interpretation of *tsimtsum* in early Hasidic writings besides Habad, and I am personally much inclined to agree with this idea. It might necessitate some concentrated study on your part in the literature concerned but I am sure you will find such activity most stimulating and rewarding. As you know, it is one of the purposes of the Institute to encourage studies of this kind, and we are happy to have in Mr. Weiss such a competent guide in this branch of learning.” Interestingly, the topic not chosen is altogether intriguing in signaling both Altmann’s sensibilities and the future leanings of Jacobs. Altmann writes: “In case you prefer subject No. 3. (“Attitude of the Rabbis...” etc) I suggest again a slight change in the title and perhaps a greater stress on the affirmative attitude to Faith. It might not be a bad idea to deal with the concept of faith in rabbinic literature and deal with the rabbis’ attitude to unbelief only from a secondary point of view.” This topic, having received prior treatment by Altmann would soon find itself the subject of Jacobs’s inquiries. Letters from Altmann to Jacobs, July 13, 1954; July 20, 1954; August 5, 1954. Jacobs Archive.

⁷⁰Jacobs had been commissioned by Soncino Press as part of a project to translate the code of Jewish law, the *Shulkan Aruch*. Responsible for chapters 66-118 of *Eben Haezer*,

Jacobs's first scholarly article, 'Evidence of Literary Device in The Babylonian Talmud,' was published in 1952. In later years, Jacobs would continue to reflect on the original contribution that this study bore for the academic study of the Talmud. The article's central claim contradicted the prevailing scholarly consensus that the Talmudic editors were 'non-literary collectors' of rabbinic discussions, suggesting instead they were actually artful crafters and conscious shapers of rabbinic dialogue towards dramatic "literary" effect, a rhetorical tactic that Jacobs himself (as we shall see in Chapter Six) would come to adopt in his own writing. In characteristically colorful language, Jacobs explains the implications of his findings:

It follows from the examples given and from many others that the redactors of the Talmud quite often used dramatic methods to achieve literary effect. In the instance discussed above we have the same device as that used by Shakespeare, for instance, in the casket scene in "the Merchant of Venice." Bassanio's correct choice is not introduced until the Prince of Morocco has wrongly chosen the golden casket and the Prince of Arragon the silver one. Had the dramatist introduced Bassanio's choice at once we could not, of course, have had the episodes of the Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Arragon.⁷¹

Later in life, Jacobs always understood his works on Talmudic analysis as representing an independent sphere of pure academic inquiry. At most, Jacobs

Jacobs's translation would have provided also for a super-commentary on process of codification vis-à-vis Talmudic sources. The sudden death of Soncino's director J. Davidson, the driving force behind the project, suspended the work in progress, never to be completed. Letters to Louis Jacobs from Soncino Press, February 11, 1952 and April 3, 1952. Jacobs Archive. Jacobs accepted the offer from Philip Blackman to revise the translations and commentary for two Mishnaic tractates (*Ma'aser Sheni* and *Challah*) in November, 1948. Letter from Philip Blackman to Louis Jacobs, November 21, 1948. Jacobs Archive.

⁷¹Louis Jacobs, "Evidence of Literary Device in the Babylonian Talmud," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 3, no. 4 (1952), 161.

“sought to show...what modern scholarship can gain from a knowledge of yeshiva type analysis of concepts...”⁷² While there is no reason to question Jacobs’s pure scholarly intentions in his choice of subject matter and the conclusions he derived, both now and in the chapters ahead there will be consideration of the conscious or unconscious forces that either prompted such studies or were ultimately affected by them. In light of the fact that Jacobs’s career came to be distinguished by an ongoing effort to identify the human hand in sacred texts, the fact that Jacobs eagerly found the tools of authorial contrivance in rabbinic texts at this stage of his career is of no small significance.⁷³ Jacobs’s intellectual integrity and plain spoken roots would always demand that valid methodologies should find their application wherever they may lead, and it would not be long before Jacobs applied these self same questions to the Biblical text itself.

Jacobs’s second publication submitted to the *Journal of Jewish Studies* would be on “The Talmudic Hermeneutical Rule of ‘Binyan ‘Abh’ and J.S. Mill’s ‘Method of Agreement’” again reflected Jacobs’s desire to give voice to his talmudic acumen in a comparative fashion.⁷⁴ While this scholarly article does not initially suggest deep significance for Jacobs’s later theological work, editorial feedback from the journal’s editor, J. Teicher provides insight into

⁷²HWI, 253.

⁷³For an explicit connection between Jacobs’ explorations in this area and its impact in Jacobs’s theological writings, see “The Talmud as the Final Authority.” *Judaism* 29 (1980): 45-48.

⁷⁴Louis Jacobs, “The Talmudic Hermeneutical Rule of ‘Binyan ‘Abh’ and J.S. Mill’s ‘Method of Agreement’” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 4, no. 2 (1953). 59-64.

Jacobs's scholarly instincts. Of the various editorial suggestions made by Teicher, the following comment is altogether intriguing:

I took out the passage concerning the 'anticipation of the rabbis of modern scientific method. I felt that this sounded a bit apologetical – and in my opinion it is quite unnecessary. Your paper shows clearly that the rabbinical method is something different from the Aristotelian logic.⁷⁵

Jacobs, perhaps already anxious to find rabbinic sanction for the “modern scientific method,” had stepped beyond the pure comparative aspect of his study and Teicher's editorial hand sought to reign in his bias.

Beyond their intrinsic merits, Jacobs's steady stream of writing would bring him into conversation with a scholarly world well beyond the confines of the Manchester Jewish community. For example, the above mentioned articles would catch the attention of scholars such as David Daube, then a professor of comparative jurisprudence at the University of Aberdeen. Their common interests prompted what would become a long-term correspondence concerning anything from the content of their respective articles, to critical feedback and collegial assistance on citations. On occasion, their correspondence contained intriguing exchanges on the nature and role of religion and scholarship. Though we have no record of Jacobs's prior letter, one is left to wonder the spirit that prompted the following comment by Daube, and of course, the impact it had on Jacobs:

Probably I am wrong in your view, but I think that the vitality of a religion is in direct proportion to the ability of its followers to infuse new spirit into its ceremonies. Of course there should always be some traditional basis. But there

⁷⁵Letter from J. Teicher to Louis Jacobs, May 19, 1953. Jacobs Archive.

must also be progress – by means of using that basis. An example of the development I have in mind is the ever increasing refinement in the interpretation of the Lord’s “coming down upon mount Sinai” which we may find in the Mekhilta.⁷⁶

The Daube-Jacobs dialogue provides a tantalizing peek into the effects that Jacobs’s scholarly efforts would have on his theological vision. What began as a rather quiet scholarly exchange had clearly extended into the theological sphere. Despite Jacobs’s late life insistence on the distinct agendas of his scholarly and theological pursuits and a curious resistance to discuss the implications of one upon the other, it is the contention and project of the present author to demonstrate the impact and nexus between the two spheres. Indeed, one need not look very far even during these years to see Jacobs’s efforts to draw a synthesis between the two.

Communal Speaking and Writing

Jacobs’s sought-after presence in Jewish communal, Zionist and academic circles is perhaps the most telling measure of his expanding theological horizons. His speaking engagements ranged from Jewish student societies in Manchester, Durham and Nottingham to “Brains Trust” panels or ongoing lecture series in which Jacobs participated with his senior or contemporary Manchester Jewish

⁷⁶Letter from David Daube to Louis Jacobs, April 24, 1952. Other correspondence dates from April 8, 1952, to September 17, 1953. Jacobs Archive.

scholars.⁷⁷ For example, in the fall and winter of 1952-1953, Jacobs participated in a lecture series under the auspices of Hapoel Mizrahi on “Types in Religious Experience,” covering the “*Navi*”(prophet), The “*Talmid Hakham*” (learned student), The “Mystic,” The “Hasid” and the “*Maskil*” (enlightenment thinker), culminating in a final symposium presided over by Altmann. Far from dry academic discourses, the dialogue at these lectures often raised issues of theological import for the Manchester Jewish community. For example, in the final symposium of the above series, Dr. Werblowsky concluded the session with the question: “Can we have a harmonious community recognizing a variety of types?” Each participant answered in the affirmative, and Werblowsky insisted that “a community which does not recognize variety is not harmonious but uniform.”⁷⁸

Jacobs’s own presentation on the *talmid hakham*, whether of his own choosing or assigned to him, provides remarkable insight into his thinking during these years. With each participant permitted to submit leading questions, at Jacobs’s behest he was asked the not insignificant questions, “Does Judaism deny outright the possibility of fresh revelation?” and “Can the *talmid hakham* enlarge his horizon without losing his character by taking in secular values such as the appreciation of arts and scientific methods?” Jacobs argued for the possibility of the *talmid hakham* embracing contemporary learning and values without losing

⁷⁷Correspondence received for speaking engagements, dating March 22, 1950 (Manchester University Jewish Students); March 2, 1951 (University of Nottingham Christian Action Society); November 24, 1952 (Manchester University Union). Jacobs Archive.

⁷⁸JC, March 20, 1953.

his [traditional] character. Altmann concluded the session noting that the *talmid hakham* “should be a modern educated type able to appreciate the values at the root of the arts and science.”⁷⁹

While a transcript of these and other sessions are either not extant or available, Jacobs’s previously mentioned knack for converting lectures to essay-length articles grants us the opportunity to explore his claims in their written form. The 1952 *talmid hakham* lecture had its roots in a June, 1952 pamphlet under the auspices of Manchester Torah V’Avodah, eventually submitted to the North American Jewish Spectator for a Spring 1953 publication.⁸⁰

His views, though largely a survey of the history and development of the *talmid hakham* in classical rabbinic texts, go on to affirm the place of the “new critical methods of the historical school” to the service of the Jewish learning. In explaining the relative merits of traditional learning and *Wissenschaft*, Jacobs explains:

It is in addition a great pity that the Yeshivah world remains closed to the methods of the modern historical study of Judaism which originated in the last century under the name of *Judische Wissenschaft*. The scientific study of the Jewish classics can alone provide that insight into the nature and growth of Judaism so indispensable to the Jewish religious leader today. Unfortunately the Yeshiva goes serenely on its way without being aware of such things as the importance of the correct and scientific editions of rabbinic texts, of the influence on Jewish law and thought of the political, economic and social background and of the outstanding contributions of savants like Zunz, Krochmal, Rapoport, Fraenkel, Steinschneider, Weiss and Graetz. The old gibe that the professor of Semitics knows what kinds of trousers

⁷⁹*Manchester Jewish Telegraph*, December 6, 1952.

⁸⁰Letter from Trude Weiss-Rosmarin to Louis Jacobs, January 15, 1953. Jacobs Archive.

Abaye wore while the Rav knows what Abaye said, is witty but unhelpful. The truth of the matter is that without some knowledge of the background of Abaye's century we cannot properly understand his teachings. One of the spiritual tragedies of our day is the unfortunate divorces between the Yeshiva and the modern rabbinical Seminary – a divorce which impoverishes both institutions.⁸¹

Jacobs's felicitous style is constant throughout, as he is able to give expression to the yeshiva world, scholarship and his efforts to reconcile the tensions therein.

Ten years earlier, Jacobs had already reflected on the institutional limitations of the yeshiva world and Jews' College, contending that neither was positioned to serve the needs of Anglo-Jewry. Here, his lament is recast to a very different effect, namely the competing agendas of the semitics professor and the yeshiva rav. The tragedy in Jacobs's estimation, both in 1943 and 1952, was Anglo-Jewry's inability to conceive of an institution capable of integrating the cultural and intellectual claims of both.⁸²

In his subsequent *Jewish Spectator* article, Jacobs makes explicit the sort of "product" he envisions:

But there are signs of growing recognition on the part of many scholars of both schools that it is possible and advantageous to somehow combine the best of both the old and the new learning...It is not too visionary to look forward to the emergence of a new type of Jewish scholar with the piety, the love of Torah for its own sake, and the faith of the *talmid hakham* – but whose approach has been revitalized by the infusion of the scientific method.⁸³

⁸¹Jacobs, Louis. "The Yeshiva Today," *Torah V'Avodah Organisation of Great Britain and Ireland*. June 1952.

⁸²Jacobs would reprint and refine this same argument later that year in the *Jewish Review*, "The Yeshivah in Jewish Life," September 5, 1952.

⁸³Louis Jacobs, "The Talmid Hakham," *Jewish Spectator*, April (1953), 20.

Jacobs sought to create a paradigm of learning with claims to both Old World learning and historical consciousness, which was precisely the model of *talmid hakham* that his mentor Altmann sought to create years before in the ill fated *Rambam Lehrhäuser*:

The values of the old way of learning must under all circumstances be preserved, for the future as well. But the old method suffices no longer. In our situation today we cannot do without the type of *talmid hakham*, yet have burst beyond it to a new problematic; and the same applies to the method of learning. The *lomdim* [scholars] from the East in their unconcerned insularity have long since disappeared from Germany. One thus has to grasp the tremendous corpus of learning under an aspect other than the unbroken structure of the metahistorical. It is important to understand it historically, just as, in all areas of the humanities, there is today a general concern with the categories of understanding. We have long since lost interpretative naiveté.⁸⁴

Stylistic differences aside, Altmann's appropriation of the methods of the historical school on Jacobs is altogether discernable at this point. Like Altmann, Jacobs seeks a model capable of integrating the competing claims of critical scholarship and traditional faith.

As with the subject of the *talmid hakham*, Jacobs's earliest treatments of Jewish dogmatics evidenced in a 1950 article on the subject also signal the degree Altmann's influence served to set and define Jacobs's theological interests and sensibilities.⁸⁵ Years earlier, Altmann asked "Are there Dogmas in Judaism?" asserting that dogma was not a native Jewish impulse, but had historically entered

⁸⁴A. Altmann, "The Teaching Methods in Lehrhäuser," in *Meaning of Jewish Existence*. 88-93.

⁸⁵Louis Jacobs, JC, August 25, 1950.

into Jewish theology due to “external causes.” Altmann’s treatment of the subject explains that while there are set beliefs, they are only formulated by the “struggle of Judaism with the religious currents of the surrounding world and against sects in its own midst.”⁸⁶ As Schechter famously argued before him, Altmann sought to both deny that dogma maintains a natural place in Jewish theology, yet affirm the limitations of sanctioned Jewish theological discourse.⁸⁷

These same equivocating efforts are evident in Jacobs’s writing as he sought to simultaneously affirm the historic boundaries of Jewish belief and distinguish Judaism from the creedal absolutes of other faith communities. Jacobs’s argument blends the style and content of both Schechter and Altmann’s efforts: the former stressing Judaism’s historic emphasis on deed over creed, the latter insisting on the “non-native” origins of Jewish dogmatics. Invoking the authoritative voice of Schechter, Jacobs states:

The absurd notion...that Judaism has no dogmas...that it makes no call on the faith and belief of its adherents has been effectively exploded by the famous essay on the subject, “The Dogmas of Judaism,” by Dr. Solomon Schechter. Judaism, as Schechter remarked, is not all things to all men; it has certain articles of belief to which a Jew must subscribe, it teaches not only that there is one God but that there are false gods, too.⁸⁸

Having discredited the Mendelsssohnian notion of a dogma-less Judaism, Jacobs goes on to explain (as Altmann did before him) that creedal positions are

⁸⁶Alexander Altmann, “Are There Dogmas in Judaism,” in A. Altmann, *Meaning of Jewish Existence*, 108.

⁸⁷Solomon Schechter, “The Dogmas in Judaism,” in S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism. First Series*, 73-104.

⁸⁸Louis Jacobs, JC, August 25, 1950.

somewhat unnatural in Jewish theology, having been formulated only in response to polemic attacks from the outside:

The impetus given to the working out of such principles was the need to combat the menace to Judaism of Christianity and Islam and the influence of Greek philosophy from without the Jewish camp, and the menace of Karaism from within so that every one of the thirteen principles has as its aim the denial of certain false belief in those systems.

Jacobs maintains that while there are definite dogmas in Judaism, the emphasis for Judaism has historically been on action, not belief. Nevertheless, the following comment stands as especially noteworthy given the direction of Jacobs's later writing:

There is obviously no religious value in the keeping of the mitzvot [commandments] of the Torah without a belief in their divine origin. Yet it is true to say that Judaism attaches far more importance to the practical application of its dogmas to life than to the abstract belief in the dogmas themselves.⁸⁹

Jacobs's equivocating position on the question of dogma suffers from the same tensions that characterize Schechter and Altmann's treatment of the subject.⁹⁰ It would take another fifteen years for Jacobs to openly critique Schechter's balancing act, which he does in his book-length study, *Principles of The Jewish Faith* (1964). In reference to Schechter, Jacobs writes:

⁸⁹Jacobs's follow up letter to the editor, JC, September 8, 1950.

⁹⁰Ismar Schorsch has recently put to expression the polarities embedded in Schechter's theological writings. On Schechter's aforementioned essay on Jewish dogmatics, Schorsch explains: "The polarities which give this essay its resonance are dogma and development. Schechter was prepared to surrender neither. *Qua* historian, he recognized the pervasive reality of change and diversity; *qua* theologian, he moved beyond the evidence to avow the existence of God and an immutable core to Judaism. There is indeed development in the history of dogma, but Schechter never allowed it to become the solvent of all continuity." Ismar Schorsch, "Schechter's Seminary: Polarities in Balance," *Conservative Judaism* 55, no. 2 (2003): 16.

To say that there are dogmas in Judaism but we neither know or can know what they are is tantamount to saying that Judaism has no dogmas.⁹¹

Jacobs's early public statements did not go unnoticed by the rest of Anglo-Jewry. For example, Jacobs's above equivocation on whether or not Judaism does indeed have dogmas drew the response of a rabbinic colleague Rabbi Isaac Chait. The Yeshiva trained Chait, Rabbi to Palmers Green and Southgate Synagogue London, correctly identified the lack of clarity in Jacobs's position, remarking:

Is there dogma in Judaism or is there not? Rabbi Jacobs leaves the reader in doubt... Belief in the unity of God, the covenant, the selection of Israel, the divine revelation on Mount Sinai, reward and punishment—are not these dogmas contained in the Bible?⁹²

Both in his response to Chait and in further lectures that Jacobs gave on the topic of dogma, Jacobs insisted that while there were “definite dogmas in Judaism,” the great stress in Judaism is on action, not belief.⁹³ The exchange of letters between Chait and Jacobs on the matter of dogma serve as the first (but certainly not the last) time that Jacobs's open-minded spirit would draw the response of Anglo-Orthodoxy.

A rather small but hitherto undocumented controversy erupted around Jacobs in 1951 when Jacobs and a Liberal rabbi, Dr. J.J. Kokotek, were invited by the Liverpool Graduates' Association to contribute to a symposium entitled “My

⁹¹Louis Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith, an Analytical Study* (London: Vallentine Mitchell & Co, 1964), 29.

⁹²JC, September 1, 1950.

⁹³JC, September 8, 1950, December 22, 1950.

Judaism.”⁹⁴ Local press clippings make clear that Jacobs, at the urging of the Orthodox rabbi of Liverpool, Rabbi Z. Plitnick, withdrew from the panel discussion. Although Jacobs’s own views on his withdrawal are not known, the fact that he had participated in a panel in the previous year on the subject of “Jewish Law in the Modern World” at least suggests that his withdrawal was in deference to, but not necessarily in agreement with, the Liverpool Rav’s objection to inter-denominational dialogue.⁹⁵ Bertram Benas (1880-1968), a distinguished Liverpool barrister, publicly defended Rabbi Plitnick’s right to press Jacobs not to participate in the panel. In response, another young barrister, William Frankel (1917-2008), opined in a letter to the JC that the Rav of Liverpool had over-extended the reach of his authority to the detriment of free discourse and the open exchange of ideas. Frankel, the future editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, frames the entire incident in the context of the freedoms and restraints of rabbinic authority:

By his action the Rav of Liverpool was superimposing his judgment, on a matter of policy, over that of a responsible organization and a colleague in the rabbinate.⁹⁶

Eerily prescient of things to come, Frankel defended the independence of a left leaning Orthodox rabbi against the right wing authority of Orthodox Jewry—all through the letters pages of the *Jewish Chronicle*.⁹⁷

⁹⁴JC, December 28, 1951.

⁹⁵*Liverpool Gazette*, Undated Clipping. Jacobs Archive.

⁹⁶JC, January 4, 1952.

⁹⁷Another undated clipping from the *Manchester Jewish Telegraph* from these years reports a prohibition on hot drinks served on the Sabbath at the Manchester Great Synagogue (an act which presumably was close to violation of Jewish law). Over the course of the ensuing debate, Mr. A.E. March, president of the Great Synagogue, reacted to the fact that hot drinks were

A telling epilogue to the above “Rabbinic Argument” was to come a few months later when Jacobs finally arrived in Liverpool at the request of the Jewish Graduates’ Association. Press coverage relates that the Liberal minister Kokotek was not only in attendance, but contributed thoughtfully to the discussion. Jacobs is reported to have pleaded for an increase in Jewish education and drew attention to the ability of *halakha* to deal with the challenges of modern life, returning to the ‘organic’ nature by which Jewish law developed. Reported in the press were Jacobs’s comments regarding potential conflicts between science and the Bible:

...He dealt with the alleged conflict between scientific discovery and the Bible, claiming it was a greater challenge to Christianity than to Judaism. Traditional Jews, he declared, long before the theory of evolution had ever been heard of, knew that every iota of the Bible was not to be interpreted literally. Their guide in this respect was the *Torah Shebeal Peh* – the Oral Law.⁹⁸

It is nothing less than remarkable to consider the prescient nature of the events. Jacobs, barred by institutions of Anglo-Orthodoxy from participating in a rabbinic context with a liberal thinking rabbi, would arrive soon thereafter in a setting under different auspices to express his earnest views. Jacobs’s actions in this incident suggest a not insignificant character trait. His unswerving commitment to open discourse bristled at the denominational parameters imposed on him by the Jewish community. Not so much rebellious, as reflecting a plain spoken

served on the Sabbath at Jacobs’s Central Synagogue, asking, “Why was it apparently right for the Central but not for the ‘Great?’”; a question which at least signaled a level of Observance at the Central more permissive than that of the Manchester Beth Din. Jacobs Archive.

⁹⁸Undated clipping, Liverpool *Jewish Gazette*. (The article’s reference to Jacobs’s initial withdrawal “last December” makes clear that this engagement took place sometime in the months following the incident of December 1951). Jacobs Archive.

insistence on “telling it like it is,” Jacobs could not (and would not) ever gently walk away from an opportunity to engage and debate ideas.

In Jacobs’s penchant for writing on the responsiveness of Jewish law to modern life, he increasingly found opportunities to show Orthodoxy’s ability to adapt to changing circumstances within the bounds of Jewish law. Responding to Reform Judaism’s “taunts” of Orthodoxy’s rigidity, one article entitled “Halachah and Changing Conditions” offers a laundry list of examples throughout rabbinic literature where Jewish law has adapted to new contexts and circumstances.

