UCLPRESS

Jewish Historical Studies
Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England

Against the certain: Solomon Schechter's theology and religion in his British years, 1882–1902

David B. Starr [1,*]

How to cite: Starr, D. B. 'Against the certain: Solomon Schechter's theology and religion in his British years, 1882–1902.' *Jewish Historical Studies*, 2017, 48(*1*), pp. 74-108. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2016v48.027.

Published: 01 May 2017

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Copyright:

© 2017, The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY) 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2016v48.027

Open Access:

Jewish Historical Studies is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

*Correspondence: thedavidstarr@gmail.com
[1] Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry, Brandeis University, USA

HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.14324/111.444.JHS.2016V48.027

Against the certain: Solomon Schechter's theology and religion in his British years, 1882–1902

DAVID B. STARR

*Brandeis University, USA**

In 1894 Solomon Schechter delivered a series of lectures on rabbinic theology, first as a guest at University College London and later in Philadelphia. He set modest expectations for the occasion, noting at the outset they were only "Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology", that is, neither systematic nor fully comprehensive. Part of his diffidence reflected a learned appreciation for the vastness of the "Sea of the Talmud" – the sheer scale and scope of rabbinic textuality that defied full coverage by any analyst. Part of his modesty constituted a riposte to Jews and non-Jews alike who claimed knowledge that they did not have to mis/characterize and deprecate Judaism. His humility about his project probably also reflected what he thought the ancient rabbis believed about their project, and what he felt about that project. "I have rather found", he noted, "when approaching the subject a little closer, that the peculiar mode of old Jewish thought . . . [is] 'against the certain' and urge upon the student caution and sobriety."[1]

That humility, his wariness of the "certain" in relation to theology, forms the theme of this paper. Schechter circled warily around the subject of theology his entire adult life. He viewed it as Christian and Hellenistic and therefore alien if not fully antagonistic to Judaism. He regarded it as too modern and narrow to do justice to the full range of Jewish history, textuality, and thought, the totality of which constituted a civilization, a combination of *nomos* and narrative, one that tied together the Jewish people, their religious culture, and their God, in time and in space.

I believe that Schechter avoided theology because he felt himself a sojourner in Jewish life. The scion of Hasidic parents born in small-town

1 Solomon Schechter, "Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology", *Jewish Quarterly Review* (hereafter, JQR) 6, no. 3 (1894): 405; repr. in *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1909; Schocken, 1961), 1.

Romania, Schechter made the journey taken by countless Jews in the late nineteenth century, from small town to metropolis, from east to west, from exclusively Jewish scholastic spaces to the university. This journey also comprised the flight from one set of truth claims to newer sources of truth like science, history, and empiricism. Schechter wrote about religion, practised religion, taught religion, urged religion, but what he believed in his innermost parts remains hidden from our view. He occupied what may be as distinctly modern a place as the more conventional narrative of modernization as secularization: a modernization that loves and safeguards traditionalism even as it shifts the grounds for such a modern ideology of a conservative approach to God and scripture and ritual.

If I am right concerning his wariness about making claims regarding what he actually knew of what he once termed "saving truths", then why the focus on Schechter's theology? Because, for all his hesitations and objections to the topic, he nonetheless worked at it and deployed it. He recognized that his prime directive – the emancipation of Judaism from opposition and misunderstanding and prejudice and ignorance and distance – required that he meet the world halfway. If most non-Jews and Jews alike, particularly in the West, thought in theological terms about religion, then he needed to use the vehicle of theology to reach an audience. He needed to use theology to buttress his ongoing claim that Jews should remain loyal citizens to the meta-political realm that he called Catholic Israel, the body politic of Israel that existed in the transcendent realm that connected the individual Jew with the history and spirit of Jewish civilization. Although he elided the subject of the relative authority of God and Israel in determining what constituted Judaism, his theological work consistently maintained the live wire connecting the two parties covenantally. In that sense the political question of who held the power in Jewish life could and should never be separated from the theological question of the meaning of it all.

That agenda may be found in virtually everything Schechter worked on in his twenty years living in England, from 1882 to 1902. Biography, history, public affairs, and above all his philological work all contained some aspects of theology. He believed and practised the compatibility of objectivity and engagement. Characteristic of the nineteenth-century model of the scholar believer, he organically connected presentist and historical concerns, science and religion, textuality and spirituality. A focus on theology, then, allows us to gain a sense of the parameters and content of Schechter's heart and mind, and a guide to his works in his

British years, what he sought to achieve and what actually happened, to him and to the world he tried to make.

Schechter's engagement with theology over and alongside his scientific work firmly places him in the context of mid- to late nineteenth-century philological thought and work. In that time scholars still worked out of theological traditions and commitments and assumed that their scientific work dwelt inside and reinforced such overarching truth claims about religious texts and civilizations. Those who toiled at such work therefore assumed such a congruence rather than carving out for themselves some sort of romantic response to opposing views of faith and reason. Such bifurcation emerged only gradually throughout the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century development of various humanistic, religious, and social scientific academic disciplines. To recapture that world of science and religion thus adds another layer to Schechter's engagement with theology.[2]

Landings

Schechter finished his courses at Berlin University in 1882, and received a rabbinic degree from the Hochschule, the liberal Jewish seminary. He faced the decision whether or not to become a practising rabbi. Although he cared little for the professional rabbinate, he needed a job. He later often related smilingly how once in his life he had been about to preach on the High Holidays, in place of a sick friend. He prepared his sermons, but his friend got well, and so he never preached the only ones he was ever called upon to deliver.[3]

At the Hochschule he tutored a young American student, Richard Gottheil. Through their mutual friend Pinkhas Frankl, Schechter also met there Claude Montefiore – a young British Jew from the famous Montefiore family. Montefiore's brother died suddenly and his parents beckoned him to return to London. Reluctant to abandon the Judaic studies he had begun in Berlin, Montefiore embraced Frankl's suggestion that he hire Schechter as his tutor, bringing the exotic Eastern European back with him to Victorian England.

This sequence of accidents changed Schechter's life: he became a noted

2 James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

3 Mathilde Schechter, "Memoirs of Solomon Schechter", Vienna-Berlin (Vienna Testimonials), New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America (hereafter, JTSA), Solomon Schechter Papers (hereafter, SSP), Box 28.

scholar and public intellectual in England, started a family, and came to the attention of a group of prominent American Jews, who hired him to lead and rejuvenate a moribund and modest Jewish seminary in New York. Under his leadership that school became the fountainhead of Conservative Judaism, which soon enough became the vital centre of twentieth-century American Jewish religious life.

That biographical arc is a well-known story now, but it merits remembering that Schechter came to Britain to pursue scholarship. In the midst of a re-evaluation of his own Jewish commitments, scholarship connected him to Jewish life even as it constituted a kind of safe space at somewhat of a remove. He worked mainly at philology but also at history and biography, biblical and rabbinic and medieval Judaism, working in both an academic and popular vein. Yet in that time he became much more than a practitioner of the emerging academic study of Judaism: he became a partisan in the Jewish conversations about Judaism and Jewishness and a participant in the social question of the role of Jewishness in modern times.

Schechter toiled at his textual scholarship, living near the British Library and going there regularly to use its manuscripts and early printed books, composing the first critical edition of any rabbinic text, his *Chapters of the Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan*. He also wrote on aspects of Jewish life for a broader audience. His higher purposes tied these two literary forms together. He insisted that Judaism live free from its detractors. The freedom and dignity of its ideas and practices relied on science to purify its texts. The tradition also needed its heroes, paragons of values who embodied its virtues.

To some extent England continued the rebellion he had undergone in leaving Romania, his home and family, and Hasidism. First in Vienna then Berlin, he engaged with the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) and the practitioners of the Science of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*), along with urbanism and the university. The Enlightenment emphasis on system and rationalism and progress challenged traditional ideas and customs for both society and the individual. Scientific study attacked the self-sufficiency of scripture and traditionalist anti-historicist ways of thinking about truth and practice.

Schechter's rebellion took him in multiple directions. He welcomed science and positivism as liberating and saw in them the means of making his mark as a scholar as well as advancing the cause of Judaism in the world. Yet he dismissed modern liberalism as inauthentic in Jewish life,

as masking a condescension if not hostility to traditional cultures like Judaism. What was he trying to accomplish, really?

Already in Europe Schechter had displayed signs of his commitment to using past and present, the objective realm of science and the partisan one of commitment to support one another. In Vienna he wrote a paper on Maimonides as both a codifier and a writer of rabbinic responsa, contrasting the ways in which attending to real-world problems in the latter genre informed a pragmatic approach to life as lived experience rather than the more abstract jurisprudence of a legal code. Schechter proceeded to argue that each of the dominant Jewish religious movements in Vienna – the liberalism of his teacher Adolf Jellinek and others, and the Orthodoxy one generation removed from the Jewish hinterlands of Bohemia, Moravia, and Galicia – should heed the lessons of the multivalent Maimonides. Conservatives should recognize the merits of the lenient Maimonides, reaching out to the less observant. For their part, religious liberals should tack back to a greater appreciation of law as autonomous and inherently legitimate in a Jewish cosmos.

