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TEYKU:

THE INSOLUBLE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF

LOUIS JACOBS

VOLUME TWO

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CHAPTER FIVE

FROM THE NEW WEST END TO JEWS' COLLEGE

Your friend Jack Hobbs¹ is in his usual hot water with the backroom boys. Nothing specially new but with the Chief returning sick speculation grows whether he'll stay the course or retire sometime next year or after. And if so, who's the heir? The literates go from Jacobs but they'll have a tough fight convincing the mountain climbers. Jacobs don't help much, by not keeping his big mouth shut till after he's IN that's if he ever gets in. Why he's going – straight to the stake – he's out. Silly, really, because he'd do better work at the Chief's desk than in the pulpit here if only he'd hold still long enough. A Litvak in a hurry, God protect us all.

- Letter from Mrs. Gertie Frankel to Rabbi Wolfe Kelman.
January 26, 1959. Kelman Archive.

Recalling his years at the New West End, Jacobs would characterize his place in the institutional life of Anglo-Orthodoxy as secure. In retrospect, Jacobs assessed his past relationship with Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie as “encouraging from the start,” pointing to Brodie’s presence at Jacobs’s induction and on various occasions during his New West End tenure as proof of his leadership role in Anglo-Jewish life.² Indeed, as rabbi to the most philanthropically significant Anglo-congregation, Jacobs’s position was of no small significance to the larger efforts of Anglo-Jewish life. To Jacobs, these cordial and ongoing points of contact were critical towards reconstructing the “prehistory” of the ‘Jacobs Affair.’ For example, in his autobiography, Jacobs describes the genial aspect of his relationship with the Chief Rabbi, stating: “These facts

¹Jack Hobbs (1882-1963): Renowned English cricketer known also as modest and self-effacing. Gertie Frankel’s correspondences, transcribed here in their original, are full of flavorful idioms, cultural points of reference and colorful spelling.

²M. Freud Kandel lists such engagements, signaling a warm relationship between Jacobs and Brodie during these years. Miri J. Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913: An Ideology Forsaken* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 127-128.

are not without bearing on the story which unfolded later.”³ In this telling, Jacobs’s theological views remained consistent, being both representative of and sanctioned by the institutions of Anglo-Orthodoxy. For despite the progressive-leanings of his congregation, in referencing the embedded nature of his New West End rabbinate, Jacobs strengthened his claims that the subsequent controversy surrounding him had less to do with his beliefs than a rightward shift in Anglo-Orthodoxy.

An altogether different account of Jacobs’s place within Anglo-Orthodoxy would be expressed by Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie in the years to come. In 1964, at the height of the second stage of the ‘Jacobs Affair,’ Brodie would take the opportunity to address the manifold questions concerning his past, present and future relations with Jacobs:

They ask how it is that I allowed Dr. Jacobs to hold the position of Minister to the New West End Synagogue from 1954 to 1959, and also agreed to his appointment as Tutor and Lecturer at Jews’ College, notwithstanding views he had expressed which were not in keeping with Orthodox belief. A number of times during his ministry at the New West End Synagogue, I felt obliged to speak to Dr. Jacobs regarding his views which he had expressed on particular occasions which were inappropriate for a Rabbi. Nevertheless, I considered, as many did at the time, that Dr. Jacobs was possessed of ability and potentialities. I felt that here was a promising man passing through a phase of intellectual and spiritual struggle and that it would be wrong to reject him before he had reached a fixed position, and his views had become crystallized... I deeply regret that my hopes for Dr. Jacobs have not been realized...⁴

Brodie’s recollection suggests an altogether different estimation of Jacobs’s place in Anglo-Orthodoxy. In Brodie’s telling, he had on multiple occasions called Jacobs’s to

³HWI, 117.

⁴Israel Brodie, “Statement to Rabbis and Ministers,” Delivered May 5, 1964. In Israel Brodie, *The Strength of My Heart* (New York: Diplomat and Living Books, 1969), 347-348.

task for expressing views beyond the bounds of Orthodoxy. Directly put, one is faced with the following question: During his tenure at the New West End, what is an accurate characterization of Jacobs's relations with Brodie and the institutional arms of Anglo-Orthodoxy?

The answer to this question is of deep significance not merely in terms of reconstructing the particulars of Jacobs's biography, but for the nature of Anglo-Jewish historiography writ large. To position Jacobs as ideologically and institutionally secure within Anglo-Orthodoxy is to promote the view that the subsequent controversy that would engulf him was not because of him, but the rightward shift of Anglo-Jewry from its centrist moorings. By this account, Brodie's leadership sin was allowing himself to be swayed by the rightward trend of Anglo-Orthodoxy rather than keeping firm with the ideological center that was both the nature of Anglo-Orthodoxy and that to which he himself ascribed.⁵ Indeed, as noted at some length in Chapter Three, despite any sympathy with Eastern and Central European Orthodoxies, Brodie's education (Oxford, Jews' College) and kindly temperament were hardly of the polarizing kind. For example, Ignaz Maybaum's partisan report of the 'Jacobs Affair' sets the stage for the subsequent controversy as follows:

Dr. Jacobs, a dynamic and personality and scholar of note, seemed to everybody, including the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Brodie, the right man to initiate a new period at the College...⁶

⁵See, for example, M. Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism*, 156-157.

⁶Maybaum, I. (1964). "The Jacobs Affair: Anglo-Jewry in Crisis." *Judaism* 13: 471-77. Other similarly sympathetic accounts include Elliot Dorff, "Louis Jacobs," in *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Washington, D.C.: B'nai Brith, 1993), 167-187.

Such a telling must be appreciated not merely for what it says about Jacobs or Brodie, but for its unstated claim regarding Anglo-Jewry. By framing Jacobs's appointment to Jews' College as a natural next step in his life and the life of Anglo-Jewry, a series of assumptions regarding the latter are conceded. If, however, Brodie's characterizations are to be believed, then Jacobs's views always lay beyond the pale of Orthodoxy from their very inception. Nevertheless, Brodie's telling remains unsatisfying in that it leaves unclear how Jacobs could have possibly been extended the position of Moral Tutor at Jews' College on the understanding that he would go on to assume the principalship. If indeed Brodie harbored doubts as to Jacobs's stated views, then it is altogether incongruous that Jacobs could be extended the opportunity for a national leadership position in Anglo-Orthodoxy, with oversight of the training of its clergy.

With the above questions in mind, this chapter will re-examine the nature of the years of Jacobs's tenure at the New West End and his 1959 appointment to Jews' College. Newly retrieved correspondence reveals the complex and troubled relationship Jacobs had with the institutional life of Anglo-Orthodoxy. This chapter will make clear that Jacobs was anything but the darling spokesman or heir apparent for the Anglo-Orthodox community. Nevertheless, as Jacobs's profile would grow increasingly controversial and he would tire of congregational life, he began to consider future options that would ironically lead him back to the heart of the very Orthodoxy to which he could lay increasingly less claim.

Bristlings Under The Chief Rabbi

Soon after Jacobs's arrival at the New West End he received an invitation to address the London Society of Jews and Christians, an ecumenical organization under the auspices of the larger Council of Christians and Jews. Presided over by Dean Inge and James Parkes, the London Society, which included such prominent Jews as Leo Baeck and A.B. Cohen on its advisory council, would meet regularly for sessions intended to give Jews and Christians an opportunity to confer together on theological and communal concerns. Upon discovering Jacobs's anticipated speaking engagement to the society, Brodie would intervene in the proceedings, writing Jacobs:

I have been given to understand that you have accepted an invitation to lecture before the Society of Christians and Jews. I do not know whether you are aware that that organisation is run under the auspices of the Liberal Synagogue. I want to point out that neither my predecessor nor I have approved of any Orthodox Rabbi or Minister being associated with that Society.⁷

The heart of Brodie's objection lay, it would seem, not in the ecumenical spirit between Christians and Jews, but in the London chapter's cooperation with the liberal denominations of Jews. Indeed, from the beginning to the end of Brodie's tenure as Chief Rabbi, he had addressed the larger Council of Christians and Jews.⁸ Jacobs, having been involved in such inter-faith dialogues in Manchester, must have bristled at the Chief Rabbi's intervention against his planned engagement.

⁷Letter from Israel Brodie to Louis Jacobs. September 29, 1955. Jacobs Archive.

⁸In 1948, Brodie had, in absentia, delivered the following greeting to the council: "The late Dr. Hertz set an example for dynamic participation in the deliberations of the Council which I will find difficult to emulate, but not I trust for want of effort on my part." "Chief Rabbi's message to the Council of Christian and Jews." December 9, 1948. Brodie Archive, MS206. Add Papers 5, Folder 1. Brodie's 1964 address is found in: I. Brodie, *Strength*, 356-360.

Though Jacobs's correspondence is not extant, one may reconstruct his line of argumentation by way of the response received from the Office of The Chief Rabbi while Brodie was convalescing from surgery:

The Jewish members of the London Society of Jews and Christians are wholly or very largely liberal Jews and it is for this reason, as well as on the grounds of its policy, that the Chief Rabbi considers it inappropriate for an orthodox minister to address this body. The Chief Rabbi was not aware that Rabbi Dr. Altmann gave an address under the auspices of the London Society. If he had known of Dr. Altmann's intention to do so, he would have endeavored to dissuade him. In view of all these points, the Chief Rabbi still considers it would not be appropriate for you to accept the invitation.⁹

Invoking the precedent of his mentor Alexander Altmann, the Manchester Communal Rabbi and occasional deputy Chief Rabbi, Jacobs seems to have sought to justify his own decision to lecture to the same society.

Though Jacobs's letter of withdrawal to the London Society is not extant, the response of its organizing secretary, Mrs. H. Benedictus, is significant both in confirming Jacobs's eventual deference to the Chief Rabbi and as a telling insight into the fracture lines within Anglo-Jewry at the time:

I read your letter and all members were very sorry to hear of your reason for withdrawing from our list of speakers for the session. My co-secretary, Miss Funnell spoke to Dr. Gaon [the Sephardic chief rabbi] of the matter who said that he had spoken to our society in the past and would do so again in the future when he had time...Dr. Ephraim Levine, your predecessor at the New West End Synagogue spoke during our last session and a number of his congregants came to hear him...It would indeed be a pity for you to deny us the privilege of hearing you speak...because of any feeling that the society is entirely a liberal Jewish affair. We have

⁹Letter from Michael Wallach, Office of the Chief Rabbi to Louis Jacobs November 7, 1955. Jacobs Archive.

an Orthodox Rabbi as an active member of the Executive council...¹⁰

It is not altogether clear why what was permissible for Rabbis Altmann, Cohen, Levine and Dr. Gaon was forbidden to Jacobs. Perhaps the simple fact that their leadership positions preceded Brodie's assuming the position of Chief Rabbinate resulted in their participation being 'grandfathered in' – an allowance not extended to Jacobs.

Alternatively, Brodie's actions may indeed signal a perceptible rightward shift.

Regardless, one is left only to imagine how Jacobs must have felt, both ideologically and institutionally, at being prevented from participating. It would not be long before another incident would present itself, stoking the fires of Jacobs' frustrations.

In 1957, Jacobs received an invitation to speak at the bi-annual convention of the congregational arm of the North American Conservative Movement, the United Synagogue. As will become evident in this chapter, Jacobs's emerging relationship with the leadership of the more ideologically progressive Conservative Movement would be a significant variable in his future decision making. An inter-alia comment between Jacobs and his North American colleague Jakob Petuchowski confirms Jacobs's initial acceptance of the invitation:

...I do hope that one day we may meet to discuss these and other matters. It so happens that I intend to visit the States as a guest of the United Synagogue of America at its next Convention in Nov. but I do not think I shall be anywhere near Cincinnati otherwise I should have been delighted to call on you.¹¹

Soon thereafter, Brodie would discover word of Jacobs's planned participation at the convention and would once again intervene:

¹⁰Letter from Mrs. H. Benedictus to Louis Jacobs. November 3, 1955. Jacobs Archive.

¹¹Letter from Jakob Petuchowski to Louis Jacobs, August 12, 1957. AJA Archive.

My attention has been drawn to a communication issued by the United Synagogue of America in connection with their forthcoming national biennial convention...

I am sure that you cannot be aware that this body represents Conservative Judaism, and not Orthodox Judaism [underline original] – its tendencies and outlook are reformist. Several Rabbis who asked me about similar invitations to attend (and lecture) to the Rabbinical Assembly which is associated with the United Synagogue of America decline the invitations on my advice. Rabbi Dr. Altmann who received an invitation, similarly refused. I hope that the report of your acceptance of the invitation was premature and that if in fact you have accepted, you will nevertheless not now be associated with this convention and thereby give support to a movement which is endangering orthodoxy in America and elsewhere.¹²

The velvet glove by which Brodie communicates his objection to Jacobs is noteworthy in itself. Brodie offers Jacobs the opportunity to claim ignorance as to the nature of the inviting organization, granting him a chance to recuse himself with his Orthodox bonafides unscathed. So too, Brodie's pre-emptive invocation of the past precedent of Altmann and others indicates the speed of Brodie's learning curve when it came to dealing with Jacobs. Neither Jacobs nor anyone else would be permitted to participate in such endeavors perceived to be endangering Orthodoxy.

Jacobs returned from his August holiday and would reply to Brodie's letter with a gracious but unrepentant position:

As you will appreciate, I have given both your letters to me on the subject a very great deal of thought. I am sorry that I am unable to agree with your views and comments as to the nature, functions and aims of the Conservative Movement in the United States and on the question of my participation in the Convention.

However, I believe you know the high regard I have for you and your office and my great appreciation for the sincere guidance and friendship you have always shown me. Consequently I am acting in accord with your wishes and am writing today to the Executive

¹²Letter from Israel Brodie to Louis Jacobs, August 8, 1957. Jacobs Archive.

Director of the United Synagogue regretting my inability to attend the Conference.¹³

Given Jacobs's increasing engagement with the proceedings of North American Jewry, one can only imagine his disappointment at withdrawing. The missed opportunity to engage in dialogue with the community to which he found himself increasingly drawn to must have come as a great blow. The forthright manner in which Jacobs makes clear that his decision is in deference to, but not in agreement with, the views of the Chief Rabbi is also significant. Having been extended the opportunity to feign ignorance, Jacobs's response makes it abundantly clear that he knew full well the nature of the Conservative Movement, and in this regard, found himself at odds with the Chief Rabbi.

Brodie's stated positions regarding the application of critical scholarship vis-à-vis biblical text were decidedly more conservative than Jacobs's views. For instance, at the Jubilee Dinner of the Society for Old Testament Studies Brodie would have the opportunity to praise the joint and cooperative communal efforts in Bible study, directing attention to the works of sympathetic scholars such as Umberto Cassutto or Yehezkel Kaufmann:

...whose works in Bible and related studies have illumined the understanding of the Masoretic text and in some cases have proved to be timely correctives of the extravagant, unjust and unfounded generalizations of a later Delitzsch, Wellhausen or Brestead.¹⁴

Brodie, as we shall see to be the case with his alma mater Jews' College, would never publicly engage in the challenge of critical scholarship on sacred study, a clear and

¹³Louis Jacobs to Israel Brodie, September 2, 1957. Jacobs Archive.

¹⁴Israel Brodie, Unpublished speech, January 5, 1950. Brodie Archive. MS206. Add Papers 5, Folder 1. Over ten years later, Brodie would retain the same hesitating engagement with the claims of critical scholarship as can be seen in his 1961 address, "The Qualifications of The Jewish Scholar," in which he make absolutely no mention of the academic study of traditional sources. I. Brodie, *The Strength of My Heart*, 404-416.

consistent point of difference between him and Jacobs. Nevertheless, despite his ideological differences with Jacobs and without flinching in his chastisement of Jacobs for his public deeds, Brodie would be reticent to censure him with regard to his ideas.¹⁵ Seeking to set boundaries, without being viewed as a heresy-hunter, Brodie's decision to block Jacobs's planned trip was a concrete way to draw ideological lines.

Despite the setback, Jacobs continued to seek the means and opportunities to engage the North American community. An interesting post-script to the above exchange would come when Jacobs again considered an invitation to the United States under the auspices of the Conservative Movement, this time at the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) convention. Writing to the RA's Executive Director Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, Jacobs nips in the bud the proposed plan for a visit, having heard of it through William Frankel's wife, Mrs. Gertie Frankel:

Gertie tells me that she has written to you about the possibility of my visiting the States and that you have suggested that it might be possible. It is more than generous of you to think of me in the midst of all yours tasks but on reflection I think it had best be left for the time being. I am quite terrified of making arrangements and then having to cancel them again because of circumstances beyond my control, as it is my name is mud....¹⁶

The above exchange makes clear that by 1958 Jacobs was fully cognizant of where the 'red-lines' stood vis-à-vis Brodie and liberal expressions of Judaism. While he may have chafed under the authority of a Chief Rabbi to whose ideological leaning he did not subscribe and authority he resented, it is clear that Jacobs at least knew where he

¹⁵It was none other than Solomon Schechter, who years earlier had pointed out the folly of making doctrinal matters the litmus test for Anglo-ministers; for if it were, "then the greatest names in Jewish learning – Zuntz, Graetz, Herzfeld, Rappaport and others - would never have been allowed to preach in the United Synagogue." As cited in C. Bermant, *Troubled Eden*, 185-186.

¹⁶Letter from Louis Jacobs to Wolfe Kelman, June 23, 1958. Kelman Archive.

stood. By 1958, Jacobs perceived that his name was ‘mud;’ his own actions or ideology had placed him well out of the good graces of institutional Orthodoxy.

Jacobs’s progressive Orthodoxy was not just an internal dialogue between himself and Brodie, but was readily apparent to all. When the foundation stone to the Herbert Samuel Hall was laid in 1957, Jacobs would declare the new building to represent the ideal of a Judaism open to the free exchange of ideas. The following week, an opinion leader of the *Jewish Chronicle* would contrast Jacobs’s comments with the proceedings of a recently concluded European Rabbinical Conference, reporting that the latter’s positive work “was vitiated by the virulent denunciation of the religious work of Reform and Liberal congregations.” In characterizing the “worthier expression of the Orthodox outlook” as expressed by Jacobs, the *Jewish Chronicle* commented:

It was their [Jacobs’s community] aim to make the centre commodious enough to afford hospitality to many different points of view. They were prepared to extend hospitality to every sincere thinker after truth, for they believed that there were many manifestations of the sacred truths of the Jewish faith.¹⁷

The *Jewish Chronicle*’s odd juxtaposition of the two totally disparate events (the groundbreaking and rabbinical conference) towards sensationalist ends renders clear its own liberal leanings. Nevertheless, the point was not lost on the Jewish paper’s readership, eliciting at least one vituperative reaction from an old provincial colleague of Jacobs, Rabbi J. Gould of the Leeds Rabbinical College:

It seems he [Frankel] ...does assume that your vague statement referred to the thoughts and beliefs of the Reformers and Liberals... It is your bounden duty to announce in the Jewish Chronicle immediately a) that your statement did not refer to the teachings of the Reformers and Liberals, which are definitely

¹⁷JC, November 15, 1957. The groundbreaking ceremony was reported in the previous week’s edition, November 8, 1957.

heretical *apikorsut*, b) that you do associate yourself with those Rabbis who attacked the Reform and Liberal Anti-Torah activities, and c) to clarify what you really meant in your statement.¹⁸

Jacobs never responded publicly or privately to Gould's letter, a lack of response that would be understood by Gould in a subsequent letter to signal agreement with the *Jewish Chronicle's* assessment of his remarks. Jacobs's arrival at the New West End, initially a source of befuddlement and disappointment to his former colleagues and mentors, would soon enough turn to antagonism and hostility as it became increasingly clear that Jacobs's rabbinate had come to express a Judaism at odds with the Orthodoxy of his earlier years.

By 1958, Jacobs was subject to increasing aggression from the right wing arm of Anglo-Orthodoxy. Upon the conclusion of that year's Anglo-Jewish Preacher's Conference, Jacobs would compare notes with his North American colleague Wolfe Kelman, who just wrapped up the aforementioned conference that Jacobs had considered attending:

Our conference has just come to an end... You will be interested to hear that a number of references were made to the Conservative Movement... (off the record, I have been involved, at the conference, in a rather heated open controversy with Dayan Swift of the Beth Din, a zealot of the first water. But I am glad to say the Chief Rabbi made it quite clear in his concluding remarks that he did not side with Swift).. I received, yesterday, the 1957 proceeding of the R.A....¹⁹

¹⁸Letter from J. Gould to Louis Jacobs, November 21, 1957. Jacobs Archive.

¹⁹Letter from Louis Jacobs to Wolfe Kelman, May 1, 1958. Kelman Archive. Worth noting is Kelman's witty response to Jacobs's letter, "Many thanks for your kind letter of May 1. I am delighted that the race is not always to the Swift." Letter from Wolfe Kelman to Louis Jacobs, May 8, 1958. Jacobs Archive.

Jacobs's parenthetical remark is significant in that it signals yet another point of friction between Jacobs and Anglo-Orthodoxy during his New West End tenure, in this case with Dayan Moshe Swift (1907-1983), a Liverpool-born member of the London Beth Din who would go on to play a significant role as one of Jacobs's fiercest opponents.²⁰ While a record of what transpired between Jacobs and Swift is not retained in the official conference proceedings or public coverage, Jacobs's autobiography sheds light on the presumed point of controversy. The full text is worth considering in that it offers a starkly negative characterization of Swift by Jacobs, unusual for an autobiography remarkably restrained in terms of ad hominem attacks on even his staunchest adversaries:

He [Swift] had studied for several years at the Mir Yeshivah in Poland. He was a powerful orator in English and Yiddish but could come out with the most outrageous attacks on individuals and groups that did not meet with his approval. A journalist who interviewed him on the subject of women's rights in Judaism described him as 'an amiable bigot.' Amiable he could certainly be on occasion and he was not so much a bigot as a man carried away by his eloquence to express opinions on matters of which he knew very little and to which he had given no thought. I had crossed swords with him before at a conference of rabbis and ministers called by the Chief Rabbi, to which Swift, who was not a member of the Conference, had been invited to make an appeal on behalf of Gateshead Yeshivah. I was minister of the New West End at the time and was conducting a study group on Cordovero's *Palm Tree of Deborah*, an essay on kabbalistic ethics, later published in my book of that name. Quite out of the blue, and totally irrelevant to the appeal he was supposed to be making, Swift attacked me for teaching the Kabbalah in public. A Jewish Chronicle reporter at the meeting said to me, 'You seem to be in hot water'. I could only reply, in the words of Chesterton, that the advantage of being in hot water is that one keeps clean.²¹

²⁰For Biographical Information on Swift see Moshe Swift and Isaac Lerner, *Moreshet Moshe: Selections from the Sermons of the Late M. Swift*, (London; Jerusalem: E. Reicher; Feldheim, 1989).

²¹HWI, 141.

The significance of the above recollection is manifold, not the least of which is the rare and raw insight into Jacobs's personal animosity towards another person. Swift used his position on the London Rabbinical court to attack those who would find common cause or points of dialogue with liberal expressions of Jewry. By early 1959, openly preaching against threats to Orthodoxy, Swift would state the challenge of the moment:

Today we deal with infamous men who openly and shamelessly dethrone God and put their own reason in His place. Cost what it may, we shall fight these heretics so that Israel may not die.²²

If the battle for Anglo-Orthodoxy was situated on the place of "reason" in religious discourse, then it would be through the rabbinic personalities of Jacobs and Swift, ironically, both products of Manchester Yeshiva, by which these tensions, intellectual and institutional, can be tracked.

One such example came in 1958 in a series of letters that illuminates the increasingly tense relations between Jacobs and the Beth Din. Beginning with the following missive, one begins to sense the mutual distrust and antipathy between the parties:

Dear Rabbi Jacobs, The Beth Din have expressed the desire to meet you here to discuss a number of problems which have arisen. Would it be convenient for you to attend here this coming Monday 10th February at 4 p.m.?²³

Jacobs's reply is notable enough to relate in its entirety:

Dear Dayan Swift,
I write to confirm our recent telephone conversations in which you were good enough to amplify the reason for my being invited to

²²M. Swift, "This Day at Sinai," *Moreshet Moshe*, 300-302.

²³Letter from Marcus Carr, clerk to the Beth Din, to Louis Jacobs. February 3, 1958. Jacobs Archive.

meet the Beth Din tomorrow afternoon; *namely, to discuss with them opinions which I have expressed.* [italics added]

In my view, a discussion of this kind is not a matter for the Beth Din, at all, and, although you intimated that it would be merely a friendly exchange of ideas, I feel that a meeting initiated by a formal letter from the Clerk of the Court, and held in the official atmosphere of the Court building, could not achieve that purpose. As I told you, I am ready at any time to discuss my views. But there is an essential difference between a conversation among colleagues and an appearance before the Beth Din. Should you wish to ask me to an informal discussion it would give me very great pleasure to exchange ideas with you and your colleagues.²⁴

Altogether significant is the fact that Jacobs “summons” appears to have been brought about not for any misdeed, but rather his “ideas.” Jacobs’s refusal to appear before in the formal setting of the Chief Rabbi’s court would elicit the following response from Swift:

I have to acknowledge yours of the 9th. Frankly I must repeat, as I told you over the telephone, that your invitation to meet the dayanim was not in any way a summons for an “appearance”. However, in their name and in mine we are still very keen to have a chat with you, and I should like you to accept this as an invitation to come over to see us. Perhaps you would be kind enough to phone Mr. Carr and make an appointment at your convenience with the hours of our meeting at the Beth Din.²⁵

To which, Jacobs would reply:

Thank you for your letter of the 18th. While I appreciate its cordial tone, the suggestions you make do not, I am afraid, meet the serious objections I raised in my last letter to a meeting at the Beth Din.

I should like to repeat my willingness to meet you and your colleagues for an informal exchange of views.

If you care to suggest a place where we can meet other than at the

²⁴Letter from Louis Jacobs to Morris Swift, February 9, 1958. Jacobs Archive.

²⁵Letter from Morris Swift to Louis Jacobs, February 18, 1958. Jacobs Archive

Beth Din itself I should be glad to accept your invitation.²⁶

The final record of the exchange would come from Swift, who would write:

I am sorry that you have not seen fit to come over to the Beth Din to discuss some matters with us. I have handed over the communications between us to the Chief Rabbi.²⁷

Despite the restrained tone of the correspondence, the above exchange directs attention to the ideological, hierarchical and personal tensions between Jacobs and the Beth Din already present in early 1958. Although the particulars of the never realized “exchange of views” are not clear from the above letters, it would seem that the entire matter revolved around Jacobs’s expressed theological views. Significant as well is the fact that the Chief Rabbi was alerted to these “communications,” though there is no indication that any further steps were taken at this stage. Further, Jacobs’s refusal to appear before the Beth Din signals his increasing unwillingness to subject himself to the ecclesiastical structures of Anglo-Orthodoxy. Finally, considering the battles to come in Anglo-Jewry, the above exchange illuminates the sharp and early differences between the personalities of Jacobs and Swift and the worlds they represented.

By the first half of 1959, the conflicts within Anglo-Jewry would increasingly find their way to the pages of the *Jewish Chronicle*. William Frankel’s objections to the Chief Rabbinate were based as much on its institutional structure as well as the ideological differences. Enamored by the open, decentralized and non-hierarchical

²⁶Letter from Louis Jacobs to Morris Swift, February 23, 1958. Jacobs Archive.

