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NOTES ON THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION IN AMERICA

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IN 1952 MODERN LIBRARY BROUGHT OUT AN EDITION OF *WHAT MAKES Sammy Run?,* Budd Schulberg's 1941 bestseller about an unsavory Jewish immigrant son named Sammy Glick, who claws his way in record time from the Lower East Side to the top of the movie industry. In a freshly written introduction, Schulberg solved the novel's riddle for the reader. What made Sammy run? "In throwing over the ways of his father without learning any sense of obligation to the Judeo-Christian-democratic pattern, he had nothing except naked self-interest to guide himself."[1]

The same year, a few days before Christmas, President-elect Eisenhower gave a speech before the Freedoms Foundation in New York in which he called attention to the foundations of democracy. "Our form of government," he explained, "has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept but it must be a religion that all men are created equal."[2]

As of 1952 good Americans were supposed to be, in some sense, committed Judeo-Christians. It was a recent addition to the national creed.

In the beginning, "Judeo-Christian" had served only to designate connections between Judaism and Christianity in antiquity. Its first appearance, according to the Supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* occurred in the *Literary Guide* in 1899: a "Judaeo-Christian 'continuity' theory" postulated the development of Church ritual out of the practices of the Second Temple. Not until some decades later did the term begin to be used to refer to values or beliefs shared by Jews and Christians, to a common western

[1]Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (New York: Modern Library, 1952), xiv.
[2]Patrick Henry, "'And I Don't Care What It Is': The Tradition-History of a Civil Religion Proof-Text," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 49 (1981), 41. This text-critical investigation of Eisenhower's famous remark, by a patristics scholar, is at once highly instructive and highly amusing.

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religious outlook. Writing in 1934, the American communist Joseph Freeman spoke of "Judeo-Christian asceticism" and of seeing "Greek paganism . . . through Judeo-Christian spectacles." George Orwell, in a 1939 book review, remarked that not acting meanly was "a thing that carries no weight in the Judaeo-Christian scheme of morals." The dates and the politics of the authors are significant, for what brought this usage into regular discourse was opposition to fascism. Fascist fellow-travelers and anti-Semites had appropriated "Christian" as an identifying mark; besides Father Coughlin's Christian Front, there were such organizations as the Christian American Crusade, Christian Aryan Syndicate, Christian Mobilizers, and Christian Party, and publications like the *Christian Defender* and *Christian Free Press*. "Judeo-Christian" thus became a catchword for the other side. In its 1941 handbook, *Protestants Answer Anti-Semitism,* the left-liberal *Protestant Digest* described itself (for the first time) as "a periodical serving the democratic ideal which is implicit in the Judeo-Christian tradition."[3]

Carl Friedrich, introducing a 1942 volume of essays on anti-Semitism, asserted that the Jews might "well perish unless the Gentile world comes to see in truer perspective the vital part the Jews constitute in the total pattern of Judeo-Christian world culture." He went on to ask, "What justifies the expression Judaeo-Christian culture? Are not Judaism and Christianity fundamentally opposed to each other?" To the contrary. Friedrich paid tribute to the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, who in *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question* (1939) had advanced the "highly persuasive" proposition that in striking at the Jews anti-Semites were striking at Christ and Christianity. Maritain, whose wife Raïssa came from a Russian-Jewish family, himself wrote an essay while in the United States in 1942 in which he praised "la tradition judéo-chrétienne" as a source of the West's enduring values.[4]

[3]"Lector" (name of author—*nom de plume*), "Incense and Lights," *Literary Guide,* 40 N.S., 1 Oct. 1899, 146; Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936), 61; George Orwell, "Stendhal," *The New English Weekly,* 15, 27 July 1939, 237. See also John Roy Carlson (pseudonym of Arthur Derounian), *Under Cover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underworld of America* (Philadelphia and New York: Blakiston, 1943); and Beatrice Jenney, ed., *Protestants Answer Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Protestant Digest [1941]), inside front cover.

[4]Carl J. Friedrich, "Anti-Semitism: Challenge to Christian Culture," in Isacque Graeber and Stewart Henderson Britt, eds., *Jews in a Gentile World: The Problems of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 7–8; Jacques Maritain, *Christianisme et démocratie* (New York: Editions de la Maison française, 1943), 29. An English translation of this essay was issued by Scribner's the following year. This was not the first time Maritain used Judeo-Christian language. In *Humanisme Intégral* (Paris: F. Aubier, 1936), a series of lectures given in Spain in 1934, he asserted that Marx's intuition of the effects of capitalist alienation was "prégnante de valeurs judéo-chrétiennes" (55). The book was published in English under the title *True Humanism* (New York: Scribner's, 1938).