The issue of theology failed to materialize in this piece. Schechter displayed little or no interest in the more conventional conversation that litigated various views of revelation, which typically connected and separated religious traditionalists and liberals. Since he sought to bring the two parties together, the avoidance of the divisiveness of competing theologies makes perfect sense.[4]

It seems more important that Schechter stressed the political issue of how these contemporary parties should and could read texts and history to strengthen the community in the present. In that sense Schechter provided his own answer to the question of the relation of theology and politics. Jews should read their civilization for the sake of a more unified life temporally and conceptually. Theology mattered less than Jewish citizenship. The communal consequences of cultural change may have reinforced Schechter's unease about his flight from Hasidism to more modernist movements like the *Haskalah* and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, both of which posed strong methodological challenges to one's theological convictions.[5]

In Berlin, Schechter waded into another public controversy, against the advice of his teacher Isaac Hirsch Weiss. The emerging fields of

4 Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

5 Ibid.

anthropology and ethnography included interest in foreign cultures and their folkways. Judaism came in for criticism as a religiously primitive and legalistic culture that practised barbarities like burying people alive, so eager were Jews to comply with their traditions mandating prompt and rapid interment. Schechter waded in to the fight. He denied that Jewish law mandated such primitive and inhuman practices. Eager to defend practice and lived religion and to avoid the liberal notion of religion as ethical idealism, what he sought above all was to claim that Judaism involved loftier spiritual ideas rather than primitive folk practices. Here too he spoke about and advocated a view of Judaism and its theological ideas and practices rather than proclaiming what he believed. Judaism required public defence not self-revelation.[6]

It therefore makes sense that in England Schechter quickly began to work in areas that fused the academic and the public interest, and that both involved theology in some fashion. His patron Claude Montefiore spurred that development. Schechter derived his only reliable income from schooling Montefiore in Judaics and in return Montefiore guided the immigrant in the ways of Victorian Britain, introducing him to fellow members of the Anglo-Jewish elite. More importantly, Montefiore helped Schechter get his first article published in a prestigious British periodical, a piece on the Talmud that appeared in the *Westminster Review* in 1883. Schechter composed the piece in German because he knew too little English and Montefiore translated the work into English.

Montefiore saw that Schechter was no ordinary budding academician. He perceived Schechter's talents as a thinker and expositor of ideas not just texts, and perhaps most importantly recognized Schechter's desire to play a more active role in contemporary Jewish affairs. Montefiore viewed this as essential and encouraged Schechter in synthesizing his interests and even making his accessible popular work his priority. "I can't bear the idea of your devoting of your time to the publication of texts. You must train yourself to write & you must write not merely for the learned world. Not bibliography but theology, not antiquarianism but history, not archaeology but religion – should be your themes. The peculiar texture of your mind is not revealed by editing a Hebrew classic; speak out you can [*sic*] for you have no one to fear & no one to hurt."[7]

6 S[alomon] Schechter, "Antisemitische Ethnographie", *Die Neuzeit* 21, no. 3 (1881), 24–5.

7 Claude Montefiore to Solomon Schechter, 31 Dec. 1885, letter no. 4 in *Lieber Freund: The Letters of Claude Goldsmid Montefiore to Solomon Schechter, 1885–1902*, ed. Joshua Stein (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 3.

Profiles

Montefiore's urgings struck a chord in Schechter, who sought more than the historical-philological methods he had learnt in Vienna and Berlin. He resisted, emotionally and intellectually, efforts at distilling Judaism or seeing himself as a cataloguer of the Jewish literary corpus. These instincts and commitments became his purposes: to combine philology with theology and history, and to work through the complexities of the tradition that contained what he later called mystical, rational, and conservative elements.[8]

Schechter invested great effort in these years in a series of essays, which together form a portrait gallery of ideal types, heroes of modern Jewry whom he idealized and wished to display before his Anglo-Jewish readership. He hoped his subjects' virtues would guide Jewry as it faced significant social transitions in late Victorian England. Rabbinic biographies of figures like the Baal Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon sought to fix these stars in the Jewish firmament, in the midst of social upheaval in Eastern Europe. Post-Napoleonic Europe took the "great man" approach to history seriously, as the building block of the nation.[9]

History occupied a strange place in the *Haskalah*. It was more an art than a science, something for men of letters, but contained a dose of moral didacticism. In the climate of Scott, Romantic history became redirected, also for moral and political reasons. Romantics viewed history as an exercise in the retelling and recreation of the nation's past, more than its analysis, demanding that the historian stand in imaginative and affirmative connection to that collective identity.[10] Romantic historiography privileged experience over philosophy and where better to seek experience than in the lives of those heroic figures whose struggles brought moral drama into broad relief and whose biographies featured strife, sacrifice, and self-assertive heroism in a climactic confrontation between opposing forces?

In January 1887 Schechter gave his first public lecture in England.

8 Moshe Idel, "On Solomon Schechter in the Pages of JQR", JQR, 100, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 551–5.

9 On rabbinic biography, see S. Stampfer, "The Gaon, Yeshivot, the Printing Press and the Jewish Community: A Complicated Relationship between a Scholar and Society", in *The Gaon of Vilnius and the Annals of Jewish Culture*, ed. Izraeli Lempertas (Vilnius University Press, 1998), 257–82.

10 David Levin, *History as Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman* (Stanford University Press, 1959), 3–23.

He took for his subject Nahman Krochmal and the importance of that conservative *maskil*'s (enlightener) work *Moreh Nebukhei HaZeman* (Guide for those perplexed by Time).[11] For his biographical portrait, Schechter drew on the accounts of Leopold Zunz, Sholomo Yehudah Rapaport, and Meir Letteris, as well as Graetz's *Geschichte*.[12] Krochmal supplied Schechter with a heroic set of attributes and actions with which he could identify. Schechter chose to emphasize Krochmal's commitment to students over scholarly productivity, his refusal to take a pulpit because of his humility and his commitment to learning, which resulted in serious financial hardships, and his physical frailty, all burdens Schechter experienced, too. But above all towered Krochmal's *raison d'être*: serving as a light unto the Jews, illuminating the essence of Judaism and its evolution, radiating that splendour to Jews perplexed by Hegelian notions of idealism and historicism that impugned Judaism as a "fossilized relic".

Krochmal's challenge may be viewed in the light of the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl's comparison of Ranke and Macaulay, two giants of nineteenth-century historiography. In Geyl's view these two figures differed about the past because they differed about the present. As a conservative, Ranke "accepted things as they were, confident that they were in some mysterious way in consonance with God's will. Similarly he accepted things as they had been, and the leading men of history, because always and everywhere he was convinced that they were evidence of God's plan." By contrast, Macaulay judged the past via the engine of contemporary Progress, and thus found it deficient in terms of science, technology, and spirit.[13]

Krochmal balanced between these positions: he validated the Jewish past in its fundamentally legal character, yet he also responded to historicist charges by making the case for the progressive nature of Jewish history and the organic development of Jewish law. That became Schechter's challenge

11 Schechter, "Rabbi Nachman Krochmal and the 'Perplexities of the Time'", *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter, *JC*), 4 Feb., p. 11; 11 Feb. 1887, pp. 13–15.

12 Sholomo Yehudah Rapaport, "Al Mot HaRav HeHaham HaGadol HaHoker HaPhilosoph Morenu HaRav Nahman Krochmal", *Keren Hemed* 6 (1841): 41–2; Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: JPS, 1941), 607–10. More recent work on Krochmal includes Simon Rawidowicz, ed., *The Guide to the Perplexed of the Time* (Waltham, MA: Ararat, 1961); Jay M. Harris, *Nahman Krochmal: Guiding the Perplexed of the Modern Age* (New York University Press, 1991); Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2002), 115–24; Lawrence J. Kaplan, "Saving Knowledge", *JQR*, 106, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 138–44.

13 Pieter Geyl, "Macaulay in his Essays", in *Debates with Historians* (London: Batsford, 1955), 27.

as well. He identified with Krochmal, in large part because the latter understood philology to be the central problem of the modern age. History not only placed the past in its own context; it separated that context from the present. In so doing it also cast doubt on the quantity and the quality of what any contemporary can know of the past. What then becomes of religious culture rooted in an unknowable past?

Whether or not he fully concurred, Schechter praised Krochmal's belief in certain dogmatic propositions. These included "God is the Creator" and the belief that the essence of Judaism lay in knowing that aspect of God and serving the God who loves His people by performance of His commandments. Such theses seemed to refute any charges of "thinly veiled scepticism" levelled at Krochmal by his Hasidic antagonists. Somehow, Krochmal combined modern historicism and love of God.