²⁷Letter from Morris Swift to Louis Jacobs, March 10, 1958. Jacobs Archive.

structures of the North American Jewish community,²⁸ in Frankel's estimation, the power of the British Chief Rabbinate and the United Synagogue was both misbegotten and misused.²⁹ By early 1959, both Brodie and Swift would preach with increasing bluntness and frequency against the progressive Reform movement on matters both ideological and administrative. The *Jewish Chronicle's* coverage, with headlines like "Reform Judaism Attacked," and "Reform Leader Hits Back: Lack of Tolerance Deplored," provides a distinct sense of which side the paper was on in terms of the emergent debate between Orthodoxy and Reform.³⁰ Such exchanges are significant in that they serve to establish the toxic religious environment where a very small and interconnected section of London Jewry interacted with Jacobs at the center. By dint of being a United Synagogue rabbi with allegiances to both Brodie and Frankel, Jacobs would come to stand at the epicenter of the brewing controversies. Soon enough, Jacobs would make his leanings readily apparent to all.

So, too, Jacobs's relations with Jews' College, Anglo-Orthodoxy's ministerial training ground, would also grow less cordial during these years. Jacobs's previously mentioned extension lectures had long since run their course. His published views that traditional faith must contend with the claims of critical scholarship were increasingly at

²⁸For example, see the JC's adoring coverage of the Conservative Movement's rabbinical conference: "It sets no rigid religious tests for its membership, and among the Congregations affiliated to it are many which are strictly Orthodox and, at the other extreme, the Reconstructionists whose theology is more iconoclastic than that of Reform Judaism." JC May 9, 1958. See also his stated affections for the model of North American Jewry, JC January 23, 1959.

²⁹As early as Frankel's previously cited letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* (JC, January 4, 1952, see Chapter Two) his views on the Chief Rabbinate were well present. Frankel's recent published memoirs, *Tea with Einstein* (2006), only makes explicit his continued objections.

³⁰See also JC March 6, 1959, April 17, 1959 and June 26, 1959.

odds with the ideological and curricular parameters of Jews College.³¹ Historically, while its principals from Drs. Barnett Abrahams and Michael Friedlander to Adolf Büchler and Isidore Epstein were all distinguished in their respective fields of Jewish scholarship, certain questions concerning scriptural authority remained off limits, a compartmentalization that Jacobs found problematic.³² Given the opportunity, Jacobs did not shy away from voicing his objections. For example, in a correspondence to his colleague Jakob Petuchowki, Jacobs relates his thoughts on the most recent publication of Jews' College's then principal, Dr. Isidore Epstein:

Have you read Dr. Epstein's 'Penguin' on Judaism? I wrote a fairly flattering review in one of the Jewish papers but felt obliged to say that his chapters on the Bible border on fundamentalism. His pupils at Jews College tell me that he is annoyed with me for this.³³

In identifying Epstein's approach to Torah as "fundamentalist," the fact that Epstein was annoyed is not too surprising. Jacobs's longtime lament that Jews' College did not

³¹An examination of the lecture notes of Jews' College's then long term lecturer in Bible, Eli Cashdan, reveals that while contextual, philological and interpretive traditions were all brought to bear on the text, questions concerning the authorship or literal truth of the biblical account were never openly addressed. Telling indeed is the recollection of Rabbi Dr. Cashdan's daughter, Evelyn, that in spite of the polymath nature of Cashdan's scholarship, he would consciously refrain from teaching the first eleven chapters of Genesis in his Bible course, explaining that "it was too difficult" to reconcile the biblical account with the scientific one. Interview with Ms. Evelyn Cashdan, Summer 2005. When asked by the present author just prior to his death if he had any 'doubts' concerning the divine authorship of the biblical text (in reference to Jacobs's engagement with critical theories) Rabbi Cashdan responded, "Anyone can have doubts, but that doesn't mean you write a book about it!" Jacobs and Cashdan would always hold each other's scholarship in high esteem; their difference, amongst others, lay in their willingness to bring the claims of critical scholarship to bear.

³²Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005. See also, HWI, 120. On the history of Jews' College, see Albert M. Hyamson, *Jews' College, London: 1855-1955* (London: 1955). For a brief sketch of Jews' College leadership, see "In the Service of Judaism" Jews' College Centenary Brochure, 9-10. For a more substantive intellectual and personal portrait of Büchler, see Bruno Marmorstein, "Adolph Büchler: Principle of Jews' College 1906-1939," *Jewish Historical Studies* XXX (1987-1988). The memorial pamphlet to Epstein collects a host of personal recollections, memorial addresses, as well as a brief survey of his intellectual achievements. (Jews College Union Society. 1962)

³³Letter from Louis Jacobs to Jakob Petuchowski. May 4, 1959. AJA. The book in question is Isidore Epstein, *Judaism: A Historical Presentation* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex; Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1959).

train its ministers to be both entrenched in tradition and capable of addressing the claims of modernity would be as true in the late fifties as it had been in his earliest observations fifteen years earlier.

During these years, the content and modes by which Jacobs expressed his theology would take a decidedly more insurgent turn. Indeed, while the next series of events are not necessarily of direct consequence to each other, collectively they suggest a charged religious mood that Jacobs was subject to, and in many ways, took part in creating. In a *Jewish Chronicle* section on young Jewish writers, Jacobs was featured as one of the most prominent and promising voices in the community and was given the opportunity to provide his recommendations for a revitalization of Jewish life:

The ideal body to promote the approach to Judaism as a religion which would combine its demand for total commitment with its own intellectual integrity could be the United Synagogue... But to do so, they must think out their own position; they should call into the search the intellectuals who were still looking for a satisfying faith and those who had already found it.³⁴

For Jacobs to publicly opine that Judaism must be both religiously committed and intellectually rigorous is hardly new. That Jacobs would publicly insinuate this to be a feature lacking in the United Synagogue should not be missed. Days after, Jacobs would once again be on the receiving end of a letter from Michael Wallach, Secretary to the Chief Rabbi:

The dayanim, sitting on the Chief Rabbinate in Commission, at their meeting yesterday considered an allegation made to them by a communal organization that you attended a function at Claridge's on 28th January, 1959. At this hotel, of course, no facilities for supervised [kosher] functions are available. The dayanim find it

³⁴JC, January 23, 1959.

difficult to believe this report and in view of the seriousness of the allegation have asked me to request your comments thereon.³⁵

While the above correspondence does not establish whether Jacobs in fact attended the said function or any of its particulars, it does shed light on the endemic tension and distrust between Jacobs and the Office of the Chief Rabbi. Given the fact that a few days prior to receiving the accusing letter Jacobs delivered a lecture at the Jewish Forum of the World Jewish Congress on one of his favorite topics, “Darwinism and the Bible,” the Chief Rabbi’s concern with Jacobs (at least theologically) was not altogether unfounded.³⁶

Though Jacobs’s earlier attempt to speak to liberal audiences in America would be blocked by Brodie, by 1959 Jacobs would revisit the issue in Brodie’s own London backyard. In March of that year, Jacobs spoke at the Upper Berkely Street Reform Synagogue in an openly publicized event sponsored by the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain. A *Jewish Chronicle* article entitled “Breaking Down Isolation” reported on the cordial relations between Jacobs and the Reform movement and expressed the participants hopes that “Jacobs would be happy to come and lecture...on a future occasion.”³⁷ Once again, Jacobs would receive a letter of admonition from his old provincial colleague, J. Gould, deploring him for associating with the ‘Reformers.’³⁸ Shortly thereafter, an invitation would be extended to Dayan Swift to speak at the New West End in June of 1959. Presumably in the company of Frankel and Jacobs, Swift

³⁵Letter from Michael Wallach to Louis Jacobs, February 6, 1959. Jacobs Archive.

³⁶JC, January 30, 1959.

³⁷JC, March 13, 1959.

³⁸Letter from Rabbi J. Gould of Leeds Talmudical College May 20, 1959.

would unleash a torrent of criticism against the *Jewish Chronicle*, declaring it to be “One of the most powerful influences in the Anglo-Jewish community – and also, of late, one of the most dangerous.” Swift went on to decry the “vague humanism” of Reform Judaism, which in Swift’s estimation, was a “non-Judaism” that should be rendered separate from the rest of the believing Jewish community.³⁹

The above series of events makes clear the deep tensions present between Jacobs and the institutions and personalities of Anglo-Orthodoxy during his New West End tenure. By June of 1959, Jacobs was situated at the far left fringe of Anglo-Orthodoxy. Ideologically, institutionally, and personally Jacobs was at odds with the Chief Rabbi. His insistence to publicly contend with the claims of critical scholarship had placed him in conflict—ideologically and perhaps personally— with the leadership of Jews’ College. Indeed, with this tense dynamic in mind, it is altogether reasonable to wonder why in July of 1959 Jacobs would decide to leave the New West End for a position at Jews’ College under the impression that he himself would one day assume institutional leadership in the years to come. In answering this question, we must once again turn back to consider the increasingly complex web of professional ambitions and relationships that Jacobs was negotiating during these years.

Damn Yankees

Jacobs’s tenure at the New West End would see his geographical, personal and ideological points of reference come into increasing contact with personalities and institutions well beyond his congregation. On the first birthday of his synagogue’s literary journal, “*Venture*,” Jacobs would take great pride in touting that “...it is clear

³⁹JC, June 12, 1959.

that *Venture* fulfills a useful purpose in our congregational life and that it has awakened interest in the wider community. Among others, the Rabbinical Assembly of America, the Minister of the Southern Rhodesian Jewish Community, the ministers of a number of metropolitan and provincial congregations and prominent lay-leaders of Anglo-Jewry have requested that their names be added to our mailing list.”⁴⁰ As his profile at the New West End would grow, Jacobs would hope that he and his congregation were perceived as a British based exponent of a far reaching international dialogue on traditional Judaism in a contemporary context.

The relationship between Jacobs and North American Jewry would run in both directions. Just as Jacobs would turn to North America for inspiration, he found himself hosting an increasing number of distinguished visitors from American shores, specifically, representatives of the Conservative Movement. It would be during these years that Chancellor Louis Finkelstein of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) would spend summer sabbaticals in England, Rabbi Seymour Siegel would make research trips to Oxford, and Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, the Executive Director of the Rabbinical Assembly, would spend a sabbatical at the nearby Upper Berkely Street Synagogue. Jacobs’s contact with some of the most distinguished members of the American Conservative rabbinate (including visits by Rabbis Abraham Joshua Heschel, Robert Gordis, and Seymour Cohen among others) would continue for many years, both in correspondences, trips to London, and eventually, trips by Jacobs to North America.⁴¹ The web of relationships, as documented by way of retrieved letters between Jacobs,

⁴⁰Louis Jacobs, “Venture” 1:4, 1.

⁴¹Interview with Mrs. Jackie Kelman, March 26, 2007.

Kelman, Finkelstein, William and Gertie Frankel, are critical in framing the events of the coming years. The trans-Atlantic correspondence would range in topic from institutional, ideological and mundane matters, often converging on the status and eventual courting of Anglo-Jewry's shining star, Louis Jacobs.

As early as 1956, Kelman had, by way of Seymour Siegel, begun to receive issues of the New West End's quarterly publication *Venture*.⁴² The ensuing friendship between Jacobs and Kelman would develop during Kelman's brief tenure at Upper Berkely Street (1957-58).⁴³ Kelman's visit would also serve to solidify a lifetime relationship with William and Gertie Frankel, having previously met them by way of their shared work for the American Jewish Committee.⁴⁴ Jacobs's warm relationship with Kelman was more than reciprocated; Kelman was thrilled to be in London. Upon returning to the States, he related to Jacobs:

I imagine that everyone eventually has his paradise lost—not necessarily the loss of one's youthful innocence but a spot on earth for which one yearns with more intense fervor as the days and years pass. I rather suspect that London is becoming that for me...If you will forgive me my homiletics, although I may feel like one of the *nefilim*, you were one of the archangels who made London a place of intellectual excitement and ferment and serene fellowship for me...⁴⁵

⁴²Letter from Wolfe Kelman to Louis Jacobs, November 2, 1956. Jacobs Archive.

⁴³Wolfe Kelman Tribute: Rabbinical Assembly Memorial Book, 5751 (1990-1991).

⁴⁴Interview Mrs. Jackie Kelman, March 26, 2007. On Frankel's evolving and long term relation with the AJC and Kelman, see W. Frankel, *Tea with Einstein*, 79-93.

⁴⁵Letter from Wolfe Kelman to Louis Jacobs April 22, 1958. Jacobs Archive. Nefilim – literally “giants.” A reference to the cross-breeding offspring of Gods of Genesis 6:1-4, appropriated by John Milton (*Paradise Lost*, VII, 605) to refer to rebellious angels, perhaps reflecting Kelman's understanding of where he stood theologically vis-à-vis Jacobs's perceived Orthodoxy.

Jacobs also enthusiastically cultivated a relationship with Louis Finkelstein, evidenced by the former's excitement over Finkelstein's anticipated summer 1957 visit to London. Jacobs extended an invitation to Finkelstein to speak at the New West End on "any Sabbath of your choice."⁴⁶ Though Finkelstein demurred, citing his Oxford research commitments and deficiencies as a preacher, their warm contact had begun in earnest. Finkelstein praised Jacobs's recently published *We Have Reason to Believe*, having come across it by way of Seymour Siegel:

I have already read part of it and I have been deeply impressed both with the clarity of the presentation and the learning. I am particularly impressed with your chapter on the Freudians.⁴⁷

To which Jacobs would eagerly reply:

How very kind of you to comment so favourably on my book. Praise from such a great authority is indeed a compliment and much appreciated.⁴⁸

Finkelstein's international stature in 1957 was undoubtedly well known to Jacobs, and attention from such a figure must have left quite an impression on the ambitious young rabbi.⁴⁹ These relationships would serve the institutional aspirations on both sides of the Atlantic. As the Conservative movement sought to expand beyond North America and Jacobs and Frankel sought to nurture like-minded allies in their endeavors, a natural

⁴⁶Letter from Louis Jacobs to Louis Finkelstein, May 22, 1957. Finkelstein Archive.

⁴⁷Letter from Louis Finkelstein to Louis Jacobs, July 28, 1957. Jacobs Archive.

⁴⁸Letter Louis Jacobs to Louis Finkelstein, July 30, 1957. Finkelstein Archive

⁴⁹Finkelstein's aptitude in public relations, outreach and expansion, exemplified in his famous Time Magazine cover story (October 15, 1951), is studied best by Michael Greenbaum in his article "The Finkelstein Era," in Jack Wertheimer, *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (New York, N.Y.: The Seminary, 1997). Vol. I, 163-231.

series of relationships would develop on the question of establishing a beachhead for Conservative Judaism in Anglo-Jewry, with Jacobs a likely point of contact.

Finkelstein and Kelman's reflections on the viability of expanding into Anglo-Jewry are, unto themselves, useful markers by which to measure the ideological mood of Anglo-Jewry during these years. Finkelstein initially considered a linkage between the North American "United Synagogue" and its Anglo namesake, seeking to recoup the instinct as initially conceived by Solomon Schechter upon his arrival to America from England just over fifty years prior.⁵⁰ As the British based Siegel wrote to Kelman in 1957:

It is his [Finkelstein's] feeling that if we hook up with anybody here it should be with the United Synagogue people. This seems to me to be a mistake. But I am sure you can come to a discussion about that when you come here.⁵¹

Siegel's doubt-filled comment is prophetic in that he understood how misguided Kelman and Finkelstein were in envisioning Brodie's United Synagogue as a hospitable context for Conservative Judaism's ritually observant but ideologically open approach. Considering that at this very time, Brodie would not even permit his ministers to attend a conference of the Conservative Movement; it would not be long before Finkelstein himself would realize how impossible such a proposed linkage would be.

By 1959, Finkelstein describes to Kelman what he saw to be an increasing polarization in Anglo-Jewry between the non-observant and the "extremist movement."

⁵⁰On Schechter's arrival in the States, see Norman De Mattos Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter, 1849-1915, Scholar, Sage and Visionary* (London: Education Committee of the Hillel Foundation, 1959), 208-210.

⁵¹Letter from Seymour Siegel to Wolfe Kelman, July 21, 1957. Kelman Archive.

Even in the two years in which I have been absent from England, conditions here have changed very considerably. I was surprised to see, for instance, that there were more people in the synagogue for the daily services than for those on the Shabbat. I also notice that people seem to take home observances and rituals less seriously. On the other hand, there is a very small extremist movement developing, which is worrying everybody. There will be plenty to talk about when we meet.⁵²

From the limited vantage point of his summer sabbaticals, Finkelstein became increasingly disheartened at the possibilities for Conservative Judaism in Anglo-Jewry. His hopes of finding a ritually observant and intellectually open Anglo-Jewry grew increasingly slim as he saw the chasm widening between the non-observant and “extremist elements.” The timing of the above letter in the spring of 1959 is also significant in understanding the events that would follow. While Jacobs may have indeed been initially perceived by Finkelstein and Kelman as the vital leader from which a movement could be developed, they came to realize that in fact Jacobs stood as a prize to be courted and brought back to the United States. In retrospect, Jacobs’s struggles—in many ways a reflection of the highest ideals of late-1950’s Conservative Judaism—represent an isolated voice in the landscape of Anglo-Jewry, an isolation that was increasingly apparent to everyone except Jacobs himself.

The increasing contact between Jacobs and his North American colleagues only served to increase his dissatisfaction with Anglo-Orthodox congregational life, frustrations rooted both in his ideological differences with the Chief Rabbi and the daily toil and toll of serving a congregation. As Jacobs later explained to Petuchowski, the decision to join Jews’ College was driven in part by a desire to leave the pulpit and

⁵²Letter from Louis Finkelstein to Wolfe Kelman April 13, 1959. Kelman Archive.

engage in scholarly pursuits. Responding to a congratulatory letter upon his 1959 appointment, Jacobs wrote:

For some time now I have felt a growing sense of frustration at the way in which a Minister's time, over here, is fritted away on trivialities leaving him no time for anything like serious scholarly work. Two offers were made to me... It was no easy thing to decide which to accept but I have finally decided to go to Jews' College and so continue to work in the community in which I was born.⁵³

Throughout his years at the New West End, Jacobs received a steady stream of international job offers. As early as 1956, the South African Chief Rabbi, Louis Rabinowitz, sought to persuade Jacobs to accept a call at the Oxford Synagogue of the United Hebrew Congregation, dangling the prospect of becoming the South African Chief Rabbi following Rabinowitz.⁵⁴ Despite the many congregational options available to Jacobs at the time, his attention would turn increasingly away from the pulpit and into academic life, understandable given his growing restlessness. And yet, while his longing for the ivory tower and his continuing ideological isolation may have indeed played a role in his decision to leave the New West End in 1959, a final motivating force also remains—the departure of Alexander Altmann for America. For it would be precisely in the spring of 1959 that an ambitious scholar-rabbi such as Jacobs would

⁵³Letter from Louis Jacobs to Jakob Petuchowski, September 2, 1959. AJA.

⁵⁴In addition to the merits of the position itself, Rabinowitz dangles his own position to Jacobs as follows: "...as you are possibly aware I have decided to stay on in Johannesburg for only another four years. I shall definitely relinquish my position at the end of this period, and I am confident that you would be a most suitable person to succeed me. I do not wish to boast, nor do I think that it is a boast that next to the Chief Rabbinate of England, my position is the most important in the British Commonwealth from every point of view." Letter from Louis Rabinowitz to Louis Jacobs, June 14, 1956. In 1958, Jacobs would also be extended an offer to the South African Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation. Letter from J. Yakelowitz to Louis Jacobs, April 23, 1958. Jacobs Archive.

have the opportunity to serve the Jewish community, the scholarly community and the all important nexus between the two.

Altmann's Departure and the Future of the Institute of Jewish Studies

In March of 1959, Alexander Altmann announced his anticipated departure for Brandeis University, opening up questions regarding the future of Altmann's Institute for Jewish Studies (IJS) and who would inherit his mantle of scholarly leadership. In his review of the Institute's Spring 1959 *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Jacobs praised the recent issue's quality, concluding:

All the more pity that the present issue comes from the press attended by the sad news that this distinguished scholar and thinker is to depart for a community where learning is more highly valued. The lure of the "Go West, Young Man" call is perhaps to be expected to attract those who have not as yet made their mark. But that Anglo-Jewry should permit its greatest theologian to leave these shores is a sorry comment on the impasses to which we have been brought by our fondness for what we imagine to be practicality.⁵⁵

Jacobs's comment is curious in that it is well removed from the merits of his review assignment at hand. In a letter to Altmann, Jacobs would explain the motivations behind his comment:

By the way, Hugh Harris asked me to submit a brief review of the latest issue of the Journal for the JC. What can one say in three hundred and fifty words? So I took the opportunity of saying that the least the community can do is to carry the burden of the Institute and convince you, before you leave, that what you have built up so well will continue to flourish.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Louis Jacobs, JC, May 15, 1959.

⁵⁶Letter from Louis Jacobs to Alexander Altmann, May 8 1959. Altmann Archive.

Jacobs well understood that Altmann's departure was significant in that it designated England inhospitable for a scholar-rabbi of Altmann's caliber. So, too, the combination of Jacobs's public and private musings indicate that Altmann's departure prompted Jacobs's to reflect on the state of Anglo-Jewry as a whole and what, if any, his role would be in its future.

At least one week prior to Altmann's March 13, 1959 public announcement of his intended departure, he would be in contact with Jacobs regarding future steps for the IJS.⁵⁷ The published history of the IJS's move to London misses the drama and politics of these few months, in which Jacobs would come to play a major role.⁵⁸ While Altmann initially planned on moving the institute to Oxford under the direction of Dr. Raphael Loewe, the IJS's board of governors would direct Altmann to split his leadership role between Jacobs and Loewe. The objections of the Anglo-Historian Cecil Roth to transferring the IJS to Oxford would prompt Altmann to turn his sights to London.⁵⁹ By early June of 1959, the IJS's Board of Governors had approved Altmann

⁵⁷JC, March 13, 1959. The week before, Jacobs would write to Altmann: "It is difficult to say these things, but I do want you to know how much I have learned from you during the past twenty years. The lack of receptivity on the part of some sections of the community must have been very frustrating but there are many of us who feel deeply indebted to you for what really amounts to a complete *weltanschauung*." Letter from Louis Jacobs to Alexander Altmann, March 6, 1959. Altmann Archive. Altmann's reply to Jacobs continues to capture some of his own motivations for departing. Responding to Jacobs's kind words, Altmann writes "May I say how greatly I appreciate your kind letter and indeed how touched I am by it. It is words from the heart such as you have uttered which compensate for a great deal of frustration, and I am happy in the knowledge of your feelings towards me." Letter from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs, March 8, 1959. Jacobs Archive.

⁵⁸See "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*, 21-32. On the move to London, the editors limit their comments to the following: "To ensure the Institute's future he [Altmann] decided that the environment where it could best flourish was the Department of Hebrew Studies at University College London, and he negotiated for the transfer of the Institute to UCL." *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁹JC, March 13, 1959. The initial planning meeting at All Souls College took place on June 4, 1959 at the home of Dr. David Daube. Letter from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs, May 7, 1959.

and Jacobs's proposal to use the New West End's Herbert Samuel Hall as the new location. In considering the allocation of space for the administrative, teaching and storage needs of the IJS, Altmann signaled Jacobs's anticipated leadership role:

Should it prove difficult to satisfy our interests in these respects, one might consider as an alternative the possibility of securing the Mocatta Library [of University College London] as a place for research and seminars whilst using the Herbert Samuel Hall for larger meetings and for housing the office of the Institute *of which you will be in charge* [italics added], and which will have to employ a part time secretary. Naturally, it would be preferable to have everything under one roof but there are weighty considerations in favour of using for research purposes a place both more central and academic in character.⁶⁰

The correspondence makes clear that Jacobs would be appointed to run the IJS upon the departure of Altmann, a decision confirmed by an invitation from Altmann to come to Manchester at the end of June:

...in order that I may initiate you as it were, into the practical work and explaining to you on the spot...some of the more important aspects of the running of the institute. Monday would be preferable because Weiss [Joseph Weiss] too, will be here and we could devote the whole day to discussing matters.⁶¹

Despite the imminent nature of the proceedings, Jacobs's appointment would never take place. Rather, Jacobs would work to secure the lay chairmanship of Ellis Franklin while the academic leadership of the IJS would fall to Joseph Weiss. By the end of July, the IJS would reconstitute itself at University College London where it continued to

Jacobs Archive. Cecil Roth's objections are stated in a correspondence to Altmann dated June 3, 1959. Altmann Archive.

⁶⁰Letter from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs, June 8, 1959. Jacobs Archive.

⁶¹Letter from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs June 11, 1959. Jacobs Archive.

remain.⁶² In his final farewell letter to Jacobs prior to his departure for America, Altmann would acknowledge the new developments in his former student's life:

Thank you for your letter of the 22nd accepting your appointment to a Research Fellowship of the Institute. I am happy to know that you have at the same time been invited by Jews' College to become Tutor to the College. Please accept my warmest congratulations. As a result you will eventually be able to devote yourself entirely to Jewish scholarship. I am only sorry for the London Rabbinate and the New West End in particular. May I wish you a pleasant holiday and au revoir to you and Mrs. Jacobs, also on behalf of Mrs. Altmann.⁶³

Altmann's words of congratulation and farewell acknowledged that Jacobs's freshly acquired position at Jews' College would enable him to achieve commensurate goals in Jewish communal leadership and scholarship. It is indeed ironic that at the time of writing, Altmann probably knew very little about how close Jacobs had actually come in joining his teacher to "Go West."

The Move to Jews' College

As early as the spring of 1958, Gertie Frankel intuited the allure that a teaching post in America would have for Jacobs. In a personal exchange between Gertie Frankel and Kelman, the prospect of a Jacobs move to the United States is openly discussed. Through Frankel's loose prose, one is able to identify an altogether intriguing dynamic, not merely between the "power brokers" of North American and English Jewry, but also Jacobs's perceived status in Anglo-Orthodoxy:

⁶²The full story of the events and personalities (Altmann, Jacobs, Frankel, Loewe and Weiss) of these few months may be found in correspondence housed at the Altmann Archive.

⁶³Letter from Alexander Altmann to Louis Jacobs, July 23, 1959. Jacobs Archive.

...And the other thing is: tis my personal opinion but I not somehow think that he [Jacobs] would be repelled by a FirstKless A1 [sic. First class A#1] teaching job in the States (not a pulpit, he got *tzoros* [troubles] enough from congregants...) You can sound out Wm [William Frankel] on the subject. But so long as Jews Coll. stays barred he aint never gonna be an integrated poisanality which, as you Ameddicans appreciate, is awfully frightfully important. Me? Wot I'll get out of it all is yet another ordained correspondent t'ree t'ousand miles away which is what I am used to...⁶⁴

The above exchange directs attention to several critical considerations in understanding the context in which Jacobs functioned. Gertie astutely sensed Jacobs's frustrations with congregational life and his desire to shift entirely to scholarship. So, too, she understood the impossibility of Jacobs assuming a teaching position at Jews' College. The only remaining possibility of Jacobs becoming an "integrated personality" lay in teaching opportunities in America. Given what would happen in the years to come, one may at least concede that in the midst of Gertie's creative prose, a salient, if not prophetic, instinct was present.

Finkelstein offered Jacobs a position at JTS over the course of his summer visit to England in July of 1959. Just days after Jacobs had met with Altmann and Weiss, Gertie Frankel informs Kelman of the Finkelstein-Jacobs meeting, again, in her somewhat coarse fashion:

Dear Woolf,
Finky? By me, is no St. Louis.
He lunched with Jacobs last Friday at Kedassia which no doubt was observed by Orthodox Anglo-Jewry with much rubbing of hands and knowing nods.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Letter from Gertie Frankel to Wolfe Kelman, April 30, 1958. Kelman Archive.