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Antifascist affirmation of a shared religious basis for western values was nowhere more evident than at the large convocations of liberal academics and intellectuals held annually from 1940 by the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, Inc. Organized by Lyman Bryson of the Columbia Teachers College and Louis Finkelstein of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Conference originated, in Friedrich's words, "essentially as a rallying point for Judeo-Christian forces in America against the threat presented to them by the Axis ideology and actions."[5] During the war and in the years immediately after it, participants denoted the spiritual underpinnings of democracy with "Judeo-Christian" and a family of related terms: "Hebraic-Christian," "Hebrew-Christian," "Jewish-Christian," "Judeo-Christianity," even "Judaistic-Christian." ("Totalitarianism is the historical result of the weakening of the Greek and Hebraic-Christian traditions we have described." "Tyranny can never tolerate the cultivation of the Hebrew-Christian tradition." "Beneath all other contributing factors . . . modern democracy is rooted in the Hebrew-Christian heritage of faith in God." "To deal effectively with the present crisis of civilization we must recognize that most of the cherished ideals are rooted unseverably in the Jewish-Christian faith.")[6]

The Judeo-Christian forces were not always precise about the meaning of their rallying cry. As Harvard's Douglas Bush commented after a particularly effusive talk by the theologian Amos Wilder, "One could wish for fuller hints of what the Hebraic-Christian tradition, to which all pay at least vague lip service, actually does or can mean in modern terms for modern men of good will. . . ."[7] Yet greater precision might have provoked unwanted

[5]Carl J. Friedrich, "Problems of Communication," in *Science, Philosophy and Religion,* vol. IV, "Approaches to World Peace," ed. Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, and Robert M. MacIver (New York: Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, 1944), 620.

[6]*Science, Religion and Philosophy,* vol. V, "Approaches to National Unity," (1945), 918, 919, 932, 957; vol. IV, "Approaches to World Peace," (1944), 753; vol. V, "Approaches to National Unity," (1945), 685, 924; vol. VI, "Approaches to Group Understanding," (1947), 702; vol. III, ed. Lyman Bryson and Louis Finkelstein (1943), 279, 287, 290; vol. V, "Approaches to National Unity," (1945), 926; vol. VII, "Conflicts of Power in Modern Culture," ed. Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein and Robert M. MacIver (1947), 398; vol. VII, "Conflicts of Power in Modern Culture," (1947), 402; statement of eight Princeton faculty members (J. Douglas Brown, Theodore M. Greene, E.H. Harbison, Whitney J. Oates, Henry Norris Russell, Hugh S. Taylor, George F. Thomas, and John A. Mackay), "The Spiritual Basis of Democracy," in *Science, Philosophy and Religion,* vol. II, Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, eds. (1942), 255; Millar Burrows, "Democracy in the Hebrew-Christian Tradition: Old and New Testaments," in *Science, Philosophy and Religion,* vol. II (1942), 412; Luther A. Weigle, "The Religious Background of Democracy," in *Science, Philosophy and Religion,* vol. II (1942), 541; Nels F.S. Ferré, "The Meaning of Human Dignity from a Theological Perspective," in *Science, Philosophy and Religion,* vol. III (1943), 287.

[7]Appendix to Amos N. Wilder, "Theology and Cultural Incoherence," in *Science, Philosophy and Religion,* vol. V, "Approaches to National Unity," (1945), 928.

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disagreement when the idea was to invoke a common faith for a united democratic front. Bush to the contrary, not everyone concerned with the fate of the West was prepared to leap onto the Judeo-Christian bandwagon.

In 1943 *Partisan Review* ran a series of essays on "the new failure of nerve"—an alleged revival of religious faith among intellectuals—which amounted to an antisymposium to the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion. Leading off, Sidney Hook, John Dewey, and Ernest Nagel each indicted the Conference for hostility to scientific naturalism. Hook, the moving force behind the series, turned his heavy guns on the Conference's "Hebraic-Christian philosophy of democracy and culture."[8] In his view, the idea that modern democracy derived from egalitarian religious dogma was logically invalid, historically false, and irrelevant to the war against Hitlerism. In making religion the cornerstone of civilization, the Conference had, according to Hook, traded in reason for the supernatural.