For Schechter that provided the means to claiming, if not necessarily believing in, a tradition. History added a "saving knowledge," [a] "fresh aspect which enables us to remain attached to them [theological commitments] with the same devotion and love as before." How could historicism add rather than distance the student from the past and from deeper truths? One must hold fast to intentionality, "a combination of the utmost reverence for religion and the deepest devotion to truth." Krochmal ranked as the saint of this modern school, one whose saving knowledge "is free from all taint of worldliness and other-worldliness . . . knowledge sought simply and solely for the love of God, who is Truth – and Nachman Krochmal was in possession of it."[14]

Schechter lived with and articulated a sense of loss and guilt about his falling away from the piety of his own father. It seems plausible that he saw Krochmal in this light as well, a paragon of a courageous, deep faith in God and the human thirst for intellectual rigour, a model for something he might himself never attain because of some lack, some doubt within himself. That never prevented Schechter from advocating for history. If anything, it may have impelled him even more to insist on the positive spiritual nature of the quest for historical truth.

That same year Schechter lectured on the founder of Hasidism and the movement itself. Unlike contemporaries such as Graetz who disdained the irrationality of the group's spirituality, and others such as Dubnov who treated Hasidism as primarily a social movement, Schechter sought

14 Schechter, "Nachman Krochmal", in Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1st series (London: A. & C. Black; Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1896), 56–88.

to understand the ideas of the movement as central to its existence. The essay wove together history, biography, and theology. He recounted the life of the Baal Shem Tov, for which he relied on the Hasidic hagiography *Shivhe ha-Besht*. In the founder Schechter located not just a mind but also a life, a note that he saw as indicative of Jewish sainthood. "Baalshem is not a man who established a theory or set forth a system; he himself was the incarnation of a theory and his whole life the revelation of a system."[15] Schechter understood Hasidism as a revival movement, one that claimed the divine presence in all things. "The keynote . . . is the Omnipresence, or more rightly the Immanence of God. . . . God, the Father of Israel, God the Merciful, God the All-powerful, the God of love, not only created everything but is embodied in everything. . . . We should thus regard all things in the light of so many manifestations of divinity."[16]

Consider the vectors emerging from this analysis. Against claims of narrow legalism and formalism, Judaism centres on inwardness and mystical spirituality. Personal piety matters more than ecclesia. Religious experience trumps religious doctrine. Poetry seems more apt to describe this way of living than prose, a poetry that lived in the hearts of plain people, who possessed religious virtues like humility, cheerfulness, and enthusiasm, unlike the conservative elitist rationalism of Eastern European Talmudic studies (which accounts for Schechter's lack of enthusiasm for the Vilna Gaon, the subject of one of his other biographical essays). All of this he probably intended for his Western audience – Jews and Christians – few of whom thought of Judaism as a pietistic popular religious phenomenon. In Schechter's telling, Hasidism became a reformist effort aimed at healing Eastern European Judaism from within.[17]

In the autumn of 1888 Schechter penned an essay on "The Dogmas of Judaism", for the new Jewish periodical begun by Montefiore and Israel Abrahams, the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (*JQR*), modelled on the establishment highbrow *Quarterly Review*. There Schechter accused Mendelssohn of backing away from dogmas, in search of congruence with Enlightenment rationalism. According to Schechter, this anti-doctrine had caused much mischief, ushering in the trend of Jewish rationalism which enabled Jewish Reformers to revise Judaism.

15 Schechter, "The Chassidim", in Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1st Series, 4.

16 Ibid., 20–22.

17 Arthur Green, "Reclaiming His Past", *JQR*, 106, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 145–9; Schechter, "Rabbi Elijah Wilna, Gaon", in Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1st Series, 89–119; Eliyahu Stern, "Rabbinics without the Crutch of Canonicity", *JQR*, 106, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 150–54.

Yet here too, Schechter, while decrying modern apologetics, engaged in them himself. He aimed to restore the theological dimension to contemporary Jewish life, not only because he felt it to be a central part of historical Judaism but also, it is likely, because he intuited that he could not make the case for Judaism to Protestants without mentioning the role of religious ideas. He also recognized the *raison d'être* of the *JQR* in Montefiore's eyes in particular as aiming at a broader, influential readership. "My object in this sketch has been rather to make the reader *think* about Judaism, by proving that it regulates not only our actions, but also our thoughts. We usually urge that in Judaism religion means life; but we forget that a life without guiding principles and thoughts is a life not worth living."[18] Judaism as a life system refuted Reform notions; a Judaism of powerful ideas rebutted Christian denunciations of Judaism as theologically incoherent. Schechter acted on the heroic impulse, reminding his readers that only powerful ideas can inspire the necessary depths of devotion in their followers, thus producing a deeper piety. "Political economy, hygiene, statistics, are very fine things. But no sane man would make those sacrifices which Judaism requires from us. It is only for God's sake, to fulfill His commands and to accomplish His purpose, that religion becomes worth living and dying for. And this can only be possible with a religion which possesses dogmas."[19]

Schechter continued to grapple with *Haskalah* and *Wissenschaft* when he took on the life and work of Leopold Zunz for a prize essay contest in 1888.[20] He prized Zunz for his efforts; mining the treasures of the religious life of the nation – its scriptures, its language, its teachers, its literature, its prayers. Through them all God spoke continuously to the people, and they spoke back to God. Schechter quoted Zunz as he rhapsodized about literature and the Divine spirit, which valorized the people's thrust for God. In this spirit he regarded the literature of the Jewish Middle Ages, which "is a reflex of the divine spirit . . . and the sum and crest of which offers us a view of what the noblest minds felt and longed for, of what they sought, loved, and also obtained, and for which they sacrificed that which was mortal in them."[21]

18 Schechter, "The Dogmas of Judaism", *JQR* 1 (1889): 126–7.

19 Ibid., 127.

20 See *JC*, 3 Jan. 1889; the essay was published posthumously in Schechter, "Leopold Zunz", *Studies in Judaism*, 3rd series (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1924), 84–142.

21 Leopold Zunz, *Zur Geschichte*, 2, quoted and translated in Schechter, "Leopold Zunz", 110.

In Schechter's hands, Zunz became not the archivist for a dying civilization with glorious treasures to be catalogued, as Steinschneider would have it, but the revivifier of a glorious past leading to national renewal, thanks to a religion of "a continuous revelation". Prayer, poetry, the synagogue, all contributed to Zunz's faith in Israel's future, according to Schechter. Considering the agnosticism with which Zunz faced the Jewish future, Schechter's interpretation is far from self-evident. Zunz might have curbed his romanticism; Schechter rarely did, believing that historians not merely make historical narratives; they make history, in their person, through their students and readers; through their constructions of the past. Schechter summed up Zunz by quoting Emerson's "belief in eternity". "We as we read must become Greeks, Romans, Turks, priest and king, martyr and executioner, must fasten these images to some reality in our secret experience, or we shall learn nothing rightly."[22]

Never mind that Emerson the Transcendentalist located the historical instinct within the Platonic universal individual, so that particular cultures "are merely the application of his manifold spirit to the manifold world." Schechter Judaized Emerson, arguing that for a generation of deracinated Jews, history, and by implication not sacred text study, makes the man. As we read, we learn, we become Jews, "if not priests and zealots, then at least prophets, *Soferim*, sages, philosophers, poets, and, if it should become necessary, also martyrs for the idea."[23] Although a scant three years before Schechter had pleaded for the study of the Talmud, now he sang a different tune, arguing that identity depended on history and its study.

Schechter's reading of Emerson reminds us of one of the central paradoxes in romanticism. Emerson's notion of the inspired individual left little room for community or nation, for anything other than the individual. Schechter, like all modern Jewish thinkers, had to contend with this problem: in the wake of the breakdown of corporate community as a structure and a source of personal identity, how might one rebuild community, as well as persuading self-consciously choosing individuals to yoke themselves to such a community? He argued that history recorded the power of the community as structure and mythic source of identity, but his audience stood outside such awareness, intellectually and existentially. How could he move them towards his vision? Schechter had

22 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History", in *Essays: First Series*, repr. in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 238.

23 Schechter, "Leopold Zunz", 114–15.

it harder than Emerson: the latter wrote for the individual, advocating self-reliance as a quasi-religious creed. The former wrote for the group, as its chronicler and advocate, but his audience was modernizing individuals, whose identities consisted of fragments, shards of Jewishness and the surrounding culture.[24]

Schechter believed with Zunz that history, not scriptures, might be their way back into Jewish consciousness. He registered his sensitivity to Zunz's anti-rabbinism, and we therefore should not read too much into his paean to historical study relative to the classic talmudo-centric curriculum. Yet Zunz was still a revolutionary in that regard; he created a scholarly legacy, took on students, saw *Wissenschaft* grow, and generated a set of ideas of Jewish history and "tradition" that could not be disputed.

His larger social impact was another matter. At a time in his life of personal growth and optimism, Schechter looked on Zunz in sunny fashion, blissfully downplaying the latter's pessimism about his own life's project's cultural ramifications. It was enough for Schechter to read Zunz as a heroic conservative, who showed the continuity and unity of Jewish life, rebutting the notion that somehow modernity, and modern scholarship, must usher in discontinuity.