Reflecting on his assembled examples, Jacobs writes:

From what has been said it will be seen that Jewish Law, far from being uncompromisingly rigid, does come to grips with modern problems as they arise and the law is made to apply to those new conditions. If these are such that the original reason for the formulation of the law no longer obtains, then that law usually loses its binding force. This is quite different from the deliberate abrogation of laws as practiced by some sections of Reform Judaism.⁹⁹

For Jacobs, both here and elsewhere, change received sanction in rabbinic legislation upon the recognition that the conditions prompting the initial legislation have ceased to be. Abrogating laws for the mere sake of change, especially by those without the base of knowledge or authority to permit such changes, is according to Jacobs, stepping outside the halakhic system. The following year, Jacobs penned an article with a similar tenor entitled “The Flexibility of Jewish Law.” As he did in his article a year prior, Jacobs draws on his encyclopedic knowledge of Jewish law to list the many occasions when special allowances and exemptions were adopted due to the conditions of the

⁹⁹Louis Jacobs, “Modern Problems in the Responsa,” *Chayenu*, May/June, 14:5-6 (1950).

Jewish community.¹⁰⁰ So, too, other articles on rather mundane topics such as the “Sale of Chametz,”¹⁰¹ though ostensibly on the particulars of a specific Jewish practice, was viewed by Jacobs as an opportunity to demonstrate the functioning of “contrivances within Jewish law in order to make it applicable to life...”¹⁰² Far from advocating reform, Jacobs wrote these and other articles with an eye towards defending Orthodoxy from the charges of not having attempted to come to grips with “modern problems.” Jacobs saw himself in line with orthodox predecessors capable of responding to modernity while fully adherent to the *halakhic* system.

In seeking to demonstrate the ability of *halakha* to adapt to modern conditions, Jacobs would turn to the teacher of his former mentor Rabbi Munk, Rabbi David Hoffman (1843-1921) of the Berlin *Rabbinerseminar*. In another such “laundry list” article, Jacobs catalogues a series of Hoffman’s attempts at dealing with “new” problems all towards the following polemic:

One often hears the accusation made that Orthodox Rabbanim have not learnt how to apply the traditional *Dinim* to modern life. It is seldom realized, except by those who have first hand knowledge in these matters, that there is a vast literature in the field of rabbinics dealing with new problems.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Louis Jacobs, "The Flexibility of Jewish Law," *Chayenu*, Jan./Feb., 15:1-2 (1951).

¹⁰¹JC, April 13, 1951.

¹⁰²Unpublished letter from Jacobs to the JC, May 7, 1951 in response to letters received reacting to his April 13, 1952 article “The Sale of Chametz.” Jacobs came under attack both from the right and the left for dubbing the sale of chametz a “legal fiction.” His Orthodox detractors accuse Jacobs of introducing a “legal fiction theory,” thus impugning the integrity of the *halakhic* system. Responding to his left, Jacobs sought to demonstrate the mechanism by which change and adaptation occurred in Jewish sources within the parameters of the *halakhic* system. Jacobs Archive.

¹⁰³Louis Jacobs, "Modern Problems in the Responsa."

Jacobs, fully at home in the field of rabbinics, was well positioned to draw on his knowledge base to defend Orthodoxy from its Reform detractors. His treatments of contemporary issues in *halakha* were prompted by an insistence on Orthodoxy's ability to contend with modernity. Thus, while driven by a desire to demonstrate Orthodoxy's relevance and application to the contemporary Jew, the conclusions of his articles often yielded rather traditional and cautious positions.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the most dramatic "new circumstance" facing Jewry during these years was the establishment of the modern state of Israel. The founding of the Jewish state raised innumerable questions regarding civil enforcement of Jewish Law. From issues as "small" as the permissibility of smoking on Sabbath to reconsidering matters of family law, to calls for reconstituting a centralized and authoritative *Sanhedrin* (rabbinic high court), the debates during these early years of Israel's existence would raise an extraordinary number of theoretical and concrete issues that tested the ability of Jewish law to respond to the changing landscape of modern Jewry.

Jacobs's bona fides in Orthodox and Zionist circles positioned him well to write occasionally on these topics. Beyond the *Jewish Chronicle*, such reflections on Jewish law in the state of Israel became the fodder for *Chayenu* and the *Jewish Review*. Jacobs, alongside other frequent contributors, engaged in lively public

¹⁰⁴Thus, for example, in this article on Artificial Insemination, Jacobs concludes: "The writer wishes to state that purposes of this article is to sketch the problem as dealt with in the sources of the Halacha and to demonstrate that the Halacha is capable of dealing with modern questions as they arise. It would be presumptuous of him to attempt to give a practical decision for the guidance of this fellow Jews. A decision of such far reaching consequences can only be given by the most outstanding rabbinic authorities." Louis Jacobs, "Artificial Insemination."

debates on the religious character of the new state. Weighing in on issues as varied as “Conscription of Women” to the revival of the Biblical practice of the ancient ceremony of *Hakhel*, a steady stream of Jacobs’s writing can be found during these years.¹⁰⁵ In what appears to be the most theologically-minded Zionist statement on record for Jacobs, in a *Chayenu* article entitled “Judaism and Freedom,” he compares the immediate and irrevocable break from Egyptian slavery to the rupture wrought by the Shoah and the earth-shattering deeds of the founders the modern State:

... We have seen the break with the past in our own day. The upheaval through which our people have lived during the past ten years is so terrible that to attempt to explain it is to be smug and complacent. The only thing we can do is to leave the whole problem as one of G-d’s mysteries which we cannot hope to comprehend. Yet one effect of that upheaval is that our people have been shocked out of its indifference to its future as a people on a land of its own. The iron clutch of the Galut has been compelled to release us and we, like our people of old in the time of the Exodus, have had no time in which to tarry and are therefore able to celebrate the Pesach of our people. The slave mentality of the Galut-loving Jew who hated real freedom has been defeated with the establishment of the state of Israel.¹⁰⁶

Given that Jacobs’s later theological writings are remarkable for their lack of attention to the theological implications of the modern state of Israel, the above passage is altogether noteworthy for the dramatic theological terms used by Jacobs to characterize the founding of Israel as signaling a break from the slave-mentality of the *galut* past. Despite the striking tone, Jacobs mitigates the impact

¹⁰⁵Louis Jacobs, “Conscription of Women,” *Jewish Review*, November 14, 1952. Louis Jacobs, “Israel Revives Hakhel,” *Jewish Review*, October 3, 1952.

¹⁰⁶Louis Jacobs, “Judaism and Freedom,” *Chayenu*, March/April 1949.

that a Jewish State would have on Judaism by directing attention to the enduring place of Jewish law in every Jew's life. The newly released slave, though celebrating an "outer freedom" produced by the modern state, must continue to exercise self-control: "The Jewish answer is that man must learn to control himself by observing the laws of the Torah." Thus, while celebrating an "emancipated" Jewry, Jacobs formulates an argument for adherence to Jewish law:

...No amount of state control can succeed in establishing decent human relations without an effective control of his actions by the individual himself. For the Jew there is no more effective way of ensuring that this inner control should exist than by strengthening the ties to Judaism. The religious Jew who is guided by the Torah will make a better and more loyal citizen of his State...¹⁰⁷

Jacobs's tactic is in essence a recasting of the enlightenment credo of how to maintain loyalty to both one's faith and state—in this case, the Jewish State. In disentangling the institutions of the state and religious Orthodoxy, Jacobs would seek to steer a middle course, enabling the Religious Zionist to claim allegiance to both.

As Jacobs saw it, the state of Israel presented a unique, sincere and thorny challenge to the Orthodox Jew:

As soon as the State became a reality many worthy people began to talk about the separation of Church and State and this called forth the rejoinder from religious Jews that such separation was foreign to Jewish tradition. The trouble was that much ink was spilt explaining why it was so important for the Torah to become the law of the State but no one seemed to realize that unless we were given a very clear definition of how far the State should be religious-of what

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

exact variety of a theocracy was envisaged-such talk was quite meaningless. It is easy to talk of a Torah State, but it is when seeking to realize it in practice that one meets with formidable difficulties and the most serious problem is this very question of State interference with the rights of the individual.¹⁰⁸

Jacobs's comments came in response to the efforts of members of the religious Zionist Mizrahi movement (of which Jacobs served as the Manchester Chair) to press an Israeli ban on smoking on Sabbath. Though seemingly of small import, such incidents (regarding Sabbath observance, kashrut and otherwise)¹⁰⁹ were emblematic of sweeping calls for civic enforcement of Jewish law in the nascent state. Seeing the dangers of religious intolerance to the official party program, Jacobs resisted any such efforts to enforce Jewish law through the mechanisms of state:

Do we feel as Orthodox Jews that it is ethically correct to attempt to enforce religious observance on nonreligious people? This raises an ethical and theological problem of the first magnitude, a question which would require for its solution, in the light of historical Judaism, an inquiry into both the great writers on religious freedom such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill, and, of course, the classics of Judaism on the subject. Yet even without an exhaustive

¹⁰⁸Louis Jacobs, "State Enforcement of Torah in Israel," *Jewish Review*, March 18, 1949. Jacobs's treatment of family law in Israel was initially a lecture topic for a Mizrahi weekend retreat the prior fall.

¹⁰⁹At the ninth annual conference of Anglo Jewish Preachers (1949), the topic was discussed of establishing a Sanhedrin (an authoritative rabbinic synod) capable of interpreting Jewish law in light of the new conditions facing Jewry, specifically the modern state of Israel. From the treatment of the conference in the *JC*, the advocates of the Sanhedrin represented the liberal wing of Anglo-Orthodoxy, believing that only such a court would be able to reinterpret Jewish law "in the light of present-day requirements so that the Torah may once again be lived in its fullness in the Jewish State and throughout the Jewish world." *JC*, May 13, 1949. Jacobs's role in this conference, while minor, is notable for his opposition to the Sanhedrin plan. In his letter to the Editor, Jacobs explains that while such a rabbinic court may be able to effect small leniencies, it would be powerless to effectuate substantive changes in law, nor would its authority be recognized by the "rabbanim of the older school" and it should be thus shelved, or as Jacobs puts it, stands as "a huge red herring." *JC*, May 13, 1949 and June 3, 1949.

inquiry of this nature the ordinary normal Orthodox Jew would be reluctant to agree that it is right to stop a man smoking on Sabbath by the exercise of force.¹¹⁰

Invoking his credentials both as an Orthodox Jew *and* enlightened thinker, Jacobs would oppose State interference on the private religious lives of Israeli Jews, despite the fact he was a religious Zionist. Nevertheless, Jacobs was well aware that while on the aforementioned issue of smoking, a complete division between church and state would be possible, on other matters—such as family law—a rapprochement would be necessary. As Jacobs writes:

If the state of Israel recognizes a secular divorce a woman will be in a position to remarry without receiving a “Get” [divorce document] the problem of the “Mamzer” [illegitimate child]... will ultimately result in the division of the people of Israel into two groups one of who members will be forbidden by their religion to marry into the other. At the same time most Orthodox Jews would not desire to see a State interfere with the rights of the individual and foisting religious observance upon him.¹¹¹

More noteworthy than the particulars of Jacobs’s inquiries and proposed solutions is his insistence on formulating a response that was both in accordance with Jewish law *and* did not encroach on the rights of the non-religious Jew. Though ostensibly dealing with the problems posed by the modern state of Israel, these articles reflect Jacobs’s early insistence on formulating an Orthodoxy capable of responding to the demands of the hour, wholly tolerant of diverse levels of observance and attentive to the ongoing condition of the collective Jewish people.

¹¹⁰Louis Jacobs, “State Enforcement.”

¹¹¹Louis Jacobs, “Law of Marriage and Divorce in Israel,” *Jewish Review*, January 21, 1949.

To be sure, it would be misleading to give the impression that all of Jacobs's public writings, lectures, and activities were of a controversial nature. Though possessing a sophistication and gift of expression that may have already marked him for a very public rabbinate, the preponderance of his efforts were not perceived by him or his community as remarkably controversial. More often than not, Jacobs's articles, reviews and published homilies served the purpose of education, uplift and Jewish edification.¹¹² So, too, his public remarks did not necessarily mark him as a controversial figure. Indeed, he would later reflect that "...no one at the Central appeared at all bothered by any of the views I held."¹¹³ His occasional sermons in the *Jewish Chronicle* and elsewhere, though remarkable in his ability to draw secular, hassidic and rabbinic literature into conversation, were most often guided by rather traditional religious sensibilities and values.

At the invitation of Rev. I Livingstone, Honorary Secretary to the Conference of Anglo-Preachers and Conference Chair Rev. I.K. Cosgrove, Jacobs was invited to address the topic of "Misplaced Emphases in Present-Day Jewish Life and Thought"¹¹⁴ to the 10th conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers in May of 1953. This address is a useful benchmark for Jacobs's growing public stature and

¹¹²For example book reviews on S.M. Lehrman's "The Jewish Design of Living," *Jewish Review*, November 30, 1951, or H.J. Zimmels "Magicians, Theologians and Doctors," *Jewish Review*, May 1, 1953. Alternatively, Jacobs wrote appreciations of figures such as Rabbi Israel Salanter on the seventieth anniversary of his death. See *Jewish Review*, June 12, 1953. So too homilies occasioned by Jewish festivals such as Hannukah, see *Jewish Review*, December 28, 1953.

¹¹³HWI, 103.

¹¹⁴Letter from I. Livingstone to L. Jacobs, November 19, 1952. Jacobs Archive.

his increasingly articulate response to theological concerns. As the lecture title indicates, the address is largely a critique of a variety of Jewish expressions in vogue at the time. Jacobs critiques the Reform viewpoint for its emphasis on God at the expense of *halakhic* observance, Hebrew and Israel (he also dismisses Neturei Karta for its anti-Zionist stand). The reinterpretation of Jewish ritual as folkways as represented by Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionist views is dismissed, as is the growing turn to secular nationalism in Israel. From the descriptive and dismissive, Jacobs turns to the prescriptive, advocating a "middle path" that does not suffer the shortcomings of the aforementioned expressions of Judaism, seizing on the advantages of each without their deficiencies:

...For the plain truth is, disguise it as we may, there is far too much emphasis today on the emotional content of Judaism and not enough emphasis on its intellectual content. On the lower level this emotional approach is evident by an unintelligent aping of the very *methods* [emphasis Jacobs] of our parents without any attempt to question their validity in the face of totally different conditions. On the higher level it manifests itself in a failure to grapple with the real problems posed by modern thought. Lest we feel too complacent in this matter we should be aware that a prominent rabbinic leader in Israel frowned on the researches of a Cassutto as "Epikorsos." [Heretical] If we wish to see the bitter fruits of such an ostrich policy we have only to converse with the average Jewish university student whose domestic piety has rapidly disintegrated under the influence of his university environment and who imagines that he is revolting against real Judaism when he attacks the obscurantist teaching of his youth.¹¹⁵

Jacobs's remarks in other contexts may be qualified as having taken place in more ecumenical or local contexts, or in some cases, being distorted for the purposes of

¹¹⁵Louis Jacobs, "Misplaced Emphases in Present-Day Jewish Life and Thought," in *Tenth Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers* (London: Narod, 1953), 62.

journalistic intrigue. It is noteworthy to consider that here, in the company of the assembled leadership of the Chief Rabbi and Anglo-Jewish Orthodox rabbinic leadership, Jacobs insists on an intellectually rigorous approach to Jewish life that is willing to adopt both the methods and claims of modernity. The findings of the great Biblicists such as Umberto Cassuto must not be ignored, lest in doing so young Jews be ill prepared to meet the inevitable claims that a modern university education will make on their faith. A Judaism that is incapable of engaging in a synthetic middle path will fail to serve the needs of the hour:

It may well be that if we oppose the secularist interpretation of Judaism by the advocacy of a refined, spiritual approach to our faith from which the other worldly element is not absent, an approach which is inspired by an imaginative religious spirit but which is prevented from excesses by the stability of its loyalty to the halachah, which has the breadth of universalism together with the depth of particularism, we shall help to bring into Jewish life and thought greater spirituality and firmer balance.

Far from seeking to condemn “this or that Jewish group,” Jacobs sought to cultivate a Jewish expression that made as its goal the attempt to integrate the benefits of many, while eschewing attempts to isolate any one point of expression from the others.

The distinctive resonance of Jacobs’s theological voice would come, in no small part, from his belief that Judaism has historically withstood and sanctioned a variety of expressions throughout. Even at this stage, Jacobs argues that it is incumbent upon every generation to draw on the range of Jewish expression with an aim towards creating a dynamic vision of faith responsive to the needs of contemporary Jewry. By 1953, very little Jewish was alien to Jacobs, the yeshiva

and university graduate, an autodidact with a remarkably retentive if not photographic memory. His grounding in diverse fields of Jewish learning and his ability and inclination to retrieve them all for consideration within the pantheon of modern Jewish theology, in their strengths and weaknesses, positioned him rather well for what would become a lifetime theological project.

Towards the very end of his Manchester tenure, Jacobs was invited to submit a piece to the *Jewish Chronicle* as part of a series entitled, “The Persistent Questioner.” In characteristic fashion, Jacobs outlines the three possible attitudes to “religious questionings.” First, Jacobs explored the rejection of religious questioning on the grounds that it may lead to heresy. Second, Jacobs identifies exasperation at the futility of seeking to answer unanswerable religious questions. Finally, in the position that Jacobs comes to advocate, he sanctions such struggles as an authentic mode of religious expression. In what would become a key aspect to Jacobs’s later writing, Jacobs explains that theology, though striving beyond human experience, always began within humanity itself. Approvingly, Jacobs cites a midrash on the verse from the book of Psalms (19:7): “The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.”

In the Middle Ages Jewish thinkers were not over-much concerned with demonstrating the beauty of Jewish life. It was sufficient for them that the Torah was perfect. The perfect Torah must be obeyed and it would then have the effect of restoring the Jewish soul. Modern historical criticism with its researches into Jewish origins has caused us to reverse the process. The fruitful approach nowadays is to work backwards: to arrive at the conception of a perfect Torah by witnessing its effect on the lives of Jews throughout the ages, of showing how the soul of the Jew had been elevated and his spirit enriched by obeying its

precepts and following its teachings. A simple but typical illustration of the difference in approach is given by Krochmal in his consideration of the Davidic authorship of the whole Book of Psalms... religious Jews who follow the traditional Jewish way of life are becoming increasingly aware of the value of an approach in which the search for truth of the critical school is wedded to the devotional atmosphere in which the traditional student of the Torah conducted his researches into the will of God.¹¹⁶

All the while an Orthodox congregational rabbi, Jacobs used this opportunity to make explicit his allegiances to Nachman Krochmal's (1785-1840) historical school rather public, a point of identification that would become only more explicit in the future.¹¹⁷ The JC's accompanying editorial cites Jacobs's article approvingly, explaining that:

He [Jacobs] adopts the right attitude of approach when he remarks: 'Judaism has nothing to fear from the sincere questioner no matter how persistent he is. It has much to fear from the support of ignorant.' Citing the example of some of the greatest teachers of Judaism in the past, he declares that a positive welcome should be given to the spiritual struggles of the persistent questioner, which ought to be regarded as the first, perhaps the essential, steps towards real faith.¹¹⁸

Jacobs's questioning spirit would become central to his theological voice and vision. With authority shifted from the secured status of sacred texts, to the inquiries of the striving Jew, Jacobs was in the process of identifying and questioning the very terms by which religious authority was to be understood by him and his soon-to-be community.

¹¹⁶JC, January 15, 1954.

¹¹⁷See, for instance, Jacobs's encyclopedia entry on Krochmal that takes on an almost autobiographical aspect in Louis Jacobs, *A Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion*, 309-310.

¹¹⁸ JC, January 15, 1954.

The Road to the New West End

As early as 1949, Jacobs had entertained offers to leave Manchester for London, Holland and Leeds. As discussed in his autobiography, at the prompting of the Chief Rabbi, Jacobs was invited to serve as the Minister of the Brondesbury Synagogue and a Dayan of the London Beth Din, positions held by Rabbi Moshe Swift who was anticipating his departure to a new position in South Africa. Jacobs recalls a meeting with the head of the London Beth Din, Dayan Yehezkel Abramsky, for reasons that while “never clearly stated,” were intuited by Jacobs to signal a need to check in with the Beth Din’s highest authority. As noted in our first chapter, Jacobs had at least one earlier “run in” with Abramsky years earlier at the opening of Munk’s Yeshiva, when Abramsky voiced his disapproval of Jacobs’s calls for an Anglicized yeshiva. Recalling his suspicions of the “cloak and dagger” nature of the application proceedings, Jacobs came to anticipate that his appointment to the London Beth Din was not as assured as initially thought.

In retrospect, Jacobs reflects:

With hindsight I can see how disastrous it would have been to have become associated with the London Beth Din, a body with which I later engaged in battle several times. The views of the Beth Din on Judaism were not my views even then, and nothing could have so effectively killed off my theological quest as to have become a member of a body with no confidence at all in free inquiry.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹HWI, 102. Personal correspondence confirms that at a preliminary stage, Jacobs gracefully declined to continue his candidacy for the position. Jacobs writes, “Am I correct in assuming that the invitation is connected with the vacant position of Rabbi and Dayan? If so, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, I feel it my duty to inform you that after due deliberation I have come to the conclusion that it would be very unfair of me to leave my Synagogue, even if I were to be offered the position.” Letter from L. Jacobs to Rev. B. Wyansky of Brondesbury Synagogue, October 11, 1949. Jacobs Archive.

The tone of Jacobs's autobiographical reflections captures the distaste the entire Brondesbury process left with him.

While able to reconstruct and justify his unease that would eventually lead him to withdraw his candidacy, unanswered in Jacobs's mind was the mystery surrounding the application process itself. A published letter in Abramsky's biography offers at least some insight into the machinations of the search committee, and a rather rare opportunity to consider how Jacobs was viewed at the time. In a 1962 correspondence from Dayan Moshe Swift of the London Beth Din to Dayan Abramsky, Swift recalls the past counsel that Abramsky (now in Israel) had extended to the London Beth Din:

...On varying occasions over the past months I have recalled you to the members of the Beth Din, and spoken of your genuine words of prophecy in the year 1949. I recall that when I considered leaving England, they suggested then a certain individual who would serve in my place in Brondesbury, with the intention that in time he would enter the Beth Din. And you told me that he was a true *epikorus* (heretic). And only now after twelve years I see the great wisdom to your prophecy, for this matter (his heresy) has been exposed in all his books and speeches. I hope that Rabbi Brodie will stand firm before the pressure upon him from different directions on this matter....¹²⁰

Swift's reminiscence, as with all recollections of past prophecies, must be taken with a grain of salt. Written at the height of the "Jacobs Affair," Swift and Abramsky were hardly non-partisan assessors of the relative merits of Jacobs's

¹²⁰Letter from Moshe Swift to Dayan Ezekiel Abramsky dated according to the Jewish calendar, Nissan 8, 5722 (1962) Aharon Sorski, *Melekh Be-Yofyo: Toldot Hayav, Po'olo Ve-Darko Ba-Kodesh Shel Maran Ha-Gaon Rabi Yehezkel Abramski Ba'al "Hazon Yehezkel"* (Yerushalayim: Menahem Ezra Abramski, 2004), 686. Author's translation from Hebrew original. For the purposes of clarity, I have glossed over the third person honorifics customary in such correspondences.

theological claims and the particular moment when their old colleague turned heretic. And yet, the private nature of the letter, written years later for an altogether different reason, permit us to consider the content of their correspondence at face value. First and foremost, Jacobs's clumsy treatment at the hands of the search committee, though still with lingering particulars left unclear, can at least be understood. Namely, in the vetting of Jacobs's candidacy for a congregational position and presumptive future member of the London Beth Din, Jacobs was perceived, at least by Abramsky, as unfit for consideration. It would seem that while Jacobs believed his acceptance in the Orthodox world went without comment, by 1949 he had already acquired at least one detractor in Abramsky.