Judeo-Christian enthusiasm came under fire from another quarter as well in 1943, when the Jewish publicist Trude Weiss-Rosmarin issued a tract criticizing statements by the president of Reform Judaism's Hebrew Union College, Julian Morgenstern. Speaking in the dark days of the war, Morgenstern had called for a partnership between Judaism and Christianity; it would be based, he claimed, on close genetic ties.

> Today we realize, as never since Christianity's birth, how intimate are the relations of the two religions, so intimate and insoluble that they are truly, basically one, that they have a common descent, a common vision, hope, mission, face a common foe and a common fate, must achieve a common victory or share a common death. We speak now, with still inadequate but steadily expanding understanding, of the Judeo-Christian heritage. We comprehend, as we have not comprehended in all of nineteen hundred years, that Judaism and Christianity are partners in the great work of world-redemption and the progressive unfolding of the world-spirit.

Separately, each faith was unequal to the task; each had its own unique and necessary contribution to make "to what we may truthfully call Judaeo-Christianity, the religion of tomorrow's better world." This, to Weiss-Rosmarin, was dangerous nonsense. Making Jewish-Christian amity depend on a shared religious identity was "a totalitarian aberration" fundamentally at odds with the pluralistic principles of democracy. Judaism and Christianity were *not* basically one; her book sought to spell out the profound differences between them. She was not the last Jewish writer to

[8] "The New Failure of Nerve," *Partisan Review*, 10 (1943), 20.

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perceive in "Judeo-Christian" a syncretizing threat to the survival of Judaism.[9]

On the rhetorical front, however, "Judeo-Christian" and its companion terms were unstoppable. After the revelations of the Nazi death camps, a phrase like "our Christian civilization" seemed ominously exclusive; greater comprehensiveness was needed for proclaiming the spirituality of the American Way. "When our own spiritual leaders look for the moral foundations for our democratic ideals," observed Cornell's Arthur E. Murphy at the 1949 Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, "it is in 'our Judeo-Christian heritage,' the culture of 'the West,' or 'the American tradition,' that they tend to find them."[10]

For his part, Murphy was contrasting America's spiritual leaders with the leaders of the Soviet Union, who proclaimed high-flying moral ideals of their own. President-elect Eisenhower made his remarks on the "Judeo-Christian concept" in a similar context: while describing the difficulty he once experienced explaining democracy to the Soviet commander, Marshall Zhukov.

> And since at the age of 14 he had been taken over by the Bolshevik religion and had believed in it since that time, I was quite certain it was hopeless on my part to talk to him about the fact that our form of government is founded in religion.[11]

At the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods convention in October of 1951, Roger Straus, the federation's honorary president, declared that the "greatest peril" confronting the western world was "the world-wide clash of two divergent beliefs: the Judeo-Christian philosophy and the crass materialism of communism." In July of the following year, at the convention of the Military Chaplains Association of the United States, Daniel Poling, the president of the association, warned, "We meet at a time when the Judeo-Christian faith is challenged as never before in all the years since Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees." In an *American Mercury* article of July 1953, J.B. Matthews, executive director of Senator Joseph McCarthy's Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations, described the communist conspiracy as aiming "at the total obliteration of Judeo-Christian

[9]Julian Morgenstern, "Judaism's Contribution to Post-War Religion," Hebrew Union College pamphlet (n.p. [1942]), 5, 15. This was Morgenstern's address inaugurating the College's 1942–43 academic year. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, *Judaism and Christianity: The Differences* (New York: The Jewish Book Club, 1943), 11.

[10]*Science, Philosophy and Religion,* vol. X, "Community of Understanding: Its Limits and Possibilities" (1950), 460.

[11]Patrick Henry, "A Civil Religion Proof-Text," 41.

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civilization.''[12] Having proved itself against the Nazis, the Judeo-Christian tradition now did duty among the watchfires of the Cold War.

On February 7, 1954, with President Eisenhower in attendance, Reverend George M. Docherty of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church devoted his sermon to urging inclusion of the phrase ''under God'' in the country's Pledge of Allegiance. In ruminating over the pledge, said Docherty, he had found something missing,

> and that which was missing was the characteristic and definitive factor in the American way of life. Indeed, apart from the mention of the phrase, ''the United States of America,'' it could be the pledge of any republic. In fact, I could hear little Moscovites repeat a similar pledge to their hammer-and-sickle flag in Moscow with equal solemnity. Russia is also a republic, that claims to have overthrown the tyranny of kingship. Russia also claims to be indivisible.[13]