⁶⁵Letter from Gertie Frankel to Wolfe Kelman, July 5, 1959. Kelman Archive.

Thus, while Jacobs's offer to come to JTS was received either at this lunch or thereabouts, by July 17th, correspondence indicates that Jacobs had accepted a counter-offer to take a position as Moral Tutor at Jews' College.⁶⁶

This turn of events—from receiving the JTS offer to accepting the position at Jews' College—would not sit well with the snubbed seminarians. Kelman shared with Gertie Frankel that:

Dr. Finkelstein is rather peeved “at being used”... He now feels put out, after offering Jacobs the position at the Seminary, he feels that this offer was used to obtain a position for him in Jews College.⁶⁷

William Frankel would respond by explaining to Kelman precisely what had happened—a necessary account, given his and Finkelstein's frustration at Jacobs' decision.⁶⁸

⁶⁶In a letter from Gertie Frankel to Wolfe Kelman, dated July 17, 1959, in addition to Gertie's notes, comments from Frankel and Jacobs are added on the subject of Kelman as a replacement for Jacobs at the New West End. Gertie writes: “What I am about to say is so secret that, please tell no-one, not even Jackie [Kelman]. Especialy [underline in original] not Finky nor any Arthurs. I write you again Wednesday morning – when I get permission to explain. This is it: The New West End pulpit will be vacant in about six months. Would you consider taking it, if it can be wangled this end? Wm [William] is *Enthusiastic and so is Jacobs.*” To the first asterisk referring to William Frankel, William tempers his wife's enthusiasm as follows: “I am [enthusiastic], but I think it's going to be a tough fight with only an off chance of success.” William Frankel's comment is immediately followed by the following notation from Jacobs: “I believe that there's a very good chance of success. William is exercising his legal caution because of the Chief Rabbi's possible attitude. But the people here will probably be able to persuade him.” More than the intriguing discussion on the possibility of a future post for Kelman at the New West End is the ease by which Jacobs and both Frankels are aware of the imminent vacancy at the New West End, a vacancy due to Jacobs' decision to go to Jews' College. Jacobs Archive.

⁶⁷Letter from Wolfe Kelman to Gertie Frankel, July 28, 1959. Jacobs Archive.

⁶⁸Kelman wrote an uncharacteristically formal and lengthy letter to Jacobs that July informing Jacobs that he was “delighted to learn that you had several conversations with professor Finkelstein and that you informally discussed the possibility of your coming to the Seminary in an academic capacity.” Beyond sharing his personal thrill at such a prospect, Kelman devotes the bulk of his correspondence enumerating the financial possibilities of supplementing the modest salary of a seminary professor, a concern apparently voiced by Jacobs in his discussions with Finkelstein. The conclusion of Kelman's letter addresses “the apparent contradiction between the leaders of the Conservative movement who are traditional, and the statements, response and other materials which reflected a less traditional emphasis.” Kelman seeks to assuage these concerns, explaining: “WE [caps original] who are associated with Dr. Finkelstein and who have been appointed to faculty and administrative positions in the Conservative

What happened was simply this...When Jacobs got the offer from Finkelstein he fully intended to accept it. In analyzing his reasons he came to the conclusion that it was not that he particularly wanted to live in America, but that his aim was to learn and teach rather than be a practicing minister. If he thought there was any hope of him being able to do the job he wanted to do in England his preference was to stay here; but he knew, as we all believed, that there was not the slightest chance of his being given the opportunity here. So his choice was either to stay on here as a minister, or to go to America as a scholar. Having made his decision to go he naturally had to consult a few people, including the honorary officers of the United Synagogue. The general reaction was that it would be a calamity for the Anglo-Jewish community if he were to go, and he was asked to wait before accepting the American offer until all possibilities of his being retained here had been exhausted. This seemed only fair and reasonable and so he gave them a chance. The result is the appointment to Jews' College and the possibility of his succession to the principalship. This is the story in a nutshell and I don't think it involves any discredit either to Dr. Finkelstein or Dr. Jacobs.⁶⁹

Jacobs's account of the month's events is rather consistent with that of Frankel. As Jacobs notes in his autobiography, it would be the offer to join the faculty of JTS that would trigger the series of events leading to his decision to leave for Jews' College:

For all the generosity and kindnesses I had received at the hands of the New West End members, I could not help being attracted by an offer I received from Professor Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, to become a full-time member of the faculty of the Seminary. A few of my friends, however were kind enough to wish to keep me in this country and they explored the possibility of obtaining for me a similar academic post in London.⁷⁰

movement share his general goals of emphasizing the necessity for authenticity of learning, the profundity of piety and the striving for intense loyalty to the traditional practices of our people. I would assume that you subscribe to these general principles, and it is for that reason that I am particularly anxious to welcome you into our midst." Letter from Wolfe Kelman to Louis Jacobs, July 20, 1959. Jacobs Archive. Given the date of the letter, it would arrive after Jacobs had made his decision regarding Jews' College.

⁶⁹Letter from William Frankel to Wolfe Kelman August 6, 1959. Kelman Archive.

⁷⁰HWI, 120.

A consistent narrative thus emerges: Grown tired of congregational life and itching for scholarship, Jacobs sought to create a position of scholarly leadership. While anxious to secure the role as Altmann's ideological successor, Jacobs was then offered a position at JTS. His London supporters mobilized quickly to assemble a counter offer that Jacobs eventually took.

The counsel and advocacy that Jacobs would receive from his New West End friends would serve to secure a position for him in Anglo-Jewry. The patrician lay board of Jews' College, similar in person and inclination to the New West End leadership, were at the same time some of Jacobs's fiercest supporters and at odds with the ideological moorings of the Jews' College teaching staff and Chief Rabbi.⁷¹ These "power-brokers" included the likes of Alan Mocatta, then chairman of the Jews' College Council; Ewan Montagu, the president of the United Synagogue; and, of course, William Frankel. All saw in Jacobs the opportunity to secure a leader reflecting their own sensibilities. This, along with their antipathy for then-principal Isadore Epstein, would result in a swift response upon hearing the possible news of Jacobs's departure.⁷² The following correspondence received by Jacobs from Donald Samuel, a New West End leader and strong supporter of Jacobs, is helpful in understanding the mood of that July:

I deeply appreciate the confidence which you have placed in me and the subject of which has of course been very much in my mind in the hours since we met.... The view that was forming in my mind towards the end of our talk has gained ground and I see greater prospect for the ideas we share if they could be inculcated

⁷¹Ibid., 48ff.

⁷²Interview with Israel Finestein, Summer 2007.

into the ministers of the future as one part of a “premier movement” the other arm of which was adult education. Furthermore our present narrow road might prove slow and too easy to block!...I am confident that you have a great contribution to make to the future of Judaism and I venture to believe that it should be through Anglo-Jewry.⁷³

Indeed, in the intervening weeks a small but powerful coterie of leaders would see in Jacobs the opportunity to both retain their prized rabbi, but also plant the seeds for the future. The prospect of Jacobs at the helm of Jews’ College could, it would seem, offer the prospect of realizing a systemic change within Anglo Jewry; namely, a generation of Anglo-rabbinic leadership reflecting the progressive views held dear by Jacobs.

Nevertheless, given Jacobs’s strained relationship with Anglo-Orthodoxy, one wonders how exactly a Jews’ College appointment ever came to be. While one may understand how the “Trojan horse” of Jacobs’s principalship served the purposes of its progressive board, how did Brodie and the faculty under Dr. Epstein allow such a turn of events to occur? Norman Cohen provides the fullest and, seemingly most plausible, explanation:

The appointment was against Dr. Epstein’s wishes and Dr. Brodie’s concurrence was given most unwillingly. (I was told by Sefton Temkin now in the USA but then a columnist of the *Jewish Chronicle* and a strong Jacobs supporter, that the Chief Rabbi was threatened that, unless, the appointment was made, Dr. Jacobs would follow Dr. Alexander Altmann, at Brandeis since 1959, on the “brain drain” to the United States and he would then have to account to an outraged public opinion for the loss, in quick succession, of two of the leading clergymen under his jurisdiction. Dr. Brodie must have had ample opportunity in the following years to regret the weakness which he demonstrated in this instance and which involved him in the embarrassing dilemma of having to

⁷³Letter from Donald Samuel to Louis Jacobs, July 8, 1959. Jacobs Archive.

explain why Jacobs was *kasher* as Tutor, but *treifah* as a Principal).⁷⁴

Considering the drama surrounding Altmann's departure, Cohen/Temkin's "brain drain" theory is a sound insight into understanding how and why a *treifah* Jacobs was able to gain a foothold in Jews' College. With Finkelstein's invitation extended to Jacobs and Altmann on his way to America, Brodie's hand was forced to concede an appointment that he would never have sought or otherwise allowed. The insistence of the honorary officers to appoint 'their' rabbi to Jews' College had nothing to do with any shared sense purpose on the part of Brodie, the Jews' College faculty or otherwise.

Thus, while there exists general agreement as to the course of the events in July of 1959, the underlying reason driving Jacobs's Jews' College appointment stands to be reconsidered. Years later, though acknowledging his desire for advancement, Jacobs would paint a rather innocent picture:

...no doubt I did not lack the itch of ambition. Yet in my defence I can only say that I sincerely wished to immerse myself in the kind of academic work that would fit in with my career as a rabbi and honestly wished to see what could be done to prevent the much-debated decline of Jews' College, which seemed to be failing to attract students for the Anglo-Jewish ministry. It was simply not true, as my opponents later hinted, that I was only bent on using the principalship of Jews' College as a stepping-stone to the Chief Rabbinate, a position which would become vacant on Rabbi Brodie's retirement. I may have been calculating, but if to that extent with the aim of eventually securing the office of Chief Rabbi, I would have been far better advised to remain at the New West End, then the premier synagogue of the United Synagogue Movement.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Norman Cohen, "The Religious Crisis in Anglo-Jewry," *Tradition* 8, no. 2 (1966): 49-50.

⁷⁵HWI, 122.

This later reflection suggests a narrative whereby Jacobs's move to Jews' College is born from a commitment to a shared project of training an Anglo-Orthodox ministry, first as a teacher and then as principal. Given that Jacobs's tense relations vis-à-vis the arms of Anglo-Orthodoxy was a matter of public record, such a telling simply does not stand consistent with the facts. More plausible is the possibility that the efforts of Jacobs's "kind friends" in securing a position for Jacobs at Jews College was an audacious act of communal politics motivated by both their desire to keep Jacobs and the expression of Judaism he represented in England.

The propitious timing of Epstein's announced retirement is also worthy of consideration. The decision that Epstein (who served as principal since 1948) would retire in 1961 upon reaching the age of 65 was ratified by the board that same July of 1959. Though documents linking this decision and Jacobs's appointment that same month are not extant, it seems likely that the approval of the two decisions by the same lay board during the same interim was done in light of each other. A case for linking the two can be found in a July 24, 1959 *Jewish Chronicle* article noting the news of Epstein's announced retirement and the opinion that "Jews' College must now consider the kind of personality whom it would wish to succeed to the principalship." Miri Freud-Kandel's study on the Anglo-Orthodoxy draws a correlation between these two events, noting Epstein's "ongoing resentment" at his forced retirement.⁷⁶ Though Jacobs, his allies, and his detractors all agree that no promise was extended to Jacobs regarding the principalship, it is altogether reasonable to imagine that Jacobs's appointment as moral tutor was extended and accepted not only on the promise of

⁷⁶M. Freud Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism*, 128-129.

Epstein's retirement, but in fact, contingent on the ratification of a specific date of retirement. Indeed, at the height of the coming controversy, Jacobs's personal notes would confirm such a sentiment, as he would write in reference to the Chief Rabbi: "Does he really think that I left the N.W.E. in order to become tutor?!"⁷⁷

Far from a warm offer to join the intellectual leadership of Anglo-Jewry, Jacobs's arrival at Jews' College would be perceived both by the institution and Jacobs as a showdown regarding the future of Anglo-Jewry. Indeed, in his short teaching tenure at Jews' College, Jacobs's progressive views would often be received with curiosity or outright hostility.⁷⁸ As Jacobs would privately explain to his colleague Petuchowski:

Believe me, I am not unaware of the difficulties I shall have to face. Here, as in so many other places, the extremists of the right are exerting an increasing hold on the life of the community and I am not persona grata with the people. But, the truth be told, I rather enjoy a fight and am not too despondent.⁷⁹

Furthermore, Jacobs's "itch of ambition" extended beyond any modest scholarly contributions, revival of Jews' College, or for that matter, a fight with the 'fundamentalist' elements of Anglo-Orthodoxy. The reach of Jacobs's aspirations in all likelihood extended to the position of Chief Rabbi. Indeed, in his letter to Finkelstein, Jacobs intimates as much in stating his reasons for accepting the Jews' College post:

⁷⁷These notes, written on the back of a wedding brochure, are undated though the surrounding notes suggest they were drafted in the midst of the 1961 controversy. For example, the adjacent note states: "Official announcement at council meeting that I was not being considered." Jacobs Archive.

⁷⁸Interview with Rabbi Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, Summer 2005. See also N. Cohen, "Religious Crisis," 50.

⁷⁹Letter from Louis Jacobs to Jacob Petuchowski, September 2, 1959. AJA.

Jews' College has offered me the position of Tutor to the College, a post previously held by Rabbi Brodie before he became Chief Rabbi. Then again I feel that I have some responsibility to the Anglo-Jewish community into which I was born and in which I was educated. I am sure, therefore, that you will understand if I do not accept your kind offer. But believe me I greatly appreciate the fact that it was made by someone of your distinction.⁸⁰

At the height of his powers at the New West End, with Epstein's ratified retirement and Chief Rabbi Brodie due to retire by 1965, Jacobs knew full well the course on which he was setting out, however ill fated it would turn out to be. For despite his outsider status at Jews' College and Anglo-Orthodoxy as a whole, Jacobs sought a Jephthah-like journey towards leading the very people for whom his disdain was only matched by their disdain for him. Thus insinuating himself into a world not his own, he began his life at Jews' College.

Epilogue and Conclusion

At the height of the first stage of the 'Jacobs Affair,' Jacobs recounted the events surrounding his appointment in his letter of resignation to Sir Alan Mocatta, the Chairman of the Council of Jews' College:

You will recall that two-and-a-half years ago I was invited by you and your colleagues to come to the college as tutor. You pointed out at the time that it was the intention of the Hon. Officers that I should be appointed principal after the retirement of Dr Epstein, though there could be no definite promise on their part since the appointment depended, under the Constitution, on the Chief Rabbi's approval. Since Dr. Epstein's retirement last July, the Chief Rabbi has been asked to give his approval for the appointment, but has failed to do so on varying grounds, the one recurring most often being that views I have expressed in writing render me unsuitable for the position.⁸¹

⁸⁰Letter from Louis Jacobs to Louis Finkelstein July 22, 1959. Finkelstein Archive.

⁸¹Louis Jacobs, JC, December 22, 1961.

Jacobs's open letter, printed in the *Jewish Chronicle* is disingenuous to the extent that it elides the real story of his appointment. The narrative that Jacobs was graciously extended an offer to teach and was ultimately rendered unsuitable due to his published theological views is simply not in line with the facts. The more accurate narrative is that Jacobs and his supporters were able to leverage the sentiment wrought by Altmann's departure, Finkelstein's invitation and a commonly inclined board, all to press his unlikely faculty appointment and even unlikelier principalship. Jacobs may have been correct that theology lay at the core of the dispute, but flagging theology as the impetus for Brodie's actions is to avoid the real story of how his appointment as moral tutor was achieved in the first place. Given the circumstances by which Jacobs was appointed, it is remarkable that any of the involved parties were at all surprised by the subsequent turn of events. Great as the blow of Jacobs's blocked appointment was to him and his supporters, in retrospect, it appears almost inevitable.

Modern histories of Anglo-Jewry inevitably tell the story of the 'Jacobs Affair' as a tale of two acts. The first is Jacobs's blocked appointment to the Jews' College principalship in 1961-62, and the second, his frustrated return to the New West End in 1964 and the formation of a new independent congregation under his leadership. Jacobs would "lose" these two battles (and perhaps the war itself) as neither he, nor his ideological position, would be able to withstand the cultural, institutional and sociological forces arrayed against him. Nevertheless, the above study hopefully makes clear that Jacobs actually won a prior, hitherto unstudied skirmish: his appointment to Jews' College in the first place. It would be Jacobs's decision "not to force the issue of

the principalship ...” at the time of his appointment as moral tutor that would indeed prove to be his only—and eventually colossal—misstep.⁸²

It served neither the interests of Jacobs nor his opponents to linger on the details of his appointment. As N. Cohen noted above, Brodie was understandably hard-pressed to explain why “Jacobs was *kasher* as Tutor, but *treifah* as a Principal.” The fact that such a decision can, in retrospect, come to be understood makes it no less of an embarrassing flip-flop to justify at the time. So, too, Jacobs would have every reason to downplay any intrigue surrounding his move to Jews’ College. Jacobs’s ongoing rhetorical tactic that he was merely laying claim to the status-quo of Anglo-Jewry would serve him and his advocates well in the years ahead. Indeed, to his final retrospect, Jacobs would make the claim:

...at the time of the controversy there had long been a tolerant, rather bemused acceptance of unconventional views within Anglo-Jewry. At that time, it was not completely hypocritical for me to label myself as Orthodox, meaning at the time, simply kosher, in the sense of observant of the precepts, and yet wish to be the head a of a traditional institution like Jews’ College.⁸³

The difference between Jacobs’s later reconstruction of events and the reality of what transpired draws attention to the ideological undercurrents of his autobiographical account and retrospect.⁸⁴ The manner by which Jacobs and his allies would retell his story would become as much, if not more, about their own efforts at self-justification than an objective recollection of the past. At best, one may reason that Jacobs, caught in

⁸²HWI, 121.

⁸³BRD, 14.

⁸⁴On 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.

the echo chamber of the New West End and Frankel's *Jewish Chronicle*, earnestly believed that his brand of Orthodoxy represented the consensus future of Anglo-Jewry. More likely (as Jacobs own correspondence reveals) he knew full well the marked differences between his theological vision and the vision sanctioned by Anglo-Orthodoxy under Brodie's leadership.

The entrenchment of Eastern and Central European Orthodoxy in Anglo-Jewish institutional life and the concurrent decline of the genteel Judaism practiced at the New West End and its communal leaders could not have happened at a worse time for Jacobs. Louis Finkelstein's own observations regarding the London Jewry of the late 1950s confirm a growing chasm in Anglo-Jewry between moderate and fundamentalist expressions of Judaism. Nevertheless, what the above chapter serves to illuminate is that independent of such trends, Jacobs's views, deeds and person lay well beyond the pale of normative Anglo-Orthodoxy. At least since his first letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1944, Jacobs had been committed to the proposition that Judaism could be both traditional in practice and ideologically open; Eastern European in its roots yet English in expression; and finally, but perhaps most importantly, able to reflect a synthesis between the "permanent values and truth of tradition and the best thought of the day."⁸⁵ Ultimately, neither Jews' College nor Anglo-Orthodoxy would be able to give sanctuary to Jacobs. His dogmatic insistence that an authentic faith must stand squarely before the challenges of modernity would render him isolated as a religious iconoclast.

⁸⁵WHRTB, 9.

Jacobs would later be fond of quoting the hasidic maxim “He who has no place anywhere has a place everywhere.” Though granted a long and successful congregational life at the New North London, Jacobs never actually came to realize his ambitions for an Anglo-Jewry that had long since passed him by. Jacobs’s “place” would ultimately be in the theological legacy embedded in his manifold publications, which as we shall come to see in the next chapter, are themselves perhaps the most personal, articulate and enduring representatives of the Judaism he was committed to creating.

CHAPTER SIX

QUEST

The wisdom of philosophers is not a commodity that can be produced on demand. Their books are not responsa. We should not regard them as mirrors, reflecting other people's problems, but rather as windows, allowing us to view the author's soul. Philosophers do not expend their power and passion unless they themselves are affected, originally or vicariously. The soul only communes with itself when the heart is stirred.

- Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy." *Jewish Quarterly Review* XXXIII (1942), 265.

Tucked away at the conclusion of Louis Jacobs's autobiography, *Helping with Inquiries* (1989), is a brief chapter entitled "Books." Over the course of these few pages, Jacobs provides a curiously perfunctory and incomplete account of his writing career. Considering that Jacobs's publishing accomplishments included almost fifty books, hundreds of popular and scholarly articles, countless lectures and addresses on an encyclopedic array of topics over the course of a lifetime, the short shrift Jacobs assigns to his written accomplishments is noteworthy unto itself. Indeed, anecdotal evidence from various biographers (present efforts included) affirms Jacobs's ongoing reticence to provide a comprehensive list or coherent portrait of his authorial achievements.¹ While Jacobs's late life retrospective, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* (1999),

¹Lifetime friends of Jacobs such as Dr. Byron Sherwin reflect on Jacobs's self assessment as "unreflective" when it came to his writing efforts. In drafting his sketch of Jacobs's intellectual accomplishments, Dr. Elliot Dorff requested an overview of Jacobs's published works, to which Jacobs jotted a fraction of his efforts. Such disinterest on Jacobs's part in maintaining a comprehensive list of his writing is reflected in numerous copies of Jacobs's Curricular Vitae in his archives, none of which approach an exhaustive list of his published efforts. Perhaps the best effort thus far in compiling a comprehensive bibliography is found in the appendix of the festschrift in honor of Jacobs. Louis Jacobs and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Traditional Quest: Essays in Honor of Louis Jacobs*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series, 114 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991), 217-226. At the time of writing, Oxford's Yarnton Library, the recipient of Jacobs's own library, is seeking to compile a

serves as an *apologia pro vita sua*, identifying noteworthy influences and a late life assessment of his claims and achievements, Jacobs forever resisted attempts at systematic or critical treatments of his intellectual accomplishments.

These final two chapters will seek to *begin* the process of providing a critical appreciation of Jacobs's writing. Given the diverse spheres of inquiry in which Jacobs's left his mark, future studies on Jacobs merit the attention of specialists in rabbinics, Hasidism, Jewish dogmatics, Jewish law and otherwise. Our present efforts are driven not so much by the presumption of being comprehensive, but rather a more modest effort to identify the key methodological pivots and categories by which Jacobs's writing may be understood as a product of the biographical efforts of the previous chapters. As an intellectual biography, it is our contention that Jacobs's scholarly, popular and theological work is a personal expression of the tensions present within Jacobs from his Manchester youth through his later influences and experiences. This final chapter will seek to flesh out this proposed nexus between biography and theology, in that Jacobs's writing may best be understood as one (of many) windows by which to view Jacobs's soul. Our two guiding categories in this venture will be the notion of a "quest" (Chapter Six) and "synthesis" (Chapter Seven).

Jacobs was a fully formed intellect by the time of his 1959 move to Jews' College, the stop date for our preceding intellectual biography. The substance of Jacobs's scholarly and theological claims was present early on and remained rather consistent throughout. Indeed, while his views may have hardened due to the

bibliography. Given that years of Jacobs's published articles for the *Jewish Chronicle* were penned anonymously in his capacity as "religious consultant," a full reconstruction of decades worth of Jacobs's popular thought and reflection could only come by way of the cooperative efforts of the JC's staff.

controversy that engulfed him, and the tools by which he defended them may have become more varied and sophisticated over the years, the *basic core* of his claims did not change in any substantive way over the course of fifty-plus years of writing. A small but telling example may be found in the 1988 preface to the reissue of his 1964 publication *Principles of the Jewish Faith*. Jacobs addressed the question of how his views had changed in the interim twenty-five years:

The inevitable question asked of an author whose book is being reissued after twenty-five years is: Have you changed your mind? It is difficult to answer this question objectively, even if, as I have suggested in the book, theology can be done objectively. If the relationship of an author to his book is comparable to that of a fond parent to an infant child, the relationship of an author to his book's reissue is that of doting grandparent to whom his infant grandchild is the most faultless baby alive. The bias of authors towards their writings is all too well known. Nevertheless, I am prepared to state (it may be evidence of superficiality) that I stand by what I have written and see no need for retraction on any of the basic contentions of the book.²

Jacobs lived to see many of his books re-issued, writing prefaces for a second or third time; although his views may have sharpened or grown refined over the years, he would always maintain that his fundamental beliefs remained unchanged. Thus, with only some exceptions to be noted, the student of Jacobs may take a somewhat synchronic approach to Jacobs's fifty plus years of writing.

Furthermore, despite the varied audiences of Jacobs's prodigious output, his achievements may be understood as a single coherent vision. As a congregational rabbi and occasional adjunct lecturer (Lancaster University, Leo Baeck College, Harvard), the independence afforded to Jacobs as a *privatgelehrte* allowed him to pick and choose his

²Louis Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith* (Northvale: J. Aronson, 1988), viii.

areas of inquiry according to his idiosyncratic interests and publishing opportunities.³

Nevertheless, his wide range of subject matter, ironically, also contributes to the overall coherence of Jacobs's lifetime achievements. Put simply, as a congregational rabbi Jacobs had the luxury (financial and intellectual) to write on topics that reflected his interests. Thus, while we need not insist on the procrustean demand that all of Jacobs's writing fit into a tidy package, in considering the wide range of Jacobs' work, we are guided by the hypothesis that each of Jacobs's works in some way reflects the integrated theological instincts of a single scholarly and theological vision.

Past Scholarship

The present effort is not the first (and hopefully not the last) to consider Jacobs's writing. In reviewing earlier efforts, four studies in particular offer useful guideposts in shaping our present efforts.

B. Sherwin's assessment of Jacobs, recently revised and reprinted in a collection of his essays, provides a critical framework by which to come to terms with the range of Jacobs's writing.⁴ For Sherwin, Jacobs's efforts are situated on the question of revelation and its implications, further classifying Jacobs's legacy into four primary areas of concern: theology, rabbinics, Jewish law and Jewish mysticism. Sherwin considers Jacobs's engagement with rabbinic literature, Jewish law and mysticism

³HWI, 251. For instance, at the request of various educational publishers, Jacobs was asked to write introductions to Jewish law, philosophy, biblical exegesis and otherwise. His children share his ability to write these volumes in one or two days, upon which Jacobs would "sit on them" for a month or two prior to submission, so as not to give the impression of either immodesty or lack of effort.

⁴Byron Sherwin, "Louis Jacobs: Man of Controversy Scholar of Distinction," *Judaism* 28 (1979). Revised and reissued in Byron Sherwin, *Studies in Jewish Theology: Reflections in the Mirror of Tradition* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), 291-315.

alongside predecessors and contemporaries in the field. Despite Sherwin's fulsome estimation of Jacobs's work, his most insightful comments worthy of further exploration are his criticisms of Jacobs's "middle way" theological position. Indeed, it is the way Sherwin astutely identifies the strengths and problems inherent in Jacobs's theology that will serve as the basis for the analysis to come.

Elliot Dorff and Neil Gillman's essays on Jacobs are both found in the context of surveys of twentieth-century Jewish thinkers.⁵ For Dorff, Jacobs exemplifies an intermediary position whereby the competing claims of faith and reason, particularism and universalism, modernity and tradition, are integrated, accommodated and bridged. Dorff devotes most of his study to examining the way Jacobs articulates his own faith, drawing primarily from the arguments found in *We Have Reason to Believe, Faith* (1968), and *A Jewish Theology* (1973). Upon evaluating Jacobs's appropriation of varied tactics towards establishing faith in God (reason, experience, the existentialist "leap of faith," the "way of revelation-tradition'), Dorff concludes that Jacobs

...does not rely on one approach alone but learns from many theories in creating his own synthesis. With respect to God, he understands the four ways to Him as not only philosophically complementary but developmentally so.⁶

Dorff's insight into the synthetic nature of Jacobs's theological vision, as much as his treatment of any its particulars, is a significant contribution to understanding Jacobs's theological legacy. As we shall come to see, Jewish theology as understood by Jacobs is

⁵Elliot Dorff, "Louis Jacobs," in S. Katz, *Interpreters of Judaism*, 167-187. Neil Gillman, "Louis Jacobs," *Conservative Judaism* 55, no. 4 (2003).