On the academic front, by the summer of 1951, Jacobs was wrought with anxiety if he would "be awarded the coveted degree."¹²¹ Eventually to receive his PhD in 1952, the draw of academic life remained ever-present in his mind. A lone diary entry from this period reveals that Jacobs had gone on to qualify for study at Oxford, and it would seem, seriously considered the prospect:

Our latest meshugas is to long to live in Oxford or Cambridge, with me as a lecturer or professor and Shula as the ideal don's wife handing out cups of tea to the undergraduates who come to sit in the garden to hear my words of wisdom in the brightness of a summer afternoon, the light summer breeze wafting a scent of roses through the air.¹²²

¹²¹Louis Jacobs, Diary entry, July 4, 1951.

¹²²Ibid.

While Jacobs's never actually went on to Oxford, the ivory tower and scholarly pursuits would always hold a mythical place in his mind.¹²³ Shortly after receiving his doctorate, Jacobs continued to actively entertain thoughts of working on an additional M.A. in Manchester. Stein advised Jacobs against the plan, explaining that seeking a "lower degree if one has already a higher degree," made little sense and suggested only a doctorate if Jacobs was insistent on pursuing further studies.¹²⁴ Less than one year later, Jacobs would continue to consider amassing academic credentials as seen in the following letter received from Stein:

As to your D. Lit plans...I certainly raise no objection to your getting in touch with Prof. Rowley. He is a most competent scholar and what he may lack in understanding of rabbinic literature you could discuss with Dr. Weiss. The "Shelah" [Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz] seems a good subject. Needless to say that what advice I could give you, I would with readiness and pleasure. Titles, anyway, do not matter so much. We want to develop ourselves and thus possibly be able to be of some help and guidance to others who are also "on the way..."¹²⁵

H.H. Rowley (1890-1969) the chair of Semitic Languages and Literatures at Manchester University, was one of the most prolific Anglo Old Testament

¹²³Though hardly an objective measure, it is telling that amongst Jacobs's personal belongings, a sealed envelope contained three documents of his most prized credentials, his two Semicha documents from Rabbis Segal and Rivkin and his letter confirming his one year position at Harvard in the mid 1980s. Informal conversations with Jacobs and his family confirm the esteemed place that the ivory tower held in his imagination.

¹²⁴Letter from Siegfried Stein to Louis Jacobs, June 24, 1952. Jacobs Archive.

¹²⁵Letter from Siegfried Stein to Louis Jacobs, March 27, 1953. Jacobs Archive.

scholars of the twentieth century.¹²⁶ This president of the Baptist Union would also seem to be an imperfect fit as academic advisor for work on Jacobs's desired research on the Bohemian Kabbalist Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz (1570-1630). These exploratory conversations, while intriguing when considering the "roads not taken" by Jacobs at this pivotal point in his career, were to be superseded by the draw of far more prestigious opportunities in the Jewish communal world.

From the provincial setting of Manchester, Jacobs would remain in contact with London throughout. His relationships from his earlier London years would allow for ongoing correspondence and visits according to the demands of completing his doctoral work. Occasional lectures in London synagogues alongside his steady stream of writing would ensure that Jacobs's presence in Anglo-Jewry was felt beyond his Lancashire congregation.¹²⁷ Public announcements establish that Jacobs had addressed the New West End at least as early as March of 1952.¹²⁸ Although Jacobs would not give his farewell sermon to the Central Synagogue until January of 1954 (according to his correspondence with Stein) by April of 1953, Jacobs was openly considering whether or not to accept the offer to replace the New West End's Reverend Ephraim Levine upon his retirement. Stein's response to Jacobs request for counsel may, in some

¹²⁶On Rowley, see James Barr, "Obituary: Harold Henry Rowley," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 33:2 (1970), 372-373.

¹²⁷In Early 1952 Jacobs gave a lecture on "Movements in Jewish Thought" under the auspices of the St. John's Wood Synagogue. JC, February 8, 1952. It would not be his last point of contact with this synagogue, the eventually site to the New London Synagogue.

¹²⁸Correspondence thanking Jacobs for "the excellent and most learned address which you delivered here last night." Honorary officers of New West End Synagogue to Louis Jacobs, March 13, 1952. Jacobs Archive.

measure, offer insight to the motivations behind this rising rabbi-scholar of

Anglo-Jewry:

London does perhaps offer wider scope for intellectual activities. I also take it that the new post would carry with it a not inconsiderable financial improvement. Your call to London would automatically make you one of the main Rabbis of the whole community. The disadvantages consist in the greater bustle of London...I think you would have more time for study in Manchester. You would probably also have to consider how much you are need in Manchester and whether you are replaceable. I know of course, we all are. But you may have gained the affection of your Kehilla...only you can decide how the finer, more genuine call of your heart responds to the call of the Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue. Needless to say that I should be very pleased to have you in a Shabbat – afternoon-walking-distance-neighborhood.¹²⁹

Why Jacobs would choose to move at this particular time is not necessarily revealed in this letter. Indeed, the actual reasons for such moves, familial (Jacobs's third child, David was born July 20, 1952), professional, ideological or financial, are inevitably never entirely clear at the moment, nor in retrospect, even to the person making the move. In his autobiography, Jacobs would assign ideological motivations to accepting the call to the New West End:

...I had begun my quest for a 'middle way' and felt it dishonest to take up a position in an at least nominally Orthodox community, subscribing evidently to a fundamentalist approach that I could not share. Unfortunately, that approach eventually became an obstacle to my continuing at the Central Synagogue, much as I was otherwise hugely contented with my position there. Maybe I had too many scruples, since no one at the Central appeared at all bothered by any views I held. Yet so it was.

¹²⁹Letter to Louis Jacobs from Siegfried Stein April 2, 1953. Jacobs Archive.

I resolved to seek a position in a synagogue where I could do my work feely without the burden of double-think.¹³⁰

As we shall come to see, Jacobs would find the liberal Orthodoxy of his new congregation to be altogether receptive to his persistent questioning.

Nevertheless, for a young rabbi filled with ambition, perhaps the declining demographic of the provincial communities in the decades following the Second World War was reason enough.¹³¹ It may indeed be true that the academic, ideological and demographic limitations of Manchester prompted Jacobs to look towards new horizons. While all these justifications to move may indeed be true, an alternative and far more simple reason may have driven Jacobs's decision—the irresistible draw and prestige of the New West End, an allure we shall examine more fully in the chapter to come.

By the summer of 1953, reports of Jacobs's imminent move had been announced in the press. His farewell ceremony, hosted by the Manchester Mizrahi Organization, was presided over by Altmann nearly six years since Altmann had inducted Jacobs.¹³² The assembled community would gather one last time to hear the parting lecture of their beloved rabbi entitled “The Spirit and Humanity of the Din [law].” From the choice of subject matter, the human element in legislation, it would seem that Jacobs was already well on his way to leading his new community.

¹³⁰HWI, 103.

¹³¹Endelman, *Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000*, 230-31.

¹³²Communal Invitation, Jacobs Archive.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM LAIB TO LOUIS: JACOBS AT THE NEW WEST END

We received the invitation to the New West End Congregation for the festivities surrounding assuming your post there. And now that I recall our past work together in holy labors, I said in my heart that I could not conceal from you what I am thinking. You can guess that given my life's path received from my parents and my teachers and close ones, that I am very stunned regarding your decision. Others are also flabbergasted at what could have happened to bring you to such a state of affairs. We are without a solution to the matter. It is my prayer that Holy One Blessed Be He establish within you good counsel and guide you on the path of truth all your days—to be of the guardians of God's watch within the congregation of Israel and to lead the nation with the spirit of Israel.

- Letter from Eli Munk to Louis Jacobs, January 1954. Translated from Hebrew, Jacobs Archive.

In considering the next stage of Jacobs's development and the subsequent controversy that would come to envelope him, it is necessary to explore the nature of his new pulpit, the New West End Synagogue. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the New West End's *sui generis* religious character serves as a central interpretive key not only towards understanding Jacobs's intellectual biography, but the historiography of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy as a whole. In his later retrospective, Jacobs would openly acknowledge “that, by occupying the pulpit of the New West End Synagogue I was throwing in my lot with an ‘Orthodoxy’ of a peculiar kind...”¹ Recognizing his progressive theological views, Jacobs's move from Manchester's Central Synagogue to the New West End was at least partly driven by his desire to live a more integrated rabbinic personality. In his own words:

¹BRD, 9.

The New West End, with its background of tolerance, broadmindedness and love of tradition seemed then the ideal congregation, one in which I could express my views freely and yet live a traditional Jewish life.²

And yet, as controversy would come to surround him, Jacobs would make a different, somewhat contradictory claim: namely, that the New West End, far from being “peculiar,” was in fact representative of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy:

We were not the real rebels. The real rebels were the United Synagogue and kindred “establishment” organizations who had moved away from the tolerant, liberal (with a lower-case “l”), non-fundamentalist tradition of Anglo-Jewry in favour of a harsh, rigid uncompromising approach, foreign to the mood of the community.³

Jacobs’s above contention, repeated by him and his supporters in the years to come, was based on the notion that the genteel Orthodoxy of the New West End was in fact the normative religious posture of Anglo-Orthodoxy. In this telling, Jacobs’s views were not only sanctioned within Anglo-Orthodoxy, but actually representative of Anglo-Orthodoxy as a whole.

To put the matter squarely: How was it possible for the New West End Synagogue to be both ideologically unique in Anglo-Jewry *and* representative of Anglo-Orthodoxy? How could Jacobs claim to be drawn to the New West End to avoid the sin of “double-think” characteristic of Orthodoxy, yet also claim that nothing he preached or wrote in his years at the New West End went beyond the parameters of Orthodoxy?

²HWI, 107.

³Louis Jacobs, “For The Sake of Heaven,” JC, December 19, 1986.

The answer to this question is not only of relevance to studying Jacobs, but also future efforts in Anglo-Jewish history. Indeed, the tensions wrought by the “Jacobs Affair” are frequently cited in ongoing debates concerning the natural condition of Anglo-Orthodoxy and the degree to which it has or has not veered away from its historic moorings. While some Anglo-Jewish historians have argued that a tolerant spirit of religious meliorism represents the normative Anglo-Orthodox tradition, more recent claims have countered that such a lost golden age of progressive conservatism, though present at the New West End and a few other congregations, was never characteristic of Anglo-Orthodoxy as a whole. For those arguing the former, the “Jacobs Affair” came to represent the decisive turning point by which the native Anglo-Orthodox tradition was ideologically and institutionally overwhelmed by more fundamentalist, and often foreign elements.⁴ Those arguing the latter identify the clear ideological boundaries of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy, rejecting any notion that Jacobs represented the normative Anglo-Orthodox tradition.⁵

In exploring Jacobs’s arrival, profile and accomplishments at his new pulpit we shall discover that the above tension can best be understood not as an “either/or” proposition but rather “both/and.” The distinctive religious character of the New West End stood in its claim to be both “representative of” and “distinctive from” Anglo-Orthodoxy. In recognizing the paradoxical condition of Jacobs’s new pulpit, not only shall the next phase of his career be illuminated, but we shall emerge with a key

⁴See, for example, D. Rubinstein, "The Decline and Fall of Anglo-Jewry."

⁵See most recently Elton, "Did the Chief Rabbinate Move to the Right? A Case Study: The Mixed-Choir Controversies, 1880-1986," *Jewish Historical Studies* 39 (2004): 121-151.

methodological insight towards sharpening future efforts in Anglo-Jewish historiography.

The New West End

The noble outward proportions of the New West End Synagogue were mirrored by its distinguished membership, rabbinic heritage and religious traditions. Admitted in 1879 into Anglo-Orthodoxy's congregational alliance, the United Synagogue, the New West End symbolized the "successful anglicized Jewry of the late Victorian and Edwardian period."⁶ Though not the largest congregation within the United Synagogue, this community in the exclusive Bayswater neighborhood embodied much of the philanthropic muscle of London Jewry, if not Anglo-Jewry as a whole. Indeed, prior to 1914, the New West End's congregants paid the highest average annual contributions to the United Synagogue of all its constituent congregations.⁷ The New West End's prominence arose from the standing of its congregation, which was composed of a remarkable blend of the members of the Anglo-Jewish gentry or "cousinhood," and at the time of Jacobs's arrival, the first generation of Oxbridge educated Jewish elite. Jacobs's autobiography recalls that at the time of his "call" to the New West End, its membership rolls included "peers and knights of the realm, judges, scientists, physicians and surgeons, musicians, artists and well-known figures in the business life

⁶Paul Lindsay, *The Synagogues of London* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1993), 76. For a partisan early history of the New West End, see Ephraim Levine, *The History of the New West End Synagogue 1879-1929* (London: John Drew, 1929).

⁷ V.D. Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain Since 1858*, 53-54. See also V.D. Lipman, "The Development of London Jewry," in Salmond S. Levin, *A Century of Anglo-Jewish Life* (London: United Synagogue, 1971), 43-56.

of the community, such as Sir Simon Marks of Marks and Spencer.”⁸ The degree to which Jacobs was affected by his new community’s patrician status is itself of deep significance. Given his working class roots, serving such a distinguished congregation would have a tremendous impact on Jacobs’s intellectual development.

The prominence of the New West End in Anglo-Jewry was intrinsic to its self-understanding both from “within” and “without.” Its leadership in communal affairs was, to some degree, contingent on its being both “integral to” and “other than” Anglo-Orthodoxy as a whole. Members of the New West End served on the boards of United Synagogue, Board of Guardians, Home for Aged Jews, Orphan Asylum and every other imaginable educational and charitable body.⁹ The following reflection in a synagogue publication written at the height of Jacobs’s tenure provides insight as to how the congregation viewed itself in light of its esteemed past:

...for, whatever Mr. Singer’s prayer book might say, the true name of the Lord they [congregants] worshipped was “Rothschild.” That a Jew should be a peer of the realm, a bosom friend of the Prince of Wales and a pillar of the City was just too wonderful for late Victorian Jewry. There was no need for them to worry about the day when the law would go forth from Zion; before their very eyes it went forth from New Court.¹⁰

Such a nostalgic reminiscence is significant for what it says about the New West End’s *self-perception* in the years of Jacobs’s tenure. As Englishmen and Jews, the membership could claim the distinction of being “twice-chosen.”

⁸HWI, 112-113.

⁹E. Levine, *History of the New West End*, 37-38.

¹⁰Temkin, Sefton, “The New West End Remembered,” *Venture* 2:2. Nov. 1957, 11-12.

Nevertheless, while the New West End's aristocratic standing granted it a degree of congregational independence, it well understood its role vis-à-vis its less benighted Anglo-Jewish brethren. For example, Samuel Montagu, a New West End founding member and a leading figure of the United Synagogue, was instrumental in the creation of the Federation of Minor Synagogues in 1887, an association representing the interests of the burgeoning and independent *chevras* resulting from the influx of Eastern European Jewry in the late 19th century. In a story told in various Anglo-Jewish histories, the Federation was ostensibly created as an institutional structure to serve the independent needs of the Eastern European immigrant community, but undoubtedly was also intended as a tool towards the anglicization of this immigrant community.¹¹ Thus, the ironic and somewhat curious situation arose whereby cousinhood figures such as the Montagus and Rothschilds found themselves speaking for and representing an Anglo - Jewry of which they were entirely a part and *apart*.

The aristocratic standing of the New West End also serves as a means toward understanding the religious orientation and spirit of the congregation. Its mixed choir of men and women and the omission from the liturgy of the prayer calling for the restoration of Temple sacrifices were but two of the signs by which the New West End expressed itself on the far liberal end of Anglo-Orthodoxy.¹² Stephen Sharot's

¹¹On the history of the Federation of Synagogues, see B. Homa, *Orthodoxy in Anglo-Jewry 1880-1940*, 14-18. The most comprehensive account of the role and motivations of Rothschild, Montagu and others in the founding of the Federation can be found in G. Alderman, *The Federation of Synagogues, 1887-1987*, esp. 1-19.

¹²E. Levine's congregational history documents the historic ritual reforms of the New West End, including just how close the New West End had at one time actively discussed adopting the triennial cycle of scriptural readings, a reform that eventually would not be adopted. E. Levine, *New West End*, 24-27.

observations on the correlations between the patrician mood of such synagogues and their religious orientations are particularly useful and to the point:

...a few upper class families continued to monopolize the honorary offices of the London synagogues. These leaders had been accepted into English aristocratic circles, but the upper-class Jew's acculturation to the life-styles of the 'gentleman,' which was an essential prerequisite for membership in the English upper class, did not involve accepting the religious beliefs or imitating the religious practices of the Church of England. In the sphere of religion the English upper class was tolerant and pluralistic: the Church of England had a rather vague theology, its teachings extended over a wide area, and it emphasized practice rather principle or ideology. There was Jewish acculturation in the religious sphere, but it was only in the form, as opposed to the content, of the services. Thus, the synagogue services remained traditional in content but the Reform and native 'orthodox' congregations followed the Church of England in its increasing emphasis on orderliness, dignity, solemnity, and decorum.¹³

Thus in spite of—or perhaps because of—its aristocratic nature, the religious orientation of the New West End, though ideologically open and non-observant in individual practice, continued to seek to publicly preserve the place of tradition—Victorian, Jewish or otherwise.¹⁴

Clergy

The ideological orientations of a Synagogue and its clergy inevitably shape one another, a symbiotic relationship readily apparent in the history of the New West End. Indeed, a brief review of the tenures of Simeon Singer (1848-1906), Joseph Hochman (1883–1932) and Ephraim Levine (1885–1966) not only adds a critical point of understanding into the New West End, but is suggestive in reconstructing the notions

¹³Stephen Sharot, "Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870-1914: The Synagogue Service," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* XV, no. 1 (1973), 58.

¹⁴HWI, 112.

that Jacobs may have had in assuming this pulpit of prominence and the latitude granted to him upon his arrival.

The Reverend Simon Singer personified the ideal of a Victorian Age Anglo-Jewish minister. Serving as minister of the New West End from the time the foundation stone was laid until his death, Singer's tenure was marked by his eloquent preaching, communal leadership and voice of moderate progress. English-born and a student of Dr. Michael Friedlander of Jews' College as well as the Viennese scholar I.H. Weiss (alongside Singer's contemporary Solomon Schechter), Singer was a blend of Continental scholarship and British gentility. Tellingly, the literary monument bearing his name, "Singer's Authorized Prayer Book," was designed "to look like the Book of Common Prayer, because whether the insides were Jewish or Christian, that was what an Englishman's prayer book looked like in 1890."¹⁵ As E. Levy would explain in his historical appraisal of the New West End, Singer, like his prayer book and congregation, aspired to express his Judaism in a manner analogous to the religious spirit found in pews across English society.

Singer's moderating leadership style was followed by a less conciliatory champion of progress, the Reverend Dr. Joseph Hochman, a brilliant product of Jews' College and Berlin University who served the New West End until his resignation in 1915. Hochman's tenure at the New West End was marked by personal and institutional tensions with the authority and theology of Chief Rabbi Dr. Joseph Hertz (1872-1946), whom Hochman had edged out for the position at the New West End upon Singer's

¹⁵Simeon Singer, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire*, 7th ed. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1904). See Elkan Levy, "The New West End Synagogue, 1879-2004," July 11, 2004. See also, "Notable Members of The New West End," *Venture* 1:1 (1957), 5. For a fuller portrait of Singer see S. Levin, *A Century of Anglo-Jewish Life*, 23.

death.¹⁶ Hochman bristled under the formalism of Orthodoxy, which led to his eventual resignation, a decision he explained publicly in the *JEWISH CHRONICLE*:

I did so because I found the synagogue out of touch with the spirit and purpose of true rabbinic teaching. To put the matter in a sentence, the so-called conservative Jew at the present time is hampered, and in his religious practice reduced to a sham, because he professes in public, though often not in private, a conformity to a set of ecclesiastical ordinances framed for a total different civilization. My standpoint, from the time I entered the ministry, was that the variation of the circumstances in which we lived demanded the proper adaptation of those ordinances to the changing times, and that there is nothing inconsistent with the spirit and purpose of traditional Judaism to such adaptation. On the contrary, traditional Judaism requires it.¹⁷

Hochman's liberal practice and open calls for reform, traceable back to his early sermons, would eventually lead to his 1915 resignation, after which he would change careers to law, going on to become the legal advisor to the King of Siam.¹⁸

Jacobs's immediate predecessor, Reverend Ephraim Levine, was a Glasgow-born graduate of Cambridge and Jews' College. Described by Jacobs as "the most outstanding preacher in the 'English Style,'" Levine's steady warmth, wit and wisdom (and the musically beloved Reverend Raphael Henry Levy) would result in the steady growth of the New West End's membership rolls until his retirement in the 1950s.²⁰

Levine's popular presence and writing (*Judaism*, 1935 and *The Faith of a Jewish*

¹⁶M. Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913: An Ideology Forsaken*, 32.

¹⁷JC, August 20, 1915.

¹⁸E. Levy, "The New West End." Hochman's views are evident in his sermons, most famously, a 1910 New Year's sermon entitled "Orthodoxy and Religious Observance." Hochman's claim that "a Jew cannot be Jewish and orthodox" would result in then Chief Rabbi Herman Adler demanding a public retraction. I thank Dr. Benjamin Elton for drawing my attention to Hochman and his sermons.

¹⁹HWI, 106.

²⁰Newman, *The United Synagogue, 1870-1970*, 216-217.

Preacher, 1935) served him well in formulating a dignified yet moderate religious leadership for his like-minded community. Levine's religious sensibilities are readily apparent in his history of the New West End:

No Synagogue should wish to function for half a century without being called upon to experience the problem of how to find at all times the *via media* which will be broad enough for all to walk upon. It redounds to the credit of those charged throughout the years with this responsibility that they have invariably succeeded in finding this middle path.²¹

The *via media* charted by Levine's leadership can also be detected in his introductory essay to the Festschrift volume honoring Chief Rabbi Hertz. The adoring tone of Levine's characterization of Hertz's breadth and sophistication of learning, pulpit oratory and communal leadership skills makes clear that these values were ideals to which Levine aspired.²² Levine's long tenure under Hertz's Chief Rabbinate established the New West End firmly on the progressive wing of Hertz's Anglo-Orthodoxy. In describing the tone set by Jacobs's immediate predecessor, then member William Frankel would recall:

...the Minhag Anglia in the New West End was represented first by the general decorum. A very decorous congregation. And secondly by the mixed choir. And the liberalism of the preacher. Ephraim Levine the predecessor [to Jacobs] would never have been dogmatic. He stuck to the rules, he would never say anything that was contrary to the basic principles of Orthodoxy. He was a liberal thinker. He was a Cambridge graduate. And he was there [at the New West End] for a long, long time...Ephraim Levine represented the more liberal element of the United Synagogue.²³

²¹E. Levine, *History of The New West End*, 23.