Yet Schechter ignored the extent to which, for its consumers, scholarship could become lived culture. Generations before, Mendelssohn had seen this, and fretted that Jews would come to replace the "living conversation" of organic culture with salons filled with books and ideas. It took a Whiggish optimism to be a Tory, to believe that the culture of reading could stem such a tide.[25]

I would argue that Zunz resonated less deeply for Schechter than did Krochmal. Krochmal was closer to Schechter, in the geographic and cultural, if not temporal sense. Krochmal fought against Hasidism, as Schechter had struggled with his father's religion. Schechter disdained German emancipationist politics; Zunz, his integrity aside, still found himself affected by the German-Jewish apologia of *Bildung*. Zunz's project – history – touched a chord that Krochmal's neo-Hegelian philosophy could not. Krochmal was a saint, in Schechter's understanding, a man of piety using modernity for the purposes of a deeper wisdom. Zunz was a man of science, and a believer, but owing to his cultural climate perhaps,

24 Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 170–71.

25 Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem: On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), 103.

a man who stood between two worlds. Schechter wanted to believe that he still stood in the world of piety, even as he seemed to hover between the two. He remained, always, a man of the East.

In 1892 Schechter reached back into the Jewish Middle Ages, adding an essay on Nahmanides to his gallery of saintly sages. Following in the tradition that saw in Nahmanides and Maimonides two contrasting religious types, Schechter branded the former as one who "felt deeply" in contrast to Maimonides the "profound thinker". Similarly to his portrait of Krochmal, Schechter viewed Nahmanides's greatness precisely in his synthesis of various parts – philosophy, Kabbalah, and feeling – that represented a "happy inconsistency" which he believed characterized rabbinics at its most sublime.[26]

Litmus Tests

In the wake of his newfound prominence occasioned by his book and public lectures of 1887, Schechter discovered what all public-minded aspirants must: with acclaim came opponents and conflict. One measure of how "traditionalists" regarded Schechter may be seen in the pages of *The Jewish Standard*, an Orthodox newpaper founded in 1888 – whose masthead proclaimed its mission statement – "The English Organ of Orthodoxy". Short-lived in years, this paper saw itself as the unyielding opponent of reform. This view had its own inconsistencies that reflected the "establishmentarian" Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy: it eulogized the secessionist S. R. Hirsch as the staunch standard-bearer of Halakhah, while predictably decrying liberal schismatics.[27]

The *Jewish Standard* found much to approve of in Schechter's thought. In its review of the inaugural issue of the JQR in October 1888, it compared Schechter's essay on "Dogmas in Judaism" favourably with Graetz's contribution to the same number, dismissing the latter as emphasizing Jewish ethics as opposed to religion, and "his extraordinary contention that Judaism is consistent with modern rationalism." Morality must reflect the Law-giving God and must depend on human awareness of His presence, unlike Graetz's "collection of fantastic paradoxes."[28]

Schechter drew a more appreciative review, one that noted his call for recognition of the "province of faith" in any understanding of the religion

26 Schechter, "Nachmanides", *JQR* o.s., 5, no. 1 (1892): 78–121.
27 See the eulogy for Hirsch, *Jewish Standard*, 4 Jan. 1889, p. 7.
28 "Jewish Quarterly Review: First Notice", *Jewish Standard*, 12 Oct. 1888, p. 4.

of Israel. Belief undergirded all forms and secondary ideas in classical Judaism, the idea that "the strong belief in God, and the unshaken confidence that at last this God, the God of Israel, will be the God of the whole world." Hence the rationality of Torah and its dictates: it bespeaks the desire to follow the dictates of the living God.[29]

Yet this ombudsman for Orthodoxy detected in Schechter's writing a theological diffidence – he failed to write about *emunah* [faith] with sufficient *emunah*. *Bitahon* (trust in the Divine) must mean essentially confidence in God's providential goodness, as opposed merely to the rather neutral English word "'faith', or the belief in unproved facts or theories. . . . This trust depends indeed on the antecedent hypothesis that God and Providence are realities, but Judaism demands that the existence of these latter should be matters not of faith but of knowledge and reasoned conviction."[30]

The review refrained from *ad hominem* questioning of Schechter's theological position, but Schechter knew the difference between his position and that of the reviewer. He never hesitated to argue that culture rested on religion, and religion rested on faith, but he showed considerably more epistemological humility when it came to "knowing" ontological truths. He knew that Jewish texts spoke of the miraculous, but he spent more time lauding the rabbinic sages who explicated those texts than affirming the content of those faith propositions. He was caught: too much in love with tradition to tolerate those who rejected it or failed to learn it; too sceptical to conflate textual reality with lived existence. He believed in history and community, it seemed, as much as in God and Torah, almost as if by doing so he could still the tension he felt between piety and rationalism.

At the same time, the Orthodox organ took him to task for his intellectual shortcomings. In the aftermath of a lecture he gave in December 1888 on "Children in Jewish Literature", an editorial noted his learning and insights. Yet he drew the paper's criticism for two things: an implicit reliance on a kind of "original intent" view of customs, and inadequate knowledge of Jewish law.[31]

The first strike brought up a central paradox in Schechter's approach to Jewish life, one that all conservative practitioners of *Wissenschaft* faced. As a historian one was duty-bound to take an interest in the origins and

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 *Jewish Standard*, 25 Jan. 1889, p. 8.

development of laws and customs. As conservatives, temperamentally and philosophically, those same practitioners sought to defend the continuity of such practices even as they uncovered problematic histories of them. On what ground stood Jewish observance – the flow of time or some higher authority? Forty years before Hirsch had asked this question of Frankel, now the newspaper asked it of Schechter. The editorial admonished Schechter and his scholarly ilk "to avoid ridiculing Jewish customs and tracing their origins to superstition."[32] Schechter avoided working through this issue, which only made him more suspect in the eyes of the Orthodox. To them, any basis for custom other than in lofty religious sentiments, threatened to historicize, relativize, and trivialize practice, thereby rendering it an easy target for reformers.

Thus Schechter navigated between the Scylla of Reform efforts to read history Whiggishly and through the prism of ethics, and the Charybdis of Orthodox insistence on anti-historicist dependence on Divine authority for customs as well as laws. Schechter invoked God against reformers who sought to argue for Jewishness as ethics; yet against forces of reaction he insisted on appeals to history. Like Frankel, he built a worldview with these two elements living in some kind of precarious balance. Like Frankel, he paid a price for this notion, taking criticism from both left and right, though his critics dealt with him much more mildly than Hirsch vis-à-vis Frankel.

Schechter also devoted more attention to rabbis and Aggadah than to law or the legal process. The *Jewish Standard* picked up on this indirectly when it noted that Schechter "though very well versed in the folk-lore and Hagadah, yet does not seem to have deep knowledge of the Halachah." Whether or not that charge was true, they were right to detect Schechter's resistance to making it the *sine qua non* of Jewish life. Law lent itself less well to myth than the stories of rabbis and their sacrifices for their culture.[33]

Schechter understood modern Jewish history as a struggle between tradition, its legitimate reformers, and parties and ideologies. He loved English constitutionalism yet rejected the Jewish factionalism that emerged from that liberalism. How could the medieval communitarian mindset contain the liberal human desire to breathe and think free? Schechter avoided that question, preferring to lament the loss of unity, clearly questioning the price paid for Jews' newfound liberation.

32 Ibid.

33 *Jewish Standard*, 28 Dec. 1888, p. 7.

He made the case for Judaism above party in response to a controversy surrounding liturgical change. His friend, and later collaborator, Rabbi Simeon Singer, had in his synagogue put forth certain prayer reforms, excising some *piyyutim* and introducing the reading of passages from an English-language Bible. Singer, a traditionalist who studied at the Bet Midrash in Vienna and received a *semikhah* (rabbinic diploma) from I. H. Weiss, saw himself as responding to the realities of literacy and illiteracy and the centrality of the English Bible in Anglo-Jewry. Schechter often inveighed against such texts, urging the Jewries of the West to create their own Bible translations and commentaries to liberate themselves from the cultural tyranny of covertly or overtly anti-Jewish, non-Jewish versions. But here Schechter took on a different opponent, namely intolerance masquerading as high-minded "Orthodoxy". The merits of the case mattered less than fighting the politicization of religion.

> But in our days, when everyone is anxious to be labelled as orthodox or reformer, religious matters have become a party question; and ever so many quotations from the Bible, the Talmud, the Shulchan Aruch, and the Responsa would fail to convince the men who call themselves orthodox of the lawfulness of Mr. Singer's proposal. Indeed I had a good old friend, a really *observant* Jew, who did not feel at all orthodox when he said grace after his dinner. He used to say: "There are as many *tzadikim le'hachis* [righteous out of spite] as *rashaim le'hachis*" [wicked out of spite].
>
> But even a party paper – and this is what I want to point out – owes some justice to the opposition, and ought not to drop the respect due to them. . . . It is easy enough to declare your neighbour a heretic. One has only to cherish a high opinion of himself, to tell all the world what a great pillar of orthodoxy he always was and still is, and to shrug his shoulders at his friend's notions of Judaism, which cannot be otherwise than heretical as they are not approved of by one's important self. But it is not at all an easy matter to observe such laws of the Torah as "In righteousness thou shalt judge thy neighbour" . . . and hundreds of such commands repeated again and again by the Bible and the Rabbis. These were not accepted in the party programme, or there would be an end to our pillarship.
>
> I, and many like me who do not pretend to belong either to reform or to orthodox parties, could only wish for the truth's sake that this offensive tone would give way to a quiet and honest discussion of the question. But to denounce and calumniate one of the noblest men in the community may be a fine trick in party politics, but it is not orthodox, and I am sure that it is neither Jewish nor religious.[34]

34 Schechter, "A Protest Against Personalities", *Jewish Standard*, 2 Nov. 1888, p. 8.

By the 1880s we see in full the paradox at the centre of Schechter, a conservative romantic yet a radical, both in temperamental and ideological terms. He left Hasidism for *Haskalah*, then left it for *Wissenschaft*. Orthodoxy and Liberal Judaism failed to pull him under their tents. Yet to his own mind he lived and worked on behalf of tradition.