⁶E. Dorff, "Louis Jacobs," 180.

neither systematic nor monolithic, but rather an ongoing and multi-faceted effort towards engendering and sustaining faith.

N. Gillman's brief essay affirms the findings of the aforementioned studies and adds a complementary insight, pointing out the stylistic manner by which Jacobs makes his claims. In drawing attention to the "excursus form" in which Jacobs's theology is often written, Gillman highlights an aspect of Jacobs's oeuvre that merits further expansion; namely, the degree to which the style of Jacobs's work is also part of its message. Jacobs's photographic memory allowed him to offer an exhaustive bibliography on any given sphere of exploration—popular, scholarly, Jewish and secular. And yet, Jacobs's theology is always phrased with a tentative humility, expressed in an urbane manner. Indeed, the style of Jacobs's excurses alone is a powerful theological statement in that it asserts the pluralistic and historically varied nature of the Jewish theological project.

Paul Morris's study offers a model that appreciates Jacobs's accomplishments while remaining unflinching in his criticisms.⁷ Morris suggests that Jacobs's work may be understood as a product of a particular moment, specifically, the History of Religions scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s, a scholarly mood that

...tended to emphasize the similarity of religious traditions, usually by stressing their supposed universalistic characteristics. This tradition-'liberal apologetics' – based on a creative method of selective proof-texting, made a distinction between lower and higher forms, identifying the latter with contemporary, acceptable liberal positions. Religious traditions were to be evaluated and

⁷Paul Morris, "The Quest for a Jewish Theology and a Non-Fundamentalist Halakhah" in Louis Jacobs and D. Cohn-Sherbok, *A Traditional Quest: Essays in Honor of Louis Jacobs*, 194-216.

presented in terms of their ‘higher expressions’. These tendencies can be discerned to some extent in Jacobs’s writings.⁸

In suggesting a cultural moment giving rise to Jacobs’s work, Morris offers a useful, albeit limited, prism that brings contextual coherence to Jacobs’ manifold efforts. Morris explicates the manner by which Jacobs distinguishes between ‘factual beliefs’ and ‘interpretive beliefs,’ integrates the claims of scholarship and theology, and separates the eternal from the ephemeral in matters of both practice and belief. The strength of Morris’s study is both that he seeks to consider the integrative dimensions of Jacobs’s diverse interests (e.g., how his studies of rabbinic literature impact his theology), and that Jacobs’s achievements are framed in response and reaction to Schechter’s historical school and Jacobs’s twentieth-century theological contemporaries (Buber, Heschel etc...). Thus, while there are spheres of Jacobs’s oeuvre with which Morris does not engage (e.g. Hasidism), any perceived deficiency is more than mitigated by his comprehensive and insightful study.

Quest

Building on the aforementioned efforts, the organizing principle of the present study of Jacobs’ lifetime achievements will be the concept of a “quest.” Throughout Jacobs’s writing, from early to late, from popular to scholarly, from his inquiries into Jewish mysticism to Jewish law and otherwise, it shall be demonstrated that the notion of a “quest” is the most consistent and personal theological trope to infuse his work and frame his claims. As we shall come to see, it is the notion of a “quest,” available to Jacobs by way of a variety of influences that would formally and informally inform his

⁸Ibid, 197.

writing throughout his life. Indeed, even when not expressly stated, it is the manner by which Jacobs appropriates the language of a “quest” in its manifold implications that will prove to be the Archimedean lever allowing us to understand the breadth and depth of his lifetime achievements.

A small, but telling, metric to measure the centrality of a “quest” to Jacobs’s thinking are the names of the two synagogue journals founded under his leadership entitled *Venture*, and *Quest*.⁹ In his autobiography, Jacobs explains the naming history of the journal to be reflective of his state of mind upon arriving at the New West End:

By this time, I was able to live with the tensions caused by my traditional background and my growing awareness of the implications of modern historical scholarship. My tentative approach was to see Judaism as a ‘quest’, finding solace in the idea that the search for Torah is itself part of the Torah. Together with a young idealist in the congregation, Alan Jacobs, son of Lawrence, a sincere God-seeker if ever I saw one, I edited a synagogue magazine with the appropriate title, I thought, of *Venture*. Here and in study groups, as well as at the meetings of the excellent Centre Society, attached to the synagogue but catering to men and women from all over London, we tried to explore the meaning of Judaism as a quest. I cannot pretend that we came up with many solutions but we all did come to value the idea of the quest as itself a solution.¹⁰

The tensions embedded within Jacobs in light of his varied background, alongside the open religious posture of his congregation, would be the impetus for a formulation that allowed for the tentative and ongoing nature of Jewish theology. Indeed, as Jacobs would preface the first issue of *Venture*, the driving ethos embedded within his search/venture/quest would become evident:

⁹*Venture*, The magazine of the New West End, would begin publication in April, 1956. *Quest*, the literary journal of the New London, would publish only two volumes, in 1965 and 1966. See HWI, 189-190.

¹⁰HWI, 116.

We have called this magazine *Venture* because this summarizes our aim. Our generation is slowly finding its way back to the spiritual treasures of Judaism. There is much evidence in the community of a search for true Jewish values and an honest attempt to apply them. Excessive dogmatism and cocksureness is out of place in the quest for faith, which can only succeed if it is conducted in the spirit of humble inquiry and with a sincere desire to understand. It is a *venture* upon which we should embark, but in matters of faith to seek is to find or better, as Pascal puts it, “Thou would’st not seek me if though had’st not found me”, in the words of the Rabbis, the search for Torah is itself Torah.”¹¹

Even at this preliminary stage, it is worth noting the varied purposes towards which Jacobs’s “venture” was intended. On the one hand, it validated an individual’s spiritual searching, whereby a Jew could turn *back into* the tradition in hope of retrieving Judaism’s spiritual treasures for contemporary application. For Jacobs and his community, a “quest” denoted forward movement and a retrieval of the past, a bridging term by which to establish continuity amidst change. On the other hand, Jacobs’s search signaled a mode of inquiry that gave preference to the search for truth over dogmatic assertions of truth itself. The object of the quest already varied from a search for “God,” for “truth” and for “Torah.” Indeed, as shall become evident, it will be the mood wrought by Jacobs’s quest more than the object of the particular quest at hand that shall stand as his ongoing and signature methodological contribution.

The first, albeit brief, published treatment of Jacobs’s “quest” may be found in *We Have Reason to Believe* (1957). In seeking to synthesize the old and new methods of study (the *Talmid Hakham* and the Professor of Semitics), Jacobs suggested a third path where the competing tensions of the two may be reconciled.

¹¹*Venture* 1:1 (1956), Title page.

... The layman too can recapture, if he is so minded, the grand old Jewish ideal of the study of the Torah for its own sake. This study will be carried out in a spirit of devotion, it will still be a religious duty of the highest order even though it will include the researches made by critical scholars many of whom were not Jews or not religious Jews. He will in fact not be content to search *into* the Torah but to search *for* the Torah, to use every tried method of investigation as God-given. For he will know that the search for the Torah is itself Torah and that to use Bahya Ibn Pakuda's famous illustration, there can be no act more pleasing to the king than the attempt of his subject to read and understand the letter the king has sent him.¹²

Though as early as 1952 Jacobs had written publicly on the need to reconcile critical investigation with pre-critical devotional study, only here did he first articulate a constructive response to the problem, namely to transform the use of the word "Torah" from a specific text or set of texts, to the act of inquiring into those texts.¹³ As noted in Chapter Four, the rhetoric of *We Have Reason to Believe* would shift the authority of the Torah away from its sacred origins toward its enlightening effects on its devotees ("Because the Torah restores the soul therefore it is perfect!").¹⁴ The shift in emphasis from the intrinsic sanctity of the Torah to the ennobling effects of a search for Torah would offer Jacobs a language that sanctions the new methods of investigation offered by "critical scholars."

¹²WHRTB, 102-103.

¹³Louis Jacobs, "The Yeshiva Today," *Torah V'Avodah Organisation of Great Britain and Ireland*. June, 1952. See also Louis Jacobs, "The Talmid Hakham," *Jewish Spectator*, April (1953), 17-20.

¹⁴WHRTB, 105.

Rezeptionsgeschichte of a Quest

Soon thereafter, Jacobs gave a far fuller and more explicit statement of his quest/search, in a manner that sheds light on the *rezeptionsgeschichte* of the idea and its applications. Building on the arguments of *We Have Reason to Believe*, Jacobs's *Jewish Values* (1960) begins with an examination of traditional and contemporary modes of Torah study, leading towards a synthetic approach that could integrate the claims of both. As in his previous book, Jacobs would opt for a third path that did not insist on "truth" being located in the claims of the ancient past or enlightened present, but rather the search for truth itself. Paraphrasing Schechter's essay on the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797):

It is reported that the Gaon of Vilna once said that if he were offered infallible instruction in the Torah by an angel from heaven he would refuse the offer for he wanted to arrive at the truths of Torah through his own efforts. Solomon Schechter, in an essay on the Gaon, compares this to Lessing's saying that if truth and the search for truth were offered to him he would choose the search for truth rather than truth.¹⁵

Just as Schechter's characterizations of the Gaon's views would become Schechter's own, so too with Jacobs's treatment of Schechter. Jacobs's approvingly adopts Schechter's assessment of the life of the Vilna Gaon by way of the German playwright Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) and their shared "longing after the truth." As noted in previous chapters, the combination of Schechter's felicitous style, choice of topics,

¹⁵*Jewish Values*, 24. Worth citing is Lessing's initial formulation: "Not the truth which someone possesses or believe he possesses, but the honest effort he has made to get at the truth, constitutes a human being's worth. For it is not through the possession of truth, but through its pursuit, that his powers are enlarged, and it is in this alone that his ever-growing perfection lies. Possession makes us inactive, lazy and proud – If God held fast in his right hand the whole of truth and in his left hand only the ever-active quest for truth, albeit with the proviso that I should constantly and eternally err, and said to me: 'Choose!', I would humbly fall upon his left hand and say: 'Father, give! For pure truth is for you alone!'" Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Hugh Barr Nisbet, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University, 2005), 98.

religious sensibility and impeccable authority in the Anglo-community would make him a lifetime point of reference for Jacobs, explicitly and otherwise. In this case, Jacobs has once again found in Schechter the content and phrasing by which to fortify his “searching” soul.

In formulating this position, for the first (but certainly not the last) time, Jacobs would turn to the *Maharal*, Rabbi Judah Lowe of Prague, for methodological precedent regarding the benediction recited prior to the study of Torah.¹⁶

Judah Lowe of Prague (1525-1609) taught centuries ago each morning the devout Jew recites the benediction ‘blessed art thou...who commanded us to occupy ourselves with the words of Torah. This teacher pointed out that the form of the benediction is not ‘who commanded us to study the Torah’ for the student of Torah knows only too well that there are to be found frequently contradictory opinions in *Torah* literature, Rabbi A affirming one thing, Rabbi B another. The student cannot know beforehand that the opinions he wishes to understand and master belong to the true Torah, for he is obligated to examine the view of both Rabbi A and B and, where these are contradictory, only one can be right.... The religious duty is ‘to occupy ourselves with the words of Torah’, to examine the conflicting opinions and try to arrive at the truth. Even if the student’s success in arriving at the truth is limited, the attempt itself is the fulfillment of the religious duty of Torah study.¹⁷

In the years ahead, Jacobs would cite the Maharal’s insight that “the search for Torah is Torah itself,” a quotation that, curiously, can not be found in searching any of the

¹⁶See Bezalel Judah Loew ben and Hayim Pardes, *Sefer Tiferet Yisrael* (Tel-Aviv: Mekhon "Yad Mordekhai", 1979), 77-86. On the life and philosophy of the Maharal, see Ben Zion Bokser, *From the World of the Cabbalah: The Philosophy of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954). Also, B. Sherwin’s definitive study, Byron L. Sherwin, *Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague* (Rutherford [N.J.]; London; East Brunswick, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University; Associated University, 1982). On understanding the Maharal’s notion of quest and its usage in mid-twentieth century Jewish theology, I am indebted to Dr. Byron Sherwin’s generous counsel.

¹⁷*Jewish Values*, 28.

Maharal's works.¹⁸ Nevertheless, by framing the task of the student of rabbinic literature to be one of "examining conflicting opinions and try[ing] to arrive at the truth," Jacobs sought to authenticate a non-dogmatic mode of Jewish inquiry, one that could include the methods of critical inquiry.

By 1963, in articulating a quest for the "Torah behind the Torah," Jacobs also cited an intellectual debt to Ernst Simon, who a few years prior gave expression to a non-fundamentalist pedagogy of the Hebrew Bible that sought "to penetrate as deeply as possible into the underlying meaning of the divine original which is present but hidden..."¹⁹ Tellingly, though openly citing Simon in his public remarks, only in his footnotes did Jacobs signal the degree to which Simon understood his conception of revelation to diverge from that of Orthodoxy. In Simon's words:

I believe that this is a Conservative approach to the problem of revelation as differentiated from the Orthodox viewpoint which identifies the actual text of the Hebrew Bible with the divine original as well as from the radically humanistic – including the Reconstructionist and Reform theories - which seem to strip the Bible altogether of its divine character. We claim neither that the divine original is in our hand nor do we admit that there is such an original. We read and teach the Bible as a palimpsest, discovering in it again and again traces of the original word of God. The text we possess reveals the hidden, authentic writ as well as it conceals it.²⁰

¹⁸For instance: "There is much warrant in the Jewish tradition for the view, in the words of Maharal of Prague, that the search for the Torah is itself Torah." Louis Jacobs, *Ask the Rabbi* (Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 1999), 2.

¹⁹See Louis Jacobs, "The Sanction for the Mitzwoth," (London: Society for the Study of Jewish Theology, 1963): 3. Ernst Simon, "Torat Hayyim: Some Thoughts on the Teaching of the Bible," *Conservative Judaism* XII, no. 3 (1958), 4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

Citing Simon approvingly, Jacobs explained the implications of the “new” picture of the Bible as rendered by critical investigation:

According to this picture the Bible is still the source of our faith and religion. It is still the world-transforming word of God. But it is now seen that the Bible is not, as the mediaeval Jew thought it was, a book dictated by God but a collection of books which grew gradually over the centuries and that it contains a human as well as a divine element.²¹

Throughout his life, Jacobs maintained that the case for plenary inspiration is not made by the Torah itself, but by later rabbinic interpreters. As such, he would construct alternative vocabularies by which to express the complex notion that Scripture contains an admixture of both human and divine content.

As important as it is to identify those thinkers whom Jacobs would cite directly, we may also consider the shared cultural moment when Jacobs’s theological vision found expression. Beyond Schechter or his illustrious rabbinic forebearers, Jacobs had numerous contemporaries employing similarly styled language. Like many of his Jewish contemporaries, Jacob’s language would adopt the coin of twentieth century religious discourse, ranging in time and temperament from J. Dewey’s *Quest for Certainty* (1929) to M. Eliade’s *Quest: The History and Meaning in Religion* (1969).²²

Likewise, Jacobs could turn to his Jewish contemporaries for shared points of expression. Jacob Agus’s 1941 study *Modern Philosophies of Judaism* would survey four contemporary Jewish theologians (H. Cohen, M. Buber, F. Rosenzweig and M.

²¹Louis Jacobs, "The Sanction for the Mitzwoth," 2.

²²John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1929). Mircea Eliade, *The Quest; History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

Kaplan) guided by one question: “Of what value is this thought to the attempts of our generation to understand the nature of God and his relation to mankind?”²³ The results of Agus’s assessment would be found at the conclusion of his work and in a much later collection of his assembled writings, entitled *The Jewish Quest*.²⁴ Similarly, Emil Fackenheim’s collection of writings from this era would be entitled, *Quest for Past and Future*. Reprinted in Fackenheim’s volume would be his 1952 essay, “Self Realization and the Search for God,” where he seeks to reconcile traditional supernaturalism and the modern humanistic ethic of self-realization leading him to conclude:

An iron logic, it seems has led man from a synthesis found in God, to a synthesis found in an autonomous self, to the surrender of all aspiration toward ultimate standards and ultimate meaning.²⁵

To be sure, the tactics, language and points of reference of Agus, Fackenheim and Jacobs are different on many counts. Nevertheless, the fact that these theologians of a common era, caught between the unacceptable choice of autonomous relativism and textual absolutism would chart out a synthetic middle course of a “quest” should not be missed.

Perhaps more than any other contemporary theologian, it was Abraham Joshua Heschel, upon whom Jacobs had leaned on in his *Jewish Prayer* (1954) that Jacobs turned to frame his “quest.” Heschel’s own tract on prayer, published the same year as

²³Jacob Bernard Agus, *Modern Philosophies of Judaism, a Study of Recent Jewish Philosophies of Religion* (New York: Behrman's Jewish book house, 1941), vii-viii.

²⁴Jacob B. Agus, *The Jewish Quest: Essays on Basic Concepts of Jewish Theology* (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1983).

²⁵Emil L. Fackenheim, *Quest for Past and Future; Essays in Jewish Theology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 35.

Jacobs's) was entitled, *Man's Quest for God*.²⁶ To be sure, long before this publication, Heschel had retrieved the concept of a "Quest for Certainty" in his first English language monograph on the philosophical thought of Saadia Gaon (882-942), stating:

The suspicion of scepticism may redound to the honor of a man's search for truth. We may, indeed, regard Saadia's philosophy as a personal quest for certainty, as an effort to reach evidence about the main issues of things.²⁷

Heschel's assessment of Saadia's thought would find expression in his own theological vision. Indeed, the frequency by which Heschel's publications return to man's 'search' for God and God's 'search' for man, renders evident the perceived utility of a "quest" to frame the task of a modern Jew. Heschel's 1954 publication would identify the act of prayer to be "an emanation of what is most precious in us toward Him, the outpouring of the heart before Him."²⁸ Indeed, altogether similar to Jacobs's search would be Heschel's estimation that "Saadia considered it a divine commandment to search for truth and to help others to attain it."²⁹

Thus, the antecedents to Jacobs's quest stand diverse in character and chronology. Perhaps tracing as far back as Saadia Gaon, certainly to the Maharal, to Schechter, to Pascal, to Lessing, to Simon and to the theo-historical moment in which Jacobs lived, the pedigree of Jacobs's own theological voice can be well identified.

²⁶ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism* (New York: Scribner, 1954).

²⁷ Abraham Heschel, "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 33, no. 3 (1943), 158.

²⁸ A.J. Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 10.

²⁹ A.J. Heschel, "The Quest for Certainty," 114. As cited from Saadia's *Sefer Yesira*, 24.

Before pressing forward, it is well worth pausing to review the manifold implications of Jacobs's "quest." First and foremost, in shifting the focus to the individual searcher, Jacobs would validate an individual's spiritual strivings, a move towards personal autonomy that reflected Jacobs's interest in individual Jews and not ecclesiastical structures past or present. So, too, by turning the locus of the religious experience to the individual, Jacobs's theology could take on a popular tone in that its very success was contingent on it being accessible to the Jews of his congregation. Furthermore, Jacobs's search was understood as a tool by which the new and old learning could be bridged. With the sacred nature of Scripture no longer dependent on its origins ("the genetic fallacy"), Jacobs sanctioned a combination of old and new methods of inquiry, claiming such study to be an inherently sacred task. As a "third-way," Jacobs's quest provided a traditionally phrased interpretive mode by which to steer between the unacceptable options of secularism and fundamentalism. Equally important would be the manner by which a quest may be understood as a response to Jewish dogmatics. By situating the starting point of Jewish theological inquiry as the individual in search of 'truth' and not a particular 'truth' itself, Jacobs gave expression to what would become one of his most daring theological propositions. The authority of religious truth had shifted from the past to the present. Framed as a quest, Jacobs embraced the internal pluralism and contradictions within classical rabbinic literature, not only permitting such an approach, but identifying it as essential to the religious project; in his own words, years later: "The very involvement in the quest is the essential part of the mitzvah [commandment]." ³⁰ Indeed, from 1960 through the end of

³⁰GTI, 48.

his career, not much at all would have changed, save, ironically, the dogmatic manner by which Jacobs's non-dogmatic approach was expressed.

The Style of a Quest

In considering Jacobs's unique intellectual achievements, as important as the substance of his claims, equally significant is the manner or style by which his historical and constructive theological inquiries were conducted. The combination of Jacobs's encyclopedic ease with rabbinic literature, Anglo-roots and scholarly discipline challenged him to construct a rhetorical style that was loyal to his complex pedigree and varied audiences.

With scholarly credentials and sensibilities, but a devotion to congregational life, Jacobs's profile can perhaps best be appreciated as neither an academic nor a homilist, but as a theological educator. With few exceptions, Jacobs would always consider his primary audience to be the quests and ventures of what he called "the Jew in the pew:"

William Temple was the editor of a book called *Essays and Reviews*. And it had a great deal of influence on the Anglican Church. So the critics said this, I don't remember the exact words but something like "these theologians, they're trying hard to present that which Mr. Jones in the pulpit can believe. So Temple said, no, you're wrong I'm not trying to present this to Mr. Jones in the pulpit. I [Jacobs] am Mr. Jones. I am Mr. Jones. You see...don't forget I think especially the Anglo-Jewish background meant a great deal to me."³¹

Unlike many of Jacobs's predecessors in Jewish theological reasoning who wrote their theologies aimed solely towards philosophically capable audiences, Jacobs always

³¹Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

believed himself to be writing for “Mr. Jones” in the pulpit, a category, which despite Jacobs’s learning and erudition, included himself. Though scholarly pursuits would always be near, the notion of being a “popular educator” would always carry with it a certain badge of honor. As he would explain:

The German-type scholarship in which I was trained at University College tended to scorn popular works and, I must confess, this has led me to cringe whenever I see a copy for sale of one of my popular books with its illustrations and attractive cover. However, Anglo-Jewry has a tradition of popular writings on Judaism and I console myself that it is not an entirely unworthwhile aim to help intelligent Jews learn more about Judaism.³²

Jacobs’s penchant for clarity was driven by a variety of pragmatic, cultural and philosophical motivations. Given a lay audience and Anglo-moorings, the “fuzzy thinking” of the German-Jewish thought of Cohen, Buber, Rosenzweig would never resonate with Jacobs. Reflecting on the language of theological instruction in 1969, Jacobs counseled his rabbinic peers as follows:

Let the ideas you express be those of the most profound thinkers but let the language you use with which to express them be that of the daily newspaper. The deeper the subject the greater should be the demand for clear, simple language. Or as someone has said: You do not have to be fat in order to drive fat oxen.³³

Even the manner by which Jacobs advises his colleagues maintains an urbane quality. Like Schechter before him, Jacobs was well aware of the way Anglo-Jewish theologians were dismissed as “the younger brothers of the Germans, putting on the trousers which

³²HWI, 260-261.

³³Louis Jacobs, "The Pulpit as an Instrument of Theological Teaching," in *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America* (Rabbinical Assembly, 1969), 24.

their elder brothers left off wearing years ago.”³⁴ Nevertheless, whether it was because of his perceived lay audience, his Anglo- insistence on clarity of expression, his familiarity with the logical positivists or the analytic tools of classification and specification instilled in him in yeshiva, as significant as the range of Jacobs’s theological achievements is the honest and plainspoken style by which those claims were made that is Jacobs’s signature accomplishment.

Rabbinic Literature

As aware as Jacobs was of the need for the straightforward expression of *his* ideas, so too, he was acutely attentive to the need to give honest expression to his rabbinic predecessors. Thus, while Jacobs strove mightily to characterize and catalog the breadth and depth of classical Judaism in a manner that was true to the indigenous modes of rabbinic thought and categorization, he also sought to give expression to the Jewish canon in a style that was linguistically and culturally accessible to Anglo-Jewry. It is the “prismatic power” by which Jacobs selects, culls, translates and organizes the ancient truths of the tradition, re-presenting them in a manner both honest to the past, and sympathetic to his English context that stands perhaps as his most distinctive stylistic and substantive attainment.³⁵

³⁴See S. Schechter, “Four Epistles to the Jews of England” in S. Schechter, Alexander Marx, and Frank Isaac Schechter, *Studies in Judaism. Third Series*, 183.

³⁵Particularly helpful are M. Fishbane’s assessments of the achievements of Nahum Glatzer, the strength of whose translations and anthologies were their lack of editorial artifice, all towards re-vivifying the tradition in a “hermeneutic of immediacy.” Nahum Norbert Glatzer, Michael A. Fishbane, and Judith Wechsler, *The Memoirs of Nahum N. Glatzer*, Jewish Perspectives. 6 (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1997), 19-20.

For instance, in his assessment of C. Montefiore's "A Rabbinic Anthology," Jacobs identified such a shortcoming in Montefiore's work, going on to caution against this methodological snare in his characteristically expressive style:

... ideas are read into the work which may not have been present in the mind of the author, or may only have been present in the mind of the author in germinal form. There used to be an old jingle:

I dreamt one night that Shakespeare's ghost
Sat for a civil service post.
The subject chosen for the year
Was taken from the play King Lear,
And Shakespeare failed. He did it badly,
Because he had not read his Bradley.

No doubt this is true of rabbinic literature, as it is true of all great literature.³⁶

From Jacobs's very early published articles, Jacobs used his entrenchment in rabbinic literature to identify points of convergence and divergence between rabbinic thought and modern ideational and conceptual thought. For instance, while one of his earliest articles explains the close parallels between the rabbinic hermeneutical principle of Binyan 'Abh and J. S. Mills "Method of Agreement," his next article of that year (1953) would explain how "the conventional identification of the rabbinic *Qal Wa-Homer* with Aristotelian syllogisms is erroneous."³⁷ From his earliest treatments of topics such as "self-sacrifice" and "disinterestedness" in rabbinic literature, to more sophisticated theological explorations such as "The Via Negativa in Jewish and Christian Thought," to short and incisive studies on The 'As If' Concept" (Hebrew: *Ke-ilu*), Jacobs's writing

³⁶Louis Jacobs, "Montefiore and Loewe on the Rabbis," *Claude Montefiore Lecture*, London (1962). Reprinted in Louis Jacobs, *Rabbinic Thought in the Talmud* (Edgeware: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005), 130-131.

³⁷See Louis Jacobs, "The Talmudic Hermeneutical Rule of Binyan 'Abh and J S Mill's Method of Agreement," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 4, no. 2 (1953); and Louis Jacobs, "The Aristotelean Syllogism and the Qal Wa-Homer," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 4, no. 4 (1953).

is filled with an array of phenomenological attempts to present a portrait of rabbinic thought, with the caution of not presuming to be a Talmudic rabbi.³⁸ In the coming pages we shall consider the content of these phenomenological studies on their own merit, and the degree to which they impacted Jacobs's constructive studies. What is critical to note at this stage is Jacobs's lifetime commitment to the unadorned characterization of indigenous modes of rabbinic thought. Well aware of the pitfalls of his predecessors, Jacobs sought to render the modes and substance of an ancient tradition to a contemporary audience.