²²E. Levine, "The Chief Rabbi," in Isidore Epstein, Ephraim Levine, and Cecil Roth, *Essays in Honour of the Very Rev. Dr. J. H. Hertz* (London: E. Goldston, 1944), 1-14.

²³Interview with William Frankel, Summer 2006.

The long (thirty-eight years) and steady pulpit of Levine would serve as the heyday of the New West End's legacy of liberal traditionalism within Anglo-Orthodoxy. Jacobs's relatively brief stint of six years would come to serve as the final burst of energy of this fading congregational spirit.

The Anglo-Jewish Context

As Jacobs arrived at the New West End, a concurrent shift within Anglo-Jewry was taking place. As discussed in the previous chapters, the influx of Eastern European immigrants at the turn of the century, the arrival of Central European refugees due to the Shoah (and the eventual arrival of Hungarian Jewish refugees in the mid-1950s), the New West End would come to represent a diminishing and outmoded segment of Anglo-Orthodoxy. As studies of Anglo-Jewry consistently point out, it would be during the 1950s that the Eastern and Central European immigrants who arrived over the previous decades would move into the institutional structures and mainstream leadership of Anglo-Jewry itself.²⁴

Particularly useful in this regard is Miri Freud-Kandel's recent study of Anglo-Orthodox Judaism. Freud-Kandel's work, both building on and reframing past studies of Anglo-Jewry, renders clear the manifold Orthodox "Judaisms" present in mid-twentieth century England and the tensions therein. Post-Holocaust, Anglo-Jewry witnessed right-wing Orthodoxy exercise an increasing influence over the Anglo-Jewish community; its umbrella congregational association, the United Synagogue; the office of the Chief Rabbi, as well as the London Beth Din and its other constituent bodies.

²⁴See for example, N. Cohen, "The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry," and C. Bermant's *Troubled Eden*, 239-253.

Freud-Kandel suggests that only in the wake of the Shoah did the centrist and synthetic instincts of the Chief Rabbinate under Joseph Hertz (1872-1946) and his predecessors feel compelled to acknowledge the rightward tug. The steady influx of refugees, increasing entrenchment of those present, and their perceived responsibility to preserve the faith of a destroyed European Jewry, collectively contributed towards a hardening expression of Orthodoxy.²⁵

As helpful as these characterizations of Anglo-Jewry tend to be, even more important for our present narrative are the effects of these transformations on the office of the Chief Rabbinate. On the one hand, Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie's (1895-1979) English birth, gentle disposition, British education (Oxford, Jews' College), distinguished pulpit leadership in Australia and service as Senior Jewish Chaplain of the British Armed Forces would collectively suggest the credentials for a centrist leadership in the model of Hertz's "progressive-conservatism." And yet, Brodie's eagerness to avoid conflict, lack of a thought-out theological system, and as posited by Freud-Kandel, "attraction to the theological position of right-wing Orthodox Judaism" collectively served to re-orient the Orthodoxy of the Chief Rabbinate in a direction completely "antithetical" to that of Hertz. Thus, the combination of cultural transformations impacting Anglo-Orthodoxy alongside Brodie's abiding respect and deference to the learnedness of his Eastern European counterparts served to characterize Brodie's tenure as Chief Rabbi (1948-1965) as a period when a "compartmentalizing"

²⁵M. Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913: An Ideology Forsaken*, 102-122.

Orthodox-Judaism asserted itself, increasingly suspicious of the cultural and epistemological claims of western living and learning.²⁶

An illustrative indicator of this trend is offered in a popular article in the *Jewish Review* by Chaim Pearl during the months surrounding Jacobs's appointment.²⁷ Pearl observed that a 1925 picture of the assembled leadership at the Anglo-Jewish Preachers Conference, forty out of forty-eight ministers wore clerical collars, the anglicized clerical garb characteristic of Jewish "Reverends" serving under Chief Rabbi Hertz. By 1953, Pearl noted that of the sixty ministers photographed only fourteen were wearing the clerical collar, a precipitous drop that stood in inverse proportion to the increasing presence of rabbis with beards (from three to seventeen). Such observations are particularly useful in measuring transformations of much deeper significance. The loss of collars and growth of beards indicated a more profound shift in Anglo-Jewish leadership away from its anglicized orientation to a demeanor more typical of Eastern and Central European rabbis. Soon enough, these transformations in rabbinic leadership would come to characterize the other arms of the professional and lay leadership of Anglo-Orthodoxy. The next six years of Jacobs's rabbinate would unfold in the ideologically wide, but demographically diminishing world of Jewish life as expressed in the New West End.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷*Jewish Review*, September 30, 1953.

The New Rabbi

In light of the palpable shifts taking place in Anglo-Jewish communal life, the news of Jacobs's appointment to the New West End would be received both publicly and privately as a sociological marker of no small significance. Given Jacobs's bonafides in the yeshiva world, the editor of the *Jewish Review*, Norman Cohen, considered Jacobs's appointment as emblematic of the rightward lurch of Anglo-Orthodoxy:

Nowhere has this change of outlook manifested itself more remarkably than at the New West End Synagogue, the congregation of which the Hon. Ewen Montagu is himself a member. Who, a few years back, would have dreamed that the successor of the Rev. Ephraim Levine would be an alumnus of the Gateshead Yeshiva! While Mr. Montagu was nailing the colours of progressive conservatism defiantly to the mast at Woburn House, his own synagogue was springing a leak.²⁸

Jacobs would later point to Cohen's misperception in understanding his appointment to signal a rightward ideological shift for the New West End. In fact, given Jacobs's increasingly heterodox views, Jacobs claimed that both he and the congregation understood full well that his appointment was a step towards furthering the progressive spirit of the congregation.²⁹

Indeed, in the eyes of Jacobs's Orthodox peers, the New West End was perceived to be beyond the pale of Orthodoxy altogether. Correspondence indicates the disapproving response to Jacobs's appointment on the part of his former colleagues, a response altogether different to that of Jacobs's later recollections. For instance, Jacobs's autobiography would recount that while his appointment might have distanced him from his early yeshiva experiences, "there was no overt criticism from these

²⁸*Jewish Review*, June 11, 1954.

²⁹HWI, 117.

quarters.”³⁰ A very different narrative can be reconstructed from correspondence between Jacobs and Reverend Joseph Halpern on the former’s application to serve as Rabbi of Golders Green Synagogue. As previously noted, while in consideration for the New West End, Jacobs had also submitted an application for this pulpit that would eventually go to Rabbi Eugene Newman.³¹ In a strained exchange, Halpern communicated the following to Jacobs:

At the outset I ought to say that your preaching at the New West End made a bad impression here. They felt you should have not gone to such a shul – if you are genuinely interested in spreading the ideals of Jewish life. Not that community but you and your family would be changed if you went there - and not for the better... You know that I speak plainly with you and regard you as a member of the family ... You have a very promising future in which you could B’EH [God willing] do excellent work. But you may be tempted to follow easier paths and false friends by allowing yourself to go after jobs that you should avoid. The New West End, in my opinion, is such a job... Think over what I have written, talk it over with Shula, and act for the best.³²

Five days later, Jacobs withdrew his name from consideration at Golders Green, explaining that “after careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that I would prefer the New West End.”³³ The fact that Jacobs’s candidacy at the New West End would mar his application to Golders Green is a telling sign regarding the growing fault lines extant in Anglo-Orthodoxy. The professional crossroads Jacobs was facing between London synagogues thus also stands as an ideological one between progressive and traditional expressions of Anglo-Orthodoxy. His choice of the New West End

³⁰HWI, 116.

³¹*Jewish Review*, May 28, 1954.

³²Letter from Joe Halpern to Louis Jacobs. May 19, 1953. Jacobs Archive.

³³Louis Jacobs to Mr. Laufer May 24, 1953. Jacobs Archive.

reflects a conscious decision to cast his destiny in a direction that, in retrospect, ran counter to the momentum of the wider community.

Jacobs's move to the New West End would serve to sever his connection with the mentors of his earlier years in London. While his return to the London rabbinic community was just six years after leaving his associate position with Rabbi Eli Munk, a wide ideological divide had developed in the interim. Having invited Munk to his January 1954 induction ceremony, Jacobs would receive the following letter of regret from his former mentor:

We received the invitation to the New West End Congregation for the festivities surrounding assuming your post there. And now that I recall our past work together in holy labors, I said in my heart that I could not conceal from you what I am thinking. You can guess that given my life's path received from my parents and my teachers and close ones, that I am very stunned regarding your decision. Others are also flabbergasted at what could have happened to bring you to such a state of affairs. We are without a solution to the matter. It is my prayer that Holy One Blessed Be He establish within you good counsel and guide you on the path of truth all your days—to be of the guardians of God's watch within the congregation of Israel and to lead the nation with the spirit of Israel.³⁴

The impact that such letters from peers and former mentors had on Jacobs is forever a mystery. In the increasingly fractious landscape of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy, the New West End was perceived by Anglo-Jewry and Jacobs himself to sail under a distinctive mast. Though Jacobs would be inducted by Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, Jacobs's new post was a decisive break with the yeshiva world of his youth. With Rabbi Dessler's death coinciding with the month of Jacobs's induction, one is only left to wonder what

³⁴Letter from Eli Munk to Louis Jacobs January 1954. Author's translation from Hebrew original. Jacobs Archive.

Jacobs's Gateshead teacher would have thought of the direction of his prized pupil's career.

Laib Jacobs became Louis Jacobs upon his arrival at the New West End—the change of name signaling a deeper transformation as he assumed this pulpit of distinction.³⁵ So, too, in shifting his professional title from an eastern European-styled “Rov,” to the anglicized “Reverend,” Jacobs would adapt to the new orientations of his London pulpit. In considering the impact that the New West End would have on Jacobs's theological development, the socio-economic orientation of his new community would be deeply felt by its new minister of working class beginnings. Despite the liberal leanings of his new community, Jacobs found himself quickly enamored by the form of Judaism expressed:

The cultural shock involved in my transformation from Rov to Minister was not too severe, especially when I witnessed on my first Rosh Hashanah service the whole congregation carrying out with complete devotion the traditional kneeling during the *Alenu* prayer.³⁶

Jacobs's estimation of the New West End's religious spirit was framed by the social standing of its membership. Despite the disparaging remarks received from his old friends regarding his new congregants, Jacobs would always understand the New West End to be filled with “deeply religious people.”³⁷ For Jacobs, the fact that this community of knights, doctors and judges was able to kneel to the same God of his modest beginnings forever remained a moving recollection.

³⁵Shulamit Jacobs, Diary entry, 300. “...though to me and family it will always be Laib.”

³⁶Jacobs, "Four Rabbinic Positions in Anglo Jewry," 80.

³⁷Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

In fact, Jacobs came to view the religious spirit of his new synagogue more favorably than that of his previous communities:

...it was very moving you see. I mean it was more of a religious experience than I had in the yeshiva on Yom Kippur. Because in the yeshiva it wasn't like a mood of prayer, it was *lomdus*...³⁸

In Jacobs's mind, the rote religious behaviorism of his yeshiva days was trumped by the religious commitments, however mild, of this new community. For that matter, Jacobs found his new community to be refreshingly free from the double standards that existed in much of Anglo-Jewry. For instance, concerning the prohibition of driving on the Sabbath, the practices of his new community at least bore a certain coherence that was hitherto lacking in his former communities:

...I mean in Manchester they also drove on Shabbat...it was the same procedure in orthodoxy. In Manchester they didn't park near the synagogue, they parked around the corner...³⁹

Jacobs quickly developed a deep respect for the New West End's Orthodoxy. Their continued love and respect for traditionalism (at least publicly), their non-dogmatic approach to their religious inquiries, along with an allowance, if not insistence on intellectual integrity, struck a chord in Jacobs. For the first time in his rabbinic career thus far, Jacobs could openly formulate an integrated model of rabbinic leadership drawing from his personal roots, academic credentials and religious sensibilities.

So, too, it would only be at the New West End that Jacobs's scholarly achievements were, for the first time, understood to be central to his congregational profile. While Jacobs's rabbinic duties were codified according to the standard

³⁸Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

³⁹Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

obligations of a United Synagogue clergyman, a contractual coda suggests added considerations particular to his new community:

It is essential that Rabbi Jacobs be abreast of modern religious thought, to continue his studies, and to issue literary works of all kinds, including articles in important Jewish papers (for which there is a continuous demand) and books on the Jewish religion. Further there is research which he undertakes as an associate of the Institute of Jewish Studies in Manchester. We entirely agree that it is in the interests of the New West End Synagogue that its Minister be in a position to make some creative contribution to religious thinking and Jewish education.⁴⁰

Jacobs's congregational career would always exist alongside his scholarly ambitions.

Here at the New West End, at least for the moment, Jacobs was extended the possibility of achieving the professionally integrated "scholar-rabbi" title he so desired.

Furthermore, Jacobs's academic achievements granted him a degree of credibility in his well educated congregation. In Jacobs's prior positions with Munk and in Manchester, his rabbinic task, in many respects, was to assist traditionally minded communities in their efforts to acculturate to the reality of Anglo-Jewish life and the claims of modernity as a whole. Here, for the first time, Jacobs's task was just the opposite. In this highly anglicized community, Jacobs's rabbinate was transformed into one of defending and integrating traditional observance and belief in the face of the intellectual and cultural claims readily available to his congregants. Indeed, it would be Jacobs's ability to contend with modernity and critical scholarship and articulate a compelling vision of Jewish life that would be his ongoing task in the years ahead.

During the next six years of his tenure at the New West End, Jacobs exhibited a frenetic energy in congregational, communal and academic life just as he did at

⁴⁰Undated New West End Contractual Agreement: "Duties and Activities of Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs." Jacobs Archive.

Manchester's Central Synagogue. Membership at the New West End would grow to its highest point in 1960 with 562 member units.⁴¹ Jacobs initiated programming for young members, such as learning programs and lectures, and launched a synagogue literary magazine entitled "Venture." Under Jacobs's tenure, the financing and construction of a major building centre (to be discussed) would take place. As rabbi to the New West End, Jacobs was called on to raise funds for communal appeals for Israel, Jews' College, and a host of charitable organizations. Jacobs would inevitably represent the "Jewish presence" at communal affairs, opening ceremonies, and the flurry of festivities surrounding the tercentenary anniversary of the re-settlement of the Jews in the British Isles.⁴²

Jacobs's congregational achievements during these years reflected not only the exuberance of a rabbi at the height of his professional prowess, but an effort towards redefining or reconstructing Anglo-Jewish synagogue life. Although Mordecai Kaplan's naturalistic formulations of Judaism would always ring hollow for Jacobs's theological tastes, Jacobs readily appropriated Kaplan's instinct towards revitalizing the structures of congregational life. The founding of a synagogue literary journal, study groups, and diverse cultural and philanthropic activities instituted under his tenure would turn the New West End into far more than a mere house of prayer, but a hub of the full range of Jewish cultural expression. Case in point is the construction of the

⁴¹A. Newman, *United Synagogue*, 215-220.

⁴²The endless and varied roles that Jacobs and his wife played in London during these years may be traced thanks to the extraordinary collection of invitations kept by Shula Jacobs.

aforementioned Herbert Samuel Hall.⁴³ Jacobs's remarks at the groundbreaking revealed that for him, the ideological motivation behind the new building was a desire to create a Kaplan-styled synagogue centre:

Try to imagine a building near to London's West End, its lights ablaze, its doors opening invitingly night by night that the voice of Torah be heard. In one room people will delve into the intricacies of the Talmud or they will study the Bible and its message for our age or they will seek to fathom the profundities of Jewish philosophy and make their own the values enshrined in the Jewish moralistic literature. In another room classes will be conducted in Modern Hebrew and the exciting new literature that is being produced in the modern state of Israel. In yet another room a discussion group will meet to try, in the light of Jewish teaching, to bring a little nearer the solution of many of our present-day perplexities.⁴⁴

In expounding on the purpose and activities of the envisioned hall, Jacobs outlined a rather expansive vision of Jewish life, including social recreation, sports and entertainment, noting that "A healthy mind in a healthy body is not only a Greek or Roman ideal. Judaism, too, knows of the importance of 'perfection in Torah, perfection in bodily health.'" Jacobs's would sum up the purpose of the new structure as follows: "...our plans envisage the emergence of a Synagogue Centre which will be the focal point of all our Jewish activities."⁴⁵ The early 1950s would see an active effort by Kaplan to extend his vision for a revitalized Jewish communal life both westward and eastward.⁴⁶ And while the American intonations of Kaplan's theological and

⁴³Though funded and built during Jacobs' tenure, the building did not actually open until Jacobs's had declared his intention to join the staff of Jews' College. See JC, September 29, 1959.

⁴⁴Louis Jacobs, *Venture*, November 3, 1957, 9.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁶Two illustrative examples of Kaplan's efforts in the 1950s are his decision to send his son-in-law, Rabbi Ira Eisenstein to Chicago's Anshe Emet Synagogue as the then westernmost Reconstructionist

institutional vision would prevent him from gaining a lasting foothold in Anglo-Jewry, in reading Jacobs's remarks it is obvious that his efforts to revitalize Jewish life both institutional and ideologically were received enthusiastically by his colleagues from across the Atlantic.

Within the New West End

The extant record of Jacobs's homiletic activity at the New West End reflects an active effort to formulate a vision of Judaism and Jewish life capable of straddling the Jewish and British moorings of the New West End's membership. Jacobs was well aware of such tensions as early as his yeshiva days when he imagined the sort of institution that could train ministers able to offer Old World learning in contemporary England. Nevertheless, it would only be at the New West End that Jacobs would encounter a congregational exemplar to which such questions bore ready application. His induction sermon renders explicit the balancing act that would come to characterize his tenure at the New West End:

At its best it is a worthwhile blending of all that is good in the Jewish and British character. It is conservative but not hidebound; firm and consistent but not fanatical; proud of its origins but not insular; sober but not unimaginative; acutely conscious of the significance and importance of Jewish law but not formalistic...It requires great courage from both minister and congregation to further the Anglo-Jewish tradition: courage to tread the middle path and avoid the extremes of the right and the left...I hope that the Judaism I preach from this pulpit will be a courageous Judaism...⁴⁷

congregation. Looking east, Kaplan initiated a correspondence with the Reverend I.K. Cosgrove as to the viability of establishing a Reconstructionist outpost at Glasgow's Garnethill Synagogue.

⁴⁷Louis Jacobs, New West End Induction Sermon, February 13, 1954. Jacobs Archive.

Jacobs's sermon identified the goal of transmitting a model of traditional Judaism that bore profound relevance to the spiritual needs and strivings of the Jews in the world of his day. While Jacobs's induction sermon undoubtedly was crafted to serve the tastes of his new community, the vision he outlined was a deeply personal one, wholly consistent with long standing tensions articulated by Jacobs well prior to his arrival at the New West End. Indeed, the middle path he sought to navigate between the extremes of the right and left is almost explicitly reminiscent of Krochmal's self-same vision.

Jacobs would continue to develop this theme in his community and writing. Another example of Jacobs's employment of Krochmal in carving a middle path, eschewing the extremes on either side, may also be found in his opening article to the first edition of the synagogue literary magazine "Venture." Here, Jacobs had the opportunity to restate the credo of the New West End as follows:

WE ARE CONVINCED that there is a burning need – keenly apparent to intelligent observers concerned about the future of Anglo-Jewry – for what may be termed a 'middle of the road' position in our Community if Judaism is to come into its own as a vital, inspiring and ennobling faith, relevant to the spiritual needs of twentieth century Jews and Jewesses. We indignantly repudiate that the adoption of such a position is a sign of weakness, lukewarmness, ignorance or compromise. On the contrary, we affirm that it calls for both knowledge and courage-knowledge to distinguish between the eternal and ephemeral, the essential and non-essential in Jewish life, and courage to avoid the extremes of the right and the left even though we live in a world in which extremes are popular.⁴⁸

As will become apparent in future chapters, the impetus behind Jacobs's theological legacy is to be found both in his biography *and* his social context. More precisely, it is the imprecise admixture of personal and contextual forces that would prompt him to use

⁴⁸*Venture* 1:1, 1.

these years at the New West End to wrestle openly with the disorienting perplexities of being a modern Jew.

In reading Jacobs's New West End sermons, the sociological and autobiographical nature of his theological ventures are altogether evident, and more often than not, rather explicit. For example, in a sermon on the scriptural reading of Genesis 12 (*Lech Lecha*), Jacobs's compared the cultural condition of Abraham to that of his own community:

It has not been easy, and it is still very difficult to be different, to mix freely in non-Jewish society, to have many non-Jewish friends, and yet to disagree profoundly with them on some of the most fundamental of life's issues. Many Jews were unable to stand the perpetual strain which adjustment in a non-Jewish society demands. Some of these attempted to solve the problem by a voluntary withdrawal from active Jewish life outside the Jewish Community. Others chose the path of assimilation. But the fact remains that the majority of our people in modern times followed Abraham in stretching the hand of friendship to their fellow man without sacrificing any of their principles.⁴⁹

Jacobs concluded by citing the counsel of the eleventh century Spanish Jewish thinker Bahya ibn Pakuda, who in his "Duties of the Heart" outlined a vision of Jewish life applicable to the twentieth century English Jew:

...the qualities of the ideal Jew, according to Bahya, [are] the ability to mix freely with all men without lowering his own standards. In a memorable phrase, Bahya speaks of the ideal Jew sympathizing with all men while in solitude with his Creator.

From his induction to his final days at the New West End, Jacobs preached with an eye towards reconciling the highest ideals of Anglo-Jewry with loyalty to traditional Judaism. Throughout, Jacobs would employ biblical narratives to exemplify the tensions facing his own community, be it living in a non-Jewish context or the

⁴⁹Louis Jacobs, "Lech Lecha," Unpublished Sermon, (1956). Jacobs Archive.

successful transmission of Judaism.⁵⁰ He would continue to turn to Krochmal, Schechter and other “middle-way” voices as theological guides. Thus, in discussing the rituals surrounding the observance of the New Moon, Jacobs would draw an analogy between the cyclically renewing aspects of the lunar cycle with the ever-present potential embedded in the Jewish people, preaching:

The Galician Jewish thinker, Krochmal, develops the theory of Israel’s deathlessness. Each nation, according to Krochmal, has its own ideals, its own god. The Greeks had the ideal of beauty, the Romans of law and so on. But once these ideals had become the common property of mankind there was no longer any reason for the continued existence of these people, the bearers of those ideals. And so, lacking a purpose, those people vanished from the scene. Israel alone, because of its loyalty to God, the Sum of all ideals is eternal as God is eternal.⁵¹

From Jacobs’s first introduction to Krochmal to his late life encyclopedic entry on him, Jacobs identifies a shared sense of purpose with Krochmal’s project.⁵² The combination of Krochmal’s commitment to a middle path and his application of an historical

⁵⁰For instance, Jacobs would use the relationship of Jacob and Joseph as a paradigm by which to understand all of Anglo-Jewry in its tercentenary year:

The story of Jacob and Joseph was repeated in the history of the Anglo-Jewish community during this century. The victims of persecution who came to these shores fifty years ago were strangers in a strange land. They came from the great centres of Jewish life in Russia and Poland. They had seen a splendid vision of Judaism as a living faith. But with all their enthusiasm, it was impossible for them, in the nature of the case, to translate that vision into action in this land. But now that their sons and grandsons have grown to manhood and they have the talents and the ability to make that dream come true. They must be the Joseph’s who will “put their hands upon Jacob’s eyes.” A famous Jewish moralist once said – ‘when we are young we have the heart but we lack the brains. Alas! When we are old enough to have the brains the heart has fled.’ This must not be the fate of the Anglo-Jewish community. As the Tercentenary Year draws to a close it is fitting that we should reflect on this theme and that we, the descendants of those courageous and loyal men and women who found a home here, should rededicate ourselves to the complete realization of the dream they saw long ago of a community strong in its attachments to the faith we love.” Louis Jacobs, December 8, 1956. Unpublished Sermon. Jacobs Archive.