One way of thinking about him is Frank Turner's notion of the phenomenon of Victorian cultural apostasy, "whose thought (rather than personal social behaviour) challenged one or more widely held cultural or moral assumptions associated with the Anglican world. . . . [these] cultural apostates rebelled from within the core of Anglican culture."[35] Schechter remained committed to a core of ideas and feelings about Jewishness; what changed were the contexts in which he found himself. Reading him on the importance of people and history, one senses the theological modernist, moving away from traditional notions of authority and belief. Yet his romantic attachment to faith as the worldview of simple Jews hardly squares with his commitment to Jewish normative praxis that determined the scope of their subjective religious experience, itself a battle in the Victorian context of institutional religion and personal feeling.

Aggadah

In 1890 Schechter received the life-changing opportunity to teach rabbinics at Cambridge. He felt marginal on several counts: a Jew in a rural English university town, a professing Jew in a bastion of the Anglican scholastic elite, a teacher of Judaism in a university at the heart of the Christian establishment, and, to make matters worse, the holder of an underfunded position that carried no college fellowship or academic tenured status, one dependent on private funders like Montefiore to make the stipend a living wage for Schechter and his growing family. However, he now lived in Cambridge where he counted among his friends and colleagues academic giants like William Robertson Smith and James Frazer. In the next twelve years Schechter himself became one of the major figures in Judaic studies, whose reach extended into the Bible and rabbinics as well as Jewish history and current affairs.

35 Frank M. Turner, "Cultural Apostasy and the Foundations of Victorian Intellectual Life", *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 44–5.

His scholarship increasingly focused on Midrash and Aggadah, culminating in his editions of *Midrash HaGadol* on Genesis, and *Agadat Shir HaShirim*. He provided a clue to his interest in such texts when he reviewed Wilhem Bacher's *Die Agada der Tanaiten*. Schechter expressed his belief that Aggadah provides the key to the soul of the sages, and religion revolves round passion, which uniquely expresses itself in the lore, not law, of Jewish literature. Schechter applauded Bacher's recognition of "the divine elements hidden in the pure lives of the rabbis, in their interpretation of Scripture, in their estimation of the Torah, in their notions of prayer, in their ideas about conduct, in their idealizing Biblical personages, in their conception of the mission of Israel, in the struggling to know and reach the ways of God in a world full of obstacles, and above all, in their enthusiastic addresses, encouraging and comforting their dispirited flocks."[36]

Aggadah's romantic tinge enabled Schechter to connect it to the present in other ways. Reviewing Oswald Simon's novel, *The World and the Cloister* (1890), Schechter noted how its idealism led him to "a strong appeal to the past", when "there was self-negation" even "on the part of men and women who have not been trained in the monastic life", who have shown "examples of heroism more signal than the accumulated incidents of the whole body of Christian saints."[37]

Modern Jewish divisions reflected the loss of the spirit of self-sacrifice, the passing of salvific suffering that suffused Jewish consciousness and yoked the people together. Modernity replaced such valour with "the Monaco point of view, everything being to them – religion, marriage, calling – nothing else but a game, the success in which depends entirely on accomplishment in the art of cheating." Such hedonism resulted from the divisions of modern life, the destruction of the soul of communal consciousness.[38]

Simon's novel reminded Schechter of the solution to the problem of modernity. The Jewish people will find itself when it finds its mission, the proclamation of God's name in the world. In the process it will come together around that imperative, transforming itself and the world at the same time. Schechter saw in this the continual refrain of Jewish drama, "an idea which has animated all our sages, from those who compiled our prayer book down to the latest historians in the present century." Now

36 Schechter, "The Beginnings of the Hagadah", *JC*, 24 Jan. 1890, p. 14.
37 Schechter, "A New Jewish Novel", *JQR* 2 (1890): 518.
38 Ibid.

it became a matter of how to preach that message to the Jewish masses, divided and indifferent.[39]

He used this theme to remind Anglo-Jews that they should limit their instinct for antiquarian glorification of their identities as Englishmen and Jews, a sobriquet then in fashion among the Anglo-Jewish rising classes. When a group of Jews founded the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1893, they invited Schechter to deliver the first paper of the inaugural meeting. He chose for his subject a text of medieval Anglo-Jewry, a *kinah*, a lamentation made famous in the wake of the Destruction of the Second Temple, and a genre that continued through medieval persecutions. This text, found in various prayerbooks, dated from the early thirteenth century, and reflected, Schechter held, knowledge of the massacres in London, York, and other places. In his introduction Schechter praised the martyrs, who had "the strength and power of endurance, to enable them to resist the temptations of persuasion and persecution." He added that "the women proved themselves even more heroic than the men." In a time of reciting with full heart the prayer for the monarch, Schechter could not resist adding that of the martyrs, "Their heart cried unto God for mercy, help, and redemption from exile and – also for revenge." Hardly sentiments to be uttered in a Victorian parlour about non-Jews, especially one's neighbours.[40]

Schechter maintained rather that "the Aggadah in its tendency to depart from the text of Scripture is liable to go so far as to come in direct opposition not only with the letter but also with the spirit of the Scripture itself. And it is only the control of the Law which keeps it within due bounds." Rather than accept the Pauline view of letter and spirit, Schechter reminded his readers that the Bible could not be so easily categorized, and that true interpretation grasped the impossibility of such a demarcation. Schechter revised Spinoza: the laws controlled people less than it kept Scripture in internal balance.[41]

When Schechter discussed the doctrine of Divine retribution, and raised the rabbinic notion of suffering as a way of connecting to one's people, if not necessarily to one's God, he knew his audience. He and they alike might suffer the loss of theological certitude but, though most of his contemporaries may have dropped ceremonial customs, they held on

39 Ibid.

40 Schechter, "A Hebrew Elegy", *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (1893–94): 8–14.

41 Schechter, "Beginnings of the Hagadah", 19.

to their community. They felt the anxiety of uncertain status; recitation of historical sufferings for the sake of peoplehood gave them resolve to persist, so hoped Schechter.[42]

Schechter's position here encountered numerous difficulties. He wanted people to live in the light of the greater good. Yet he also wanted that corporate entity to abjure oppressive doctrine or the illiberal imposition of it on the individual. The church, or the priesthood, symbolized for him such malfeasance. So how to create religious solidarity, in the absence of such empowered collectives? How to persuade Jews to come back when they had already left such a world? Schechter's idealization of the past could inspire feelings of admiration, but could it inspire obedience?

The Bible

Any proper accounting of Jewish history required grappling with the Hebrew Bible. By 1890 biblical criticism reigned triumphant, migrating from its German home to England and America, capturing bible study in universities still committed to theologically informed and directed teaching.[43]

Jews shared this text with their Christian brethren; it provided opportunities to find common ground. But that typically involved professions of universalism on the Jewish side, and of the Church triumphant from the Christian vantage point.[44] The issue went far deeper than higher criticism's assault on Mosaic authorship; the real battle involved the history of Israel as it bled into the Second Temple period, and the legitimacy of the early rabbis as interpreters of the text. How to read that history became the issue: as the growth or decline of Israel and its proximity to God's presence.

Schechter's reactions to biblical criticism reveal the extent to which modernity modified if not shattered his traditionalist upbringing. We have already seen that in the 1880s he acknowledged publicly the late dating of non-Pentateuchal biblical texts. That came as no surprise; in that he

42 Schechter, "The Doctrine of Divine Retribution in Rabbinical Literature", *JQR* 3 (1891): 34–51, esp. 44.

43 J. W. Rogerson, *The Bible and Criticism in Victorian Britain: Profiles of F. D. Maurice and William Robertson Smith* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Bruce Kuklick, *Puritans in Babylon: The Ancient Near East and American Intellectual Life, 1880–1930* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

44 David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Englightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 215–31.

echoed traditionalist scholars such as Luzzatto and Krochmal, not to mention Zunz, who applied such criticism even to the Five Books of Moses.