The sermon stirred Congress into action, and Congressional speeches on behalf of the change recurred again and again to the importance of ''under God'' in differentiating America from its ideological adversary. ''Judeo-Christian'' served the same purpose, highlighting, in a way that included Americans of all faiths, the godliness of the United States against the godlessness of the USSR.[14]

Yet the hot and cold wars of mid-century do not alone account for the rise of Judeo-Christian attitudes. There was a theological dimension as well. Since the late thirties, some American Protestant thinkers had begun to emphasize the ground that Christianity shared with Judaism. These were not, as might have been expected, liberal divines disposed to winnow Christian doctrine down to love of God and neighbor. Theirs, rather, was the darker vision of the Continental theology of crisis. They followed Karl Barth and Emil Brunner in scorning the optimistic image of man and his works that had prevailed in nineteenth-century Protestantism. The funda-

[12] *The New York Times,* 29 Oct. 1951, 26; 23 July 1952, 6; J.B. Matthews, ''Reds and Our Churches,'' *The American Mercury,* July 1953, 13. In light of this aim, Matthews professed puzzlement that so many clergymen had, as he imagined, become dupes of the Kremlin. The article provoked such an outcry that, in the first major setback for McCarthy, Matthews was forced to resign his committee post.

[13] Quoted in the *Congressional Record* (1954), 7763.

[14] A resolution of the American Legion of Erie County, New York, supporting the revision of the Pledge, covers all rhetorical bases:

> Our civilization is a product of the Christian-Judaic conception of the individuality and dignity of every human soul. The liberalism of our constitutional form of government, in turn, is the product and the beacon light of western civilization and its acceptance of one God with universal and supreme spiritual significance. . . . The inclusion of God in our pledge would acknowledge the dependence of our people, and our Government, upon the moral direction and the restraints of religion. At the same time, this action would serve to deny the atheistic and materialistic concept of communism.

See ibid., 7591.

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mental facts were man's sinfulness and his obligation to transform himself through faith in the absolute. Theology based on categories derived from ancient Greek and modern secular philosophy was denigrated in favor of a "biblical" theology that could better convey the personal relation between God and man pictured in Scripture.

In *The Challenge of Israel's Faith* (1944), the biblical scholar G. Ernest Wright attacked contemporary Protestantism for overconfident historicism in its approach to the Old Testament and undertook to sketch out the basic and enduringly relevant characteristics of Old Testament religion. Paul Minear of the Andover Newton Theological School took the same tack in *Eyes of Faith* (1946). Although both books expressed orthodox Christian beliefs, their aim was not the traditional apologetic one of showing the New Testament as fulfilling and superseding the Old. Instead, they sought to indicate the extent to which the New Testament belonged to the world of the Hebrew Bible and to stress, against nineteenth-century theology, the centrality for Christianity of the Hebrew faith.

America's leading Protestant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, was also the foremost Christian "Hebraist." The Hebrew prophets provided the essential inspiration for Niebuhr's great theme of the moral complexity of historical existence. "I have," he wrote in 1944, "as a Christian theologian, sought to strengthen the Hebraic-prophetic content of the Christian tradition." In fact, in the postwar period, Niebuhr's conception of the nature of Christianity evolved increasingly towards the Hebraic. In the second volume of his 1939 Gifford lectures, revised and expanded for publication in 1943, Niebuhr had stated, "The Christian belief that the meaning of both life and history is disclosed and fulfilled in Christ and his Cross, is in a sense a combination of Hellenic and Hebraic interpretations of life." Yet in *The Self and the Dramas of History* (1955), his last major theological work, that was no longer the case.

> The essence of the Christian faith is drawn from the Hebraic, particularly the prophetic, interpretation of life and history, and is erroneously interpreted as the consequence of a confluence of Hebraic and Hellenic streams of thought.[15]

The distinction between the Hebraic and the Hellenic derived from Matthew Arnold, who in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) had defined these as the two great spiritual disciplines of the West. Both, according to Arnold, aimed at "man's perfection or salvation," but they pursued it in very different ways. Hellenism's way was through reason ("to see things as they

[15]Reinhold Niebuhr, Introd. to Waldo Frank, *The Jew In Our Day* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944), 4; Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribner's, 1949), II, 36–37; Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York: Scribner's, 1955), 44.

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really are''); Hebraism's, through behavior (''conduct and obedience'').[16] Although Arnold appreciated the virtues of Hebraism, which he saw most fully realized in the Puritan ethic, his call was for greater cultivation of the Hellenic side—for more high culture and disinterested thought—which in his view had been neglected by Protestant civilization since the Reformation.