Just as Jacobs was aware of the dangers of assigning contemporary terminology to ancient categories of thought, he was also concerned with the breadth of rabbinic literature as whole. Jacobs's aforementioned remarks on Montefiore's Rabbinic Anthology go to the heart of addressing this question:

There have been some important studies of rabbinic thinking published in recent years which remind us that, in fact, it is in many ways a complete misunderstanding of the Rabbis to think of them as philosophers. They were not inferior philosophers, they were not bad philosophers or philosophers without an adequate philosophic training. They were not philosophers at all. The thinking of the Rabbis – to use the expression which has now become current, thanks in particular to the work of two men, Max Kadushin and Isaac Heinemann – was not systematic thinking but organic thinking....The rabbis were responding in a direct and elemental way to life's problem, and they realized that life is complex, that life contains contradictions that you cannot fit life into a system and there may be responses, valuable in one particular situation, that will be less than valuable in a different

³⁸Louis Jacobs, "The Via Negativa in Jewish and Christian Thought: The Zohar and the Cloud of Unknowing Compared," in *The Annual Sachs Lecture* (Colchester: Essex University, 1997). Reprinted in Louis Jacobs, *Judaism and Theology: Essays on the Jewish Religion* (Edgware: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005), 10-21. Louis Jacobs, "The 'As If' Concept in Rabbinic Literature," in *Transcript of Aryeh Dorfler Memorial Lecture* (London: Leo Baeck College, 1971).

situation...it is doubtful if the Rabbis would have agreed that you can compile a rabbinic anthology.³⁹

In M. Kadushin, Jacobs would find useful the notion of “value concepts” in that they provided the opportunity to give substance to rabbinic thought without attempting to define them too rigidly or systematically. Indeed, when the second edition of Kadushin’s book was issued in 1965, Jacobs declared the “triumphal” emergence of Kadushin’s central thesis, advising that “No one who wishes to understand the rabbis can afford to neglect his fine insight into the very nature of their thinking.”⁴⁰ Echoing Kadushin’s observations and sensitivities,⁴¹ Jacobs would introduce his book, tellingly entitled *Jewish Values*, as follows:

There is no monolithic system of Jewish values but a series of complex applications of Jewish truth in which the more subtle distinctions and shades of meaning were debated at length by the best Jewish intellects.⁴²

Despite the above stated doubts as to the possibility of writing a rabbinic anthology, Jacobs would go on to do just that. Nevertheless, the title of Jacobs’s work would be consciously *A Jewish Theology* (1973), the indefinite article serving as a mild rebuke to any past or future theologian (e.g. Kaufman Kohler’s *Jewish Theology*) who dared to speak for the entirety of Jewish theological expression.⁴³ Much in the same

³⁹Louis Jacobs, “Montefiore,” 131-132.

⁴⁰Louis Jacobs, “Book Review: The Rabbinic Mind,” *Conservative Judaism* XX, no. 1 (1965).

⁴¹Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1952), 1-10.

⁴²Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Values* (London: Vallentine, 1960), 9.

⁴³Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005. K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered* (New York: Macmillan, 1918).

way that Solomon Schechter's study of "Jewish Theology" was initially entitled *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, Jacobs understood the need for such efforts to be humbly phrased and limited in scope considering the breadth, depth and complexity of rabbinic literature.⁴⁴

So, too, Jacobs's excursions form of writing was unto itself a vehicle to communicate the tentative and pluralistic nature of Jewish theology. Jacobs drew on an extraordinarily diverse array of sources representing a variety of views on any given subject, all the while resisting the temptation to come down definitively on a given topic. By weaving biblical and rabbinic sources alongside medieval, hasidic and contemporary sources, Jacobs's usable "canon" was as wide as it was deep. The breadth of Jacobs's publishing was not merely in the variety of spheres of his inquiries, but in the creative application of those sources towards his constructive works. For example, B. Sherwin notes in his study of Jacobs that as important as Jacobs's masterful translations of "kabbalistic pietica" may be, perhaps more significant is his application of these ideas in his own discussions of contemporary Jewish ethics.⁴⁵

For example, Jacobs's popular *Jewish Personal and Social Ethics* (1990) drew on biblical, medieval, rabbinic, hasidic and modern Jewish sources in formulating his views. Jacobs's depiction of the Jewish ideal of the "good life" employs biblical, rabbinic and medieval sources regarding *Imitatio Dei*, directing the reader towards the importance of 'being yourself.'

⁴⁴See Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), xix. By the 1961 Schocken edition, The 'Some' from the title of Schechter's study was dropped.

⁴⁵B. Sherwin, "Louis Jacobs," 310.

A hasidic master began to depart, in some respects, from the way followed by his father. When the hasidim objected, the master retorted: "I do follow my father. Just as he departed from the way of his father, I, too, follow in his tradition in departing from his way." Or, as Solomon Schechter remarked, "You cannot get your father to write your love letters for you."⁴⁶

Aside from the topic at hand, the intrigue of the above passage is the ease by which Jacobs appropriates sources from across cultural and chronological divides when constructing a position. Jacobs's encyclopedic ease with Jewish literature placed an extraordinary and unexpected range of voices and genres into conversation on any given subject matter.

Indeed, as P. Morris notes, Jacobs's appreciation for the ethical and theological values embedded within Jewish law is emblematic of Jacobs's creative and holistic appropriation of Jewish sources towards reconstructing rabbinic thought and culture. Reacting to Montefiore's inability to use *halakhic* material towards discussing rabbinic thought, Jacobs would insist (paraphrasing A. Kook), that just as there are laws of poetry, there is poetry, or theology in laws. For Jacobs, Jewish observance would represent "Rabbinic thought crystallized in action."⁴⁷ For instance, in Jacobs's *A Jewish Theology* (1973), his discussion of Jewish ethics was informed by rabbinic responsa literature. In one such case, Jacobs explores a responsum by Rabbi M.J. Breisch (1895-1976) of Zurich on the question of whether a doctor is obligated to inform a young woman that her fiancée is suffering from terminal cancer. In unpacking the legal precedents shaping Breisch's ultimate decision (yes, he should inform her), Jacobs

⁴⁶Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Personal & Social Ethics*, (West Orange, N.J.: Behrman House, 1990), 5.

⁴⁷Louis Jacobs, "Montefiore," in *Judaism and Theology*, 138-140.

generates a valuable discussion on the ethics of disclosure.⁴⁸ Alternatively, Jacobs's penchant for extracting theological content from legal material is evident in his compendious survey *Theology in the Responsa* (1975), culling together hundreds of instances in which theological questions are discussed in responsa literature, a *sui generis* project with the stated intent to

...give lie to the view that Jewish theology is un-Jewish and that the *halakhist* concentrates solely on the deed, ignoring the beliefs that provide the deed with its sanction and infuse it with life.⁴⁹

No mere “phenomenological” study, Jacobs's book stands as a powerful argument on the content and concerns of rabbinic legal discourse. As Morris explains: “The most significant element of Jacobs's reinterpretation of the traditional conception of *halakha* is his contention that it is not the traditional practices themselves but the religious values embedded in these *halakhic* institutions that bring humanity closer to God.”⁵⁰

Throughout his life, Jacobs was unrepentant in his view that an internal pluralism was part and parcel of the nature of Jewish thought and theology:

You see I'm frightened by some American thinkers who operate like a big theory. What do you hold? So if you hold this, you mustn't hold that. I've quoted Walt Whitman who is an American. Walt Whitman said, do I contradict myself? Then I contradict myself. I am huge. I contain multitudes.⁵¹

⁴⁸Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 240.

⁴⁹Louis Jacobs, *Theology in the Responsa* (London: Routledge, 1975), x.

⁵⁰P. Morris, *Quest*, 206.

⁵¹Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

Jacobs forever resisted the temptation to essentialize Judaism, either historically or in practice. In his autobiography, Jacobs credits his Rosh Yeshiva Moshe Segal with this instinct that he would carry throughout his life:

In my work of Jewish theology I have been saved from any reductionist thrust by my years at Manchester Yeshiva as a student of the Rosh [Moshe Segal].⁵²

Perhaps more than any one teacher, it is the manifold expressions of Judaism that Jacobs's would encounter over his life time that prevented him from ever conceding any one spokesperson for Judaism. Despite Jacobs's affinity with the historical school, he was well familiar of the "blind spot" that historians such as H. Graetz had regarding the spiritual contributions of Hasidism, a lacuna that Jacobs was both positioned and inclined to address.⁵³ Indeed, from Litvish yeshiva learning, to Habad hasidut, to the German Orthodoxy of S.R. Hirsch, to the Orthodoxy of Anglo-Jewry in all its permutations (not to mention north American Jewish scholarship) Jacobs's wide ranging biography ensured an equally diverse and democratic approach to the totality of Jewish learning.

Contradiction and Paradox

Because of Jacobs's appreciation for the pluralisms embedded within rabbinic literature, throughout his life he would find himself drawn to a range of thinkers who gave sanction to contradiction and paradox as a viable religious category. For instance, in G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936), Jacobs found a rhetorical style guided by the belief

⁵²HWI, 31.

⁵³*Principles of Faith*, 5.

that in matters of faith “being a mixture of two things, it is a dilution of two things; neither is present in its full strength or contributes its full colour.”⁵⁴ Jacobs’s characterizations of Judaism were akin both in rhetoric and content to Chesterton’s assessments of Christian doctrine in that they both sought to “[get] over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, but keeping them both, and keeping them both furious.”⁵⁵

Throughout his writing, Jacobs drew from his Jewish predecessors who employed paradox as a viable category of theological discourse. For instance, in his work on Aaron of Starosselje (1766-1828), Jacobs would direct his efforts on the manner by which this early Habad thinker sought to reconcile the competing impulses of Jewish theology without resigning to unacceptable dualisms. Though Jacobs’s treatment of Aaron would be largely phenomenological, his summary conclusions identify what he believed to be the most potent forces of Aaron’s thought, and perhaps the abiding allure of this thinker:

The key to the whole system is Aaron’s particular solution of how *deus absconditus* can become *deus revelatus*. Aaron’s answer is to draw a distinction between God’s point of view and our point of view... The whole revelatory process is only as seen by us – but the human beings who are themselves part of that process. The distinction is no longer between two aspects of deity, but between two ways of looking at deity.⁵⁶

⁵⁴G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 95-96. Marc Shapiro, in his remarkable study of Jehiel Weinberg suggests Chesterton’s influence on Weinberg’s Orthodoxy. Whereas Shapiro’s comments are based on perceived common tropes of Weinberg and Chesterton, in the case of Jacobs, the number of times Chesterton is quoted are too numerous to count, thus establishing a more direct influence. See Marc B. Shapiro, *Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg* (Portland: Littman Library, 1999), 74-75.

⁵⁵G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 96.

⁵⁶Louis Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity: The Life and Words of Aaron of Starosselje* (London: Vallentine, 1966), 152-153.

In the appendix to his book *Faith* (1968), Jacobs would point to Rabbis Aaron's thought as an example of the ability of Judaism to embrace paradox as an authorized modality of Jewish theology. Indeed, the entire appendix on "Jewish Parallels to the Tertullian Paradox" serves as a brief review of hasidic thinkers, including Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866), Rabbi Aaron, and Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav (1772-1811), who gave sanction to a formulation of cognitive paradox in matters of faith.⁵⁷ Elsewhere in the same volume, Jacobs returned to Judaism's ability to allow diverse and contradictory views on a range of subjects, defending such a condition with an anecdote about another hero of his, the hasidic master Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Horowitz of Ropshitz, The Ropshitzer Rebbe (1760-1827):

...before he was born, an angel showed him two contradictory lists of rules for the conduct of life. In one list he read that a man cannot know the Torah unless he is as cruel as the raven to his wife and children (*Erubin* 22a) but in the other list he read that a man must have more regard for the welfare of his wife and children than for his own (*Hullin* 84b). In one list: "A scholar should be like a flaming fire in his wrath" (*Ta'anit* 4a). In the other: "Who inherits the World to Come? The meek man, who bows low when entering and leaving" (*Sanhedrin* 88b)... The Ropshitzer went on to recount many further contradictions and said that, at the time, he had been lost in thought, contemplating how hard it was to find a way of life in which these contradictions would be resolved. Suddenly he heard the words: "*Mazel Tov!* A male child is born." He remained wondering, and since then has still labored to find the way to follow both sets of rules, however contradictory.⁵⁸

On a range of matters throughout his career, Jacobs contended that Judaism was able to embrace contradictions, and was consistently drawn to thinkers championing such an approach. From Ayer to Starosselje to the Ropshitzer to Chesterton, Jacobs's

⁵⁷Louis Jacobs, *Faith* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1968), 201-209.

⁵⁸Louis Jacobs, *Faith*, 176.

employment of paradox became a signature building block of his constructive theological efforts.

Such considerations as to Jacobs's theological sympathies may also serve as critical tools by which to understand his choice of subject matter. Though Jacobs resisted attempts to understand his phenomenological studies as indicators of his theological claims, it is striking to consider the manner in which the content of Jacobs's studies serves to buttress his own constructive statements of theology. For instance, short monographs on topics such as "Confessions of Ignorance,"⁵⁹ or "The 'As-If' Concept,"⁶⁰ or "Woe to me if I say it. Woe to me if I do not say it,"⁶¹ may at face value be understood as detached studies on the native modes of rabbinic thought and theology. Yet, as the titles indicate, these studies collectively serve as a sustained argument regarding the tentative and non-fundamentalist mode by which Jewish theological claims takes shape.

In this regard, we may also better understand one of Jacobs's most idiosyncratic books, a study on the rabbinic concept of "*Teyku*." Jacobs documents and studies over three hundred instances when the rabbis were faced with an insolvable problem that according to folk etymology, would be decided in the eschatological future.⁶² The

⁵⁹Louis Jacobs, "Confessions of Ignorance," in Mordecai Waxman and Tseviyah Ben-Yosef Ginor, *Yakar Le'mordecai: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Rabbi Mordecai Waxman: Essays on Jewish Thought, American Judaism, and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1998), 133-136.

⁶⁰Louis Jacobs, "The 'As If' Concept in Rabbinic Literature."

⁶¹Louis Jacobs, "Woe to me if I say it. Woe to me if I do not say it," in Mosheh Halamish, ed., *Ish Bi-Gevurot: Studies in Jewish Heritage and History Presented to Rabbi Alexander Safran* (Israel: Behotsat yedide hatan-ha-yovel, 1990). Reprinted in Jacobs, *Rabbinic Thought in the Talmud*, 79-84.

⁶²*TEYKU* - an acronym for "*Tishbi Yetaretz Kushiyyot U'Abayos*," (Hebrew) "The Tishbite (Elijah, the harbinger of the world to come) will resolve problems and difficulties."

intrigue of this book, aside from demonstrating Jacobs's mastery of rabbinic literature, lies in the conclusions it reaches. Ostensibly, Jacobs's study clarified a small but significant understanding of one term—"Teyku." Contrary to previous scholarship, "Teyku" marks the presence of an argument of two equally balanced sides, and not "one to which a solution has yet to be found..."⁶³ In other words, *Teyku* signaled not so much an unsolved problem but an insoluble one. Given that Jacobs's theological career would be marked by a persistent effort to identify and contend with the competing tensions embedded in rabbinic literature and his own biography, it seems altogether possible that as with his other monographs, Jacobs's "*Teyku*," though ostensibly a phenomenological study, stands to be considered as a positive statement serving Jacobs's own theological quest, namely the historic sanction of contradiction in Jewish texts.

Formulating a Theological Position

Given Jacobs's plainspoken, pluralistic and prismatic approach to the expanse of Jewish literature, it is reasonable to ask if and how his studies ever extend beyond encyclopedic accounts of Jewish reviews on particular issues of Jewish content or belief. After all, with an avowedly phenomenological approach and a dogmatic resistance to imposing his own categories of expression onto traditional sources, precisely how did Jacobs formulate his theological vision for the contemporary Jew?

Part of the answer lies in an appreciation of the way Jacobs's writing reflects his perception of classical modes of rabbinic reasoning and argumentation. To put it

⁶³Louis Jacobs, *Teyku: The Unsolved Problem in the Babylonian Talmud: A Study in the Literary Analysis and Form of the Talmudic Argument* (London; New York: Cornwall Books, 1981), 301.

plainly, Jacobs's writing style reflected his own characterizations of Talmudic reasoning:

...the Talmud does have a literary style of its own, provided by the ordering of the material in a dramatic way. It is a style not of words but of ideas. The arguments and debates are so arranged that there is a building up of the discussion step by step until the climax is attained. Information is withheld until it can be given at the appropriate stage for drawing the threads of the argument together, as if the editors are saying: We have been leading you, the student, into tortuous paths and you have gone astray. Now we will show you the true path and all will become clear. The student is led to one side first with one protagonist then with another until all the pros and cons have been exhausted. Even the digressions from the main argument have been planned so as to give the impression of spontaneity, much as a dramatist will use interruptions of the main plot in order to prevent the stereotyping of his play and its characters.⁶⁴

Jacobs's insights into the contrived, conscious and careful arrangement of talmudic material (and their biblical precedents) would inform his notion of religious discourse in his own lifetime.⁶⁵ Jacobs's assessment of the dialectical Talmudic form of argument and counter-argument, thesis and refutation, thrust and parry are consciously or unconsciously appropriated by Jacobs's in his own work.

Indeed, in reviewing Jacobs's phenomenological studies over the course of his career, one is struck by just how closely Jacobs's explorations reflect his

⁶⁴Louis Jacobs, *The Talmudic Argument: A Study in Talmudic Reasoning and Methodology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984), 203-204. As noted in Chapter Two, Jacobs had made a similar point much earlier using slightly more colorful language: "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." Louis Jacobs, "Evidence of Literary Device in the Babylonian Talmud," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 3, no. 4 (1952), 161.

⁶⁵On the indigenous nature of dialectical thinking in Jewish literature, see Louis Jacobs, *Talmudic Argument*, 1-17.

characterizations of native modes of rabbinic thought. Consider, for example, the phrasing of the following conclusions in a variety of Jacobs's 'phenomenological' studies, all of which come after a comprehensive exploration of a particular theme. In each case, the point to consider is not the theme itself, but rather the manner by which Jacobs sets the poles of the debate in order to lead the student to a particular middle-road conclusion:

On "The Afterlife":

As in so many other spheres Judaism steers a middle course, rejecting both extreme other-worldliness and non-attachment and hedonistic indifference to or atheistic denial of the After-life. It is, indeed, possible for a religion to be both this-worldly and other-worldly for, viewed from the aspect of Eternity, this world and the world to come are one...It is this interaction between the two worlds that is at the heart of the paradox expressed by the ancient Jewish teacher: 'Better is one hour of repentance and good works in this world than the whole life of the world to come; and better is one hour of bliss in the world to come than the whole life of this world' [Avot 4:17].⁶⁶

On "Self-Sacrifice":

Dr. Hertz is, of course, right that it would be an impossibility for all men to attempt to go through life, loving their neighbors more than themselves. As the self is the only rule for society. But the rare individual, who...can rise to the heights of giving his life for his friend...is a saint and would be recognized as such by Judaism...⁶⁷

On "Disinterestedness":

Traditional Jewish teaching would certainly not encourage its followers to desist from doing good because their motives are not of the purest But in that teaching, the ideal of "for the sake of Heaven" is never lost sight of, the ideal of the Psalm: "To do Thy will is my desire, O My God".⁶⁸

⁶⁶WHRTB, 124.

⁶⁷Louis Jacobs, "Greater Love Hath No Man: The Jewish Point of View of Self-Sacrifice," *Judaism* 6 (1957), 47.

⁶⁸Louis Jacobs, "Disinterestedness," *Judaism* 6 (1957), 8.

On “Attitudes to God”:

The truth of the matter is that there are two approaches to God, not contradictory but complementary. These are expressed in the words of the triumph and song of victory the Israelites sang at the shores of the Red Sea...

This is my God, and I will glorify him;

My father’s God, and I will exalt him. (Ex. xv.2)

Judaism emphasizes both the concept ‘God of the fathers’ and the need for religious experience expressed in the concept ‘my God’.⁶⁹

On “Attitudes of Judaism to other faiths”:

There is a delicate balance in Judaism between particularism and universalism, so that it is possessed of the depth of one and the breadth of the other...⁷⁰

On “Scholarly vs. Traditional modes of Jewish learning”:

The pioneers in the field of ‘Jewish Science’ were bound to adhere to the principle of the ‘separation of science from faith and life... This one-sidedness can not be redressed. But it would be a spiritual tragedy if this were done by rejecting the tried methods of scholarship in exchange for blind worship of the past...⁷¹

On “The Chosen People”:

The Jew of today is the heir to the whole tradition and this means that here, as in other areas, there are tensions with which he has to learn to live. ... The modern Jew must learn to avail himself of the values inherent in the doctrine while taking due caution against its degeneration. To attempt to live without such tensions is to deprive life of its creativity.⁷²

In each instance, Jacobs consistently identifies the two sides of a discussion, accepts the tensions therein, and seeks to steer a middle course between the two. As with the Talmudic modes of argumentation, the two sides of a particular issue are presented, debated, weighed and, with an air of inevitability, a middle course taken. The sheer

⁶⁹WHRTB, 30.

⁷⁰WHRTB, 136.

⁷¹Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Values*, 30.

⁷²Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 274.

frequency of this rhetorical tactic throughout Jacobs's writing makes it one of the most distinguishing features of his oeuvre.

Years later, Jacobs would offer a fuller and unintended methodological insight into the style of his theological claims at the conclusion of his study *Religion and the Individual*. The book, an extended study on the abiding significance of the individual in Jewish sources, would curiously conclude by hedging on the accumulated evidence. The final paragraphs, in spite of (or more directly, because of) the inter-alia manner in which they were made, are worth citing at length because they serve as an incredibly valuable insight into Jacobs's methodological approach:

It is simply not possible to give a neat answer to the question, for instance, whether Judaism is particularistic or universalistic or whether it is this-worldly or other-worldly or in our case, whether religion centres on the group or the individual To take any aspect of Judaism and to treat it as the norm by quoting proof-texts is to court failure since texts can easily be multiplied on the other side. Ultimately, it is not a question of either/or but of both this/and this, with the individual deciding where to place the emphasis; to choose to live by the emphasis which caters to his spiritual needs while acknowledging that a different emphasis is desirable for those with different needs. Indeed, the same individual may favour one emphasis at one time in his life and under particular circumstances and yet prefer a different emphasis in other times and circumstances. It is no mere quibble to affirm that this fact in itself demonstrates that the individual must be significant, since the final choice is his and his alone...⁷³

In this statement Jacobs provides a methodological thesis by which to understand the 'searching' mode of his inquiries. Rabbinic literature's unsystematic and pluralistic nature of opinion on any one subject would play directly into Jacobs's encyclopedic knowledge, his photographic memory, and respect for the diversity of Jewish expression wrought by his own biography. Jacobs, aware of the eclecticism intrinsic to

⁷³Louis Jacobs, *Religion and the Individual*, 118-119.

Jewish expression, would thus understand the task of the searching Jew as determining what Judaism does or doesn't say on any given subject. While Jacobs's framing of the issues may have goaded a student towards a certain position, Jacobs remained aware that "the final choice is his [the individual's] and his alone." Moreover, Jacobs wrote with a refreshing awareness that the individual's final decision was not so final at all since theological positioning is forever tentative, a personal quest open to being amended throughout a lifetime.

Nevertheless, such considerations would not deter Jacobs from making positive statements concerning Jewish belief. Jacobs's repeated efforts to steer a middle course amongst the many options historically extended by the expanse of Jewish literature would find ready application in his works of "constructive theology." From the beginning to the very end of his publishing career, in stating his prescriptions for Anglo-Jewish institutional and theological life, Jacobs's sustained tactic would be to posit two options, identify their respective shortcomings, and insist on a third way that integrated the viable elements of the rejected options towards creating a dynamic synthesis. Recall for instance, the conclusion of Jacobs's first published letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* and his recommendations for rabbinic education:

...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 Jews' College.⁷⁴

⁷⁴JC, July 28, 1944.

Nearly fifty years later, Jacobs continued to frame his theology as a synthetic choice between two alternatives. Consider the rhetoric by which Jacobs's frames his "signature" issue, the subject of revelation, to which we shall return to in Chapter Seven. Jacobs reviews the fundamentalist views and liberal views, concluding:

Many maintain simply that the new picture is wrong and is no more than an heretical misunderstanding it is right and proper to reject. Others maintain that, indeed, there is clearly a human element in the Torah and that this requires a complete reinterpretation of the tradition. The third view, the one I am trying to expound in this lecture, is that it is possible and desirable to be totally committed to Jewish observance and to treat the mitzvot as divine commands without any sacrifice of intellectual integrity.⁷⁵

Thus, from his earliest institutional recommendations for Anglo-Jewry to his eventual theological positions, Jacobs consistently stakes his position after considering a series of options, understanding their respective strengths and weaknesses and eventually arriving at an inevitable third way. As B. Sherwin noted, such an approach is "consistent with the British proclivity to find a "middle way" between alternative religious positions."⁷⁶ Building on Sherwin's observations, we may further conclude that Jacobs's theological inclinations towards a third-way position, are both British *and* classically rabbinic, or, more precisely, a combination of both.

Excursus: Zionism and Anglo Jewish Consciousness

The implications of Jacobs's "Britishness" extended beyond matters of style or literary points of reference. Difficult to pinpoint but important to consider in this brief excursus is the degree to which Jacobs's Anglo roots impacted his notions of Jewish

⁷⁵Louis Jacobs, *God, Torah, Israel: Traditionalism without Fundamentalism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1990), 28. Hereafter, GTI.

⁷⁶B. Sherwin, "Louis Jacobs," in *Studies in Jewish Theology*, 293.

nationalism and peoplehood. As his biography makes clear, despite plenty of opportunities to leave England for positions of prominence, with the exception of a sabbatical year spent at Harvard, Jacobs remained in England throughout. So, too, despite his marriage to an unabashed Zionist and his own early leadership in religious Zionism, he never once considered emigrating to Israel. Indeed, altogether remarkable is the paucity of writings on the implications of the modern state of Israel for contemporary Jewish identity, a noteworthy lacuna given the encyclopedic range of Jacobs's writing and the treatment of the topic amongst Jacobs's twentieth-century Jewish theological contemporaries (e.g. A. Heschel, J. Soloveitchik, M. Buber, E. Fackenheim and D. Hartman).

Jacobs's loyalty and attachment to Anglo-Jewry is stated most explicitly in a short lecture delivered in 1981. His remarks on the subject, significantly to an Israeli audience, signal his strong affection and identification with his country of origin:

I know it is unfashionable to say so and I am particularly hesitant for obvious reason to say it here [Israel], but I believe that there are close affinities between the Jewish and the British character. Both have a strong sense of justice and of fair play.... If there was an Ernest Bevin there was also a Balfour and a Churchill and further back a George Eliot and a Disraeli. Both characters are blessed with a sense of humor, directed especially against themselves, and ability to take life seriously without becoming too self-righteous or fanatical...⁷⁷

Jacobs's remarks enumerate commonly shared values between Jews and Englishmen, such as patriotism, biblicism and a universal spirit. Regardless of whether such traits are in fact characteristic of either the Jewish or British character, it is noteworthy that

⁷⁷Louis Jacobs, "Jewish National Consciousness in the Anglo-Jewish Community: An Analysis," in *President of Israel's Sixth International Seminar on World Jewry and The State of Israel* (Israel: 1981), 11.