⁵¹Louis Jacobs, “Israel and the Moon,” January 6, 1957. Unpublished Sermon. Jacobs Archive.

⁵²See Encyclopedia entry “Nachman Krochmal.” Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1995), 309-310.

sensibility to Judaism would forever resonate with Jacobs. Certainly, as Jacobs would seek to find his own voice and vision amid the tensions of 1950s Anglo-Jewry, such illustrious forerunners in the historical school would provide important precedent for his own theological ventures.

Academic Life

Jacobs's resumed his academic interests soon after arriving in London. By the summer of 1954, he and Altmann were in deep correspondence planning articles and lectures, often in consultation with Joseph Weiss.⁵³ Jacobs's position of communal leadership was not lost on Altmann, who by 1955 was encouraging Jacobs to identify potential donors from the New West End to support the ongoing activities of the Institute of Jewish studies.⁵⁴ In addition to maintaining his Manchester connections, Jacobs cultivated new ones in London, reaching out to Jews' College. During the summer of 1954, Jacobs and the principal of Jews' College, Isidore Epstein (1894-1962), agreed upon an extension course to be taught by Jacobs at the University Hillel House on the topic of "The Talmud, Its Origins, Growth and Redaction." This ten-session course aimed at Jewish university students was representative of what would be a lifetime constituency for Jacobs—the Jewish student on campus. For Jacobs, these lectures would grant him a forum where he could speak openly about issues of concern both to him and the students. From the students' perspective, Jacobs's lectures would

⁵³Letters from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs, July 13, July 20, August 5, 1954. Jacobs Archive.

⁵⁴Letter from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs, November 24, 1955. Jacobs Archive.

long be remembered for their stimulating, sophisticated and lively engagement of tradition with intellectual rigor.⁵⁵

The subject matter of many of Jacobs's publications during his years at the New West End had their roots in his earlier thinking. For example, Jacobs's 1957 article, "The Economic Conditions of the Jews in Babylon in Talmudic Times Compared with Palestine," was largely a précis of his doctoral thesis.⁵⁶ So, too, his survey "The Concept of Hasid in the Biblical and Rabbinic Literatures" reflects Altmann and Weiss's prior encouragement within Manchester's Institute of Jewish Studies.⁵⁷ In 1959, Jacobs published a second article on the contrived literary nature of the Babylonian Talmud.⁵⁸ As with his earlier study, Jacobs's article assembled an array of Talmudic passages all towards proving that the Talmudic redactors consciously employed literary devices "in order to heighten the effect of the argument." Seven years after his first treatment of the issue, Jacobs signals a greater willingness to consider the implications of his findings, explaining the artificial arrangement of the Talmudic material to support the "reasoning of the medieval Spanish school and many modern scholars to the effect that the Talmud was committed to writing by its redactors,

⁵⁵Interview with Geoffrey Alderman, Summer 2006.

⁵⁶Louis Jacobs, "Economic Conditions of the Jews in Babylon in Talmudic Times Compared with Palestine," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 2, no. 4 (1957).

⁵⁷ Louis Jacobs, "The Concept of Hasid in the Biblical and Rabbinic Literatures," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 8, no. 3-4 (1957).

⁵⁸ Louis Jacobs, "Further Evidence of Literary Device in the Babylonian Talmud," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 9, no. 3-4 (1958). The first article, discussed in the previous chapter was Jacobs, "Evidence of Literary Device in the Babylonian Talmud."

and not at some subsequent period...”⁵⁹ Most intriguing are Jacobs’s final, rather turgid remarks concerning the implications of his research:

The Rabbis criticize King David for referring to the Torah as his “songs.” Scripture, for them, was primarily the source of religion and morals, the record of the divine will for mankind. But this has not prevented even those who accept their teaching from discovering literary merit in the Book of Books. By the same token, the fact that the Rabbis were interested mainly in discussing the word of God and applying it to the life of their people need not blind us to the recognition of the literary form and style of their greatest moment, the Babylonian Talmud.⁶⁰

The prose of Jacobs’s final comments is uncharacteristically tortured. In spite of this, (or more perhaps, because of it) it is worth pausing to elucidate this final comment.

Jacobs begins by alluding to the rabbinic critique of King David’s claims of the human composition of Scripture. In spite of this “fundamentalist” stance of the rabbis, Jacobs maintains that the rabbis readily allowed for the “literary” merit of the Torah to be accepted. If one were to reread Jacobs’s above conclusion replacing the word “literary” (third sentence) with “human” then the potential implications of Jacobs’s findings are rendered plain. The literary/contrived nature of sacred texts renders them unambiguously human, a conclusion that Jacobs’s scholarship has demonstrated, now in at least two published articles. Throughout his career, Jacobs’s would always consider his research on the contrived nature of the Talmudic argument to be a vital element of his intellectual legacy.⁶¹ Notwithstanding the *academic* merits of such studies, the implications of Jacobs’s Talmudic research on his theological legacy should not be

⁵⁹Louis Jacobs, “Further Evidence,” 139.

⁶⁰Ibid., 147.

⁶¹Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

missed.⁶² As Jacobs would repeatedly state in the years ahead, if the methods of inquiry were sound, then there could be no restrictions as to the application of those methods. The notion that any body of literature, rabbinic or biblical would be designated *noli me tangere* never resonated with Jacobs. In this case, Jacobs's ability to identify the human hand in rabbinic texts would necessarily and eventually apply to the biblical text as well.

Having previously published an article on the lexical term "Hasid," Jacobs's next foray into Jewish mysticism would be more ambitious in nature: a translation of Moses Cordovero's (1522-1570) "Palm Tree of Deborah," a tract he would later characterize as a "moralistic work on the idea of *Imitatio Dei* according to the Kabbalah...."⁶³ In addition to providing a historical context to both Cordovero and Kabbalah, Jacobs's introductory comments discuss the eventual influence of the "Palm Tree" within the Musar practice of devotional reading, a regimen that Jacobs could remember well from years before.

Indeed, the particulars of Cordovero's own biography may have held some personal resonance for Jacobs. Living in sixteenth-century Safed, Palestine, Cordovero himself was the product of two distinct streams of Jewish thinking and tutelage. As Jacobs begins his study:

Jewish studies in Safed at this period were divided into two groups, the 'revealed things,' the Bible and Talmud and their

⁶²I thank Dr. Byron Sherwin for alerting me to the importance of Jacobs's Talmudic studies in terms of how they would come to shape his theological claims.

⁶³Louis Jacobs, *Concise Companion*, 100.

commentaries and the Codes of Jewish Law, and the ‘hidden things,’ the Kabbalistic mysteries.⁶⁴

Beyond the intrinsic merits of Cordovero’s writing, as a student of the greatest legalist of the day, Joseph Caro (1488-1575) and the greatest mystic, Solomon Alkabetz (d. 1580), Cordovero may have represented in Jacobs’s mind an embodiment of two distinct streams of Jewish expression. Like Solomon Schechter before him, Jacobs saw in Cordovero the embodiment of the legal, spiritual, and moralistic instincts of sixteenth-century Safed.⁶⁵ In a field hitherto dominated by M. Buber and G. Scholem, Jacobs’s early articles and translations on Hasidic literature stand as remarkably independent-minded, scholarly expeditions into this then under-explored field of Jewish studies.⁶⁶ Whether or not Jacobs was aware of the pioneering nature of his work, or the intellectual and personal forces that gave rise to what would become a signature building block to his scholarly legacy is not clear. Later in life, Jacobs would have a rather uncomplicated explanation for why he chose to study and translate the books that he did, remarking, “...it is true that the best way to get to know a book is to write a book on it.”⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, Jacobs’s assessment of Cordovero’s achievements is altogether fulsome:

⁶⁴Moses ben Jacob Cordovero and Louis Jacobs, *The Palm Tree of Deborah* (London: Vallentine, 1960), 9-10.

⁶⁵For Schechter’s treatment of Cordovero, see “Safed in the Sixteenth Century” in Schechter, *Studies in Judaism. First Series*, esp. 259-262.

⁶⁶See Morris M. Faienstein, "Hasidism. The Last Decade in Research," *Modern Judaism* 11, no. 1 (1991): 111-124.

⁶⁷HWI, 267.

...in the field of ideas Cordovero is a master. Bold flights of fancy, rich and vivid imagination, a genius for systematizing the most abstruse and widely separated statements, these are the gifts Cordovero possesses in abundance. That all men's souls are united and that therefore to love one's neighbor is to love oneself; that one can perform acts of mercy to God, *even the act of burying the dead*; that the good man does not destroy any of god's creatures...that man hold up the very heavens by his deeds; it is ideas such as these which have made the Palm Tree of Deborah one of the greatest and most popular of Jewish moralistic works.⁶⁸

As we shall see in Chapters Six and Seven, Jacobs would repeatedly turn to the richness of mystical and moralistic literature such as Cordovero to formulate his writing, both historical and constructive.

It would be during these years that Jacobs would publish his first articles in North American journals on a variety of topics. Given Jacobs's photographic memory and ease of expression, these articles all share a card catalog-like quality of exploring a particular theme through classical rabbinic and hasidic literature. For example, Jacobs's first article on the Jewish point of view of "self sacrifice" demonstrates that there exist in Jewish literature arguments on both sides of the question of whether one may give one's own life in order that another may live. Jacobs's survey of biblical, rabbinic and medieval literature shows that while Judaism may very well differ from the Christian ideal of self sacrifice, "...Jewish history has no lack of such 'fools of God.'"⁶⁹ Just a few months later, Jacobs would publish a complement to his article on the theme of "Disinterestedness." Jacobs's article (the topic of a sermon as well) explores the egoistic and altruistic aspects of human nature and the degree to which a person may or

⁶⁸Louis Jacobs, *Palm Tree*, 45

⁶⁹Louis Jacobs, "Greater Love Hath No Man: The Jewish Point of View of Self-Sacrifice," *Judaism* 6 (1957), 47.

may not act free from self interest.⁷⁰ As with the earlier article on “self sacrifice,” Jacobs charts a middle ground, demonstrating that while the ideal of “disinterestedness” (*lishmah* or *l’shem shamayim*) permeates classical Jewish literature, the rabbis believed that the commandments might also be observed for ulterior reasons. These studies on theological concepts, the first of many in the years to come, reflect the ease in which Jacobs’s could assemble an array of sources—ancient, modern, Jewish, secular and religious—when dealing with a concept, eventually offering a balanced view and adopting a middling position. More than the articles themselves, these efforts are significant in tracing the development of a series of relationships between Jacobs and North American scholars. As will be seen, it was because of these articles and occasional book reviews that Jacobs found himself in increasing personal, intellectual and professional contact with North American publications and personalities.⁷¹

Jacobs’s authorial ambitions were blessed with a fortuitous series of relationships with receptive publishing houses. From Altmann’s Institute of Jewish Studies and its *Journal of Jewish Studies* to the publishing subsidiary of the *Jewish Chronicle*, Vallentine Mitchell, to serving as a driving force behind the establishment of the “Littman Library” (named in honor of Joseph Littman, the father of one of Jacobs’s congregants Louis Littman), Jacobs’s efforts would always be sought and accepted for publication.⁷²

⁷⁰Louis Jacobs, "Disinterestedness," *Judaism* 6 (1957).

⁷¹Louis Jacobs, "The Ten Commandments by Solomon Goldman," *Conservative Judaism*, Book Review, XI, no. 4 (1957).

⁷²On Vallentine Mitchell and a full history of the *Jewish Chronicle*, see D. Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991*, 198. On the founding of the Littman Library, see HWI, 123.

Perhaps most important to understanding Jacobs's prodigious scholarly and popular output during these years would be his developing relationship with the *Jewish Chronicle* and its editor William Frankel (1917-2008). Jacobs's frequent contributions to the *Jewish Chronicle* in the form of opinion pieces, book reviews, sermons and as an anonymous religious consultant would increase upon his arrival in London. His arrival at the New West End would mark the beginning of a life-long friendship with Frankel, who that same year was appointed General Manager of the paper and soon thereafter editor.⁷³ Born into an observant Jewish environment, trained as a barrister and active as a lay-leader in congregational, national and international Jewish affairs, Frankel would begin a new era for the Anglo-Jewish newspaper: As David Cesarani explains:

Frankel was determined to introduce into the paper the issues that were agitating the wider society and the young voices which were challenging received wisdom. It was his ambition to make the *Jewish Chronicle* more than the 'organ of Anglo-Jewry'; he wanted it to become an international Jewish newspaper, covering world stories with a corps of reporters of which any other paper would have been proud.⁷⁴

The *Jewish Chronicle* under Frankel would be revised in ways far more substantive than the layout. "Delighting in controversy," and "impressed by the courage of American friends," Frankel's *Jewish Chronicle* would take on a "distinctly liberal inflection" transforming itself from serving as the voice of Anglo-Jewish institutional life to serving as a frequent and unabashed critic of the policies and hierarchical

⁷³Frankel describes his own journey through the Jewish Chronicle in his recently published memoirs, William Frankel, *Tea with Einstein and Other Memories* (London: Halban, In association with European Jewish Publication Society, 2006).

⁷⁴Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, 211. See too D. Cesarani's "David Kessler and the Jewish Chronicle," David Kessler and Alan David Crown, *Noblesse Oblige: Essays in Honour of David Kessler Obe* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1998), esp. 70-74.

structures of those very institutions.⁷⁵ The confluence of Jacobs's rabbinic position, Frankel's role as public provocateur and the New West End's prominence will prove to be altogether significant in the unfolding drama of the years ahead.

During these initial years, Jacobs's close relationship with Frankel resulted in a series of popular publications under the *Jewish Chronicle* masthead. As Frankel himself would recall:

Very early in his new pulpit, Louis delivered a series of sermons on Jewish prayer which impressed me greatly. By that time I had become the General Manager of *The Jewish Chronicle* and I offered to publish them under the imprint of Jewish Chronicle Publications. He was happy about that and the booklet did rather well, particularly in the United States. It was his first publication and its success must have inspired him to undertake more writing.⁷⁶

Beginning in 1955 with a small volume "Jewish Prayer," followed by *A Guide to Yom Kippur* (1957), *A Guide to Rosh Hashanah* (1959) and, most famously *We Have Reason to Believe* (1957) Jacobs's encyclopedic knowledge of classical Jewish literature and his ease of expression would find steady dissemination through Frankel's publishing efforts. With the exception of *We Have Reason to Believe*, which we shall shortly turn to in more depth, Jacobs's initial efforts at writing were neither intended nor received as anything other than popular treatment of traditional themes and festivals. Indeed, the primary allure of Jacobs's festival guides, much of which had appeared in previous shorter articles, appears to be the lucid and straightforward way he explained Jewish ritual and liturgy, weaving in biblical, medieval, Hassidic and secular sources. It would

⁷⁵Ibid., 213ff.

⁷⁶Frankel, *Tea with Einstein*, 159.

not be long, however, before Jacobs would turn his efforts towards constructing a Jewish theology that was not merely traditional, but also, as we shall see, controversial.

Conclusion

Jacobs's arrival and tenure at the New West End may (and in some ways *must*) be read in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, Jacobs's position of prominence, continued writing and growing public profile represent an important upward step in his rabbinic career and the life of the New West End. On the other hand, this chapter has sought to make clear that at the New West End, Jacobs began to function independent of the traditional arms of Anglo-Orthodoxy. Far from being ensconced in Anglo-Orthodoxy, Jacobs's appointment at the New West End stands as a significant break with the Orthodoxy of his past. Jacobs's homiletical and scholarly output indicates that he himself was well aware of the competing tensions existing within his congregation. The New West End's non-dogmatic spirit alongside Jacobs's own ventures would afford Jacobs the opportunity to formulate a theological response satisfying to him and his like-minded congregants.

Jacobs's tenure at the New West End came to stand at the epicenter of the tremors to be felt within Anglo-Jewry. Almost exactly ten years after his arrival at the New West End Synagogue, Jacobs and his supporters would establish the independent "New London Synagogue." In what came to be referred to as the "second stage" of the "Jacobs Affair," the New West End membership would be unsuccessful in its efforts to restore their beloved rabbi to his former pulpit, recently vacated by the America-bound Rabbi Chaim Pearl. In brief, the Chief Rabbi's refusal to issue a certificate permitting

Jacobs to reclaim the New West End pulpit would result in the dramatic and very public dismissal of an entire synagogue board who would soon thereafter reconstitute themselves as a new congregation.⁷⁷ In a meeting on Sunday May 3rd, 1964, Jacobs would frame the decision to form a new synagogue as follows:

The question, friends, is not what the term Orthodox means in other parts of the world- it has many different meanings – but what has Orthodoxy meant in the United Synagogue and in Anglo Jewry. If by Orthodoxy you mean an attitude of mind which shows no hospitality to modern scholarship and modern thought and inquiring mind, then I would say that we shall certainly not be Orthodox and we shall be proud not to be Orthodox. (*Cries of "Hear, hear"*) It was never the fashion of the New West End Synagogue to have the kind of Judaism taught and preached that is suitable only for know-alls teaching a congregation of docile sheep. However, if by Orthodoxy you mean – and the words are not mine but from the preamble of the United Synagogue – “Progressive Conservatism”, that is what Orthodoxy in Anglo Jewry is, respect for Jewish tradition, then we are as Orthodox as the next man. “Progressive Conservatism”, to work out the implications of that paradoxical term would take many years. I hope that one of the things we will do in the new congregation is to work out the implications of this term.⁷⁸

In light of the above study, Jacobs’s rhetorical claim stands as both true and untrue, honest but also disingenuous. Jacobs’s characterizations of the non-dogmatic Orthodoxy of the New West End are indeed accurate estimations of both his tenure and the ones preceding him. Nevertheless, to claim that his new congregation was an effort to “restore the *status quo ante bellum*,” making explicit that which always stood as

⁷⁷See almost any history of twentieth century Anglo-Jewry for the particulars of the “second stage” of the Jacobs Affair. Most recently M. Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913: An Ideology Forsaken*.

⁷⁸A special Meeting of the Members of the New West End Synagogue held at the Rembrandt Rooms, London, S.W.7, In the Chair Mr. Oscar Davis, May 3, 1964. Jacobs Archive.

unequivocal in Anglo-Orthodoxy as a whole, simply does not stand up to the facts.⁷⁹

Jacobs's appropriation of Hertz's term "Progressive Conservatism" says less about the normative religious posture of Anglo-Orthodoxy in the past, present and certainly the future, than it does about Jacobs's interest and ability to find authoritative precedent for his own claims.⁸⁰ As Chapter Five will document, Jacobs's New West End position at the periphery of Anglo-Orthodoxy would become more and more pronounced and uncertain in the coming years. Nevertheless, it would be in his demographically diminishing but ideologically expansive tenure at the New West End where Jacobs would have the opportunity to begin constructing his lasting theological legacy, a subject to which we shall presently turn.

⁷⁹See Cohen, "The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry," 46.

⁸⁰As Israel Finestein makes clear, in its initial context, Hertz's employment of "Progressive Conservatism" bore none of the theological connotations by which it would come to be interpreted, by Jacobs or anyone else. See I. Finestein, *Anglo-Jewry in Changing Times: Studies in Diversity, 1840-1914* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1999), 10. On the context surrounding Hertz's "Progressive Conservatism," see A. Newman, *The United Synagogue*, 137. So too, G. Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, 215-216.

CHAPTER FOUR

WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE: PEDIGREE, CONTENTS AND RECEPTION

I am greatly interested in your forthcoming publication which I am sure will arouse great interest. Fortunately, you are in a position in which “the ire” of the fundamentalists can do you no harm, backed as you are by your congregation.

- Letter from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs, December 6, 1956, a few months prior to the publication of *We Have Reason to Believe*. Jacobs Archive.

Jacobs’s developing theology, as expressed in his most infamous publication *We Have Reason to Believe* (1957), did not emerge in a vacuum.¹ While Jacobs’s struggle to come to terms with the competing claims of faith and reason, scriptural authority, and biblical criticism may find their roots in tensions present within him from his earliest years, his efforts must also be understood as representative of much larger trends in British, American, Jewish and non-Jewish theological ventures. As Jacobs achieved a position of prominence in the Anglo-Jewish community, his ideological horizons would increasingly look beyond his Anglo-Orthodox points of reference. It would be during these years that Jacobs came to appropriate the insights of like-minded thinkers past and present, who though religiously conservative in orientation, were insistent on an honest and open engagement with modernity and critical scholarship.

Thus, this chapter turns away from the biographical tone of the previous chapters towards an appreciation of the wider theo-historical moment in which *We Have*

¹Louis Jacobs, *We Have Reason to Believe: Some Aspects of Jewish Theology Examined in the Light of Modern Thought* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1957). Hereafter, WHRTB.

Reason to Believe was written. We shall seek to identify not so much the particular forces that gave rise to the publication of Jacobs's most famous work (though we shall come to do that, too), but the theological precedents and interlocutors that Jacobs would come to integrate into his own efforts in constructive theology. This chapter will demonstrate that Jacobs's theology was a reflection of a complex dialectic of assimilation and self assertion, which while fed by many sources, came to stand as original and unlike anything in its environment.²

An important precursor to *We Have Reason to Believe* and telling indicator of Jacobs's growing intellectual horizons was his initial publication, *Jewish Prayer* (1955). Indeed, the intrigue and import of this compact volume is not so much anything remarkable in its subject matter, a fairly traditional defense of prayer, but rather the manner and points of reference by which Jacobs constructs his argument. In addition to Jacobs's usual points of rabbinic, medieval reference (Isaiah Horvitz, 1555-1628, Joseph Albo, 1380-1445) and English (Chesteron, Toynbee, etc.), this volume is remarkable in its open and approving appropriation of non-Orthodox Jewish thinkers, often from America or American-based publications. A survey of the book's footnotes indicates a reliance on the proceedings of multiple Rabbinical Assemblies of America, leading lights of the non-Orthodox world (Leo Baeck, Hugo Bergmann Theodor Gaster) and assorted North American publications (Commentary, Conservative Judaism).

For example, Jacobs's inquiry into prayer came by way of Abraham Joshua Heschel's remarks at the 1953 assembly of Conservative rabbis, the Rabbinical Assembly of America. Heschel's address, a penetrating critique of a Judaism overly

²A. Funkenstein, "The Dialectics of Assimilation," 11.

focused on its institutional structures and not on God and prayer, is remarkable in its antagonism towards Mordecai Kaplan's naturalistic formulations of Jewish life and ritual.³ Jacobs approvingly adopts Heschel's religious sensibility, appropriating his premises as the starting point for his own inquiries. Apart from finding in Heschel a common theological instinct, it is noteworthy to consider the cautious manner by which Jacobs cites Heschel's remarks at a convention of Conservative Rabbis. Although Heschel may well have personally transcended denominational affiliations, it strains credulity to imagine that neither Jacobs, his publisher, nor his readership were aware of Heschel's institutional affiliations at the Conservative Movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and the non-Orthodox assembly that gave his remarks a forum. Perhaps in referring to Heschel by his academic credential (professor) and never stating the Rabbinical Assembly's denominational association with Conservative Judaism, Jacobs sought to tactfully appropriate Heschel's insights without raising any concern regarding the person or context giving them expression. Regardless of the degree to which Jacobs was or was not aware of Heschel's affiliations, this trim volume is remarkable for the increasing openness by which Jacobs looked beyond his Anglo-Orthodox setting for the tools and topics to help frame his own inquiries.