Niebuhr wanted just the opposite. Without denying the manifold contributions of Hellenism to modern life, he blamed it ''for all of our most serious misunderstandings about man and his works.'' Those were chiefly two: the identification of the self with the mind and the belief that history proceeds on a rational pattern. Hebraism, with its personal God, its sense of covenant community, and its memory of historical revelations, was far better equipped to penetrate the mysteries of human existence. Hebraism showed man and his communities for the problematic and imperfect entities they were, but while freeing humanity from the illusions of perfectionism it exalted the prophets' refusal to abide the problems and the imperfections. This was the essential contribution of ''Hebraic-Christian culture,'' ''Biblical-Christian awareness,'' and ''Biblical Faith'' to the moral and political crises of the present age.[17]

The neo-orthodox emphasis on the Hebraic character of Christianity played its part in fostering Judeo-Christian rhetoric during and after the war. At the early meetings of the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, for example, Nels Ferré, John Bennett, and Amos Wilder all betrayed Niebuhrian influence in their invocations of Jewish-Christian faith. To be sure, Paul Tillich, whose systematic theology relied on secular philosophical categories, took his friend and colleague to task for what he considered an overemphasis on Christianity's Hebraism. Tillich nonetheless endorsed the Judeo-Christian outlook in Hebraist terms. ''The Church,'' he wrote, was ''always in danger of losing her prophetic spirit,'' and it therefore needed ''the prophetic spirit included in the traditions of the synagogue . . . as long as the gods of space are in power, and this means up to the end of history. . . .'' In ''Is There A Judeo-Christian Tradition?,'' written in 1952 for the journal *Judaism*, Tillich argued the affirmative by asserting that the two religions shared faith in an exclusive and righteous God, an understanding of man's historical existence, and the need to wrestle with ''a legalistic and utopian interpretation of righteousness.''[18]

Neo-orthodoxy insisted on the limited and historically conditioned char

[16]Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1941), 129–30.

[17]Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History*, 76, 117, 121, 160.

[18]Paul Tillich, ''Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Knowledge,'' in Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1956); Tillich from an unpublished manuscript quoted in A. Roy Eckardt, *Christianity and the Children of Israel* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1948) 146–47; Tillich, ''Is There A Judeo-Christian Tradition?'' *Judaism*, 1 (1952), 107.

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acter of all earthly institutions. The great sin, endemic to humanity, lay in absolutizing the contingent; this was idolatry. The great virtue, embodied in the prophetic tradition, was constantly to question society's false absolutes in the name of the only true absolute, the God who transcended history. Among the false absolutes were the Church and its theology. Christianity as an institution embedded in history needed to be modest about its exclusive claims to truth—especially vis-à-vis Judaism. Tillich held that Christianity could be seen as a Jewish heresy and Judaism as a Christian one, a position adopted by Niebuhr as well: "At best, the two can regard themselves as two versions of one faith, each thinking of the other as an heretical version of the common faith."[19] In *Christianity and the Children of Israel* (1948), A. Roy Eckardt elaborated a neo-orthodox "theology for the Jewish question" which pointed to "the peculiar function which Judaism performs in the divine economy, that of testifying on behalf of a universal God of justice." For this reason, Christianity and Judaism had a relationship different from that of Christianity and other religions. Moreover, because Christianity characteristically attempted to limit grace to a particular historical reality,

> We are confronted with the paradoxical fact that, while Christianity originally broke away from Judaism partly for the purpose of universalizing the Judaeo-Christian message, today Judaism has the function of protesting on behalf of universalism against the particularization of that message by Christianity.[20]

Judaism was essential if the Judeo-Christian message were to get across.

Jewish writers did not fail to grasp the outstretched hand. During the war, the novelist and critic Waldo Frank allied himself with the neo-orthodox in calling for a convergence of Judaism and Christianity:

> I do not refer of course to the false convergences of Jews, "freed" of the Synagogue and of gentiles, "freed" of their churches, who meet upon the flat lands of empiricism. I do not refer to the pastors who shallow Jesus into a "very good man" or to the rabbis who assimilate Judaism to tepid Protestantism and ethical culture. I do refer to profound men of a new militant Church like Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr: religious minds who read the great stories of both Testaments as psychological truth beyond rationalist concepts; truth which reveals the insufficiency of empiric thought to explain the organic truth of man that only man's flesh and blood can utter.