Now, however, Schechter went further. Whether he changed because of his new position or chose to reveal what he had previously harboured secretly, we cannot ascertain. But in a review of a book on canonization written by his Cambridge colleague, H. E. Ryles, in 1893, Schechter stated, "gradual growth does not apply to these three groups [the tripartite division of the *Tanakh*] at large, but also to every book of the twenty-four in particular which constitute the Old Testament, each book having, according to the modern school, a history of its own before it was admitted to the Canon."[45]

This position held out risks and rewards for Jews trying to deal with the loss of Mosaic authorship. Cambridge served as home to a group of Biblicists, who created the *Cambridge Bible Commentary*. By and large this group, in the wake of Wellhausen, saw the priestly materials as late. But crucially for Jews, they also believed that the very historicity of the biblical text, its dynamism, reflected not textual or cultural corruption but the progressive revelation of God to succeeding generations. To them, critical scholarship added to our knowledge of God through our knowledge of the process by which His text came to be.[46] This reading squared the Victorian circle, placing biblical criticism in the service of evangelical Protestantism, by stressing the Bible as the word of God rather than intellectual doctrine, the record of God and his personal relationship with the generations. This scheme (depending on the author) could lead upward to the rabbis as the next link in the chain of ancient Israel as it gave way to Second Temple and post-biblical Judaism, or it could decry their post-exilic cult and absurd exegetical interpretations of Scripture.

However far from home Schechter strayed when it came to biblical criticism, he also personalized the issue – critiquing the critics and their cultural agendas. Since much of the field was Protestant, and anti-Jewish in its disdain for Israel's ancient cultic practices, Schechter tried to walk a fine line of accepting the notion of historical development while rejecting the declension model of that trajectory as it applied normatively to the history of Jewish culture.

His close relationship with Robertson Smith epitomized his attempt to finesse the problems of the field. Smith pioneered the use

45 Schechter, review of H. E. Ryles, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, JQR 5 (1893): 342–4.
46 Rogerson, *Bible and Criticism*, 284–7.

of comparative religion, utilizing the anthropological study of living cultures. He premised this on the counter-assumption that meaningful comparisons could be drawn between peoples and cultures, a challenge to the uniqueness of Israel posited by Jews and Christians alike. But in his insistence on the centrality of ritual, and worldview, as opposed to abstract ideas and doctrines, Schechter could find powerful support. He too believed that ideas drew their power not from their Platonic coherence, but from the extent to which communities internalized and externalized them in their world. This focus on the group rather than the individual ran counter to Protestantism's focus on the individual, but could be seen as congruent with Judaism's corporate character.

Schechter also welcomed Smith's views of a personal God, witnessed by prophets, experienced by persons, families, clans, even the bureaucratic levitical priesthood, who could be seen as congruent with a covenantal understanding akin to Judaism's. Most importantly, in *The Religion of the Semites*, his important and popular lecture series that became a central text of Victorian scholarship, Smith refused to divide Israelite history into good and bad, pre- and post-Exile.

Robertson Smith's then became a text that Schechter could interpret to reinforce his Jewish conservative *Wissenschaft* forebears. He sought to counter any attempt by non-Jewish critics (or Jewish ones, for that matter) that undermined the legitimacy of Jewish law. In the case of Ryles, Schechter attacked the author's attempt to position the Second Temple period, in which the Prophets became canonized around 300 BCE, standing in opposition to the law. When Ryles depicted rabbinism as "spiritual sterility", Schechter called him on it.[47] Where others saw ancient Israel as a series of sharply discontinuous chapters, Schechter crafted a linear narrative of consensus and continuity, stretching from Moses at Sinai, with God as continuous Revealer, all the way to the Divine inspiration accorded to the rabbinic interpreters of the biblical text. By positing textual development, higher criticism ironically made that plot line possible, at least in the hands of a rabbinic advocate.[48]

But Robertson Smith's function as a possible proof text for Schechter reminds us how difficult he found the task of building a modern view of the ancients after the wrecking of his earlier perspective. Robertson Smith himself seemed to embody a tension, if not downright contradiction,

47 Schechter, review of Ryles, 342–4.
48 *JC*, 15 Feb. 1885, p. 13.

between his theology of a personal God acting as revealer and providential figure as opposed to his sociological perspective on the natural, immanent causes of the history of religions and their development.[49]

Rabbinics

Schechter took up the subject of rabbinic theology to fight against its negative press, in the Jewish and non-Jewish world. His predecessor in rabbinics at Cambridge, Solomon Sziller-Szinessy, attempted to read Christianity into rabbinic texts. Such efforts struck Schechter as historically and intellectually wrong and, worse, indicated a disloyalty to the integrity of Judaism. These Jewish forays into ecumenicism he opposed as playing into the antisemitic Christian interest in deprecating rabbinic Judaism. Throughout 1894 and 1895 Schechter invested much of his time in his lectures at University College London (UCL), and they attracted much notoriety. UCL announced the talks "with special reference to the Doctrines discussed by Paul the Apostle." Schechter wrote privately to his friends the Bentwiches that Jews succumbed to such approaches, lamenting that Jewish preachers used too much Christian doctrine – like salvation – in their homiletics, rather than hewing to Jewish themes like holiness.[50]

These essays most fully express what Montefiore wished for his tutor: popular speaking and writing on theology, history, and religion, rather than bibliography, antiquity, and archaeology. Schechter's talks promoted an educational agenda, with knowledge of rabbinic ideas as a kind of Jewish civilizational citizenship, however much the student might lack the skills to read such ideas in their original textual state. Citizenship meant arming Jews with the capacity not just to participate in but also to shape Judaism as it lived in history. The texts created the community and the community created the texts, be they legal or mythic in nature. Via the study of rabbinic literature Schechter aimed to show his listeners and readers the creators of Judaism, since Judaism emerged from post-biblical

49 William Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites: 2nd Edition of 1894* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002); useful assessments include William Johnstone, ed., *William Robertson Smith: Essays in Reassessment* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), esp. the contribution by S. C. Reif; T. O. Beidelman, *William Robertson Smith and the Sociological Study of Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 1974); Rogerson, *Bible and Criticism*, 56–179; Bernhard Maier, *William Robertson Smith: His Life, his Work, and his Times* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

50 See the notice in *JC*, 20 July 1894, p. 20; the UCL notice in Herbert Bentwich Papers [HBP] (CZA), A100/59; Schechter to Bentwich, 12 Jan. 1894, HBP (CZA), A100/59.

not biblical writings. He understood that within the world of rabbinic Judaism one found God or at least the rabbis' God in both legal and non-legal materials, in short everywhere.

Schechter sought or claimed to play a role as aggregator more than interpreter, allowing the rabbis and their texts to speak for themselves. Yet the categories he devised – "The Kingdom of God (Invisible)" – suggest the hovering presence of contemporary non-Jewish scholars like Harnack and Ferdinand Weber and Schechter's intuition that the rabbis needed some degree of repackaging at least in terms of labels. He understood that a historical and conceptual gap separated him from his subjects: he thought of them or at least presented them in theological terms even as he maintained that "the old Rabbis seem to have thought that the true health of a religion is to have a theology without being aware of it."[51]

A glance at the table of contents of the 1909 publication of *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* reveals Schechter's delicate balancing of Jewish and general approaches to theology. The overall structure of the book suggests a Christian taxonomy and progression from theology to anthropology to soteriology, that is, God to humanity to salvation. Yet within each of those categories the topics proceed from the general – God and the world – to the particular – the Election of Israel, or from the Kingdom of God (Invisible) to the Kingdom of God (National).

Schechter delivered the talks in this order, suggesting a premeditated trajectory. After speaking of the Divine and the Kingdom of God, he proceeded to his lectures on the heart of rabbinic Judaism and that which aroused Christian animus, its legal character. He titled the lectures to name the path to understanding Judaism for his audience. Schechter first described the "Law" and its appearance in classical literature. Then he moved from the descriptive to the normative in the "Joy of the Law", maintaining its affective as well as cognitive nature.

He ended the lectures with a plea for the traditionalism at the heart of rabbinism. The merit of the fathers tied the generations together spiritually as well as biologically and historically. The last lecture on the law of holiness and the law of goodness took dead aim at Christianity's dismissal of priestly religion, arguing instead that law necessarily involved the formalism and pietism of the *sancta* and the moral uplift of the prophet.

His public talks ended here; the larger project he completed only with

51 Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 12.

the publication of the book. True to the Christian categories, he ended with what the Christians called "salvation". However, he subverted salvation, humanizing it by dwelling on the problem of sin and how Judaism triumphs over it. Victory requires human acceptance of one's freedom and sin, thus spelling a rebellious acting out of that liberty rather than meeting one's preordained fate. Humanity lives not alone but also in the shadow of God's grace. Winning out over one's complexity and sinfulness therefore requires both "man" and God, freedom and grace. In the end, the most profound Jewish commitment, the faith that persons can write and rewrite their life stories via repentance and change, spells not just a personal and political value of freedom but a spiritual belief in personal relationship with the Divine that wants people to emerge transformed.

Just as Schechter imposed new categories he also claimed a conceptual consensus that tied rabbinic thought into a whole. This involved him in a bit of a tension. On the one hand his interpretive historicism led him to contextualize each and every text historically and philologically, seemingly setting texts apart; whereas the substantive project of presenting the "Rabbis" involved him claiming unifying purposes and outcomes that yielded common patterns and a larger meaning in history.[52]

The shape and substance of the work mattered in the project of correcting errant and pernicious views of classical Judaism. Yes the rabbis possessed ideas, doctrines, and a theology. And this spirituality pervaded not just dreamy stories and mystical flights but law too, as the latter "was very sensitive to all shades and changes in theological opinion." Time once and for all to rebut Paul, to reknit flesh and spirit, letter and spirit, law and lore, as aspects lived together not apart.