American Predecessors

The 1950s saw the growth of the so-called "New Jewish Theology," a generation of theologically minded scholar-rabbis who would leave an extraordinary

³Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Spirit of Prayer." Paper presented at the Fifty Third Annual Convention of The Rabbinical Assembly of America, Atlantic City, 1953. Though never mentioning Kaplan explicitly, Heschel's address may be understood as an extended argument against Kaplanian naturalistic, civic or cultural formulations of Jewish life.

and enduring imprimatur on the institutional and theological landscape of trans-Atlantic Jewry. Numerous journals, including “Judaism,” “Commentary,” “Conservative Judaism,” “Central Conference of American Rabbis Quarterly Journal” (Reform) and “Tradition” (Orthodox), were founded during these years, all attentive to explorations in Jewish theology. This coterie of theologians included such luminaries as A.J. Heschel, E. Fackenheim, J. Petuchowski, J. Soloveitchik, W. Herberg, E. Borowitz, M. Steinberg, A.J. Wolf and R. Gordis, who were gripped by a spirit of theological inquiry remarkable both in its sophistication and cooperative spirit.⁴ The mood and goals of this school can be sensed in the introductory statement of purpose to “Judaism”:

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a world-view on the issues that are timeless - the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relations to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world.⁵

Given this school’s shared insistence on articulating a theology able to contend with the claims of both modernity and tradition, it is not surprising that Jacobs would find

⁴The only full study of the “New Jewish Theologians” to date is Robert G. Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). L. Silberman’s brief essay on the accomplishments of the school is particularly useful. Lou Silberman, “Concerning Jewish Theology in North America: Some Notes on a Decade,” in *American Jewish Year Book*, ed. Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1969): 37-58. The introductions to assorted volumes of collected essays from this era also serve as useful points of entry to the context in which these thinkers functioned. See for instance, Arnold Jacob Wolf, *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965). Norman Podhoretz, *The Commentary Reader; Two Decades of Articles and Stories*, (New York: Atheneum, 1966). Arthur Allen Cohen, *Arguments and Doctrines: A Reader of Jewish Thinking in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). Robert Gordis and Ruth B. Waxman, *Faith and Reason: Essays in Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1973). More recently, see Arnold Eisen, “Theology, Sociology, Ideology: Jewish Thought in America, 1925-1955,” *Modern Judaism* 2 (1982): 91-103.

⁵Gordis, Robert, “Toward a Renaissance of Judaism.” Mission Statement. Judaism 1:1.

himself glancing with increasing frequency across the Atlantic for publication and communication.

As would be the case with Jacobs, many of these thinkers stood in reaction to the pragmatic naturalism of Mordecai Kaplan who had hitherto reigned supreme in American Jewish intellectual discourse. A post-World War II disillusionment with the excesses and evils of secularism propelled this cadre of thinkers towards formulating a God-centered Jewish theology all the while aware of Kaplan's ongoing claim on the modern condition. As A.J. Wolf stated in his essay on the achievements of this school:

...For we are not old-fashioned Jews. We have grown up on the American continent (where most of us were born), studied in secular universities (where most of us now teach), assimilated the pragmatism, optimism and scientism of our century. If we assert traditional doctrine, it is not because we know no alternative. For us, Judaism is not so much a heritage as an achievement. Or perhaps more accurately, to make it our heritage has become our decisive task.⁶

If Kaplan served as a foil to many of these thinkers, in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig the English speaking world was prompted to offer a homegrown response to their existentialist Jewish theologies. The arrival of their theological contributions by way of European refugees and English translations paved the way for a variety of theological emulators and imitators.⁷

So, too, the efforts of the "New Jewish Theologians" may be understood as an extension and reaction to the Neo-Protestant theological renaissance wrought by the

⁶A.J. Wolf, *Rediscovering*, 8.

⁷The translations of Buber and Rosenzweig would arrive by way of the efforts of N. Glatzer, M. Friedman, Will Herber and others. See Franz Rosenzweig and Nahum Norbert Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Farrar, 1953). Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: K. Paul, 1947). Martin Buber, *Writings* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956). Martin Buber, *Pointing the Way* (New York: Harper, 1957). Martin Buber and Nahum Norbert Glatzer, *The Way of Response: Martin Buber; Selections from His Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966).

writings of P. Tillich, the Niehbur brothers and Karl Barth, giving application to Heinrich Heine's maxim "Wie es Christelt sich, so Judelt es sich." As Trude Weiss-Rosmarin would comment, the grammar of American Jewish theology in the 1950s had taken a decidedly Protestant turn:

As a corollary to the contemporary Protestant theological renaissance, which has also an impact on the general thought climate of our day, thanks to men like Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultmann, the Niebuhrs, Paul Tillich, a.o., virtually all of contemporary Jewish theological endeavor is oriented to doing in the Jewish sphere what these Protestant theologians have accomplished in their area.⁸

From Milton Steinberg's theological addresses to Will Herberg's explicit debt to Reinhold Niebuhr, the derivative nature of American Jewish theology at the time was either to be applauded or derided, but significantly, never disputed.⁹

Finally, the etiology of these new Jewish theologians may be best understood as framed by the sociological context giving it expression, namely, the condition of mid-

⁸Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, *Jewish Spectator*, November 1960, 6.

⁹See for example, Milton Steinberg's 1949 Rabbinical Assembly address "The Theological Issues of the Hour," largely a comprehensive review of then contemporary Protestant thought and its relevance and application to Jewish theological categories. Milton Steinberg, "The Theological Issues of the Hour," Paper presented at the Rabbinical Assembly of America, Concord, NY, 1949. Herberg's reliance on Protestant theology is made explicit in the introduction to *Judaism and the Modern Man*, making clear his debt to Reinhold Niebuhr "What I owe to Reinhold Niebuhr in the formation of my general theological outlook, every page of this book bears witness." Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion* (New York: Farrar, 1951). Critics of Herberg would point to this intellectual debt as his greatest liability in that it cast doubt as to the "Jewishness" of his theology. See for instance Steven Schwarzschild's stinging review in the *Menorah Journal*: "...Will Herberg arrived at the intellectual and religious position he now holds...through a lengthy period of Communism, and then approached close to Niebuhrian Protestantism. Herberg himself is the last to wish to make a secret of all this, for he rather tends to consider his past ideological peregrinations as typical of modern man's torturous, straying search of this soul and salvation. Yet-though the Talmud does say that 'In the place where a penitent stand saints cannot stand,' Herberg ought not to make a whole *apologia* from the fragmentary truth of this dictum...indeed Herberg's insistence upon his religious authority on the ground of his former defection implies something akin to the notion of the later followers of Sabbatai Zevi - that God commands us to sin so that we may be save by Him out of our sinfulness!" Steven S. Schwarzschild, "Judaism á la Mode," *The Menorah Journal*, Spring 1952, 40:1, 103.

twentieth century American Jewry. Lou Silberman draws attention to such factors prompting this efflorescence of theological thinking:

The import of this paradox of an ever more secular society defining allowable differences in terms of religious groupings was developed during that decade [1950s] in its most ambitious form by Will Herberg in his volume *Protestant Catholic-Jew*. If Diaspora existence was to be religious existence or, perhaps more accurately, existence as a religion (i.e. ecclesiastical institution), it required, intellectually, a body of reflective thought interpreting the structures, forms, and institutions of that existing- theology. Thus viewed, theology serves the apologetic function of providing an intellectual structure for a community forced by its historical setting to appropriate a churchly mode of existence....¹⁰

The establishment of the state of Israel prompted a theological awakening, not so much because Diaspora Jewish thinkers understood the state of Israel as a theological marker, but because a modern Jewish state put diaspora thinkers on their theological heels. Put simply, if one were going to be a committed Jew in the fifties and choose not to live in the Jewish state, one needed a well thought-out response; in other words, a theology, that justifies a distinctive diaspora community. In America, as with Jacobs himself, theology would come to play an apologetic function whereby such questions of belief would serve as proxy for the sociological tensions of the Jewish world.

In their journals, informal study groups, rabbinical conventions and otherwise, “revelation” served as the Ariadne’s thread to over a decade of publications.¹¹ From E. Fackenheim’s provocative 1951 *Commentary* article “Can There be a Judaism Without

¹⁰L. Silberman, “Concerning Jewish Theology,” 39.

¹¹Interview with Arnold Jacob Wolf, March 14, 2007. I am grateful to Rabbi Wolf for shedding light on the weeklong Canadian summer retreats organized by David Hartman. A sense of the content and spirit of these retreats of theologians and scholars, including Elie Wiesel, Jacob Neusner, Steven Schwarzschild, and Zalman Schachter can be sensed in Wolf’s collection of Essays. A.J. Wolf, *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*.

Revelation,¹²” to A.J. Heschel’s *Torah Min Hashamayim B’spakloria shel Hadorot*,¹³ revelation would be a catchall for the aforementioned perplexities of mid-century Judaism. Emblematic of this tendency is the oft-cited symposium on the “The Condition of Jewish Belief,” a symposium of thirty-eight of the most distinguished Jewish theologians of the era, assembled and issued by the North American Jewish journal *Commentary* in 1966. Asked to respond to a series of questions, the editors began by asking what was understood to be the lynchpin for all future theological discussion: “In what sense do you believe the Torah to be divine revelation?”¹⁴

Of course, the tension between divine revelation and human reason is a dilemma unique neither to Americans, Jews, or the 1950s. Since Spinoza’s devaluation of Scripture’s divine status and Kant’s valorization of autonomous human reason, the predicament of the modern liberal Jew has been an enduring effort towards retaining the majesty of revelation in all its ramified consequences while not forsaking the claims and context in which the modern Jew exists. Given the fact that Spinoza, Kant, biblical criticism, Darwin and other challenges to notions of biblical inerrancy existed long before the 1950s, it is not only reasonable, but for the purposes of our study, necessary to ask the question: Why the proliferation of writing on the subject of revelation at this time?

¹²Emil Fackenheim, "Can There Be a Judaism without Revelation," *Commentary*, (December 1951): 561-72.

¹³A.J. Heschel, *Torah Min Hashamayim B’spakloria Shel Hadorot [Theology of Ancient Judaism]*, Hebrew. 2 vols. (London: Soncino, 1962).

¹⁴*Commentary, Condition of Jewish Belief: A Symposium Compiled by the Editors of Commentary Magazine* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

Illuminating in this regard is H. Richard Niebuhr's 1941 study "The Meaning of Revelation." Niebuhr begins his study of revelation by noting his generation's self awareness of the human experience as being historically conditioned. "No other influence has affected twentieth century thought more deeply than the discovery of spatial and temporal relativity."¹⁵ This awareness posed a particularly acute problem for any scripturally-based faith, which in Niebuhr's case, was Christianity. Just as past religious ideas originated in a particular social context, so too Niebuhr averred "we are aware today that all our philosophical ideas, religious dogmas and moral imperatives are historically conditioned."¹⁶ Niebuhr cites the twentieth century theologian's inability to recoup a pre-enlightenment approach to Scripture explaining:

...the methods and the fruits of Biblical and historical criticism as well as of natural and social science cannot be so eliminated from men's minds as to allow them to recover the same attitude toward Scriptures which their seventeenth-century forbearers had.¹⁷

Niebuhr's essay stands as a courageous attempt to situate the eternal truths of past revelation and apply them to our own historically conditioned moment. In his own words:

This is the sum of the matter: Christian theology must begin today with revelation because it knows that men cannot think about God save as historic, communal beings and save as believers. It must ask what revelation means for Christians rather than what it ought to mean for all men, everywhere and at all times. And it can pursue its inquiry only by recalling the story of Christian life and

¹⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 7.

¹⁶Ibid., vii.

¹⁷Ibid., 4.

by analyzing what Christians see from their limited point of view in history and faith.¹⁸

Caught between the Scylla of historical relativism and the Charybdis of pre-modern fundamentalism, Niebuhr sought to steer a middle path for the mid-century faith adherent whereby the authenticity of revelation need not be contingent on a pre-critical mindset. Indeed, Niebuhr's theology of revelation would insist that the authentic religious experience acknowledge its contingent nature even as it gropes towards the Eternal.

Will Herberg's 1951 book, "Judaism and the Modern Man," offers a Jewish inflection to the accomplishments of mid-twentieth century Protestant theology. In the wake of the Holocaust, Herberg's attempts to grapple with revelation would follow a different path than that of Niebuhr. In a somber assessment of humanity, Herberg explained that decades of unbroken violence have "brought man to the brink of the abyss." In his own words:

Intoxicated with his success, he [humanity] denied God because he could imagine no power superior to his own. Or rather he transformed himself into God and began worshipping himself and his power. It was an appalling idolatry, and its consequences could hardly have been otherwise...¹⁹

Revelation, for Herberg, was representative of both the challenges and opportunities for post-war Jewry. Modern man's inability to accept revelation was due not so much to the challenge of historical criticism but because it served as a direct challenge to the idolatrous self-worship of the age:

¹⁸Ibid., 42.

¹⁹Herberg, *Judaism and the Modern Man*, 7-8.

The fact of the matter seems to be that the modern unbeliever refuses to believe for the same basic reason that the unbelievers of all ages have refused; the biblical word is a decisive challenge to his pretensions to self-sufficiency and to all the strategies that he has devised to sustain them. Modern man is ready to “accept” revelation if that revelation is identified with his own intellectual discovery or poetical intuition. But with the revelation that comes from beyond to shatter his self-sufficiency, to expose the derelict of his life and to call him to radical transformation of heart, with that revelation he will have nothing to do. The resistance to revelation is a resistance to the exposure of the idolatries by which we live....²⁰

For Herberg, humanity’s confidence in itself had rendered the notion of outside revelation altogether passé – at its own peril. Herberg counseled a return to traditional categories of belief, all the while recognizing a modern Jew’s inability to return to the epistemological naiveté of a pre-modern faith.²¹ A renewed commitment to revelation brought:

...a new center and a new perspective in terms of which whatever knowledge we may have may be related to the ultimate truth about existence.²²

Jacobs, who both in his footnotes and later recollections would readily acknowledge his debt to Herberg, appropriated Herberg’s effort to strike a middle course between modernism and fundamentalism, seeking a synthetic approach by which the Bible could be taken seriously, but not necessarily literally. In Herberg’s own words:

Fundamentalism is right in stressing the unity of the Bible and its character as revelation; modernism is right in pointing to what may be called the human aspect of the Bible and hence to its relativities

²⁰ Ibid., 258.

²¹The predicament of the Modern Jew’s inability to retrieve a pre-critical naiveté is given precise formulation in Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Images of Knowledge in Modern Jewish Thought," *Criterion* 36, no. 2 (1997), 2-11.

²²W. Herberg, *Judaism and the Modern Man*, 259.

and fallibilities. An adequate understanding of revelation must take into account what both have to say and combine them into a higher and more pregnant synthesis.²³

As would be the case with Jacobs, Herberg's desire to restore traditionalism without resorting to biblical fundamentalism would lead him to reconsider the meaning of revelation itself. Citing the "third way" as advocated by F. Rosenzweig, M. Buber and H. Richard Niehbuhr, Herberg develops a dialogical notion of revelation, allowing him to conclude that "Scripture is thus not itself revelation but a humanly mediated record of revelation." As would Jacobs, Herberg appropriated Emil Brunner's gramophone analogy to come to terms with his redefined notion of revelation:

If, to use a recording of God's word, man-made but an authentic recording nevertheless, then we must remember that a recording is inert and silent until it is played and listened to: the Bible is simply a closed book until it is read with an open heart and a ready will.²⁴

Herberg's return to revelation was prompted by a belief that scripture served as the most potent antidote for the pitfalls of a self-involved and self-assured humanity. Thus, while framed differently, Herberg's tactic, language and sources would provide a significant and openly cited precedent to Jacobs's own explorations in revelation.²⁵

Although Jacobs would explicitly cite his debt to his non-Anglo contemporaries, he would also come to stand as a distinctly British approach to the New Jewish Theologians. The existentialist mood wrought by Buber and Rosenzweig and their Protestant theological counterparts never rung entirely true to Jacobs's Anglo-

²³Ibid., 250.

²⁴Ibid, 252. WHRTB, 81.

²⁵Jacobs would write an altogether fulsome review of the paperback release of Herberg's *Judaism and the Modern Man* (1960). See Louis Jacobs, "A Living Faith," JC, May 6, 1960.

sensibility. Sharing with his American colleague Wolfe Kelman his thoughts

concerning a review of *We Have Reason to Believe*, Jacobs would write as follows:

A review of my book ‘We Have Reason to Believe’ has just appeared in the Journal of Semitic Studies in which the author – an existentialist – takes me to task for not being ‘touched by the Absolute’. The existentialist boys have hit upon many truths but the danger of introducing mysteries at every turn is sufficiently obvious...²⁶

Jacobs’s guarded appreciation of the American theological school was stated directly in a later review of Arnold Jacob Wolf’s edited volume “Rediscovering Judaism.” In what would be an otherwise fulsome review, Jacobs pointed out a perceived deficiency of the volume, and by extension, the school:

One is reluctant to criticize this unique attempt at Jewish theological thinking in the idiom of our day, but readers in this country will probably find jarring the too dominant and exclusively existentialist note.

Now we are all, indeed, to some extent, heirs to the Kierkegaardian mistrust of system, but systematic thinking about Judaism also has its place. One might have expected at least, a more systematic treatment of why system is not enough.

One thorough essay on linguistic analysis and its relation to theology would not only have been a welcome addition to the volume in itself but would have served as a corrective to occasional imprecision and lack of clarity.²⁷

Jacobs would never feel truly at home in American theological thinking. For all his breadth of reading, Jacobs’s intellectual orientations would never permit him to glean too heavily from contemporaries outside of England. Lacking a point of resonance with German-Jewish thought and never fully identifying with the tropes of American-Jewish

²⁶Letter from Louis Jacobs to Wolfe Kelman, Oct 11, 1958. Kelman Archive.

²⁷Louis Jacobs, JC, April 1, 1966.

theology, Jacobs would ultimately return to what he found to be the clear, elegant and honest expression of British Jewish theology, despite all its limitations.

The British Scene

Jacobs's Anglo community would provide ample precedent to his inquiries into the nature of revelation. As M. Noll makes clear in his study of the subject, the British reaction to the claims of biblical criticism took on an altogether distinct trajectory from its Continental or American counterparts. Though the findings of critical scholarship were initially rebuffed by mid-nineteenth century scriptural traditionalists, over time a more willing posture was adopted whereby even the evangelical community would seek to integrate critical methods into traditional patterns of belief. To be sure, while the evangelical embrace of scholarship was initially driven by a desire to refute its very claims, over time critical scholarship found a place in traditional belief.²⁸ As G.

Marsden explains in his treatment of the subject:

...in general, once moderate historical-critical ideas were advanced by evangelicals known as reverent defenders of the faith, the new attitudes were accepted with remarkable swiftness. By the 1890s most of the clergy had abandoned traditional assumptions concerning the full historical accuracy of Scripture for some form of higher criticism. ...In all this rather peaceful development suggests that nineteenth-century British evangelical religion, like British politics, was closer in style to Edmund Burke than to Oliver Cromwell.²⁹

²⁸Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), 72ff.

²⁹George Marsden, "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon, a Comparison with English Evangelicalism," *Church History* 46, no. 2 (1977), 218.

With few notable exceptions, from Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (1891), to C.H. Dodd's *The Authority of the Bible* (1928), to H. Wheeler Robinson's *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (1942), a steady state of affairs existed whereby the claims of piety and criticism sat cooperatively side by side. Noll's study adds a cultural dimension, claiming that the presence of strong evangelical student organizations in British universities in the form of inter-varsity fellowships, along with the blurred professional lines between the academic and church communities, would together serve as an impetus for the easy engagement of critical scholarship with traditional faith in England during these decades.

H.D. McDonald's assessment of Anglo attitudes towards revelation reasons that the Anglo community's willingness to cede the traditional notions of revelation and biblical inerrancy would prompt efforts to retain notions of biblical inspiration derived from the message "within" the text, rather than its origins. In describing the manifold books on the subject of revelation in the first half of the twentieth century, McDonald writes:

A change of emphasis is therefore to be observed. Inspiration came to be less and less identified with the insights of religious geniuses and began to be identified more and more with the inner illumination of the Spirit of God. The Bible was then conceived to be the record of these revelations which this divine illumination assured to chosen men. Often reference was made to the Biblical teaching concerning the believer's illumination by the Holy Spirit as being an illustration of this concept of inspiration. Such an action by the spirit, it was stressed, did not involve infallibility. In the case of those to whom we owe the Bible the process was the same, only, of course, much more intense; but even here there was no guarantee of infallibility.³⁰

³⁰H.D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1860-1960* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), 256.

No longer contingent on “origins,” the claims of the Bible would be found in its “effects” on the believer. In language reminiscent of Jacobs’s own writing, C.H. Dodd (1874-1973) would explain in his treatment of revelation: “...thus the religious authority of the Bible comes to us primarily in inducing in us a religious attitude and outlook.”³¹

As with their American colleagues, the Anglo community would often turn to history as the instrument to cut the Gordian knot of fundamentalism and secularism. Reminiscent of Niebuhr’s aforementioned struggles in determining the eternal and ephemeral aspects of revelation, H.W. Robinson would write that same decade:

Every revelation will necessarily bear the marks and limitation of its historical period, but this does not mean that the eternal is not revealed, because achieved, in the temporal.³²

For Robinson, by acknowledging the very fallibility of Scripture, an opportunity to redeem its meaning and authority would be presented. The Bible’s ongoing authority was found not so much (if at all) in proving its singular revelation in antiquity, but rather by its continued ability to inspire humanity in every age. It was Jacobs’s own would-be Manchester academic advisor, H.H. Rowley, who would argue as much in numerous publications, reasoning that just as imperfections of the Bible are attributable to it having been received by ‘real men,’ so too the perfections of the Bible are assured by its continued ability to inspire ‘real men.’³³

³¹Charles Harold Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (London: Nisbet & co., 1928), 297.

³²H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 158.

³³On Rowley, see McDonald, *Theories of Revelation*, 251-254. A particularly useful entry into Rowley’s treatment of the subject can be found in Harold Henry Rowley, *The Relevance of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 11-51.