Frank wanted his people to acquire a new appreciation of Jesus ("the finest personal flower of Jewish wisdom"), but he did not expect Jews to become Christians or vice versa. They should rather be "two harmonious minori-

[19]Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History*, 91.
[20]Eckardt, *Christianity and the Children of Israel*, 146–47.

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ties in an overwhelmed and menacing world."[21] Though opposed to religious liberalism, Frank was not a traditionally observant Jew, and neither was Alfred Kazin, who took a neo-orthodox line in his contribution to *Partisan Review*'s 1950 symposium on "Religion and the Intellectuals." "Obviously, then," Kazin summed up his position,

> I do believe in "prophetic" rather than in "institutional" religion; and, moreover, that the central and enduring values do stem from, even where they are no longer consciously tied to, the prophetic tradition of Judaism and Christianity.[22]

Yet it was not only to nonobservant Jewish intellectuals that neo-orthodoxy appealed. Abraham Heschel, professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary and the leading conservative Jewish thinker in postwar America, embraced a Niebuhrian approach to the problems of sin and evil in his major theological treatise, *God In Search of Man* (1955). In an appreciative essay on Niebuhr written the following year, Heschel argued that Judaism shared Niebuhr's central conviction of the inescapable confusion of good and evil in human existence, although he criticized Niebuhr for underestimating the importance in "the Hebraic tradition" of the *mitzvah*—the divine commandment, the carrying out of a sacred deed—"as the instrument in dealing with evil."[23]

The foremost Jewish proponent of Jewish-Christian Hebraism, however, was Will Herberg. Herberg had been a leading communist activist and theoretician, but in the late thirties his Marxist faith collapsed and he turned to religion—as a result of reading Niebuhr.[24] He struggled with the possibility of becoming a Christian but was dissuaded by Niebuhr himself, who told him he could not become a good Christian until he was first a good Jew.[25] (In a paper read in 1958 before a joint meeting of the Jewish and Union Theological Seminaries, Niebuhr described Judaism and Christianity as "sufficiently alike for the Jew to find God more easily in terms of his own religious heritage than by subjecting himself to the hazards of guilt feeling involved in a conversion to a faith, which whatever its excellencies, must appear to him as a symbol of an oppressive majority culture.")[26] Returning to Judaism, Herberg began to write theology, and in 1955 was named

[21]Frank, *The Jew In Our Day,* 181–82, 178, 184.

[22]Alfred Kazin, *Partisan Review,* 17 (1950), 234.

[23]Abraham Heschel, "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr," in Kegley and Bretall, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr,* 409.

[24]Herberg gave an account of his Niebuhrian conversion in a short article on Niebuhr, "Christian Apologist to the Secular World," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review,* 11 (1956), 12.

[25]Bernhard W. Anderson, Introd. to Will Herberg, *Faith Enacted As History: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 14.

[26]Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christians and Jews in Western Civilization," in his *Pious and Secular America* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 108.

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Professor of Judaic Studies and Social Philosophy at (Methodist) Drew University.

Judaism and Modern Man (1951) was Herberg's "confession of faith." In its conception of the human predicament and the relation of the human to the divine, in its critique of Hellenism and secular liberalism, the book is profoundly Niebuhrian. In fact, Herberg was interested in confessing something that went beyond the particular faith of Judaism; he emphasized at the outset that whereas the terms "Jewish religion" and "Jewish faith" would be used for "the specific structure of Jewish spirituality," "Hebraic religion" and "biblical faith" were meant "to express the fundamental religious affirmation and commitment held in common by Judaism and Christianity."[27] He surveyed the extent of that common holding the following year in an address before the American Academy of Religion entitled "Judaism and Christianity: Their Unity and Differences." Drawing largely on the ideas of the German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, Herberg concluded that the two faiths

> represent one religious reality, Judaism facing inward to the Jews and Christianity facing outward to the gentiles, who, through it, are brought to the God and under the covenant of Israel, and therefore cease to be gentiles.[28]

One religious reality did not mean one religion. The differences between a Christ-centered Christianity and a Judaism centered on God's covenant with Israel were real and irreducible, and must persist "until the final clarification."[29] American society would evidently persist as the "triple melting pot" portrayed by Herberg in his widely-read *Protestant Catholic Jew* (1955). Yet while setting a stamp of approval on the country's plural religious order, that book too ends with an impassioned avowal of "Jewish-Christian faith." In the final analysis this was the real thing, the authentic faith needed "to transform the inner character of American religion."[30]

The proponents of prophetic Hebraism were not cloistered academics

[27]Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), ix, xi.