Jacobs posits how these two points of identity co-exist with ease. Describing the average “English Jew,” an unsubtle proxy for his own views, Jacobs explains:

...while on the political scene there may be dual loyalties, psychologically his Britishness and his Jewishness exist easily side by side not as suspicious partisans but as true friends and neighbors. Your average English Jew may still believe that he is in *Galut* [exile] but he believes that if the Jew has to be in *Galut* there is no nicer place to be and nowhere, apart from in Israel, where he can feel more at home than in the British Isles, a little country without much power today but still a green and pleasant land of tolerance, culture and sophistication in which a Jew can breathe easily in freedom and where he can practise his Judaism without let or hindrance. More to the point for our analysis, he can experience his Jewish national consciousness without in any way feeling a traitor to the land in which he was born or where he was welcomed with open arms.⁷⁸

Thus, while Jacobs would describe Anglo-Jews to be “Jews first and Britishers second,” and never flinch from praising Israel’s achievements, Jacobs’s entrenchment in his Anglo context remains one of his most distinguishing features. In typical understated fashion, Jacobs concluded his remarks to his Israeli audience with the following personal reflection:

I won’t go so far as to say that it is advantageous to have been born and raised in the Anglo-Jewish community, but I’m certainly not ashamed of it.”⁷⁹

Beyond his personal affections for his Anglo-Jewish community, Jacobs’s restrained Zionism also reflects a theological stance in that he resisted assigning the State of Israel any theological valence, and as such, it stood beyond the purview of a Jewish theologian. Altogether telling is his late life lecture on the subject of Israel, in

⁷⁸Ibid., 11.

⁷⁹Jacobs, “Jewish National Consciousness,” 29.

which as part of a three part series on “God, Torah and Israel,” this final lecture on Israel never once mentions the state of Israel, choosing instead to examine the doctrine of the Chosen people and the subject of Jewish eschatology.⁸⁰ So, too, in Jacobs’s remarks on the subject of “Zionism after 100 Years,” Jacobs’s insights are devoted to outlining a non-fundamentalist approach to Zionism. First and foremost, as a non-fundamentalist, Jacobs explains:

We find it hard to accept the view that *Eretz Yisrael* [The land of Israel] is a divinely promised land in a direct sense, because we have become accustomed to the dynamic view of Jewish history, including sacred history.⁸¹

Holiness, Jacobs explains, should not be understood to reside “in a quasi-physical way in the soil [of Israel].” In insisting that the state of Israel be understood in a non-fundamentalist way, Jacobs further reconsidered the implications of such a concept. For instance, in regard to those whose lives were lost in defense of the Jewish state:

Brave men and women have been prepared to lay down their lives that the state of Israel may endure, but the theological basis for their sacrifice is that their courage and martyrdom was that of freely choosing individuals on behalf of other individuals. To sacrifice one’s life for a state, no matter how nobly conceived, is idolatry. Indeed, the nobler the conception the greater the danger of idolatry.⁸²

Jacobs’s non-fundamentalist vision resists assigning religious martyrdom for fallen soldiers in defense of a modern state. Thus, not surprisingly, Jacobs staunchly rejects attaching any messianic significance to the modern State:

⁸⁰GTI, 57-80.

⁸¹Ibid., 211.

⁸²Ibid., 214.

Many religious Zionists now speak of the emergence of the State of Israel as: *athalta de-geulah*, ‘the beginning of the Redemption’, this wish to introduce messianism into the realities of present-day political life. This is a very dangerous thing to do, since realized, or even partly realized, eschatology tends to justify actions and thought that otherwise would be unjustifiable.... This is not merely a question of semantics. Yes, we have to dream of Zionism for the future; dreams are very important. But they ought not to be feverish dreams.”⁸³

As Jacobs would state succinctly in his 1973 publication *A Jewish Theology*, “Jewish nationalism is no substitute for religion.... Neither the land of Israel, nor secular Hebrew culture, nor the Jewish people themselves should be worshipped.” Though a lifetime Zionist and lover of Hebrew literature, Jacobs forever guarded against “the apotheosis of the Jewish nation.”⁸⁴ Jacobs’s ease in England combined with his fierce objections to assigning religious significance to the land or state of Israel would render his Zionism moderate in expression.

Aside from the aforementioned reasons, there may be a more personal aspect to explain Jacobs’s lukewarm religious Zionism. As his public profile grew more contentious in the early 1960s, the Anglo-Orthodox Jewish community was pitted against each other as various factions chose to side either with or against Jacobs. While Jacobs knew full well that his progressive views were a break with the yeshiva world of his youth, he could never forgive those who, despite privately sharing his beliefs, publicly broke ranks with him. For Jacobs, the fact that his old friends in the religious Zionist community sided against him in the “Jacobs Affair” signaled not only a personal slight but a lack of intellectual integrity that he could never understand or forgive. This

⁸³Ibid., 216.

⁸⁴Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 281

personal betrayal, forever lingering with Jacobs, would inevitably impact his willingness to give full expression to the religious Zionism so integral to the first half of his life.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Interview with Naomi Jacobs, January 2, 2008.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AN UNEASY 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.

- Louis Jacobs, *We Have Reason to Believe*, 9.

In formulating his theological positions, Jacobs sought to avoid charges of what he understood to be the "pitfalls" of modern Jewish apologetics: 'obscurantism,' 'religious schizophrenia,' and 'intellectual dishonesty.' Indeed, as our previous chapter demonstrated, while Jacobs recognized and even celebrated the pluralistic and sometimes contradictory nature of Jewish theology, in constructing his own positions, he sought to formulate a quest that reflected a coherent and integrated stance, compelling to both the religious and intellectual demands of the contemporary Jew. Jacobs would forever be guided by the ideal "that a synthesis is possible between the permanent values and truth of tradition and the best thought of the day."

This final chapter will seek to evaluate the manner by which Jacobs developed his synthetic positions and assess the degree to which he was successful. While the range of Jacobs's writing extended to an array of theological topics, the present efforts will focus on three areas: belief, the sanction of *mitzvot* and development of Jewish law. These three topics, subjects that Jacobs wrote about at length, allow us to consider the roots of Jacobs's views, study his eventual positions and evaluate the success of his proposed synthesis. In each case, we shall see how the diverse influences of Jacobs's

biography shape his stance and awkwardly inform each other throughout. It is the uneasy nature of Jacobs's efforts at synthesis that shall reveal him to be a bifurcated soul, struggling mightily to balance the competing and insoluble tensions wrought by his own biography.

A) Faith

Jacobs's approach to faith is best understood by way of an analytical distinction regarding belief that is rooted in his personal biography and remains an ongoing tension throughout his writing. For Jacobs, faith is expressed in two varieties: personally and historically considered. The former category of faith is alternatively referred to by Jacobs as '*emunah*,' 'interpretive,' or 'non factual' beliefs, and refers to convictions of a personal and non-rational nature. Here, belief in God is derived not from any empirical or historical evidence, but by way of the subjective experiences of the believer. The latter 'historically' or 'cognitively' considered' category of faith, alternatively referred to as 'factual beliefs,' is a 'propositional' or 'reasoned' faith that is subject to the tests of philosophic reason, history, verification and thus constant reevaluation.

Faith: Personally Considered

Jacobs's fascination with the "personal act of faith," was in many respects, an integral part of his "quest," in this case, a quest for God. Throughout his career, Jacobs would turn to the raw, non-rational and personally-felt faith as found in his knowledge of Jewish mysticism, including Kabbalah, Hasidism and specifically the thought of Habad. As a historian of religion, Jacobs could always point to his cultural context for the factors giving rise to his interest in mysticism:

A number of factors have been at work in promoting the fresh interest in the subject. On the general religious scene these are: the decline of authoritarian religion, demanding a more individualistic and experiential approach; the opening up of new vistas through the publication in translation of the classics of Oriental thought; the recognition by Otto and others of the non-rational element in religious experience; and the irrepressible psychological need for what has been called the exploration of 'inner space' in the age of the cosmonaut and of the insignificance of man and his whole planet in the kind of cosmos revealed by modern astronomy.¹

While such reflections may indeed be correct, Jacobs's enduring fascination with the irrational nature of faith as found in his studies of Jewish saints, saintliness and Jewish mysticism must be understood as a deeply personal feature of his theological vision.

Indeed, Jacobs's later works would introduce his fascination with Jewish mysticism by way of personal testimony. Reflecting back on his early yeshiva teacher Rabbi Yitzhak

Dubov:

My mystical inclinations, whether real or imaginary, were fortified when Rabbi Dubov invited some of his students to his home to meet Rabbi Yitshak Horowitz, known as Reb Yitshak Masmid (*Masmid* is the Ashkenazi Hebrew terms used of someone who constantly studies Torah), a leading exponent of mystical theology in the Habad vein. This emaciated figure seemed to us youngsters a typical ascetic (none of us had actually known of this term) whose head reached to the heavens... I recall Reb Yishak addressing the yeshiva students one night immediately after we had carried out the traditional ceremony of the benediction over the moon (kidush levanah), a mystical rite if ever there was one.... When we yeshiva students went out into the cold night, bathed in the light of the moon, and performed the rite, we would have had little inclination to engage in demythologizing even if we had known of this concept. We were attracted by the sheer mystery of the rite, including, or perhaps one should say especially, the magical elements; the threefold repetitions, the dancing towards the

¹"Mysticism," *Judaism* 16:4 (1967): 475.

moon...and the greetings to one another as if we had just returned from a long journey, as indeed, we had.²

Jacobs's early immersion in Jewish mysticism, like that of Schechter before him, would forever impress on him a reflexive connection with what he believed to be the non-rational heart of the religious experience, defined by Schechter as "the effect of a personal religious experience when man enters into close communion with the divine."³ Indeed, it should not be missed that Jacobs would author a book on "Saints and Saintliness," the same title as Schechter's essay on the subject.⁴ In language reminiscent of W. James's own definition and classification of saintly conduct and excesses, Schechter and Jacobs, despite their historicist moorings would remain forever drawn to the personal aspect at the heart of the religious experience.⁵

Jacobs's lifetime of surveys of Jewish mysticism, saintly personalities and "boswells" of mystical life collectively serve as a lifetime of redressing a perceived inattention to this critical aspect of the Jewish religious cannon. For Jacobs, Hasidism granted him a spiritual vocabulary where theology was not contingent on demonstrable proofs, but on sincere "God Seekers," who sought to get their heads into heavens." In his own words:

²BRD, 185-186.

³"Saints and Saintliness" in S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism: A Selection* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 123-149.

⁴Louis Jacobs, *Holy Living: Saints and Saintliness in Judaism* (Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1990). S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism: A Selection*, 123-149.

⁵See William James and Martin E. Marty, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, The Penguin American Library (New York: Penguin Books, 1982). "At the heart of religious experience is "saintliness," 271. On the Jamesian emphasis on the first hand religious experience, see most recently Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2002).

...daring stormers of the heaven who taught that God needs man for his grace to flow throughout all creation and that no human deed is trivial since, for good or for ill, it has a tremendous cosmic effect.⁶

A case in point is Jacobs's lifetime fascination with the mystical notion of *devekuth* to God, an interest that may be studied by way of his research on the little studied hasidic master Rabbi Aaron ben Moses Ha-Levi Horowitz of Starosselje (1766-1828). Building on G. Scholem's treatment of the ecstatic notion of *devekuth*, or attachment to God, Jacobs was drawn to Rabbi Aaron's development of the rapturous proposition of "the extinction of the world and the self in union with God."⁷ Jacobs would be the first to translate and consider Rabbi Aaron's acosmic/panentheistic theology ("all is in God").⁸ Far from a detached study of an idiosyncratic thinker, Rabbi Aaron represented for Jacobs an important voice in the pantheon of Jewish theological thought, worthy of contemporary usage and application:

Aaron's significance in this history of Jewish thought is that he is both the most systematic and the most consistent representative of the Habad philosophy, as well as being the one thinker of this school who does not shrink from drawing the most radical

⁶Louis Jacobs, "Introduction," in Lawrence Fine, *Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety, the Beginning of Wisdom*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), ix.

⁷Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), 122-123. Jacobs's fullest estimation of Scholem is found in Louis Jacobs, "Aspects of Scholem's Study of Hasidism," *Modern Judaism* 5, no. 1 (1985). Jacobs maintained an occasional correspondence with Scholem (1897-1982). Jacobs Archive.

⁸Jacobs's working definition of Panentheism/Acosmism is as follows: "Historically considered, pantheism is the doctrine that God is immanent only. He is the universe and the universe is He. Deism on the other hand, holds that God is transcendent only. He is apart from the universe. Conventional theism holds that God is both transcendent and immanent. He is other than the universe and yet is in the universe. A new term is required for that mystical philosophy of theism which holds that while God is *more* than the universe, more than a name given to the totality of things, the universe is in Him. There are, in fact, two terms which have been suggested to convey this thought. These are *panentheism* ('all is in God') and *acosmism*.... Prominent among Jewish panentheists or acosmists is the subject of this study, Aaron ben Moses Ha-Levi Horowitz." Louis Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity: The Life and Words of Aaron of Starosselje*, 11.

conclusions from its premises. In his work there is found a highly unconventional acosmic or panentheistic philosophy. For Aaron, monotheism is not only the doctrine that there is only one God or that God is unique but that, beneath the multiplicity of the finite world, there is only God and that all things are embraced by his perfect unity. Aaron's passion, to which he dedicated his life, was to achieve the 'lower' and the 'higher' unification. More than any other traditional Jewish thinker, he is the great seeker of God's unity.⁹

Hasidic panentheism as expressed by Rabbi Aaron would always hold a special appeal for Jacobs in "its stress that all is in God, that He is 'closer than breathing and nearer than hands and feet'"¹⁰ For Jacobs, the appeal of Hasidism was its religious expression of "full creative imagination...with a heart warming naïveté masking a mature sophistication."¹¹ Perhaps most importantly, it represented the possibility of spontaneous and personal engagement with God, uncluttered by the burdensome efforts and vocabulary of theologians and philosophers.

In this regard, an instructive study may be found in a short appendix to Jacobs's *Faith*. In a brief review of the Jewish parallels to the Tertullian paradox, Jacobs takes on the contention of (among others) his old nemesis, Isidore Epstein that "No Jewish thinker is on record as denying the incompatibility of faith and reason." Asserting that "historically considered this is quite untrue," Jacobs lists an array of Jewish thinkers who have adopted such a position, including the founder of Habad, Schneor Zalman of Liady (1747-1813), his grandson Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866), his favorite disciple, the aforementioned Rabbi Aaron, and the longtime object of

⁹Ibid., 157.

¹⁰Louis Jacobs, "Relevance and Irrelevance," 138. Elsewhere, Jacobs would draw attention to Rabbi Aaron's distinction between God's point of view and that of humanity. See Louis Jacobs, *Seeker*, 152 and *Religion and the Individual*, 89-90.

¹¹Ibid.

Jacobs's fascination, Nahman of Bratzlav (1772-1811). Each of these scholars, Jacobs demonstrates, recognized that "faith is bound to contradict reason because there is an 'absurdity at the heart of faith.'"¹²

Thus, from the hasidic ideal of *devekuth*, to Jacobs's fascination with the notion of *hithpa'alut* (ecstasy) as found in Dobh baer of Lubavitch's *Quenteros Ha-hithpa'alut* (Tract on Ecstasy),¹³ to his inquiries into Rabbi Aaron's efforts to conform the human will with the divine, Jacobs would demonstrate an ongoing kinship with the non-rational heart of faith, guided by the belief that embedded within humanity lies a spark of the divine longing to be reunited with God by way of prayer, deed and contemplation. In Jacobs's own words:

There is to be found among some of the Jewish mystics, the astonishing idea of the 'divine spark' in man, according to which, ultimately, there is something in the human soul, or, at least, in the Jewish soul, that is itself indistinct from God.¹⁴

Thus, Jacobs's personally considered faith is derived not from 'reasons' to believe, but rather a theological *a priori* rooted in his spiritual biography. As he would state:

...the Jewish believer opts for God in complete conviction that this belief makes sense of human life with all its difficulties in a way in which no other philosophy does. It was on the basis of this, for example, that Judah Ha-Levi begins his arguments for faith. He does not argue for God as Creator of the world but as the Deliverer of Israel from Egyptian bondage.¹⁵

¹²*Faith*, 206.

¹³Dov Baer Schneersohn and Louis Jacobs, *Tract on Ecstasy* (London: Vallentine, 1963).

¹⁴Louis Jacobs, *Religion and the Individual*, 42.

¹⁵*A Jewish Theology*, 20.

From his early rejection of M. Kaplan's naturalistic formulations of Judaism to his late life reflections, the arguments impelling Jacobs's faith would lie beyond reason.

Altogether telling is the way Jacobs would distinguish the controversies surrounding his views on revelation and the mid-1960s 'Honest to God' debate surrounding Bishop John Robinson's controversial secular theology:

I was not and am not now a Jewish Bishop of Woolwich. I do not hold and never have held that belief in God should be reinterpreted in non-personal terms nor do I hold any kind of 'Death of God' philosophy, which is not itself dead and buried, although resurrected from time to time. Belief in a personal God, the God of the Jewish tradition, in no way offends anyone's reason. On the contrary, it is this belief that 'makes sense' of human life in general and Jewish life in particular.¹⁶

Whatever the "deathblow" dealt to the classical proofs for God by modern philosophical criticism, Jacobs's early religious experiences would ensure that a personal, non-rational faith would always find an integral place in the matrix of his theology.

Faith: Historically Considered

Despite being anchored by a deeply personal, perhaps inexpressible faith, Jacobs would write widely on the historical development of Jewish belief over the ages. Like Schechter before him, Jacobs's historicist moorings made him keenly aware that the cultural and intellectual contexts that gave rise to a Maimonides, Rashi or otherwise, were different for each and certainly than that of the contemporary theologian:¹⁷

In other ages and against a different cultural background a different attempt is required at understanding the basic principles of Judaism. The possibility of openness to new knowledge and the

¹⁶BRD, 26.

¹⁷S. Schechter, "The Dogmas of Judaism," in S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism: A Selection*, 73-104.

reinterpretation of essential beliefs is no illusion since, historically considered, the basic principles themselves are the product of a God-seeking people reflecting on their destiny and their role in the divine scheme – a people trying to find God and be found by him. The speculative, interpretive element is itself basic to Jewish faith.¹⁸

For Jacobs, Maimonides did not have the final word in Jewish theology; in fact, historically considered, the principles of Jewish faith have changed with every age, in accord with the “best thought of the day.” As such, the authority for Jewish belief is to be found not in any one set of beliefs, but the ongoing search for those beliefs by the inquiring Jew of every age.

A rather telling indicator of Jacobs’s appreciation for the historical development of Jewish belief comes by way of his *Theology in the Responsa* (1975). This *sui generis* study of theological topics as they arise in responsa literature is ostensibly intended to “give the lie to the view that Jewish theology is un-Jewish.”¹⁹ In fact, this study may be read as a striking statement vis-à-vis the nature of Jewish belief across the ages. Upon noting the variety of views on an array of theological topics throughout the history of responsa literature, Jacobs draws the inevitable conclusion regarding the relationship between the conditions and context of the age and the nature of Jewish belief:

One might almost speak of theological halakha. . . . It is not difficult to see how the climate of opinion in a particular age, even in a particular land, influenced theological decisions, but then this surely also applies to halakhic decisions. It is doubtful whether any teacher can ever rise entirely above his age to survey religious

¹⁸Louis Jacobs, “Faith,” in Arthur Allen Cohen and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs* (New York: Scribner, 1987), 237-238.

¹⁹Louis Jacobs, *Theology in the Responsa*, x.

questions of great moment in the completely detached manner in which the angels are said to carry out their functions on earth.²⁰

Theology in Responsa serves as an extended defense of the changing nature of Jewish theology over the ages. As such, Jacobs's readily acknowledged the lack of a final authoritative system on matters of Jewish belief and the importance of the individual human personality. Such a realization, far from being a cause for concern, would signal a delightful freedom of conscience, or in his own words: "...no man need say that there is no room for him to lodge in Jerusalem."²¹

Jacobs did not shy away from giving contemporary application to his observations regarding the historic development of Jewish belief. In fact, Jacobs understood that the starting point for his constructive efforts in theology was his observations as a historian of religion:

The contemporary Jewish theologian must endeavor, however inadequately, to do for our age what the great mediaeval theologians sought to do for theirs. He must try to present a coherent picture of what Jews can believe without subterfuge and with intellectual honesty.²²

Indeed, Jacobs's rare criticism regarding Schechter was his estimation that the historical school failed to apply its findings regarding the historical development of belief towards constructive theological statements for the contemporary Jew. As a theologian, Jacobs understood his task to define the freedoms and restraints of Jewish belief for his contemporary community:

²⁰Ibid., 344.

²¹Ibid., 345.

²²AJT, 4.

It is Judaism as a living faith, not only as a happy hunting ground for the student of antiquities that we require. We agree with Schechter that there *are* dogmas in Judaism. But we must try, at least, to take up the matter where Schechter left off and ask ourselves what these dogmas are and if and how they can be re-interpreted for the Jew of today.²³

In matters of faith, Jacobs would ultimately prove to be critical of his theological godfather. In Jacobs's estimation, Schechter failed to offer a contemporary expression of Jewish belief, a task that Jacobs would make his own; namely to discover what the contemporary Jew, given the findings of the age, can presently believe with integrity.

An Uneasy Synthesis

At this stage, we may begin to appreciate the two "kinds of faith" embedded within Jacobs. Historically considered, Jewish belief, evolving throughout history, must be reconsidered in every age. Personally considered, however, Jacobs's "act of faith" transcended historical or rational considerations. It is to the question of how Jacobs did or did not reconcile these competing modes of belief that we now turn.

In seeking to navigate between these two "types of faith," Jacobs had the model of his Manchester mentor, Alexander Altmann. In a 1951 address on the "Modern Analysis of Faith," Altmann observed a distinction in the nature of religious faith that would, in time, assert itself in Jacobs's own discussions of the topic. Distinguishing the modern's task from that of the medieval:

The medieval discussion of faith was primarily concerned with the claims to truth of revelation and reason respectively. It investigated

²³Louis Jacobs, *Principles*, 7.

the validity of faith against the authority of reason, but left the nature of the act of faith as such more or less unexplored.²⁴

Altmann's survey of the "two types of faith" made clear that the modern Jewish theologian, unlike his medieval counterpart, is concerned not so much with the systematic investigation or defense of theological claims, but rather the non-rational character and function of the *act* of faith.²⁵ Altmann's address (delivered to a conference of Anglo-ministers) sought to spur the gathered religious leadership towards awakening the primal faith of their parishioners. Altmann, who had previously written on the historical development of Jewish belief, would nevertheless counsel a less systematic approach to his colleagues in the ministry:

...a faith proved to the hilt ceases to be faith. Rationally to demonstrate the dogmas of faith is doing a distinct disservice to religion.²⁶

Altmann's distinction between the historic development of Jewish theology and the raw act of faith as well as his emphasis on the latter over the former would not be lost on Jacobs.

Shortly thereafter, in a series of sermons on "Religion and the Individual" written soon after arriving at his New West End pulpit, Jacobs explored the nature of

²⁴Alexander Altmann, "The Modern Analysis of Faith," in *Ninth Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers* (London: 1951), 33. This address is cited at length in WHRTB (1957), 31-32.

²⁵Though never cited by Altmann, his address would be delivered the same year as the English publication Martin Buber's *Two Types of Faith*, itself a study of the fundamental immediacy of Israel's biblical faith as compared to that of the Christian gospels. Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1951). See also, Altmann and Jacobs's old Manchester colleague's study of the subject: R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Faith, Hope and Trust: A Study of the Concept of Bittahon," in *Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies London*, ed. J.G. Weiss (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964). Jacobs would go on to cite this paper in his own work on the subject, first presented by Werblowsky ten years earlier at the Institute of Jewish Studies, Manchester on November 30, 1954. See also, M. Kaddushin's discussion of the subject in Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind*, 42-43.

²⁶A. Altmann, "Analysis," 36.

the relationship between humanity and God, distinguishing between faith wrought by a personal encounter with God and that arrived at by way of assent to a series of theological propositions:

But it is not only because each person approaches God in his own way and conceives of Him in accordance with his own personality, that we can speak of man and *his* God. We use this expression because religious truth is different from truths about the nature of the world in that to fully comprehend religious truth a man must be personally involved.... For in the religious view it is not the bare fact of God's existence that matters but man's personal relationship with God. Reciprocity is the essence of religious experience. Man must be able to say that God is *his* God. [italics original]²⁷

As we shall come to see, Jacobs forever maintained a distinction between two different kinds of belief, personal and propositional. Distinct but interdependent, Jacobs believed a synthesis was necessary.

Thus, from popular to scholarly formulation, Jacobs's explorations of Jewish belief maintained ongoing attention to the "two types of faith." As he would explain in his earliest published treatment of the subject:

In other words, a distinction must be drawn between *proof* and *conviction* - Proof is one of the ways to conviction, but there are other ways too. So that the real question is not whether the existence of God can be proven but whether belief in His existence is overwhelmingly convincing.²⁸

Jacobs went on to clarify that in matters of faith, it was not an either/or proposition, but both/and:

The truth of the matter is that there are two approaches to God, not contradictory but complementary. These are expressed in the

²⁷Louis Jacobs, "Religion and the Individual," *Venture Supplement* 1, no. 2 (1955), 19-20.

²⁸WHRTB, 26. See E. Dorff, "Louis Jacobs," 171.

words of the triumphant song of victory the Israelites sang at the shores of the Red Sea when, with the miseries of their past behind them and the promised land in front, they found God.

This is my God, and I will glorify him;

My father's God, and I will exalt him (Ex xv.2)

Judaism emphasizes both the concept of 'God of the fathers' and the need for personal religious experience expressed in the concept 'my God.'²⁹

Given the theological models of Altmann and Schechter as well as the competing impulses of his yeshiva experiences and critical sensibility, Jacobs forever sought to balance personally and historically considered modes of Jewish belief, which in Jacobs mind were equally sanctioned by the Jewish tradition.

Case in point is his *Principles of the Jewish Faith* (1964), where Jacobs created two classes of beliefs, *interpretive* and *factual*. The former acts of faith "of most fundamental significance" are incapable of verification, or understood as assertions about the nature of human existence and the "truths by which men live." The latter "factual beliefs" may be abandoned if they are discovered to contradict the "facts of the material universe."³⁰ So, too, in his study *Faith* (1968), Jacobs further elaborated on this distinction, adopting the vocabulary of linguistic philosophy:

In reality 'belief in' is qualitatively different from 'belief *that...*', in a different dimension as it were. 'Belief *that...*' is cognitive, intellectual, propositional. 'Belief *in...*' moral, volitional, a response of the whole personality.³¹

²⁹WHRTB, 30. See also Louis Jacobs, "The Jewish Tradition" in *Judaism and Theology*, 73.

³⁰*Principles*, 459-460.

³¹*Faith*, 18.

Thus, it would be by way of these two categories and the distinction between the two and that would guide Jacobs's theological claims, which in a more pithy formulation, boils down to the difference between a philosopher and a poet:

The difference between the philosopher and the poet is that the philosopher tries to get the heavens into his head while the poet tries to get his head into the heavens.³² This saying, attributed to G.K. Chesterton, can be adapted to describe the difference between the great medieval philosophers and the kabbalists and hasidic masters. The basic aim of the philosophers was to interpret the Torah by the light of reason.... The kabbalists, on the other hand—and they were followed in this by the hasidic masters...were trying to get their heads in heaven....³²

In spite of—or perhaps because of—Jacobs's ongoing loyalty to both “types of faith,” an inevitable tension exists between the claims of one and the other. Despite his entrenchment within Jewish mysticism, Jacobs maintained an ongoing reticence to embrace its implications. The arms length by which Jacobs would treat mysticism is altogether reminiscent of Schechter's push and pull relationship with the same subject. One of Jacobs's studies on Hasidism would be tellingly titled “The Relevance and Irrelevance of Hasidism.”³³ In what is largely an altogether critical assessment of Hasidism, Jacobs concludes by stating:

For all that, Hasidism is far more than a pleasant anachronism, and its masters are more than cosmic talkers spouting holy nonsense.... Allowing for the exceptions, the Hasidim were, and still are, highly gifted practitioners of the art of religion, pursuing, with the exercise of the full creative imagination and with a heart warming naïveté masking a mature sophistication, their aim of bringing God down to man and encouraging man to rise on the rungs of the ancient ladder linking heaven and earth.³⁴

³²Louis Jacobs, *Heads in Heaven*, 9.