Jacobs's efforts to find a "third way" that Scripture could be taken seriously but not literally would thus come by way of Jewish and non-Jewish American theologians, non-Jewish British churchmen, and as this thesis will contend, his own Anglo-Jewish predecessors. While both Solomon Schechter and the former Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz would draw a hard line against "Higher Criticism" (source criticism), as Jacobs's footnotes demonstrate, he was not lacking in predecessors offering alternatives to Hertz's contention that Judaism "stands or falls on the belief in revelation."³⁴ For example, Jacobs approvingly cited the debarred minister Morris Joseph (1848-1930), who in 1903 had expressed an eagerness to reconcile the authority of Scripture with modern critical theory. In acknowledging the human character of the Bible, Joseph (a point of reference for Jacobs's own study) would posit that the touchstone of scriptural authority was "intrinsic worth and nothing else."³⁵

So, too, Jacobs's efforts to reconcile scriptural authority with biblical criticism would come by way of Joshua Abelson's (1873-1940) study of the subject in the short lived journal "Jewish Review." Abelson sets out his goal of creating a "half-way house" between critical findings and traditional faith, offering an unsystematic array of

³⁴See S. Schechter, "Higher Criticism - Higher Anti Semitism" in S. Schechter, *Seminary Addresses & Other Papers*, 35-39. See Joseph H. Hertz, *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, (New York: Bloch, 1948), 252. More extensive treatment of the subject may be found in his Pentateuchal commentary Joseph H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs: Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary*, One-volume ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1950), esp. 197-200. For a full study of Hertz and his Pentateuchal commentary Harvey Warren Meirovich, *A Vindication of Judaism: The Polemics of the Hertz Pentateuch* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1998).

³⁵Morris Joseph, *Judaism as Creed and Life*, 5th ed. (London; New York: George Routledge and Sons; Bloch, 1925), 17. Joseph's engagement with Darwin, modern reason and scientific inquiry is readily apparent in his collected sermons, see Morris Joseph, *The Spirit of Judaism: Sermons Preached Chiefly at the West London Synagogue* (London; New York: George Routledge & Sons, 1930). On M. Joseph's storied career see, EJ 11:417 and C. Bermant's, *Troubled Eden*, 185-186. As Bermant notes, Joseph's career serves as a precursor to the controversies surrounding Jacobs.

arguments towards the conclusion that “it is quite possible to hold a modernized view of the Bible without at the same time bartering away those priceless fundamental truths which are the life-essence of historic Judaism.”³⁶ Every Jewish age, Abelson posits, has related to the biblical text differently, with the current challenge of biblical criticism being merely our generation’s interpretive lens. Further, the application of a modern sensibility and critical apparatus in Bible study “is to enhance, rather than diminish, our reverence for its truth.”³⁷ Finally, in a passage that Jacobs would come to cite in full, the claims of biblical criticism and faith “can be regarded as two distinct compartments.”³⁸ Indeed, each of these arguments stated by Abelson but never fully elaborated upon would in some way find their way into Jacobs’s fuller treatment of the subject.

Thirty years prior to *We Have Reason to Believe*, a view eerily akin to Jacobs’s opening methodological statement was offered by Maurice Farbridge in his *Judaism and the Modern Mind*:

...Jews of today can be divided roughly into two sections: those who are always testing Judaism with an open mind and barely attain conviction and those who are full of convictions but regard it as sacrilege to examine the foundations on which they are based. The earnest seeker after truth thus often finds himself in the utmost difficulty. He turns to one man and finds no faith, to another and finds no reason. Is this divorce between faith and reason inevitable? Is it possible for the single heart and open mind to dwell together in unity? This is the problem which is agitating the mind of many modern Jews, and the author of this volume has

³⁶J. Abelson, “Bible Problems and Modern Knowledge,” *Jewish Review*, March 1913, 479.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 480.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 483.

attempted to provide a solution in these pages in a manner which he trusts will appeal to the thinking Jew of today.³⁹

Farbridge's diagnosis of the predicament of "the earnest seeker of truth" and his resolve to address the conflict therein makes him a noteworthy predecessor to Jacobs. In his preface, Farbridge called on his readers to find a "new synthesis" where the competing truths of the old and new learning can be reconciled. His chapters on "Bible Difficulties – Moral and Scientific," "Judaism and the Higher Criticism," "Is the Bible Inspired?" and "Judaism and Miracles," run parallel both in topic and methodology to Jacobs's own treatment of the subject matter. While differences abound (not the least of which is Jacobs's engagement with rabbinic precedent—a literature from which Farbridge drew only infrequently), both Farbridge and Jacobs would readily allow for "traditional Judaism to be entirely independent of the results of higher criticism."⁴⁰

Thus, Jacobs had numerous Anglo-Jewish precedents in Farbridge, Abelson and Joseph, who like their non-Jewish counterparts, sought to maintain scriptural authority but had long discarded the so-called "genetic fallacy." Indeed, much of the novelty of Jacobs's argument would be found not so much in its content, but in the denominational affiliations of the person making them. Joseph, after all, came to serve as a Reform minister due to his beliefs, and Farbridge never served a pulpit.⁴¹ It would only be Jacobs who would make the bold claim that such beliefs could be compatible with his status as an Orthodox minister.

³⁹Maurice Harry Farbridge, *Judaism and the Modern Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), vii.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 168-69.

⁴¹ Abelson is a figure worthy of further exploration. His liberal views did not preclude him from occupying numerous Anglo-pulpits, educational institutions and assisting Hertz in the editing of the Chief Rabbi's commentary on the Pentateuch. On Abelson, his training, career and attitude towards biblical criticism, see H. Meirovich, *Vindication*, 36-37 and 62-63. Also, EJ 1:249.

In considering Jacobs's influences and antecedents, we may also consider the popular theological climate occurring alongside the above discussions in church and academy. As Adrian Hastings explains in his study, a Christian intellectual revival proceeding steadily from the 1920s would reach its peak in the England of the 1950s:

The non-religious orthodoxies of the inter-war years had been badly bruised by the experience of the war and disillusionment with Communist Russia. There was never a time since the middle of the nineteenth century when Christian faith was either taken so seriously by the generality of the more intelligent or could make such a good case for itself.⁴²

Perhaps the greatest exemplar of the neo-traditionalist mood was C.S. Lewis, whose literary accomplishments struck a highpoint in the mid-twentieth century. Like G.K. Chesterton before him, it is perhaps Lewis's resistance to easy categorization as a popular author, formal theologian or clerical writer that is precisely the point to consider in the chord he struck in Anglo-religious discourse. Hastings explains that it was the blurring of lines between Lewis's faith and scholarship, imagination and social conservatism that would render him "very satisfying to many a young searcher after wisdom."⁴³ With Lewis, as would be the case with Jacobs, style and substance were closely related, and theology would seek to strike the balance between being popular and sophisticated, traditional yet non-conformist, practical and mystical, compelling and critical, traditional in formulation and yet non-dogmatic in expression.

Even without establishing a "direct" influence on Jacobs, the mood of religious thinkers such as Lewis suggests an important context towards identifying what, if any,

⁴²Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*, 3rd ed. (London; Philadelphia: SCM; Trinity, 1991), 491.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 493.

the distinctive British elements of mid-century religious apologetics may have been. For example, the Kierkegaardian “leap of faith” would never resonate with Lewis, who would reprove the existentialist school for its “fuzzy thinking.”⁴⁴ In his modern defense of faith, Lewis would be critical of “chronological snobbery;” namely, “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.”⁴⁵ Thus, while Lewis did not believe in the infallibility of Scripture, the findings of biblical criticism were to be accepted with a degree of suspicion, and for that matter, never to be taken as grounds for reconsidering the sanctity of Scripture. Lewis’s fullest comments on the nature and authority of the biblical text delivered in 1950 would seek to appreciate the literary quality of the Bible, but never relegate the Bible to be “just” literature.

It is [the Bible], if you like to put it that way, not merely a sacred book but a book so remorselessly and continuously sacred that it does not invite, it excludes or repels a merely aesthetic approach.⁴⁶

As with Chesterton, Lewis’s rhetorical spirit would seek to reverse the epistemological calculus of the Enlightenment, insisting that the modern may have more reason to believe in the truths of yesteryear than the tenuous and ephemeral findings of the present.⁴⁷ The rhetorical mood of the Anglo-religious community in which Jacobs operated was guided by a desire to construct the means for the modern believer to

⁴⁴Richard B. Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis, Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 69.

⁴⁵C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, 1st American ed. (New York: Harcourt Bruce, 1956), 24. Cited in Cunningham, 38.

⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version*, Ethel M. Wood Lecture; 1950 (London: University of London; Athlone, 1950), 25. On Lewis’s scripturalism, see Will Vaus, *Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C.S. Lewis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 32-41.

⁴⁷See G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1908).

embrace the orthodoxies of the past in spite of—or perhaps because of—an engagement with contemporary thought.

Apart from identifying Jacobs's theological interlocutors, it is also important to consider the Anglo-philosophical discipline in vogue at the time of Jacobs's intellectual coming of age. Logical positivism and linguistic analysis would dominate Anglo-philosophical discourse during these years, having found forceful exposition in A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936). Although Jacobs would not come to engage fully with Ayer's claims until his later book *Faith* (1968), a preliminary consideration of such currents serves to illuminate even Jacobs's early publications. Indeed, the logical positivist's distinction between truth claims capable and incapable of verification ("the verification principle") would pave the way for a reconsideration of statements of faith. Thus, while linguistic philosophy could be rallied towards demonstrating the meaninglessness of religious convictions, it could also point to the essential *difference* and independence between statements derived from faith and those resulting from empirical inquiry. Worth citing in full is a representative passage from a friend of Jacobs, Frederick Copleston, whose book *Contemporary Philosophy* would appear in the bibliography of *We Have Reason to Believe*.⁴⁸

In the last century people used to talk about a conflict between religion and science. We see now that there is not, and cannot be any conflict between religion and science in the sense in which that conflict was understood in the last century; for no verified scientific statement can contradict a revealed dogma. We are no longer troubled by apparent discrepancies between scientific theories and *Genesis*; for we have a better idea now of the nature of scientific theories and hypothesis on the one hand, while on the other hand every sensible person realizes that the Bible was not

⁴⁸Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

designed to be a handbook of astronomy or of any other branch of science.⁴⁹

The argument that scriptural truths are of a different “kind” than those derived from empirical investigation is hardly a discovery of logical positivists. Indeed, our above survey makes clear that such a distinction was a long-time tool of religious apologists, Jewish, non-Jewish, American and British. As Hans Frei traces in his book-length study on the subject, modernity brought with it an allowance that scriptural authority was not contingent on the historical or literal truth of its content and referents.⁵⁰ And yet, while not “new,” linguistic philosophy would provide the philosophical matrix by which the status of sacred literature could remain intact while claiming to remain responsive to the findings of critical inquiry. Jacobs’s adoption of a “two *kinds* of truth” approach, one offered by way of ancient texts and the other by way of modernity, was a defensible and oft-used distinction in his day.

Finally, Jacobs’s inquiries into the nature of revelation in light of the claims of critical scholarship may be understood in the context of a series of publications and cultural events during these years. As G. Larue contends, the 1952 introduction of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible amidst acclaim and criticism drew attention to matters of biblical language, authority and translation in a very public and heated way.⁵¹ So, too, evangelical efforts such as Billy Graham’s, spring 1954 “Great London

⁴⁹Frederick Charles Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1956), 32.

⁵⁰Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

⁵¹Gerald A. Larue, “Another Chapter in the History of Bible Translation,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 31, no. 4 (1963).

Crusade” would not only draw huge numbers (over 1.3 million), but increased attention to the fault lines between American and British approaches to Scripture as well. Graham’s mission, capped by a Wembley Stadium appearance of over 120,000, would be followed by a “*Times Bible Supplement*” on the “Historical, Social and Literary Aspects of the Old and the New Testaments Described by Christian Scholars.” In response to Graham’s American evangelical efforts, *The Times* sought to articulate an English response, “seeking to show how the Bible was shaped, what it has meant to past generations and what it might and should mean to the present and future.”⁵² Jacobs would go on to offer a Jewish response to the efforts of Christian scholars of *The Times* supplement, a *Jewish Chronicle* article that, as we shall see, provides the basis for his own treatment of the subject in *We Have Reason to Believe*.⁵³ Indeed, a passing glance at books published contemporaneous to *We Have Reason to Believe* makes it abundantly clear that Jacobs’s effort, though distinct in its Jewishness, was far from isolated in English theology. Beginning with John Baillie’s *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (1956), to J.K.S. Reid’s *The Authority of Scripture* (1957), to H.H. Rowley’s *Faith of Israel* (1957), to Raymond Abba’s *The Nature and Authority of the Bible* (1958), these years would produce a series of like-minded efforts towards constructing a theology that while conservative in its leanings, was capable of withstanding an honest and open engagement with modernity and critical scholarship.

The importance of the above theological survey is not so much an insistence on establishing a causal relationship leading up to *We Have Reason to Believe*, or the

⁵²“The Bible: Historical Social and Literary Aspects of the Old and New Testaments described by Christian Scholars,” *Times of London Supplement*. June 21, 1954, 2.

⁵³Louis Jacobs, “This is The Law,” *JC*, July 23, 1954.

suggestion that any one single incident prompted Jacobs's own theological ventures. Quite the contrary, it is the contention of this thesis that the tensions wrought by the conflict between traditional faith and critical inquiry were well embedded within Jacobs independently of the later context in which he functioned. What the above study does hopefully illuminate is the national and international theological mood surrounding Jacobs and the tools he used to respond in the ways he did. Indeed, a full appreciation of *We Have Reason to Believe* arrives by recognizing the manner in which Jacobs assimilates the tactics and topics of his predecessors and contemporaries in order to address what must ultimately be understood as deeply personal questions stirring his own soul.

Precedents to Publication

In his years at the New West End, Jacobs would never hide his progressive views concerning revelation and their implications for traditional text study and practice. Shortly after his arrival, Jacobs gave voice to a rather progressive stance on the subject of the literalism of the Bible. In response to the aforementioned *Times Bible Supplement*, Jacobs directed his attention to the question of how Judaism historically contended with questions concerning the literal truth of the biblical account:

What has Judaism to say on this question? One thing is clear, Jews are not, and never have been fundamentalists in the Protestant sense. For even a nodding acquaintance with Jewish theological thought makes us familiar with the doctrine of the *two* [italics original] Torahs according to which authority in Judaism rests not on the Bible alone but also on its complement, the Oral law, which, if correctly understood, means not only those oral traditions

reaching back to Bible times but, in addition, the persistent attempt by the Jewish teachers, to apply the Biblical message to life.⁵⁴

Jacobs's short article states the manner by which the rabbinic tradition tempers, mitigates, and in some cases, rejects biblical law and institutions, explaining "this is why the few passages of the Bible which offend our moral sense or our intellect have never been a real stumbling block to Jews – for it was instinctively recognized that these passages have not to be taken literally." From the rabbis of the Talmud to the twentieth-century Orthodox authority Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, for Jews the authority of the Bible has never been contingent on its literal meaning. Biblical criticism may offer a different "degree" of challenge to the traditionalist, but insofar as it represents one generation's scriptural interpretative lens, it does not represent a challenge of a different "kind." Jacobs concludes:

All this is not, of course, to say that we have no problems to solve in our approach to the Bible or that we can afford to disregard the findings of Modern Biblical scholarship. But it does mean that our tradition is such that it ought to be possible to work out an approach to the Bible which takes into account modern critical investigations and the profound insights contained in the classical Jewish post-Biblical literature.⁵⁵

Jacobs's emphasis on the authority of the "secondary meaning" of the Bible over the revealed Bible itself was a theological trope appropriated from Solomon Schechter, and one he would return many times.⁵⁶ It remains to be considered whether Schechter, Kook or rabbinic literature as a whole would have ever sanctioned the "kind" of

⁵⁴Louis Jacobs, "This is The Law," JC, July 23, 1954.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶See S. Schechter, Alexander Marx, and Frank Isaac Schechter, *Studies in Judaism. Third Series* (Philadelphia: The Jewish publication society of America, 1924), 15.

challenge represented by biblical criticism, a rhetorical sleight of hand upon which Jacobs would grow increasingly reliant. Nevertheless, this brief article is significant in that it provides the seeds for Jacobs's future inquiries and makes evident the tactic by which he would make his claims. Namely, that Jacobs's views, no matter what they may be, would always have precedent and sanction within Jewish law and literature.

During his years at the New West End, Jacobs openly discussed the implications of a non-fundamentalist view of revelation. His autobiography chronicles public speaking engagements where he would candidly contend with these questions.⁵⁷ The record of his peripatetic preaching, and perhaps more importantly, its impact on him, is found in his own correspondence from the time. As he would explain to a colleague in 1958:

In a few days time I am off to Oxford to speak to the Jewish students. The subject they have chosen for me is: 'The Higher Criticism and its Implications for Faith and Practice.' As you may know, this subject has been exercising my mind ever since I read Semitics at the University. Needless to say the most-helpful things have been said in 'Conservative' publications. The more one thinks about it the great the need for a 'Conservative' movement over here.⁵⁸

So, too, to a scholarly audience he would write openly on higher criticism in a review of Solomon Goldman's posthumously published *Ten Commandments*.⁵⁹ Within his New West End congregation he would openly preach on the subject; for example:

To understand the Bible correctly we have to recognize that its eternal truths are expressed against the background of an ancient

⁵⁷HWI, 117-118.

⁵⁸Letter from Louis Jacobs to Wolfe Kelman, October 1958. Kelman Archive.

⁵⁹ Louis Jacobs, "The Ten Commandments by Solomon Goldman."

civilization very different from our own. *To take the Bible seriously, we must not take it literally.* [italics in original] We need not be perturbed at the fact that in some matters its views differ from those of modern science or that some of the Biblical stories are paralleled in the Babylonian and other ancient mythologies. The *eternal* [original] truths found in the Bible stand out like precious jewels whose brilliance is unaffected by their setting.⁶⁰

Jacobs's record prior to 1957 makes clear that the claims he would make in *We Have Reason to Believe* were well formulated, and in many cases, already addressed by him in a variety of public contexts. The authority of the Bible in the face of critical scholarship, the veracity of its account, and the moral difficulties it presents to a modern sensibility were all questions Jacobs had considered for quite some time.

We Have Reason To Believe

The publication history of *We Have Reason to Believe* is traceable through the recollections of Jacobs and his publisher and friend, William Frankel. Shortly after arriving at the New West End, Jacobs began numerous initiatives intended to reach out to young members, one of which was a study group composed primarily of young, university educated congregants. These lively and directed discussions on a variety of theological topics were driven by a desire to reconcile the competing claims of contemporary thought and traditional faith.⁶¹ It would be the discussions emerging from this group that would become the subject matter of the planned publication.

⁶⁰Louis Jacobs, "Points from Recent Sermons" *Venture*, November 1956 (1:3), 11.

⁶¹Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006. See also HWI, 116. A photograph of the celebratory meal at the conclusion of the first year of study, with the Chief Rabbi, Louis Jacobs, Mr. and Mrs. William Frankel and Mr. Jack Kleeman is to be found in the *Jewish Chronicle*. JC, March 18, 1955.

With Jacobs's intellectual predecessors and context considered, we are positioned to review the key methodological pivots of his 1957 publication, *We Have Reason to Believe*. Embedded within his work, these traces of his distinguished forbearers may be detected in language, content and method. Consider, for instance, the book's opening paragraph:

There are three pitfalls to be avoided by Jewish apologetics in its attempt to grapple with the problems raised by modern thought. It must not refuse to recognize the existence of the problem by rejecting, in the name of traditional, modern thought and all its ways as of the devil. It must not encourage that division of the mind in which incompatible ideas are allowed to exist side by side in water-tight compartments. Nor must it be desperately stampeded into postulating an artificial synthesis, a queer hybrid faith which both the adherents of traditional Judaism and representative modern thinkers would repudiate. A true Jewish Apologetic, eschewing obscurantism, religious schizophrenia, and intellectual dishonesty will be based on the conviction that all truth, 'the seal of the Holy One, Blessed is He', is one, and that a synthesis is possible between the permanent values and truth of tradition and the best thought of the day.⁶²

As a work of Jewish apologetics, Jacobs's introduction stands as an attempt to address the particular angst of his immediate audience at the New West End. Emerging from a congregational study group, Jacobs attempted to create an integrated theological statement that could bridge the competing pull of tradition and modernity within his own immediate context. And yet, Jacobs's language extends beyond the moment of his community. As an opening statement, Farbridge's aforementioned introduction nourishes Jacobs's own words. In problematizing the plight of the modern Jew as being pulled between faith and reason and opting for an integrated "truth," Jacobs's introduction is revealed to be an extension of Farbridge's language before him. So too,

⁶²WHRTB, 9.

there exists a Krochmalian intonation to Jacobs's formulation, whereby the epistemological extremes of the left and right must be shunned in favor of a middle path integrating the claims of both.⁶³ Additionally, Jacobs's appropriation of a rabbinic citation (b. Shabbat 55a) signals the employment of rabbinic literature to buttress his claims, a tactic near absent in his Anglo-based antecedents.

Furthermore, it is impossible to read this passage without considering Jacobs's own biographical journey. After all, Jacobs's early yeshiva experience had given him numerous personal referents in formulating his objection to religious obscurantism. Munk, Stein and Altmann represented differing degrees of "religious schizophrenia" whereby the interface of competing claims was to be avoided at all costs. Jacobs's ongoing commitment to tradition and modernity would cause him to formulate an approach that would allow for both sets of claims to exist synthetically, without impugning on the integrity of either. It would be this final methodological commitment, infused by an array of rabbinic texts and expressed in the cadences of the Anglo-intellectual tradition that stands as the distinctive feature of this slim but storm-stirring volume.

Jacobs's introductory assertion that the primary concern of his book is "with attitude and mood" is both true as well as somewhat disingenuous. Indeed, it is from the very calming mood he creates that he stages some of his more audacious attacks on pre-modern Jewish belief. For example, as Jacobs set out on his methodological course, he explains the tactic by which the "truth of tradition" and the "best thought of the day" could be balanced:

⁶³Nachman Krochmal and Leopold Zunz, *Moreh Nevukhe Ha-Zeman* (Berolini, 1923), esp. 10-12. (Hebrew)

Some things (such as knives and other physical implements) become increasingly unserviceable as they grow older; other things (such as the multiplication table) do not. There is no necessity for supposing that dogmas belong to the first class rather than the second. If a true assertion was made many centuries ago, there is no gain in replacing it by a false statement made more recently. No reverence for antiquity must make us hesitate to discard an old statement if we have good reason for thinking it is false. But the question is one of truth or falsity, not of age as is implied by the use of the word *outworn*. Jews today are interested in theological questions. Religious Jews want to be sure that their faith is no vague emotion but is grounded in reality. They want to be in the position of confidently asserting: ‘We have *reason* to believe’.⁶⁴

The above passage, other than providing the genesis of the volume’s name, offers insight into Jacobs’s rhetorical method.⁶⁵ Like C.S. Lewis before him, Jacobs objects to forms of “chronological snobbery,” positioning himself as a defender of traditional belief and asserting that the antiquity of a statement must never be the criteria to discard it. Yet, having established in the defense of tradition the folly of citing the temporal origins as a reliable metric to measure truth, the momentum of Jacobs’s argument shifts seamlessly towards a consequence that while logical, is a rather sharp departure from traditional Judaism—namely, a ready willingness to discard ancient doctrine if proven false. In establishing the poles of the debate as “truth and falsity, not of age,” Jacobs has, in short order, leveled the playing field, redefining the terms of the debate for his

⁶⁴WHRTB, 10.