[28]In Herberg, *Faith Enacted As History,* 51. Rosenzweig (1886–1929) was, like Herberg, a secularized Jew who flirted with Christianity before returning to the faith of his fathers; his conception of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity (summarized by Herberg) was most fully spelled out in his 1921 masterpiece, *Der Stern der Erlösung (The Star of Redemption).* In his paper before the Jewish and Union Theological Seminary faculties, Niebuhr held the Rosenzweigian definition unsatisfactory for Christians ("it obscures some of the real differences between the two religions"), but stated that it was "certainly a better definition than those which prompt Christian missionary activity among the Jews." See "Christians and Jews in Western Civilization," 108.

[29]Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man,* 61.

[30]Will Herberg, *Protestant Catholic Jew* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor, 1960), ch. 11, 254–72.

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discoursing privately with each other; they included celebrity theologians on the order of Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century and Horace Bushnell in the nineteenth. Niebuhr graced the cover of *Time* magazine's twenty-fifth anniversary issue in 1948. He and Tillich in particular were called upon to pronounce on any and all questions of faith and morals. In endowing the Judeo-Christian tradition with intellectual substance and intellectual respectability, they helped create the image of religious consensus that marked the surge of piety in postwar America.

Indeed, the neo-orthodox were anything but remote from the ideological warfare of the day. Niebuhr, an indefatigable commentator on national affairs, repeatedly urged the Hebraic conception of human nature as both the fundamental justification of democracy and its strongest argument against its foes. Asserting that communism and secular liberalism were comparably deluded, he argued in *The Irony of American History* (1952) that if we could only

> understand that the evils against which we contend are frequently the fruit of illusions which are similar to our own, we might be better prepared to save a vast uncommitted world, particularly in Asia, which lies between ourselves and communism, from being engulfed by this noxious creed.

In *Pious and Secular America* (1958), he went so far as to claim that the lack of a dynamic faith helped explain the susceptibility of the East to communism, against which the West had in some way been inoculated "by the historical dynamism of the Judaeo-Christian tradition." For his part, Herberg held that democracy "cannot serve as our saving faith"; it needed to be grounded "in something more ultimate, in some really total commitment that will protect it from inner corruption as well as from external attack." Only "prophetic faith" could save us from "the dynamism of totalitarianism."[31] Congress was not alone in stockpiling spiritual ordnance for the free world.

Yet for all its usefulness to ideological combat and consensus during the fifties, the Judeo-Christian enterprise of neo-orthodoxy had its recusants. The Catholics, especially, withheld the hem of their garment. The *philosophia perennis* required no Hebraic infusion to save it from liberalism, and as for undergirding anticommunism with religion, American Catholicism was sufficient unto the day. "Hebraic faith," moreover, contained much that was repugnant to Rome. Its opposition to Hellenic modes of thought (including natural law) extended to Thomism, which was nothing if

[31]Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner's, 1952), 16; Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America*, 51; Will Herberg, "Prophetic Faith in an Age of Crisis," *Judaism*, 1 (1952), 199, 198.

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not Hellenic; and Thomism reigned supreme in pre-Vatican II theology. The neo-orthodox also took issue with the role assumed by the Roman Catholic Church. In Niebuhr's words,

> When an institution which mediates the judgment of God upon all the ambiguities of historic existence claims that it has escaped those ambiguities by this mission, it commits the same sin which the prophets recognized so clearly as the sin of Israel.

The papacy was the preeminent embodiment of that sin. Ever since the Pope had claimed to be Christ's vicar on earth, "Christianity has been inferior to Hebraic prophetism in failing to observe a proper distance between the divine and the human. . . ."[32]

Under the circumstances even John Courtney Murray, American Catholicism's lonely champion of religious pluralism, could have no use for the Jewish-Christian faith of Niebuhr and company. In *We Hold These Truths,* a collection of essays that adds up to a defense of natural law against its neo-orthodox critics, Murray held that Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism were "radically different" styles of religious belief, none of which "is reducible, or perhaps even comparable, to any of the others." The best that might be hoped for was "creeds at war intelligibly" under "the articles of peace which are the religion-clauses of the First Amendment."[33]

"The Judeo-Christian tradition" can be found in postwar Catholic writing, but use of the phrase was always qualified, often amounting to no more than an acknowledgement of the Jewish roots of Christianity. Typical is Jacques Maritain's assertion, in the 1950 *Partisan Review* symposium, that people

> are becoming aware of the fact that no real radical movement in politics and no fundamental social improvements are to be brought about without the spiritual energies and the basic humanist tenets inseparable from the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, and that democracy can only live on Christianity.[34]

The energies and the tenets might derive from Judaism, but the sustaining reality was Christian.