³³Louis Jacobs, *Judaism and Theology*, 134-143.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 138.

Worth comparing is Schechter's similarly guarded appreciation of the subject as found in his study: "The Chassidim:"

Amid much that is bad the Chassidim have preserved through the whole movement a warm heart, an ardent, sincere faith. There is a certain openness of character and a ready friendliness about even the modern Chassidim which are very attractive. Religion is still to them a matter of life and death....³⁵

Jacobs's Anglo roots and university experience (among other factors) would prevent him from ever presuming to become a mystic. As he would reflect on mystical literature late in life:

I don't swallow it whole. I don't swallow it at all. But I have an affinity with it.... Do you know the saying over of Reb Pinhas of Koretz? "The Zohar kept me in Judaism."³⁶

While recognizing the difference in character between the two categories, Jacobs linked them uneasily and perhaps unsuccessfully. In his treatment of Maimonides's classical formulation of Jewish belief, Jacobs's would suggest a means to differentiate "between beliefs which cannot by their nature be contradicted by new knowledge and beliefs which can be so contradicted," leading him to the following conclusions:

Of traditional beliefs which cannot be contradicted by new knowledge are the basic ones of belief in God, in his goodness and mercy, in His unity and power, that He has revealed himself to Israel in the *Torah*, that Israel has a special role to play in the fulfillment of God's purpose, that the Messianic age will dawn, that the soul is immortal, that God is to be worshipped, that man is to practice justice and righteousness and to strive to be holy and feel compassion for others. Of traditional beliefs which can be

³⁵S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism: A Selection*, 189.

³⁶Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2006.

contradicted by new knowledge are: the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the Isaianic authorship of the second part of the book of Isaiah, the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and the Song of Songs and the Davidic authorship of the Psalms, that the rabbis of the Talmud were infallible supermen, that the world is not more than five thousand seven hundred and twenty-three years old, that the earth is flat and in the centre of the universe....³⁷

Jacobs's "thinking Jew" accepts the first class of beliefs as "traditional because they are true." No new information will undermine them. The latter beliefs, on the other hand, are subject to reconsideration according to the "new knowledge" of every age.

And yet, as past studies of Jacobs have noted, his distinctions between interpretive and factual beliefs stand open to the charge of subjectivity.³⁸ Jacobs's perfunctory division of beliefs into the two categories is almost arbitrary in that the division is justified seemingly according to his own internal sensibility. For example, it is never fully stated why "belief in the hereafter" is not subject to reinterpretation, whereas rabbinic miracles are. No amount of evidence, it would seem, would be enough to affirm or refute either belief. The reasons for accepting one and not the other is neither fully understood nor adequately defended.

So, too, Jacobs's personally anchored faith, compelling to him, presumes that all participants in such discussions are in fact, holding the same *a priori* faith commitments. As Jacobs would state early on:

What it all amounts to is this, that while the existence of God cannot be proved if we start from the beginning, none of us do, in fact, start from the beginning.³⁹

³⁷Louis Jacobs, *Principles*, 459.

³⁸See especially the aforementioned studies of E. Dorff, B. Sherwin and P. Morris.

³⁹WHRTB, 29.

Thus, the very strength of Jacobs's faith is also revealed to be a weakness in that his assumptions regarding God, interpretive beliefs and the stirring power of a mystical religious experience are derived almost entirely from his own personal biography, assumptions that are hardly transferable to would-be believers from alternative backgrounds. Indeed, in asking Jacobs precisely how he would engender a faith akin to his to the theological initiate, Jacobs, though acknowledging the problem, readily conceded the difficulties in such a project.⁴⁰ Thus, apart from the internal problems embedded within Jacobs's two kinds of faith, one is left to wonder how precisely such a faith is at all accessible to other searching Jews. To be fair, Jacobs concedes that his suggested tactic is not a precise science. For Jacobs, faith was an ongoing project, the strength of which was to be found not by the certainties of any one age, but in the individual Jew's ongoing approximations of that which is ultimately beyond expression. In other words, faith was a quest, both through history and throughout the life of every Jew:

The Jewish man of faith knows only too well of its confusions and uncertainties. His is a questing faith, in which to seek is already to have found.⁴¹

B) Sanction of the *Mitzvoth*

As discussed in Chapter Six, Jacobs's "quest" for Torah stands as perhaps his most daring tactic vis-à-vis the status of sacred scripture, its study, origins and the rabbinic tradition emanating from it. This section shall explore the prickly extension of Jacobs's "bottom up" theology, namely, how in such formulation, may one retain a

⁴⁰Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

⁴¹ Louis Jacobs, "Faith," in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought* (1987), 238.

notion of divine authority, commandment, or in Jacobs's phrasing, "Sanction for Mitzvoth." Indeed, throughout his life, Jacobs rejected any notion of revelation that asserted "a static transmission of a corpus of revealed truth," preferring a process of "human beings reaching out to God, engaged in a process of trial and error, and influenced by the civilizations in which they live."⁴² In attributing to the Torah elements both human and divine, Jacobs inevitably faced the challenge of constructing a compelling rationale for Jewish ritual observance. After all, if the Torah is the process by which humanity seeks to know the divine will, then to what degree can the commandments derived from it be understood as divine legislation? Further, given Jacobs traditional observance patterns and insistence on critical inquiry and enduring supernaturalism, this question of the sanction of the *mitzvoth* would be a particularly thorny one in need of a synthetic answer.

From a 1963 address to the "Society for the Study of Jewish Theology" entitled "The Sanction of the Mitzvoth" to his final published theological reflections (*Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, 1999), Jacobs maintained a rather consistent tactic in addressing the authority of the *mitzvoth*. Given his entrenchment in scholarly discipline and his insistence on the human element in sacred texts, Jacobs set the goal of constructing an approach whereby "it is possible and desirable to be totally committed to Jewish observance and to treat the *mitzvoth* as divine commands without any sacrifice of intellectual integrity."⁴³ Just as he sought to balance his "two kinds of faith," so too, we shall have the opportunity to understand and evaluate the degree to which Jacobs was

⁴²GTI, 28.

⁴³GTI, 28.

able to achieve a synthetic balance between his redefined notion of sacred scripture while maintaining the divine authority in its legislative content.

Jacobs's synthesis, which he called the "theological approach" or "halakhic non-fundamentalism," may best be understood as an *extension of* and *reaction to* the findings of the historical school as expressed by Conservative Judaism's Solomon Schechter and Louis Ginzberg (1873-1953). The latter's explication of the "genetic fallacy" would become central to Jacobs's own thought. Echoing Ginzberg's contention that "the evaluation of a law is independent of its origin,"⁴⁴ Jacobs averred that questions concerning the origins of Scripture did not affect its commanding authority.

Jacobs maintained:

...critical theories regarding the origin of Jewish observances or, for that matter, regarding the origin of the Torah itself, ought not to render obsolete Jewish loyalty to the Torah, the Halakhah, and the mitzvot as divine commands.⁴⁵

Drawing on Ginzberg's oft-cited example of the murky origins of the Sabbath, Jacobs recognized that for an adherent of the historical 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."⁴⁶ Not plenary inspiration, but the historic observances of the Jewish people across the ages was the binding authority in Ginzberg's formulation. This attractive phrasing, both historically inclined and ritually committed, would become an integral building block in Jacobs's

⁴⁴Louis Ginzberg, *Students, Scholars and Saints* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1928), 207.

⁴⁵GTI, 36.

⁴⁶L. Ginzberg, *Students*, 206.

own constructive theology. As he acknowledged in his 1963 address: “A sound theological approach will not fail to build on the findings of the Historical School.”⁴⁷

Nevertheless, Jacobs readily expressed his misgivings regarding Ginzberg and the historical school. Jacobs’s deeply felt supernaturalism recoiled at what he believed to be such a dangerously naturalistic rationale for observance. Thus, even while accepting the premises of the historical approach, he would also caution against it, explaining, “we see Judaism as more than history.”⁴⁸ Jacobs’s objections became sharper in the years to come, and he held that observance of *mitzvot* derived entirely from the historical experience of the Jewish people and not on a God who commands (*metzaveh*) was unacceptable: “Such an attitude is a theological monstrosity. Ancestor-worship is a form of idolatry.”⁴⁹ Jacobs’s strong objections regarding the notion of “revelation in the shape of history,” wrought by his instinctive supernaturalism, would forever prevent him from being fully comfortable within the historicist camp.⁵⁰

Jacobs thus spent a lifetime effort seeking to answer the lingering question of his theological mentor Alexander Altmann: “...can the historical and theological approaches be reconciled with another?”⁵¹ Objecting to the Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist and Historical schools’ approach, Jacobs offered a textured “theological” view that sought to retain both a historical sensibility and a concept of a commanding God:

⁴⁷Louis Jacobs, “Sanction,” 12.

⁴⁸Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹Louis Jacobs, *Tree of Life*, 230.

⁵⁰S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism: A Selection*, 18.

⁵¹A. Altmann, “Jewish Studies: Their Scope and Meaning Today,” 13.

...we believe...the fifth [theological] attitude that Judaism is a religion and a religious approach sees the *mitzvoth* as the way to God. The sanction for the *mitzvoth* is that they succeed in bringing men to God. Because they do this they are commanded by God.⁵²

Resisting “a surrender of the religious,” as characterized by Mordecai Kaplan’s folkways or Ginzberg’s sanctification of the Jewish historical experience, Jacobs assigned the power of *mitzvoth* the ability, past and present, to identify and draw close the will of God.⁵³ Years later, Jacobs justified this theological stance by way of the commandment to kindle the Hanukkah lights, a ritual observance that despite having no basis in biblical law, retains the formulaic character of a divinely sanctioned commandment:

...historically considered we have in all this an anticipation of the idea that, whatever its origins, a ritual should be observed if its observance enhances the spiritual life of the Jew... when Jews kindle the Hanukkah lights, they do so as part of their *quest* [italics added] for the divine will and that is how the command is conveyed.⁵⁴

What is true for Jacobs in the study of Torah is true for the observance of commandments. Ritual observance is authorized by God not because of its origins, but rather because it bears the past traces and future promise of identifying and realizing the divine will. Such approaches are consistent with the Historical School’s suspicion of the genetic fallacy; yet, as Jacobs would forever insist, they retain a supernatural and commanding element therein.

⁵²Louis Jacobs, “Sanction,” 15.

⁵³GTI, 28.

⁵⁴BRD, 118.

Over the years, Jacobs would inventory *mitzvot*, repeatedly constructing a language of observance where commandments while not contingent on origins could nevertheless claim to be revealed by God. Most often, Jacobs pointed to the ubiquitous range of non-biblical Jewish observances which, like Hanukah lights, served to demonstrate that the authority of the commandments has never been derived from their origins. Rather, it is God's will as revealed through the historic observances of Israel that served as their ongoing authority. For example, as Jacobs would explain in reference to the non-biblical observances of Yom Kippur:

In theological language, God really did command Jews to keep Yom Kippur, but the command has to be seen as conveyed through the divine-human encounter in Jewish history. But it is not history that is being worshipped, it is the God who reveals His will through history.⁵⁵

Or, in regards to the Synagogue:

The best illustration of what is meant by revelation through the experiences of the people of Israel is provided by the institution of the synagogue. Even the fundamentalist, who holds that for religious institutions to be binding a direct divine command is necessary, has to admit that there is no such divine communication for Jews to frequent the synagogue....⁵⁶

Or, in reference to *tefillin* (phylacteries):

Since it is right and proper for Jews to follow Jewish rituals in their worship of God, we can say without subterfuge: "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to wear tefillin." Where did He command us? Though the historical experiences of the Jewish people in its long quest for the divine.... In a word, Jewish rituals belong to the collective expression by the

⁵⁵Louis Jacobs, *Tree of Life*, 231.

⁵⁶BRD, 115 -116.

Jewish people of its covenant with god. As such they are far more than folkways. They are commanded by God.⁵⁷

In Jacobs's *A Jewish Theology* (1973), he would cite his debt to Buber and Rosenzweig, in stating that the dynamic nature of God's self disclosure may be maintained in spite of the findings of biblical criticism.⁵⁸ Neither folkways, nor *mitzvoth*, Jacobs's employed the language of *minhagim* (customs), historic observances that carried the weight of a commandment:

We believe in the God who, as Frankel said, reveals Himself not alone to the prophets but through K'lal Yisrael, the Community of Israel as it works out and applies the teachings of the prophets. Yes, it is true, in a sense, that the whole Torah of Israel is Minhag, custom, growing through the experiences of human beings and interpreted by them in response to particular conditions in human history. But we go on from there to say that since this happened, since this is how God revealed Himself, then the Minhag of Israel is *Torah*.⁵⁹

Jacobs's 'theological language' thus stands as an admixture of historicism, traditionalism and supernaturalism. Insistent that observance was and is not contingent on the origins of scripture, Jacobs nevertheless understood the importance of phrasing *mitzvoth* as a response to the divine will.

Assessment

Jacobs's arguments for observance would always retain a supernatural element, a "leap of faith" that Jacobs would state, though, as previously noted, never fully explained or defended. As with matters of belief, Jacobs's rationale for observance was

⁵⁷GTI, 139.

⁵⁸AJT, 208-210.

⁵⁹Louis Jacobs, "Sanction," 12.

contingent on his *a priori* acceptance of the divine element of Scripture. As he would assert early on:

Either one sees power in the idea of submission to God's will or one does not see it. If one does see it, and very many sensitive religious people do, then there can be no greater value than the idea of a *mitzvah* as an opportunity of doing God's will.⁶⁰

What is to Jacobs self-evident, namely the power of God's commanding voice and the ability of ritual observance towards realizing that voice, remains an assumption that even his most sympathetic critics note as a shortcoming. As B. Sherwin writes:

Jacobs' claim that because the *mitzvot*, developed by the people of Israel, bring people to God, they must, therefore, be considered as if they were commanded by God, is not adequately defended. It does not necessarily follow that because revelation is a monologue of Israel to God that it is also a monologue of God to Israel.⁶¹

Less kindly phrased is M. Kellner's characterization that in Jacobs's "fuzzy theology," he "seems to be trying to have his cake and eat it" in that he preserves the notion of commandment while discarding the notion that the authority of a commandment is found in direct expression of God's will.⁶² Jacobs's patterns of observance, ingrained in him from his yeshiva days, would guarantee that no matter how liberal his thought, he would always retain a sense of being commanded. Whether phrased as observations or criticisms, such characterizations are altogether well founded, noted even by Jacobs himself. Jacobs readily conceded the problems inherent in his position, insisting only that his problems were "less acute than the problems of those who try to have Judaism

⁶⁰Ibid., 12.

⁶¹B. Sherwin, "Louis Jacobs," in *Studies in Jewish Theology*, 300. See also Norman Solomon "Three Books on Jewish Faith," *Journal of Jewish Studies* LII (Spring 2001): 150.

⁶²Menachem Kellner, "Louis Jacobs' Doctrine of Revelation," *Tradition* 14 (1974), 145.

without Halakhah or those who try to live as fundamentalists.”⁶³ Indeed, even the briefest review of Jacobs’s writing renders evident the cautious way he would state his theology, forever maintaining that on such matters “it is better to be vaguely right, than definitely wrong,” or, as was apt to quote Meredith:

Ah, what a dusty answer get the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life.⁶⁴

C) Development of Jewish Law

Jacobs’s historicist sensibilities and extraordinary familiarity with rabbinic literature made him one of the most learned, prolific and articulate students of the development of Jewish law of his generation. His ability to amass overwhelming evidence towards demonstrating the way extra-*halakhic* factors (ethics, psychology, socioeconomics etc...) impacted the development of Jewish law, have to some degree defined the territory for all future inquiries. And yet, as a congregational rabbi committed to traditional patterns of Jewish observance, Jacobs had the additional task of considering the application of his research for his own community. Here we shall seek to understand Jacobs’s approach to Jewish law. Namely, to what degree did Jacobs’s descriptive assessments regarding the development of Jewish law impact his prescriptive recommendations for contemporary Jewish observance?

Jewish Law - Historically Considered

As noted in Chapter One, the seeds for Jacobs’s understanding of *halakhic* development may be traced to his diary entries in the spring of 1944. Jacobs’s early

⁶³Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 230.

⁶⁴Louis Jacobs, “Objectivity and Subjectivity in Jewish Law: The Debate on AID” in Jacobs, *Rabbinic Thought in the Talmud*, 208.

exposure to C. Tchernowitz as encouraged by Altmann, his subsequent exposure to the historical school, his theological claims regarding the human element in revelation along with his own research into the literary or “contrived” quality of rabbinic literature collectively served to construct a sustained argument regarding the historically conditioned nature of Jewish law. Far from being a closed system whereby the entirety of the written and oral Torah was conveyed *in toto* from God at Mount Sinai, for Jacobs, *halakha* had a history shaped by a variety of cultural contexts, eras and personalities. From his earliest articles in *Chayenu* and *The Jewish Spectator* with provocative titles such as “Organic Growth vs. Petrification,” Jacobs makes clear that when it comes to matters of Jewish law, it has always allowed for, if not encouraged adaptation, innovation and flexibility. From these initial efforts through his extended study of the subject, *A Tree of Life: Diversity Flexibility and Creativity in Jewish Law* (1984), while his tactics and points of reference would grow more varied and sophisticated, his basic thesis on the developmental nature of Jewish law remained rather consistent.

From his sketches of *halakhists* of note to his explorations of the particulars of Jewish law, Jacobs maintained that *halakhists* are always governed by considerations other than the strict interpretation of Jewish law. As he would boldly declare in the opening volley of his study of the subject:

The thesis of this book is that the *Halakha* - the legal side of Judaism - 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 condition that occur when the ostensibly purely legal norms and methodology are developed.⁶⁵

Jacobs's book mounts a massive amount of evidence towards demonstrating the degree to which non-*halakhic* factors play a critical role in shaping *Halakhha*. Altogether telling is Jacobs's response to his subsequent detractors who critiqued his study for the wide ranging and unsystematic series of examples covered, varied both in geographical distribution and historical context, a criticism to which Jacobs would reply:

This is indeed so. In my view, there are not precise parameters of halakhic development except those provided by each halakhist's general view of Judaism itself, beyond which, of course, he can never go or wish to go. My contention is that in considering particular issues, each halakhist worked to broaden the halakhic framework from within in order to arrive at a ruling that would be consistent with his own understanding of the demands of Judaism.⁶⁶

So, too, Jacobs's studies of individual *halakhic* decisors or decisions arrived at similar conclusions. For example, in his study on the responsa of Rabbi Joseph Hayyim of Baghdad (1835-1909), Jacobs would conclude:

Hayyim emerges from his responsa as a Halakhist of note, true to his methodology, as stated in his introduction, of summarizing all that has been written on a given question but reserving for himself the right to decide by his own reasoning and sense of justice. Like the other famous respondents, he tries hard to be completely objective, working always as if there is a pure science of the Halakhah that is free from all external influences, whether personal or due to the social background. Of course, in reality, there is no escaping one's background. Hayyim's approach is colored by the conservative and very 'Oriental' society in which he lived. To recognize this is to cast no aspersions on Hayyim's great ability.

⁶⁵Louis Jacobs, *Tree of Life*, 3.

⁶⁶Louis Jacobs, *Tree of Life*. Introduction to second edition (2000), xiii. See critique from Kirschenbaum in Moshe Sokol and Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy* (Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1992), 87.

There is, after all, a history of Jewish law, and even the most noteworthy of the respondents do not operate in a spiritual vacuum.⁶⁷

Alternatively, in delineating the *halakhic* arguments surrounding a particular issue, Jacobs would stay consistent with his understanding of the dynamic nature of Jewish law. For instance, weighing in on the *halakhic* debate surrounding AID (Artificial Insemination by Donor), Jacobs reviewed the extant rabbinic treatments of the subject, concluding:

From all this...it is clear that the great Halakhists are governed in their decision making by considerations other than those of pure Halakhah. Consciously or unconsciously, the Halakhists are not only asking what the law is but also determining what the law should be if the general values of Judaism, as they see these, are to be realized.⁶⁸

Perhaps more than any other area of Jacobs's lifetime scholarly achievements, his claims concerning the conditioned nature of Jewish law are consistent, sustained and supported throughout.

Prescriptive Recommendations

From Jacobs's descriptive observations on the history of Jewish law, we may now turn to his own prescriptive recommendations regarding contemporary *halakhic* decision-making. Namely, how did Jacobs's views regarding the historical method vis-à-vis the development of Jewish law impact his recommendations for his particular historical context? Considering his progressive views concerning the human hand in

⁶⁷Louis Jacobs, "The Responsa of Rabbi Joseph Hayyim of Baghdad," in Wolfe Kelman and Arthur A. Chiel, *Perspectives on Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of Wolfe Kelman* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1978), 194.

⁶⁸Louis Jacobs, "Objectivity and Subjectivity in Jewish Legal Decisions: The Debate on AID" (Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, 1991), 14-15.

revelation, how precisely did his approach to law differ from his assessment of the fundamentalisms of Orthodoxy? As we shall come to see, it is the divide between Jacobs's observations as a legal historian and *halakhic* decisor that stands as one of the most curious, complex and possibly inconsistent aspects of his legacy.

As early as 1963, Jacobs acknowledged the differences between his approach and that of a fundamentalist approach to Jewish law.

If your history is rigid, if it is dinned into you day after day that you must believe that every detail was dictated by God to Moses on Sinai, you will be rigid in your practice. If, on the other hand your theory is flexible, allowing for the concept of development, is broader and wider and more liberal, is soundly in accord with the idea of historical growth and change, then your practice will be less fiercely intolerant, more amenable to reason without degenerating into superficial lack of concern.⁶⁹

In this early instance, Jacobs offers two examples of innovations or considerations that such a "flexible" approach would recommend. First, Jacobs suggests permitting the use of a microphone on the Sabbath, a form of amplification otherwise prohibited according to Jewish law. Second, Jacobs counsels integrating the children of mixed marriages who though raised and identified as Jewish, are not legally so according to matrilineal descent. In this case, Jacobs recommends (contrary to the more rigid stance in Orthodoxy) that such individuals be integrated into the ranks of traditional Jewry by way of conversion "without much ado."⁷⁰ Though the particulars of the two issues are never fully discussed, in both cases Jacobs seems to be searching for examples of how

⁶⁹Louis Jacobs, "Sanction," 14.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

the reality of his Anglo-Jewish context would press him towards accommodating Jewish law to new conditions, humanitarian, pragmatic or otherwise.

Shortly thereafter, Jacobs would hint at particular considerations of a non-fundamentalist approach to Jewish law. Invoking the language of the Historical School, Jacobs explains:

Since, on our account, it is the historical experience of the people of Israel which serves as the source of the authority, under God, for Jewish observance, it follows that a precept of little significance in the *Halakhah* may come to assume much significance through the emphasis it has received in Jewish life and history. Conversely, a precept of great significance in the *Halakhah* may pass into the background as a result of Jewish life and experience.⁷¹

Thus for instance, Jacobs explains that whereas the offense of eating leavened bread on Passover may be a *halakhic* offense greater than that of marrying out of the Jewish faith, historically considered “the latter offence is far greater than the former.” While Jacobs intimates that in taking such historical considerations into account, the non-fundamentalist may be inspired to “make the necessary adjustments,” he never actually articulates specific examples or a precise methodological tactic by which such historic and *halakhic* considerations may be identified, balanced and integrated into prescriptive recommendations for Jewish law.

Jacobs’s gives his approach fuller expression in his *A Jewish Theology* (1973). Jacobs’s chapter on “Torah and Mitzvah” restates verbatim his 1963 views on the “Sanction of the Mitzvoth,” with a new addendum on a non-fundamentalist *halakha*. Here, Jacobs introduces the categories of “significant,” “meaningless” and “harmful” to delineate his observance patterns. For example, observance of Sabbath or Yom Kippur,

⁷¹ Louis Jacobs, *Principles*, 466.

donning a prayer shawl (*tallit*) or phylacteries (*tefillin*) are significant in that “life’s spiritual enrichments are enhanced by [these] observances.”⁷² Other observances such as the prohibition of shaving with a razor or *shatnez* (a mixture of woolen or flax) are deemed meaningless. The final “harmful” category, refer to those observances that “promote injustice,” a category including the plight of the bastard child (*mamzer*) barred from marrying into the people of Israel or the chained woman (*agunah*) unable to remarry. Jacobs summarizes his views regarding the three categories as follows:

The non-fundamentalist halakhist will seek to deepen understanding of the significant, try to discover possible meaning in the apparently meaningless, and endeavor to mitigate the effects of the harmful without destroying the system as a whole. He will not necessarily be less scrupulous in his observance than the fundamentalist but if so will see gain in this rather than loss. He still has serious problems on his hands but they are less acute than the problems of those who try to have Judaism without Halakhah or those who try to live as fundamentalists.⁷³

At this stage, Jacobs’s test of “religious significance” vis-à-vis the *mitzvot* is left open to the charge of subjectivism, a criticism brought most forcefully in by M. Kellner in his review of *A Jewish Theology*.⁷⁴ Indeed, Jacobs’s determination that *tefillin* is meaningful but *shatnez* is meaningless is never adequately defended. And, as we shall see further, Jacobs’s estimation that a woman’s inability to remarry is unjust, but her inability to be a full participant in a prayer service *is* just, only renders evident the subjective nature of Jacobs’s distinctions.

⁷²AJT, 226.

⁷³Ibid., 229-230.

⁷⁴M. Kellner, "Louis Jacobs' Doctrine of Revelation."

From these awkward beginnings, Jacobs never fully reconciled his ritual traditionalism with his awareness of the full implications of the historicist approach. For instance, in a 1985 review of Boaz Cohen's *Jewish Law and Roman Law*,⁷⁵ Jacobs critiqued Cohen's concluding thesis that history and *Halakha* are autonomous disciplines, pleading, not surprisingly, the historically contingent nature of religious decision-making:

This approach of non-involvement in practical decision-making has long been typical of historians of the halakhah, either because they fear that involvement may compromise their scholarly objectivity or because they modestly aver that no scholar can be expected to have skill and competence in more than one field. In other legal systems, too, legal historians are rarely acknowledged jurists. Yet, while one can go along with the idea that the law has a life of its own, following its own precedents, and that history should not have the determinative voice in halakhic decision, it is hard to see why it should be denied any voice. To put it bluntly, if the researches of the historians have made it seem extremely plausible that certain laws were not given directly by God to Moses at Sinai but have developed gradually over the ages—the stages in the development having been traced—why should this fact not be used as an encouragement for further development where such is needed?⁷⁶

Despite his critique of Cohen and endorsement of a historical sensibility, on the matter of patrilineal descent, Jacobs would weigh in decidedly against the forces of change, offering a rather caustic assessment of the nature of American Jewry worth citing at length:

...I cannot claim an awareness of all the arguments for change in the matter of matrilineal descent but those that I have seen have little weight. Why is the change advocated and what particular

⁷⁵Boaz Cohen, *Jewish and Roman Law, a Comparative Study* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 133-145.