Schechter played the gentleman in public, cultivating an aura of witty savant who moved easily in polite English academic circles, embracing even those with whom he disagreed. In private he took a different tone altogether. In a letter to Gottheil in August 1894 he mentioned his upcoming course in rabbinic theology, and hoped that Gottheil could arrange for him to give the course in America. Schechter expanded the cultural context as he perceived it:

> Dear Gottheil, if you would have the misfortune to read as much Christian theology as I do, you will be convinced that they are a to'eva [abomination] and that at the bottom they are longing for nothing else

52 Samuel Moyn, "The Spirit of Jewish History", in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy. Vol. 2: The Modern Era*, ed. Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman, David Novak (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76–7.

> than their old savage . . . [pagan] gods and goddesses which the policy of Charlemagne took away from them. Of course they were converted by force and never meant to become real honest monotheists. They have now their opportunity and want to undo the history, but let them say so frankly and be direct and straightforward with us and not bore us with subject-object nonsense, which gives itself the air of superior wisdom by Capitals and hyfons [sic] – Man-God? Why not Elephant-Spider, humble-Chief Rabbis, enlightened-bishop etc. etc. . . . Pray, I am not such a fanatic as you believe. I do believe that God is a merciful father and will deal kindly with all creatures especially those born and bred in sin and in error. . . . Are there not such things as truth and untruth, and is not the duty of the teacher to expound the former and to warn against the latter, even at the risk of having the [illegible]? or is the mission of the theologian somewhat like that of the Leader-writer in the Times whose business it is to register the public opinion, digest it well, and throw it in some shape of Oxford English with some touch of sham philosophy, so that the philistines are almost astonished at the details of their own wisdom[.]
>
> About [illegible] of the deity [illegible] the article Edersheim in the E. Britannica. I did not mean exactly Christianity, but vulgar pantheism in general, of which Christianity is only a part.[53]

Throughout the lectures Schechter sounded the same theme: the best theology embraced inconsistency rather than system. Rabbinic thought reflected deeply felt feelings more than rigorous logic, which the sages and Schechter deemed appropriate for a subject more about God as compassionate Father than as philosophical construct. God's love for Israel resembles the love a father feels when disciplining His child: the Divine experiences pathos with the pain of His beloved. Such an emotional bond explains how one school of rabbinic thought maintains that human suffering atones for sin.[54]

The letter to Gottheil made clear that Schechter distinguished between truth and philosophy, regarding the latter as foreign to the study of the cultures of the sages, and used as a weapon by non-Jews hostile to Judaism, and Jews estranged from their own culture, and embarrassed by it as well.

Yet the 1894 lectures stepped outside traditional rabbinic categories and imposed new ones. He made this strategic move because he wanted to present the rabbis as romantics, feeling God, creating doctrines if not dogma that expressed the deep pietistic connection of God, the world, and

53 Schechter to Gottheil, August 1894, New York, JTSA Library, SSP, Gottheil File.
54 Schechter, "Doctrine of Divine Retribution", 34–51, esp. 45, 48–9, 50.

Israel, via a relationship that legitimated Jewish peoplehood and Jewish law. Schechter conceded apologetically that "one has only to study the Mishnah to see that it was not moral or spiritual subjects which engrossed their attention, but the characteristic hair-splitting about ceremonial trifles." That disavowal of juridical spirituality led him to his major argument: the Midrash and Aggadah showcased the rabbis wrestling with "subjects such as God, and man's relation to God; by righteousness and sin, and the origin of evil; by suffering and repentance and immortality; by the election of Israel, Messianic aspirations, and many other cognate subjects lying well within the moral and spiritual sphere, and no less interesting to the theologian than to the philosopher."[55]

But a polemical anti-Christian and anti-Hellenist motive lurked barely hidden beneath the surface of Schechter's prose. As in his essay "On the Study of the Talmud", Schechter acknowledged the defects of rabbinic texts and their "peculiar nature" – namely, the lack of system. This led them into frequent contradiction, a "carelessness and sluggishness in the application of theological principles which must be most astonishing to certain minds which seem to mistake merciless logic for God-given truths."[56] That concession, however, led him to take the offensive, insisting that cultures ought to be studied sympathetically, from the inside as it were, without apologia or self-denial. They required no external reference point for validation. He contrasted Judaism to the commentators of the Pauline Epistles, who felt the need to defend their views by debasing the rabbis since, if the rabbis proved true, the Gospels proved false. "I need not face this alternative. The theology of the Rabbis may not be perfect; but what theology is perfect?"[57]

"From the inside" suggested a deeper and more manifest move on Schechter's part, what might be understood as the move from theology to religion. The former involved propositions that Schechter in principle saw as extrinsic to Judaism or just dogmas about which he appeared uncertain, whereas the latter included the lived experience of the Jews, which he enthusiastically described, analysed, and judged as morally and spiritually worthy.

As the scion of Habad Hasidism, Schechter saw mysticism as organic to rabbinic theology (as he had done in his essay on Nahmanides). The Torah emerged as an emanation and he spoke of the concept of *tsimtsum* – God's

55 Schechter, "Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology", 405–27, esp. 406–7.
56 Ibid., 412.
57 Ibid., 415.

self-limitation enabling the material world to emerge.[58] Here he came to a parting of the ways. How could he reconcile the modern study of religion, in the wake of Wellhausen, Robertson Smith, and Frazer, with studying it sympathetically from within? It seemed impossible to apply the former to theology: it "cannot stand the searching tests of history and modern criticism. These tests have only too often been applied to Jewish theology. But has not this theology a centre of its own, which is God and nothing but God, elements of eternal truths and vital principles, which enabled it to withstand all hostile powers tempting it to remove or to destroy this centre which made it what it is?"[59]

Schechter had made a choice; he declared that in a conflict between science and religion, he chose religion, or at least the people living within religious culture. As he reacted to bible criticism, accepting the criticism but often rejecting the critics, so too he felt about rabbinism and its detractors. He asserted that science should be used; rabbinic texts and history should be studied critically. Yet that was less important than understanding the wisdom of the sages on their own terms. In some ways he appeared more protective of rabbinics than he behaved regarding the Bible.

The ensuing lectures proceeded to lay out Schechter's own taxonomy: God's relations with the world, with Israel, the notion of kingdom in its various aspects, law and *mitzvot*. Throughout he adhered to the same method: the rabbis possessed beautiful souls more than philosophical minds, they quested for God, reciprocating God's love for Israel. The non-system of the Aggadah of course represented his wilful reading of rabbinics; a focus on Halakhah would have provided ample evidence of a system of jurisprudence, however jeopardized by the history of textual transmission problems and geographical dispersion.

These lectures remind us of a sobering continuity that has run through Jewish history since the Middle Ages: as rabbinics stood at the centre of post-biblical tradition, it became the target of those who sought to evade or destroy Jewish culture. Schechter operated in a peculiar Jewish ambiance, one which no longer took law seriously even as Anglo-Jewry deferred to the authority of the Chief Rabbi, in nominal terms. Theology was a blood sport for the English, however, as witnessed by the pitched battles waged by the Tractarians and the Oxford Movement versus

58 Schechter, "Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: The 'Law'", JQR 8, no. 1, o.s. (1895): 10–11.

59 Schechter, "Some Aspects", 415–16.

evangelicalism, and the broad church's challenge to narrow Anglicanism. Jews and Judaism continued to occupy the attention of non-Jews even as it became passé to many Jews. Somehow all this came together – Schechter's role as Cambridge professor, his penchant for controversy, and his love of tradition and hatred of its enemies – to lead him towards the centre of Jewish life and towards leadership.

Studies in Judaism

Ever ambitious, in 1896 Schechter published his first English-language popular book, *Studies in Judaism.* It consisted of previously published essays including the profiles discussed here. The introduction to that volume still stands as the best guide to Schechter's thought both in breadth and depth and in the happy inconsistency and internal tension that he recognized in himself.

He revisited the challenge of biblical criticism and philology, which led to the rise of the historical school, which led in turn to the historicization of revelation and the written Scripture. As historicism reduced the status of the written Torah, it elevated post-biblical rabbinic literature to the rank of Scripture. This resulted – at least in the scholarship of pious conservatives like Krochmal as opposed to religious radicals like Abraham Geiger – in a narrative of ever-flowing continuous religious intensity and creativity and transmission, connecting the biblical world to the rabbis of the Talmud to their followers in the Middle Ages.