⁶⁵Years later, Jacobs would attribute the title of his book to Dr. Ian Gordon, a participant in his study group. Years later he would explain in full: “...this expression ‘We Have Reason to Believe’ is not my own and I claim no credit for it. About thirteen years ago, soon after I was appointed to the ministry of the New West End Synagogue, I gave a talk on something like the scientific approach to life and religion. There was a member of the audience who later became a dear friend and he suggested to me afterwards that surely a good expression for the kind of approach in which reason is recognized as essential even in the religious life but in which reason is not identified with the religious emotion: ‘We Have Reason to Believe.’ I liked it and I used it as the title of the little book...” Louis Jacobs. Unpublished notes of speech given at New London Synagogue. January 24, 1967. Jacobs Archive. There is no indication that Jacobs or Gordon were aware that a similarly titled volume published in England decades prior. Stephen Paget, *I Have Reason to Believe* (London: Macmillan, 1921).

reader. For that matter, the sleight of hand that Jacobs employs to make his claim must be pointed out and called into question every time it occurs. Jacobs's ability to redirect the vocabulary and categories of past authority towards unpredictable conclusions and recast the substance of established structures in a manner freely and sometimes unknowingly granted by his readers stands as the unstated and perhaps most daring tactic of his book.⁶⁶

While the topics covered in *We Have Reason to Believe* range from explorations of psychoanalysis and faith, theodicy, miracles and the after-life, our present focus shall be on the crux and controversy of the book: the four middle chapters devoted to the subject of revelation.

Upon considering the claims of both tradition and critical scholarship, Jacobs's first response, in the philosophical vogue of the day, seeks to affirm the truth found within both, all the while avoiding the appearance of concurrently holding contradictory truths:

⁶⁶As James Boyde White establishes in his study on the subject, central to understanding the force of cultural claims is both in *what* is stated and *how* such claims are established. Whether it be Shakespeare's Richard II, a Supreme Court ruling, Lincoln's second inaugural address or Mandela's "Speech From The Dock," White explores the rhetorical strategies of these authors and speakers to the degree that they consciously, actively and artfully construct their arguments to force audiences to redefine prior conceptions of authority - political, moral or otherwise. He writes:

The task of the writer is not so much to use words with preexisting meanings as to create a text that gives new meanings to the words within it; this in turn means that a text about authority does not simply point to the authority it invokes or resists but partly creates it. Think, for example, of the way Mandela defines "sabotage" - as an instrument not of terrorism but of civilization, explicitly opposed both to the terrorism of the state and to the terrorist inclinations of the Africans - or of Lincoln's creation of the Union, not merely as a formal arrangement among the States but as a common identity shared by North and South, white and black, given reality by a shared narrative of moral significance."

As applied to Jacobs, it would be his awareness of the common store of assumptions of his readership and their tacit sources of authority that stands as an ongoing undercurrent of *We Have Reason to Believe*. See James Boyd White, *Acts of Hope: Creating Authority in Literature, Law, and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

To talk about ‘reconciling’ the Maimonidean idea and the documentary hypothesis (or, for that matter, any other view based on ‘untraditional’ methods of investigation) is futile for you cannot reconcile two contradictory theories. But to say this is not to preclude the possibility of a synthesis between the old and new knowledge. There is a clear distinction between saying that two points of view are both correct and saying that both *contain* truth.⁶⁷

Here, Jacobs appropriates the analytical distinction between differing “kinds” of truth claims. In sorting out the competing claims of traditional faith and critical scholarship, the chapter in which Jacobs would provide “A Synthesis of Traditional and Critical Views” ironically—indeed problematically—hangs on an acceptance of the difference in nature between the claims.

The second strategy by which Jacobs contended with the challenge of critical scholarship was his claim that the new knowledge posed no threat to traditional belief. Rabbinic tradition, it would seem, has always allowed for a certain theological latitude when it came to the doctrine of revelation:

This, in fact, is the fundamental question - not whether this or that theory is correct, but whether the appeal to tradition is valid in matters to which the normal canons of historical and literary method apply, and whether the authority of Jewish Law is weakened as a result of scientific investigation. [italics original]

The third view holds that we can afford to be objective in examining the literary problems of the Bible and that it does not at all follow that because, as a result of more highly developed methods of investigation, including the use of archeological evidence, we are compelled to adopt different views from the ancients, we must automatically give up the rich and spiritually satisfying tradition that has been built up with devotion and self-sacrifice by the wisest and best of Jews.⁶⁸

⁶⁷WHRTB, 68.

⁶⁸WHRTB, 72.

Here, Jacobs's theological position, by way of Abelson, Rosenzweig, Herberg and like-minded proponents of a "third way," posits that the power of revelation was never contingent on plenary inspiration and that the notion of divine-human cooperation posed little challenge to the believer.

Like others before him, Jacobs fashions an interpretive model capable of contending with the human element in divine revelation. After an approving survey of like-minded thinkers he states:

It goes without saying that these or similar views which see no incompatibility between the ideas of Scripture as the Word of God and the use of critical methods in its investigation, can only be entertained if the doctrine of "verbal" inspiration is rejected. It is true that in the vast range of Jewish teaching on revelation there are numerous passages in which 'verbal' inspiration is accepted or, at least hinted at. But this is not the whole story. It can be demonstrated that long before the rise of modern criticism some of the Jewish teachers had a conception of revelation which leaves room for the idea of human cooperation with the divine....⁶⁹

The above characterization of the classical Jewish view vis-à-vis revelation, especially considering Jacobs's background, is nothing short of startling.⁷⁰ To collapse the traditional view of revelation into "numerous passages in which verbal inspiration is accepted, or, at least hinted at," is a claim that even Jacobs must have understood to be a rather audacious restatement of tradition. Jacobs follows with ten rabbinic texts demonstrating the ability of the rabbis to contend with the possibility of revelation

⁶⁹WHRTB, 77.

⁷⁰The literature on the pre-modern "normative" view is vast. A good starting place is Jon Levenson's study "The Eighth Principle of Judaism and the Literary Simultaneity of Scripture." Jon Douglas Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 62-81.

being understood in divine-human terms. With the collective weight of tradition behind him, Jacobs is able to conclude:

No doubt our new attitude to the Biblical record, in which, as the result of historical, literary and archaeological investigations, the Bible is seen against the background of the times in which its various books were written, ascribes more to the human element than the ancients would have done, but this is a difference in degree, not in kind. The new knowledge need not in any way affect our reverence for the Bible and our loyalty to its teachings.⁷¹

In such a rendering, Judaism has always tolerated if not sanctioned such new knowledge. The challenge of biblical criticism it would seem, is neither new, nor for that matter, much of an issue.

Jacobs would thus offer two distinct responses to how critical scholarship may be integrated into traditional belief. First, scholarship posed no threat to tradition because the claims of one bear no effect upon the other. The second tactic posited that tradition has always allowed for the human element in revelation, the latest expression having arrived in the form of critical scholarship.

While the merits of these two approaches may be evaluated on their own terms, it is well worth considering whether the two answers are not just distinct, but in actual fact, mutually exclusive of each other. To put it squarely, either pre-modern approaches to Scripture allowed for critical scholarship or they did not. How can the “new knowledge” be independent from traditional faith claims, yet integrated easily with traditional modes of reverential study? The ease with which Jacobs employs varying arguments to defend his views creates a mood of reasoned unassailability that is, in retrospect, not all together logical, consistent or systematically considered.

⁷¹WHRTB, 80.

So, too, in considering Jacobs's claims it should not be missed that there is a world of difference between acceding to source criticism and advocating a theology founded on the "Divine-human partnership" in revelation; the latter having ample precedent in rabbinic sources, the former being a subject about which pre-Spinozan Jewish theologians knew nothing. Jacobs himself would acknowledge this years later, explaining "It will not generally do to try to turn the Talmudic rabbis into Bible critics before their time."⁷² Unlike the theological tropes of Buber and Rosenzweig, when faced with the confrontation of human and divine authorship, Jacobs would resist what he perceived as the "fuzzy" thinking of the existentialist school. Despite his awareness of the pitfalls, Jacobs's initial efforts suffer from some of the same internal inconsistencies that he cautions against in the book's opening statement.

The internal contradictions of Jacobs's desired synthesis between traditional and modern views are rendered evident by examining his approach to the challenge the Bible poses to contemporary science and morality. In terms of the contradictions between modern science and the biblical account, Jacobs defended the enduring truth of the biblical narrative maintaining: "The purpose of the Bible is not to further scientific discovery; its purpose is to teach men the way to go to heaven, not the way the heavens go."⁷³ However, when it comes to defending the moral difficulties presented by the Bible, Jacobs adopts a Niebuhrian historic sensibility whereby God's truth slowly unfolds in each generation. Jacobs would guardedly acknowledge his debt to non-Jewish theology:

⁷²BRD, 77.

⁷³WHRTB, 84.

...we have seen in modern times a different conception of divine inspiration has gained ground – one that has admittedly been popularized by Christian scholars with a theological axe to grind, but which can be fruitfully adopted by Jew and which is not, if rightfully understood a radical departure from tradition.⁷⁴

In confronting morally problematic scriptural passages, Jacobs (as did his Protestant contemporaries) would grant that all of human experience, revelation included, was conditioned by a particular historical context. As such, contemporary humanity is both empowered and obligated to sort through baser notions representing lower stages of spiritual development through to higher ones:

The eternal truths expressed in such verses as ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,’ ‘in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’, ‘So God created man in His image’, are in no way invalidated because they are to be found in a book which reflects the thought-patterns and uses the language of the times in which it was compiled. The Bible is thus seen to be eternal truth expressing itself in the framework of time. As has been said, a thing is not true because it is in the Bible, it is in the Bible because it is true.⁷⁵

Jacobs does not articulate a systematic litmus test by which eternal truths may be distinguished from more ephemeral ones. Rather, he points to the Oral Torah “the sum total of Jewish research into the Bible and Jewish application of its teaching throughout the ages [that] has always given expression to the eternal values while avoiding the application of those which have had their day.”⁷⁶

Thus, once again Jacobs’s tactic vis-à-vis scientific and moral problems is internally inconsistent. On the one hand, the claims of science and the Bible are wholly different in kind, and thus not in conflict. On the other hand, the rabbinic tradition has a

⁷⁴WHRTB, 88-89.

⁷⁵WHRTB, 89.

⁷⁶WHRTB, 90.

built in hermeneutic whereby morally objectionable biblical passages can be interpreted out of tradition. In Chapters Six and Seven, we shall have the opportunity to consider Jacobs's theological legacy more fully. For the moment, the difficulties inherent in Jacobs's early theology are worth considering. Despite the effortless and authoritative way in which Jacobs's claims are made, the strengths, weaknesses and varied nature of his theology can begin to be seen by the discerning eye.

Finally, given Jacobs's dramatic refashioning of revelation, it is not surprising that he seeks to address the outstanding matter of constructing a compelling argument for Jewish ritual observance given a weakened sense of scriptural authority:

How can we go on submitting to the rigorous demands of traditional Judaism, many ask, if the critical view as to some of its origins are accepted? Do not these views shatter our confidence in the divine nature of some of the Jewish observances? The answer, according to the view of Torah sketched above, is that knowledge of the lowly origin of certain Jewish practices, need not cause us to lose faith, for it is not the origin of a religious practice that matters, but what it has become, the highest form in which it has been expressed.⁷⁷

Jacobs identifies the source of scriptural authority in its cumulative effects, not in its origins. Turning to the models of Altmann, Schechter and Zunz, Jacobs found respected precedent in shifting scriptural authority away from "the mere revealed Bible" towards its secondary meaning as revealed in Judaism's interpretive history.⁷⁸ Once again, Jacobs would appropriate rabbinic texts by which to authorize the findings of the historical school:

⁷⁷WHRTB, 103.

⁷⁸Schechter, *Studies in Judaism. First Series*, 15. As referenced in chapter two, see A. Altmann, "The Teaching Methods in Lehrhäuser," 92. Also, L. Ginzberg, *Students, Scholars and Saints*, 206.

There is a discussion in the Midrash on the verse: ‘The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.’ One Rabbi says that the meaning is that because the Torah of the Lord is perfect, therefore it restores the soul. The other Rabbi interprets the verse to mean, *because* it restores the soul, therefore it is perfect.... We are inclined to recognize the *human* element in the Torah to a far greater extent that they could have done. But we too accept the Torah as the word of God because we can witness the *effects* of Jewish observance. [italics original]⁷⁹

As with his Christian contemporaries, the source of scriptural authority for Jacobs would be a functional test where the arguments for ritual observance were dependent on how inspiring it was to the practitioner, not on *a priori* claims of inspiration. Jacobs’s answer to the gnawing question of the sanction for the commandments (a subject to which we shall return) is satisfying inasmuch as it never veers from its historicist moorings. Here, unlike before, Jacobs consistently explains the rationale for Jewish observance as independent of claims of divine inspiration—what Jacobs would come to call the “genetic fallacy.” Jacobs’s argument, both cogent and amply supported, is controversial only in one respect – that a rabbi claiming to be Orthodox was making it.

Given the subsequent controversy surrounding *We Have Reason to Believe*, one risks forgetting that this volume was Jacobs’s first, not last, attempt at articulating a coherent theological vision for a traditional Jew fully engaged with the claims of modernity. In the years ahead, Jacobs would have the opportunity to refine, defend and expand his theological vision. And yet, even at this stage Jacobs’s vision is remarkably developed in its strengths, weaknesses and far-reaching nature. Having imbibed the fruits of critical scholarship, Jacobs crafted an argument by which traditional faith could be maintained all the same. For that reason alone, the pioneering aspect of Jacobs’s

⁷⁹WHRTB, 105.

book is significant in that he is the first openly Orthodox Jewish scholar to plainly confront the maculate nature of the biblical text. It should also not be missed that Jacobs's efforts sought to defend tradition in the face of modernity and not the other way round. From his contention that scholarship and faith reside in distinct epistemological spheres to his assertion that Judaism has always been able to withstand the challenges of the day, Jacobs passionately sought to construct a theological strategy by which traditional Judaism could be upheld by the modern Jew.

Finally, in reading *We Have Reason to Believe*, it becomes evident that it is the manner in which Jacobs makes his claims, not the claims themselves, that is perhaps the most enduring and intriguing aspect of the book. In citing rabbinic prooftexts, in repeatedly pointing to the sanction of his views from within traditional Judaism, in the intelligible and refined mood in which Jacobs's assertions are made, his authority is derived by way of his claim to the very tradition that he is redefining. It is this final element which is perhaps not only the chief methodological stratagem of the book, but also the key to understanding its challenge for Anglo-Jewry. Ironically, it would be Jacobs's insistence that his views lacked any novelty that would be his most daring claim of all.

Perception and Reception

In light of the theology stated in *We Have Reason to Believe* and the subsequent controversy it generated, it is worth turning to the question of how its contents were perceived at the time of publication. On this question, while the facts of publication are rather consistent, a conflicting set of opinions exist concerning how the claims of the

book were perceived by its author and publisher. William Frankel's recently published memoir is instructive:

I read the manuscript and told Louis to come over and talk about it. I told him that I thought it was an important book and was sure that Vallentine Mitchell (The publishing subsidiary of the *Jewish Chronicle*) would publish it. But I advised against early publication. The reason was that the retirement of Dr. Israel Brodie, then the Chief Rabbi was expected in the next year or two. I had no doubt that Louis would be a strong candidate, but I took the view that early publication of the book would provide ammunition to the right-wingers likely to oppose his appointment. Why not wait until after the event and publish then? Louis, however was adamant. He did not want to wait, and, if his views were likely to be controversial, he thought it right that they should be known before his name was considered rather than be disclosed afterwards. I naturally deferred to his opinion, and the book was duly published in 1957.⁸⁰

Frankel's recollection of past prophecies fulfilled are a valuable, albeit self serving, insight towards reconstructing the ideological mood giving rise to the publication of what would later be such a highly controversial book. While there is no basis to doubt the central role Frankel played as publisher, friend and congregant to Jacobs, Frankel's ignored prophetic wisdom and deferential positioning must be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, his recollection does point to a rather significant question in understanding the debate over the next few years of Jacobs's life: Namely, to what degree was Jacobs aware of the contentious nature of the claims of his book at the time of publication?

In later years, Jacobs and his advocates would always claim that his views were merely representative of long-standing and sanctioned positions in Anglo-Jewish

⁸⁰W. Frankel, *Tea with Einstein*, 159-160.

Orthodoxy. From the height of the “Jacobs Affair” and onwards, Jacobs would point to the manifold precedents to his views.

The charge of ‘heresy’ was brought against me on the strength of what I had written in *We Have Reason to Believe* on the doctrine of revelation. The view I put forward on this theme, that we can and should keep the mitzvoth while keeping an open mind on their origin, was hardly original. I tried to show in *We Have Reason to Believe*, that even in the Middle Ages the human element in the Torah was not entirely unacknowledged.⁸¹

Jacobs forever maintained that his theological views vis-à-vis revelation were well grounded in classical Jewish literature and Anglo-Jewry itself. Proof positive for Jacobs on the lack of novelty of his claims would be the fact that the Chief Rabbi did not comment on the book upon receiving a copy, a fact that Jacobs would repeatedly reference in the years to come.⁸² Indeed, Jacobs could always point to his tepid reviews as a sign of the unremarkable nature of his claims. Thus, in contradistinction to Frankel’s recollection, Jacobs would aver that his views merely echoed what been stated time and again: “I still fail to see how the book could have been considered heretical in the tepid Orthodoxy of Anglo-Jewry.”⁸³

Recovered correspondences provide an opportunity to reconsider Jacobs’s later recollections. A tantalizing letter to Jacobs from his Manchester mentor, Rabbi Dr. Altmann, written in the months preceding publication reveals that at the time of writing, Jacobs was at least hoping that his book would cause more of a stir than it initially did:

⁸¹BRD, 13.

⁸²BRD, 11.

⁸³HWI, 118-119.

I am greatly interested in your forthcoming publication which I am sure will arouse great interest. Fortunately, you are in a position in which “the ire” of the fundamentalists can do you no harm, backed as you are by your congregation. I hope Lord Samuel will agree to write a foreword to your book.⁸⁴

While Jacobs’s prior letter to his senior colleague is not extant, Altmann’s remarks indicate that Jacobs knew full well that his book could potentially arouse the fury of the fundamentalists. Another collegial correspondence confirms that at the time of publication, Jacobs was well aware that he had strayed from Orthodoxy. Having received a warm letter of congratulations from his old classmate and colleague, Rabbi Dr. Jakob Petuchowski, then a prominent American Reform theologian, Jacobs would reply:

It is not so surprising that our points of view should meet at many points. After all it is impossible for anyone aware of the facts to be completely Orthodox in theory. You no doubt recall Dr. Hertz’s bon mot that a little *epikorsus* [heresy] is natural to a university graduate but it must be Jewish *epikorsus*.⁸⁵

Jacobs’s exchange with his old colleague betrays an awareness that his claims had strayed from Orthodoxy. Since they both studied under Siegfried Stein at University College, Jacobs and Petuchowski knew full well that if they were to integrate the findings of critical scholarship into their faith, it would be impossible “to be completely Orthodox in theory.”

Jacobs’s correspondences with Altmann and Petuchowski indicate that to his ideological right and left, he knew full well the magnitude of his contentions. Jacobs’s later insistence that his theology was consistent with Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy belief

⁸⁴Letter from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs, December 6, 1956. Jacobs Archive.

⁸⁵Letter from Louis Jacobs to Jakob Petuchowski, June 25, 1957. AJA.

must be understood as a rhetorical strategy and not consistent with the facts. After all, for Jacobs to concede “heresy,” both then and onwards, would result in him foregoing any claim to the mantle of Anglo-Orthodoxy—a fact readily apparent to William Frankel. Indeed, in the years ahead, Jacobs’s primary rhetorical tactic would always return to the question of “What do you mean by Orthodox?” knowing that whatever his answer, Jacobs would seek to claim a place therein. Neither then nor in the near future would Jacobs ever openly declare a break with Orthodoxy; he would only redefine its content or ideological parameters. The invocation of precedent towards justifying theological innovation must be appreciated as the primary (though subtle) method employed by Jacobs and his supporters. The combination of Frankel’s recollections with Jacobs’s correspondence at the time make clear that contrary to his later claims, he was altogether aware of the ‘heretical nature’ of his book in the context of Anglo-Orthodoxy.

Regardless of Jacobs’s hopes and Frankel’s fears, the most remarkable thing about the reception of *We Have Reason to Believe* would be its unremarkable nature. Though Frankel’s *Jewish Chronicle* would characterize the book as “controversial and stimulating,”⁸⁶ promoting it actively throughout 1957, the book was received with only moderate interest in Anglo-Jewry, selling a respectable 1000 copies.⁸⁷ Despite its progressive content, there is no indication that it aroused the indignation of anyone. The religious Zionist paper, the *Jewish Review*, gave the book a largely lukewarm review,

⁸⁶JC, May 31, 1957.

⁸⁷C. Bermant, *Troubled Eden*, 241.

praising Jacobs's "intelligibility," "fluent pen," and "breadth of knowledge" more than any originality or controversial content found within:

In fact, Dr. Jacobs—such is the width of his reading— has ransacked the treasure of Jewish thought for an apt text or anecdote to support opinion, to embellish an argument, and at times to beg the question. There are moments when we are left wishing for more of Dr. Jacobs and less of his card index....To say all this is not to belittle the value of his book. In fact, it makes extremely interesting reading, for Dr. Jacobs is never a dull writer. His erudite mind and fluent pen can render the most abstruse philosophic theme into language all can understand.⁸⁸

If Jacobs had intended to produce a controversial book, that intent was missed by his readership. Similarly, Jacobs's contribution was gently panned by the scholarly community. In the *Journal of Semitic Studies*, A. Neher reflects on the popular nature of Jacobs's work, commenting more on the parvenu approach of the English rabbinate than the courageous effort of a traditionalist seeking to come to terms with the implications of critical inquiry:

...this book keeps within limits... "Judaism chooses the middle course" is the Golden Rule of the author (pp. 125-126), which resolves in advance everything problematical from the problems raised. We know in advance that, notwithstanding inescapable pro and contra arguments, we shall in the end find ourselves in an equilibrium, which is averse to extreme or unstable positions. Neither in God nor in the Torah are there any mysteries, but at most enigmas; a little patience and spirit, and we shall resolve them for you!...What makes this book nevertheless worth while is the general tone in which it is written. But this is meant not only the brilliance of certain analyses where the lack of substance is compensated for by an attractive form, but the impression of security which pervades the whole.⁸⁹

⁸⁸H. Lewis, *Jewish Review*, July 19, 1957.

⁸⁹A. Neher, "We Have Reason to Believe: Some Aspects of Jewish Theology Examined in the Light of Modern Thought," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3, no. 4 (1958).

If Jacobs's rhetorical tactic was to cloak his bold claims with an aura of rabbinic precedent, inevitability and unassailability, then he had, it would seem, succeeded a bit too much. The lack of reaction from the Chief Rabbi and the indifferent response from the general religious or scholarly communities, reflect that *We Have Reason to Believe* failed to spark much of a conversation at all. As the next chapter shall explore, while the book's cool response may have undoubtedly been a source of disappointment for Jacobs, it would be exactly at this time that Jacobs would have ample opportunity to "arouse the ire of the fundamentalists in his midst.