⁷⁶Louis Jacobs, "There Is No Problem of Descent," *Judaism* 34, no. 1 (1985): 58.

change is contemplated? I hope it is not impertinent, for someone writing thousands of miles distant from the great country in which the women's liberation movement has made such rapid strides, to express the astonishment that the clamor to change an ancient law which made Jewish status depend on the mother should have originated in that very country.... We should not be scared of the consequences if our aim is to redress a great wrong, but can it seriously be held that the application of the matrilineal principle has been responsible for the perpetration of a great wrong now to be addressed by valiant iconoclasts?....To change this particular law would strike at the heart of the whole halakhic process and would involve a theological as well as well as an halakhic upheaval. And for what? The potential loss is great. The gains, if any, are few and the price is far too high.⁷⁷

As an Englishman observing American Judaism at a distance, Jacobs could not identify with the cultural trends that pressed for modifications of Jewish law in another context. Jacobs's derisive attitude regarding the proposed innovation exhibits a total lack of awareness that just as the press for innovation is driven by a particular social context (America), so too his objections to the proposed changes are similarly framed by his particular context and sensibility. Indeed, twenty years later as the Conservative movement would contemplate same-sex unions, Jacobs would reject such instincts once again as emblematic of the "faddishness" of American Jewry.⁷⁸ Jacobs's claim that only the weightiest considerations could change a well-established Jewish law would never be met in the cases of patrilineal descent, egalitarian worship and homosexuality. That Jacobs's ingrained traditionalism would never permit him to entertain such innovations is understandable. Given his studies in Jewish law, the fact that he was unable to even

⁷⁷Ibid., 59.

⁷⁸Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

acknowledge that his own views were as culturally conditioned as those of his illustrious predecessors is nothing short of astonishing.

Jacobs's objections to change ran deeper than cultural differences with his trans-Atlantic counterparts. His inability to give full expression to a non-fundamentalist *halakha* reflected a lingering sympathy with the Orthodoxy of his youth. In personal practice, Jacobs was by all accounts, punctilious in his religious observance. His congregation, even after its break with Orthodoxy, never permitted the innovation of mixed seating or egalitarian worship. On matters of personal identity, Jacobs would openly concede "the need for 'liberals' to co-operate with the Orthodox in matters of personal status if the Jewish community is not to be split into two..."⁷⁹ No matter how liberal he became in his thinking, Jacobs maintained an ongoing reluctance to break with traditional observance patterns.

So, too, Jacobs's reticence to produce responsa over the course of his lifetime indicates unease with charting out the particulars of a non-fundamentalist *halakha*. Given his facility with the material and the ease with which he wrote, it is worth considering the deeper significance of such a gap in his writing.⁸⁰ While Jacobs could point to his popular and often anonymously penned *Jewish Chronicle* column "Ask the Rabbi," for short studies on a wide range of issues, the journalistic nature of these pieces maintain a descriptive, not prescriptive stance. Jacobs insisted that his responses

⁷⁹Louis Jacobs, *Tree of Life*, xxxii.

⁸⁰Even a superficial glance at Jacobs's *Theology in the Responsa* (1975), or *A Tree of Life* (1984), makes evident his encyclopedic grasp of the expanse of response literature. Jacobs's attributed his familiarity with responsa literature to his years flipping through volumes at the Manchester Yeshiva. Interview with Louis Jacobs, Summer 2005.

were not intended to have any binding legal nature as evidenced by his introduction to the collection of previously published studies:

The method adopted here is first to discover whether a given topic has been discussed directly in the classical sources of Judaism or, if not, whether an attitude can be inferred from statements in these sources. The sources may display a variety of opinions on the matter and it is then necessary to try to discover which is the more authoritative. With regard to some problems there are fresh insights arrived at only in more recent times, which render precarious a direct application of the ancient teachings to the new situation. The only approach is to note tendencies and suggestions, avoiding dogmatism as far as possible, and to resist the temptation to write a collection of responsa.⁸¹

Throughout the volume, Jacobs's studies remain historically descriptive, resisting any appearance of responsa, only indicating tendencies and trends, never rendering authoritative opinions.

Even on issues of deep cultural resonance to which he devotes extended study (such as his previously mentioned treatment of artificial insemination) Jacobs reviews the range of opinion as a means of demonstrating the culturally conditioned nature of the *halakhic* process but resists offering his own view.⁸² So too, his study of the plight of the bastard child (*mamzer*), perhaps his most involved study of a particular legal issue in print, falls short of rendering a legal decision.⁸³ Only rarely did Jacobs write anything close to resembling a responsum in the sense that he rendered a positive position on the subject, but even here his language hedges against a formal position. For instance, in a study on the permissibility of the use of plaques to acknowledge the

⁸¹Louis Jacobs, *Ask the Rabbi*, 2.

⁸²Louis Jacobs, "Objectivity and Subjectivity in Jewish Legal Decisions: The Debate on AID".

⁸³Louis Jacobs, *Tree of Life*, 239-254.

generosity of philanthropic contributors towards communal life, Jacobs reviews the breadth of opinion from biblical through medieval responsa. His final opinion is noteworthy not for what he says, but for what he does not:

To sum up: The thrust of Jewish teaching is to encourage the practices of donors having their names recorded. Nevertheless, this cannot be stated as a categorical law – an actual din [legal ruling].... In this area tact and finesse are important. As in all such borderline issues, it is impossible to have clear-cut rules. It depends ultimately on discretion and good taste, as well as the common sense, of those who are responsible for the administration of the synagogue. The vital thing is, once a rule has been made, to be consistent in sticking to it. Nothing is more calculated to cause offence than when members have been asked to accept this kind of rule against plaques and the like and then an exception is made for one of the members, even where a good case can be made for making an exception. For the rest, the ideal of peace and harmony in the community should override all else, certainly in this area. A community which stays together prays together.⁸⁴

Jacobs's counsel reads as a seasoned congregational tactician, not halakhic decisor.

Deemed a borderline issue, Jacobs advises discretion and most of all consistency as each community moves forward in its particular policy choice. Similarly, in a paper on the question of *aliyot*, the practice of being called up to synagogue scriptural readings, Jacobs reviews the range of practices and opinions on the subject, concluding:

So, all having been said, while traditional rules and their elaboration should not be ignored by the gabbaim (the “wardens”), ultimately it must be left to their discretion and their ability to please all the members of the congregation: forlorn hope!⁸⁵

Jacobs's persistent reticence to render a legal decision on varying matters of Jewish law, instead preferring to review the range of historical opinion and then counsel tactics of implementation, suggests a conscious decision not to offer a practical vision of what a

⁸⁴Louis Jacobs, "The Problem of Plaques," *The Masorti Journal* 1, no. 33-36 (1987). 36.

⁸⁵Louis Jacobs, "Aliyot: In the Sources and in the Service," *The Masorti Journal* 2 (1988), 10.

non-fundamentalist halakha would actually look like. Despite being the most able theorist and advocate for such a liberal *halakha* to exist, his decision not to produce responsa literature remains one of the most noteworthy lacuna of his legacy.

Assessment

Jacobs's inability to integrate his descriptive observations regarding Jewish law into his prescriptive recommendations is far from unique to him. Indeed, Jacobs's discretion in rendering legal decisions is characteristic of many proponents of the historical school. In characterizing the uneasy relationship between historicism and *halakhic* decision-making at the historical school's Breslau Seminary, Ismar Schorsch has suggested that:

The twin model of the Rosh Yeshiva and the German professor combined to raise the academic at Breslau or New York above the level of a mere *moreh hora'ah* [halakhic decisor]. No discrepancy was felt between devoting the bulk of the curriculum to the study of rabbinic literature and ignoring the halakhic needs of the contemporary community.⁸⁶

Though Schorsch's observations regarding the Breslau school are suggestive, it is unclear if they are operative in the case of Jacobs. While Jacobs readily acknowledged that he did not write responsa, he resisted explaining why. Indeed, in acknowledging the criticism of the liberal theologian Rabbi John Rayner (1924–2005) that Jacobs had failed to produce a *halakha* that reflected his theological claims, Jacobs suggests an altogether unhelpful reference to his *Tree of Life*, a volume that despite its exhaustive

⁸⁶Ismar Schorsch, "Centenary Thoughts: Conservatism Revisited," in *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1986), 83.

nature, is entirely descriptive in nature, insistent that it “offers no blueprint for the future.”⁸⁷

We may once again turn to Jacobs’s intellectual mentor Solomon Schechter in our efforts to understand the internal contradiction of Jacobs’s writing on the history of Jewish law. Despite being the most articulate exponent of the historical school in his day, Schechter was (like Jacobs) internally torn when it came to the application of the historical method regarding *halakhic* interpretation. He makes explicit reference to his own bifurcated soul in the above mentioned introduction to his *Studies*:

How long the position of this [historical] school will prove tenable is another question. Being brought up in the old Low synagogue, where, with all attachment to tradition, the Bible was looked upon as the crown and the climax of Judaism, the old Adam still asserts itself in me, and in unguarded moments makes me rebel against this new rival of revelation in the shape of history. At times this now fashionable exaltation of tradition at the expense of Scripture even impresses me as a sort of religious bimetallism in which bold speculators in theology try to keep up the market value of an inferior currency by denouncing loudly the bright shining gold which, they would have us believe, is less fitted to circulate in the vulgar use of daily life than the small cash of historical interpretation. Nor can I quite reconcile myself to this alliance of religion with history, which seems to me both unworthy and unnatural.⁸⁸

Schechter’s “old Adam” sensed the limits by which scholarship and a historical sensibility could inform one’s religious practice. For Schechter, as would be the case for Jacobs, his anchoring in traditional learning and observance resulted in an attachment to tradition that resisted the obvious implications of a historicist sensibility. Like

⁸⁷WHRTB, Preface to the Fifth Edition, x. *Tree of Life*, 231.

⁸⁸S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism: A Selection*, 18.

Schechter, Jacobs, though liberal in ideology, remained devout in practice, never charting a path in observance terribly distinct from the Orthodoxy that produced him.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Both in matters of faith and practice, Jacobs never fully realized the seamless synthesis he set out to achieve. In matters of faith, his innate supernaturalism and traditionalism existed at odds with his historicist understanding of the development of Jewish belief. For Jacobs, there were simply certain *a priori* matters of belief to which he was committed. So, too, regarding the sanction of the *mitzvot*, Jacobs's faith in the divine voice behind Scripture meant he never really faced the full challenge of a maculate Scripture. In matters of observance as well, the internal inconsistency regarding Jacobs's intimacy with the historic development of Jewish law and his inability to carry this awareness into matters of practice is at odds with his stated goal of synthesis. In each case, the "old Adam" within Jacobs from his yeshiva days forever resisted a confrontation with the full implications of secularization. Thus, while Jacobs was well aware of the competing claims of modernity and traditional observance, he remains open to the charge of compartmentalization. So, too, the student of Jacobs is left with the question of how accessible is Jacobs's theological legacy for one who does not share his intrinsic faith, observance and traditionalism. Or, to put it differently, while Jacobs's synthesis may have worked for him given his storied biography, is it a vision that can find application otherwise?

⁸⁹On the internal inconsistency of the Historical School see, Elliot Cosgrove, "Conservative Judaism's Consistent Inconsistency," *Conservative Judaism* 59, no. 3 (2007): 3-26.

To be fair, Jacobs appears to be well aware of the deficiencies of his approach. Throughout his lifetime Jacobs acknowledged his critics, fully cognizant that he still had “serious problems on his hands.” Jacobs would contend that the integrity of a religious position was not to be found in claims of unassailability; indeed just the opposite. It would be the ability to squarely face insoluble problems, even with a tentative, humble and flawed response, that was the mark of a worthy religious quest. After all, Jacobs’s quest was never contingent on arriving at an absolute truth. From the beginning through the end of his life, Jacobs sought to encourage an atmosphere that validated both the intellectual and spiritual integrity of a religious search, all the while goading other spiritual pilgrims towards seeking a truth that while present, was perhaps necessarily unattainable. Not so much the answers themselves, but the mood wrought by such a quest filled with religious devotion and intellectual integrity stands as Jacobs enduring legacy. In Jacobs’s own words:

I do not have the answer...but like so many others who are non-fundamentalist in outlook and yet totally committed to the *halakhic* way, I would like to have an answer. Adapting the saying of R. Johanan (b. Eruvin 27b), if someone will be good enough to provide the answer I will gladly take his change of garments to the bathhouse for him. Perhaps at this stage of the investigation the thing to be done first, and above all others, is to encourage the mood, rather than seek to provide all the answers.⁹⁰

⁹⁰Louis Jacobs, “The Talmud as the Final Authority.” *Judaism* 29:1 (1980), 48.

CONCLUSION

Being connected with our past, at home in our literature, and in sympathy with ourselves as it were, we shall find it easier to approach the ultimate questions.

- Alexander Altmann, *Jewish Studies: Their Scope and Meaning Today*, (1958), 15.

When Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs passed away in London on July 1, 2006, his children report that at his bedside sat a selection of books that he requested to have present. In addition to his *siddur* and *seforim*, at hand were an anthology of G.K. Chesterton's writings, a Pelican book of English Essays, and a Penguin selection of the "Metaphysical Poets." To the degree that one can read into such things, the scene is illustrative of the passage from the Jewish prayer book: "*sof ma'aseh, b'machshava techila*," "the last in deed being first in intention." Jacobs's theological achievements are biographical in that they are reflections of his teachers, colleagues, context and time. His struggles between faith and reason, observance and critical scholarship, reflect a lifetime effort to reconcile the competing, contradictory and often insoluble commitments of the first half of his life. To the very end, Jacobs remained a bifurcated soul, forever loyal to the range of traditions embedded within him.

To study the biography of Louis Jacobs is to seek to understand not just the life of one man, but to grasp the outline of twentieth-century trans-Atlantic Jewish history. Jacobs's profile was shaped by the major demographic and intellectual shifts of the past century, and as such, his work is a rare exchange between the Anglo and Jewish worlds, Continental and Anglo Jewish expressions, the ivory tower and the pulpit. Jacobs's scholarly achievements were impelled by quandaries knocking at his own heart as a

result of his unique training, and his legacy must be seen as such. To consider the oeuvre of Jacobs is to know more than just the theology of one man; rather, it is to make manifest the tensions present in the tortured soul of twentieth century Anglo-Jewry.

This study prompts us to reconsider a variety of biographical, social and theological dimensions regarding Jacobs and his legacy:

First and foremost, our findings radically revise the mythic narrative surrounding Jacobs's life. Retrospectives on Jacobs have hitherto characterized him as the shining star of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy: a native born, university-educated product of yeshiva learning. As the story goes, at the height of his congregational powers, he was 'warmly invited' into Jews' College as moral tutor on the understanding that he would become principal upon Isidore Epstein's retirement. Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, whose views were indistinct to those of Jacobs, blocked his principalship in deference to the rigid orthodoxies of the Eastern and Central European immigrants. The inability of Jacobs and his followers to secure a place for him and the Judaism he represented, either at Jews' College ("Jacobs Affair I") or his newly vacated pulpit ("Jacobs Affair II"), signaled the end of Anglo-Jewry's historically centrist and open-minded position.

In light of this study, a very different picture of Jacobs emerges. As early as 1943, Jacobs's diary entries reflect that he well-recognized his points of difference with his Eastern European teachers. Despite his deep respect for their learnedness and earnest religious spirit, he struggled with their objections to western learning *and* their inability to embrace other expressions of Judaism, even those within Orthodoxy. Jacobs's early London experiences only served to amplify these emerging tensions. With Munk, Jacobs began to consider an educational paradigm that could relay the

riches of yeshiva learning to an Anglo-audience, a task that he had declared in his first letter to the JC. Under Siegfried Stein, Jacobs was introduced to the world of critical scholarship and the radical implications it potentially bore on sacred text. Nevertheless, despite his lifetime debt to Stein, Jacobs came to object to his teacher's unwillingness to consider the implications of his scholarship on traditional religious life.

Back in Manchester and under the influence of Alexander Altmann, Jacobs was increasingly pitted against the personalities and points of authority of his yeshiva training. So, too, Altmann's rabbinate came to represent for Jacobs a synthetic model of scholar-rabbi to which Jacobs could aspire. Nevertheless, in his refusal to fully embrace the implications of his historicist sensibilities, Altmann would (in Jacobs's estimation) fall short of the very synthetic goals to which Altmann himself professed. Jacobs's open engagement with critical scholarship and free-spirited teaching throughout the community designated him as an open thinker, and in the eyes of at least some of his Eastern European colleagues, unacceptably so.

Jacobs's formal break with the Orthodoxy of his yeshiva youth came with his arrival at the New West End. Although the New West End's prominence extended throughout Anglo-Jewry, it was situated on the left-wing of Orthodoxy and the ideological and ritual moorings of its congregational spirit were an increasing isolated voice within Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy. Jacobs's tenure at the New West End, a flurry of communal leadership activity, was also marked by ongoing tensions with Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie and other arms of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy. Jacobs found kindred souls in Wolfe Kelman, Louis Finkelstein and other representatives of the ideologically open but ritually observant Conservative Movement of North America. This served only to

increase the ideological and institutional frustrations of his congregational duties.

Despite his hopes and awareness of the heterodox nature of its contents, Jacobs's 1957 publication, *We Have Reason to Believe*, failed to arouse the ire of Anglo-Jewry. It would be during these years, however, that his progressive views and increasing dialogue with liberal expressions of Judaism would draw the increasing antagonism of his Orthodox colleagues. By 1959, both Jacobs and his adversaries understood him to exist on a very different ideological path than the one sanctioned by the Orthodoxy of the Chief Rabbi.

Jacobs's move to Jews' College was the result of an admixture of pressures, politics and personalities that allowed Jacobs to be in line for a position for which he was ideologically unsuitable. Whether Brodie did or did not indicate that the position of principal would be extended to Jacobs upon Epstein's retirement is neither clear, or for that matter, altogether relevant for present purposes.¹ For while this matter may be of deep personal and institutional significance to the parties involved, the ideological cast had been set well beforehand. In advocating for a full engagement between critical scholarship and sacred study and observance, Jacobs had stepped well beyond the bounds of Orthodoxy as defined by Brodie, Eastern and Central European Orthodoxy, Jews' College and, for that matter, Hertz and Schechter as well.²

The implications of our study also allow us to reassess the "Jacobs Affair II."

Jacobs's claims in 1964 and the years to come that he simply sought to reclaim the

¹Even Jacobs's staunchest supporter William Frankel wrote "...I am not quite sure now whether the proposal to appoint him [Jacobs] as principal of on Dr. Epstein's retirement was put to him [Brodie] by Ewen Montagu at that time." W. Frankel in his Preface to the fifth edition of WHRTB (2004), xxi.

²See Meirovich's definitive study of Hertz's approach to critical scholarship, Harvey Warren Meirovich, *A Vindication of Judaism: The Polemics of the Hertz Pentateuch* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1998).

normative Orthodoxy of Anglo-Jewry stand to be reconsidered. Jacobs may have been quite correct that within the New West End, his views were unremarkable. Such an assertion, however, simply does not stand in the face of Anglo-Orthodoxy as a whole. The fact that Jacobs “failed to see” how his views could have caused such a stir, does not, in retrospect, make them any less *treif*.

Such reconsiderations serve only to refine, not diminish, the importance of Louis Jacobs for Anglo-Jewish self-understanding. In the years since the “Jacobs Affair,” Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy has time and again proven to be inhospitable to the ramified consequences of critical inquiry on traditional faith. Most recently, in 2003 the octogenarian Jacobs attended the *aufruf* of his granddaughter’s future husband in the coastal English resort town of Bournemouth. The officiating Orthodox reverend contacted the Chief Rabbi’s office to inquire whether Jacobs could be called up to recite the liturgical blessing for the Torah reading, as would be customary on such occasions. The refusal to extend the honor to Jacobs is emblematic of the enduring inability of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy to institutionally or ideologically countenance Jacobs and his views.³

Alternatively, the controversy surrounding Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks’s *Dignity of Difference* (2003) demonstrates a related point.⁴ Launched to coincide with the anniversary of the September 11th attacks, Sacks’s book sought to give expression to a vision of tolerance whereby the faith claims of the world’s diverse religious

³Colin Shindler, "Scandal in Bournemouth," *The International Jerusalem Post*, September 26 2003.

⁴Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London; New York: Continuum, 2002).

communities could co-exist. In doing so, Sacks's book wrought the wrath of senior figures within his own Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy establishment for intimating that Jews may not be in possession of absolute truth. Indeed, the revisions of the second edition render clear the nature of the charges made against him. For example, the following emendation:

First edition: "In heaven there is truth; on earth there are truths. Therefore, each culture has something to contribute."

Second edition: "Each culture has something to contribute to the totality of human wisdom."

These changes, as well as passages expurgated entirely (e.g. "No one creed has a monopoly on truth"), signal a state of affairs regarding the ideological and institutional limitations of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy. The fact that Anglo-Orthodoxy's Chief Rabbi was forced to retract such radical views of interfaith co-existence makes the Jacobs Affair appear to be a prophetic lament on the future of Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy. Regardless of whether Jacobs's synthetic middle ground ever had a place in Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy, its moderate traditionalism is strikingly anachronistic today.

Nevertheless, the incompatibility between Jacobs's views and Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy do nothing to diminish the distinctive and ongoing, if not pressing, relevance of his theological achievements. Jacobs exemplifies the possibility of constructing a contemporary Jewish theology grounded in an authentic and intensive engagement with the full spectrum of classical Jewish learning, from rabbinics to medieval philosophy to mysticism and beyond. His achievements, both historical and constructive, represent a developing and comprehensive statement regarding the challenges facing the Jewish community in the modern period.

Jacobs's work, though reflecting the theological instincts of his era, stands unique in many respects. His studies of talmudic logic and argumentation, Hasidism and Jewish law were pioneering in their time and in many cases, continue to define those respective fields. Jacobs's attention to the native forms of rabbinic expression, employment of a stunning array of sources towards formulating his positions, ability to give sanction to "paradox" and "contradiction" as viable modes of religious expression, and the clear and felicitous expression throughout more than ensures his ongoing place in the history of Jewish scholarship. Jacobs's ability to integrate the range of his interests further contributes to the distinctly synthetic nature of his scholarly endeavors. The simple realization that Jacobs wrote, on his own, the encyclopedic Oxford Companion to Jewish Studies is an extraordinary testament to the scope of his Jewish learning.⁵ Jacobs more than achieved the ministerial litmus test of his spiritual mentor, Solomon Schechter: namely, the ability to declare: "*Judaeci nihil a me alienum puto.*" "I regard nothing Jewish as foreign to me."⁶ The lack of a legacy to Jacobs's scholarly achievements represents, among other things, the increasingly specialized and compartmentalized nature of Jewish study both in traditional and academic circles.

Jacobs's proposed theological synthesis fell short on many counts, sometimes even by the very criteria that he set for himself. A product of two worlds, Jacobs's work reflects his best (albeit imperfect) attempts to uphold a commitment to sound

⁵Louis Jacobs, *A Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion*, Abridged and updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999).

⁶"Now, we all agree that the office of a Jewish minister is to teach Judaism; he should accordingly receive such a training as to enable him to say: "*Judaeci nihil a me alienum puto.*" "I regard nothing Jewish as foreign to me." He should know everything Jewish - Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Liturgy, Jewish ethics and Jewish philosophy; Jewish history and Jewish mysticism, and even Jewish folklore. None of these subjects, with its various ramifications, should be entirely strange to him." In "The Charter of the Seminary" in S. Schechter, *Seminary Addresses & Other Papers*, 19.

scholarship and traditional Jewish observance. Jacobs's efforts to reconcile the historical and theological approaches reveal a tension felt by his *Wissenschaft* predecessors, perhaps most of all, Altmann.⁷ In Jacobs's case, the inner tensions were exacerbated for two reasons. First, unlike his illustrious predecessors in the historical school, Jacobs forever maintained a deeply felt supernaturalism and resolute commitment to traditional observance. No matter how "engaged" Jacobs may have been with the challenge of critical inquiry, his theological *a priori*s anchored his faith, his understanding of sacred scripture and ritual observance. Second, Jacobs insisted on an unflinching engagement with the implications of critical scholarship that extended well beyond Altmann, Schechter or anyone else claiming to be Orthodox. For Jacobs, there were simply no questions that were "off limits;" the sound methods of critical inquiry would find application wherever they may lead. It is precisely because Jacobs espoused dogmatic commitments to both "revealed religion" and "critical inquiry" that the competing elements of his bifurcated soul were rendered that much more insoluble.

Furthermore, the student of Jacobs is left with the lingering question of precisely how accessible is his theological legacy for one who does not share his intrinsic faith, observance and traditionalism? Jacobs's theology "worked" for him, precisely because no matter how progressive his views, his reverent faith was never shaken from its yeshiva moorings. So, too, despite Jacobs's intellectual cognition that Judaism has always been shaped by the conditions in which it existed, his reflexive traditionalism would never permit him to actively reconstruct Jewish practice according to the

⁷See A. Altmann, "Jewish Studies". On this address and the ongoing need to reconcile the historical and theological approaches, see Paul Mendes Flohr, "Jewish Scholarship as a Vocation" in Altmann et al., *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, 33-48.

changing needs of his own lifetime. Jacobs's legacy, in spite of his averred attention to the needs of the "Jew in the pew," in retrospect is somewhat impervious to the shifting sands and tides of contemporary Jewish life.

And yet, these shortcomings only serve to cast the extended shadow of his achievements to include present day efforts in Jewish theology. Indeed, this study directs attention to a lacuna in present day Jewish studies—the absence of scholars at home in traditional modes of Jewish learning and observance, critical scholarship, and the all important nexus between the two. After all, what could be more valuable to a searching Jew than a theology and *halakha* that strives to integrate the claims of traditional faith and intellectual integrity, ritual adherence and an innovative spirit? Any attempts at constructing a theological vision for the "hyphenated identities" of contemporary Jewry must seek to construct a synthetic vision capable of negotiating the claims of tradition and modernity, universalism and particularism, individual autonomy and rabbinic authority. Jacobs's steadfast effort to understand and manage these forces renders him a viable paradigm of Jewish theological reasoning for the foreseeable future.

Finally, perhaps it is Jacobs's language of a "quest" that stands as the most readily usable language for contemporary efforts in constructive Jewish theology. Jacobs's quest-driven faith, though forged in a different era, resounds with a striking relevance in our age of the "Sovereign Self."⁸ In framing faith as the quest of an individual Jew through the riches of tradition towards a forever elusive truth, Jacobs formulated a theology that is both empowering and filled with humility. If indeed, "the

⁸Steven Martin Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

search for Torah is Torah itself,” then Jewish inquiry, observance and prayer become a series of opportunities for discovery—of the self, of others, and of an unknowable God. Such a quest, directed both towards tradition and the heavens, acknowledges that every Jew exists at a different point on their search, all the while joined in a common cause. In an age increasingly polarized between the alternatives of secularism and fundamentalism, a quest-driven faith further enables one to affirm belief while respecting the integrity of another’s faith. By dint of his engagement with tradition, fierce intellectual integrity and constant encouragement regarding the individual quests of the Jews in his midst, Jacobs’s work is instructive, if not required, reading for those wishing to participate in future discussions in constructive Jewish theology.

In considering Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs’s achievements, one inevitably asks what is forever lost with his death and what legacy remains for generations to come. The depth and range of Jacobs’s knowledge reflect an inimitable set of historical circumstances that would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate. The tensions that came to be crystallized in him, though still resonating throughout Anglo-Jewry, are on some level, representative of a bygone era. Nevertheless, the forthright, clear, honest and synthetic manner in which he conducted his quest—connected with the past, at home in traditional literature, in sympathy with humanity—remains a model that transcends the limitations of his life and the world that produced him.

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