Schechter lingered over the question of the historical school's theological position, one that centrally involved loss. Here he referred to his scholarly forebears and role models – Krochmal, Rapaport, and Zunz, all of whom accepted biblical criticism and sought to harness its emphasis on the historicity of the Bible for the sake of constructing a series of links connecting the rabbinic age to their Israelite antecedents, in one great chain of being. But Schechter reckoned the loss and the gain: the text becomes historicized, while its narrating agent, Tradition, becomes equal to the text on which it builds. "Tradition becomes thus the means whereby the modern divine seeks to compensate himself for the loss of the Bible, and the theological balance is the satisfaction of all parties happily readjusted."[60]

This is the first plank in Schechter's personal platform. But Schechter surely knew better; the "parties" in modern life organized themselves

60 Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1st series, xiv–xv.

around their opposition to his formulation. The Orthodox rejected the demotion of revelation to history and the uncertainty of legal authority that ensued, while Reform looked askance at endowing Tradition with such power over the free will and personal autonomy of the Kantian individual.

After recounting the fruit of the Historical School's labours, Schechter tells the reader his second tenet. The "historical school has never, to my knowledge, offered to the world a theological programme of its own. By the nature of its task, its labours are mostly conducted in the field of philology and archaeology, and it pays but little attention to purely dogmatic questions. On the whole, its attitude towards religion may be defined as an enlightened Scepticism combined with a staunch conservatism which is not even wholly devoid of a certain mystical touch. As far as we may gather from vague remarks and hints thrown out now and then, its theological position may perhaps be defined: – It is not the mere revealed Bible that is of first importance to the Jew, but the Bible as it repeats itself in history, in other words, as it is interpreted by Tradition."[61]

Since Schechter played the rebel and critic throughout much of his life, he shows his own dilemma: how to combine the two sides of his personality, the sceptic and the pietist. He never compromised either trait – he preferred to think both could be subsumed under a broader philosophy of history. But that left open the definition of history, of Tradition, and the crucial question of authority for making change.

He then faced squarely the matter of authority, in the most famous and romantic passage of the essay:

> Since then the interpretation of Scripture or the Secondary Meaning is mainly a product of changing historical influences, it follows that the centre of authority is actually removed from the Bible and placed in some *living body*, which, by reason of its being in touch with the ideal aspirations and the religious needs of the age, is best able to determine the nature of the Secondary Meaning. This living body, however, is not represented by any section of the nation, or any corporate priesthood, or Rabbihood, but by the collective conscience of Catholic Israel as embodied in the Universal Synagogue. The Synagogue "with its long continuous cry after God for more than twenty-three centuries", with its unremittent activity in teaching and developing the word of God, with its uninterrupted succession of prophets, Psalmists, Scribes, Assideans, Rabbis, Patriarchs, Interpreters, Elucidators, Eminences, and Teachers, with its

61 Ibid., xvii–xviii.

> glorious record of Saints, martyrs, sages, philosophers, scholars, and mystics; this Synagogue, the only true witness to the past, and forming in all ages the sublimest expression of Israel's religious life, must also retain its authority as the sole true guide for the present and the future.[62]

Israel decided for itself its life, according to Schechter. Not God, not a revealed text, in fact the history of the canon taught that Israel decided even that. The Synagogue not only interprets the text, it creates it and validates it, along with "general custom which forms the real rule of practice." What limited the authority of Israel? Only "its long, continuous cry after God for more than twenty-three centuries", an evocative if not analytically precise formulation. To the obvious objection that such a historiosophy of religion flouted the notion of Judaism as a revealed religion, establishing a revealing and commanding God, Schechter retorted, "It is 'God who has chosen the Torah, and Moses His servant, and Israel His people.' But indeed God's choice invariably coincides with the wishes of Israel; He 'performeth all things' upon which the councils of Israel, meeting under promise of the Divine presence and communion, have previously agreed. As the Talmud somewhere expresses [B. *Shabbat* 88a – with reference to the establishment of Purim] itself with regard to the Book of Esther, 'They have confirmed above what Israel has accepted below.'"[63]

Schechter's ambivalence about his own mythic reading of Jewish history shone through. He offered this as a conspectus of his people's history, though without the means to test it. He blurred the difference between the phenomenon of such a people-driven civilization and the possibility that throughout history Jews might have operated with a much more theocentric view of authority, even as in practice they flouted it.

Most importantly, he historicized his historicism. First he confidently asserted that the historical view dominated the centre, with only marginal opposition from the likes of the Neo-Orthodox or the Reformers. In the next breath, he asked

> How long the position of this 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

62 Ibid., xviii.
63 Ibid., xix.

> 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. . . . It bowed before truth, but it had never made a covenant with facts only because they were facts. History had to be re-made and to sanctify itself before it found its way into its sacred annals.[64]

He split the difference by ascribing to his view a historiographical significance, not a theological one, leaving unresolved what he believed in the latter realm. It was clear what he failed to believe, however. He recognized the supremacy of history as a guide to current thinking, and he wished to weigh in with a view of Jewish history that transcended the divisions of immigrants and natives, rich and poor. He fought the Christian supercessionists by constructing a continuous narrative of a communitarian culture, one led but not autocratically dominated by its leaders, all of whom sacrificed for the greater good, at times heroically.

Yet for all that, he recognized the historically contingent aspect of his own construct. A historical age demanded stories of the past, but what of theology, the timeless search for God? So too he felt that "old Adam" in him, noting "we may hope that even its theology, as far as it goes, will 'do' for us, though I neither hope nor believe that it will do for those who come after us." History became a tool, a method, for fixing texts, constructing an intelligible, culturally meaningful portrait of the past for the sake of galvanizing Jews in the present, whom he hoped to yoke to that sense of collective history and destiny. As Richard Hofstadter wrote, public identity requires history to connect individuals to the larger realm of the civic. As a juridical prescriptive "Catholic Israel" was totally inadequate: how to define radical change from what the "Universal Synagogue" deemed appropriate reform, via referendum? It worked as a romantic rendering of the historical community, revering its texts and traditions even as it built upon them.[65]

Conclusion

Schechter departed from England in 1902 in frustration and anticipation. Frustration that his university failed to make a true place for him, that

64 Ibid., xx–xxi.

65 Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 3.

his material woes continued and his family's future there Jewishly and otherwise remained uncertain, and that Anglo-Jewry esteemed him but remained led by others with different values and purposes. America held out the promise of the New World, an antidote to all those Old World limitations. Above all he hoped that Catholic Israel might flourish there, a more unified Jewish community led by his vision of Torah as both an object of intellectual focus and a structure for life. There he hoped to create a community less interested and riven by narrower categories like theology and law.

What significance should we assign to Schechter's theological work in his British years? It became a focus of his work, both in his scholarship as well as in his work aimed at a broader public. His philological work always touched on both historical questions as well as conceptual matters, and matters spiritual stood at or near the centre of such work. His frequent contacts with non-Jewish scholars and their shared interest in classical Jewish and Christian texts demanded his attention to theology in an analytical manner that often verged on the normative as he advocated for the autonomy of Jewish tradition, including the correct scholarly apprehension of that tradition.

His attempts to mediate traditional Jewish life for the broader public Jewish and Gentile also almost always touched on if not centred on theology. Victorian England as well as modern notions of Judaism as a religion focused on religion as idea, regardless of whether and how such ideas might become realized in the lives of moderns. Theology obviously figured prominently in the life and work of figures like Krochmal, the Baal Shem Tov, Moses Mendelssohn, and Nahmanides, and Schechter used those essays to work out his own views and to propound those to his readers. The question of the impact of those efforts demarcates his own sense of his limitations in these years. His readers respected him but they probably failed to follow him.

One ought not to fault his listeners, readers, even closest students and followers for failing to follow him when in deeper ways he withheld vital saving truths from them, indeed perhaps because he remained unresolved for himself about such metaphysical matters. He penned the thought of the rabbis and his sainted heroes, yet in the end we still want to know what of his God, his Sinai, why he remained observant, to whom he prayed, and so on. We know that he loved Judaism; it remains less clear what of Judaism he believed. Jews must stand with their people, with its books and culture as idea and as lived, but why? Catholic Israel presupposed the

people's agency in creating and sustaining Judaism as a civilization, but what then of the commanding creating loving law-giving God?

His desire to make an impact led him to America. There he could head up a research institution. There he could train rabbis to connect the high culture of tradition and modern Jewish science alike for American Jewry. There he hoped to create at least one community in the mould of Catholic Israel, a community unified in time and in space, venturing into the twentieth century even as it conserved the past. There religion – history, text, idea concretized in the lived experience of the Jewish people – would he hoped flourish however shallow its theology remained. Religion would play a role in the creation of a community political in its commitment to Jewish peoplehood and religious in its avowal of spiritual concerns. But there the challenges remained: how would politics and religion mix, and could religion asserted suffice for the modern temper? Time would tell.

***Note on contributor**
David Starr is the Executive Director of Tzion, a Program for Israel Literacy, and a visiting Research Associate of the Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry, Brandeis University. He previously served as Scholar in Residence for Israel Education & Programs at Gann Academy, the pluralistic Jewish high school in greater Boston, Massachusetts. He was the founding Dean of Me'ah at Hebrew College, and teaches on the faculty of the Wexner Heritage Program. He holds a doctorate in history and Jewish studies from Columbia and rabbinic ordination from JTS, and is currently writing a biography of Solomon Schechter.
thedavidstarr@gmail.com

© 2017, The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY) 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.