The preeminent expression of Judeo-Christian Catholicism was the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies established in 1953 at Seton Hall Univer-

[32]Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man,* 145; Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History,* 103.

[33]John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 138, 125.

[34]Jacques Maritain, *Partisan Review,* 17 (1950), 324. An extended discussion of "the Judeo-Christian revelation" occurs in Maritain's *Moral Philosophy* (New York: Scribner's, 1964), 75–91.

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sity under the direction of John M. Oesterreicher. Oesterreicher, a convert from Judaism, was a long-time promoter of Catholic-Jewish understanding, a liberal who applauded enthusiastically when Pope John XXIII had the adjective *perfidis* deleted from the Good Friday prayer for "the perfidious (i.e., unbelieving) Jews." The Institute's yearbook, *The Bridge,* featured articles on Jewish subjects by Catholic authors, which were designed to enhance Christian appreciation of Jewish culture and to stimulate discussion between Christians and Jews. Nevertheless, the final purpose of the Institute was, in Oesterreicher's words, "to bring our age back to Christ." It sought, said the Jesuit weekly *America,* "not to remove the stumbling-block of the cross, but to reveal it as the very bridge over which Israel must pass in order to enter into the promise." While eschewing overt proselytization, the Institute was dedicated "to an intellectual apostolate calculated to facilitate the passage of the old to the new."[35] This was a far cry from the Hebraism of Judeo-Protestant neo-orthodoxy.

On the Jewish side, too, there was resistence. Robert Gordis, writing in 1955, could take up cudgels on behalf of "Hebraic-Christian heritage" and "the Judaeo-Christian tradition" by citing the common history of the two religions and "the debt that democracy owes to the Hebraic tradition"; but, in a swipe at Herberg, he denied that the Jewish principle of *tschuvah*—the turning from sin and return to God—required

> a complete break with modernism, as we are exhorted in certain circles, and the enunciation of a "post-modern" religious philosophy, which explains its affinities for Christian neo-Orthodoxy by constructing a cloudy, blurred image of an imaginary "Judeo-Christian world view."[36]

Similarly, Alexander J. Burnstein, in his contribution to The Library of Living Theology volume on Reinhold Niebuhr (1956), argued that Niebuhr's central theological ideas could not be "consistently combined with the teachings of the Hebrew scriptures and normative Judaism." *Tschuvah,* which expressed man's "extraordinary capacity for good," was fundamentally at odds with Niebuhr's stress on man's "frightening iniquity and spiritual impotence." The persistent concern of such Jewish writers was that enthusiasm for the "Judeo-Christian" not blur the distinctiveness of Judaism. Bernard Heller was happy to praise Paul Tillich for emphasizing the Church's need of "the prophetic spirit included in the tradition of the

[35]"Pray for the Jews," *America,* 101, 11 April 1959, 215; Quentin Lauer, "Love Links Christian with Jew," *America,* 94, 11 Feb. 1956, 530. See also the editors' Statement of Purpose in the first volume of *The Bridge* (New York: Pantheon, 1955), 9; Lauer, "Love Links Christian with Jew," 529.

[36]Robert Gordis, *Judaism for the Modern Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1955), 216–17, 128.

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Synagogue," but attacked him for seeming to downplay the difference between Christian devotion to Christ and Jewish devotion to Torah. Judaism, said Heller, "refuses to accept the kiss of death."[37]

The theological scruples had little effect on the popularity of "the Judeo-Christian tradition," which, understood in one way or another, survived the Eisenhower years with prestige intact. In 1961 the Protestant biblical scholar William F. Albright, in the spirit of neo-orthodoxy, traced "the Judeo-Christian religious continuum" from Samuel on down through the Essenes, the lay spiritual leaders of the Middle Ages, the Reformation, John Wesley, and, within Judaism, the Hasidic movement. "All these phenomena," he wrote, "are characteristic of the self-critical continuum of Judeo-Christianity." The same year, the Catholic priest Bruce Vawter, in *The Conscience of Israel,* called the moral code of the Hebrew prophets "a most cherished heritage of our Judeo-Christian civilization"; for him, their dissent was less important than their "spiritual optimism," which had "always been the seed of progress in the Judeo-Christian tradition." In 1964 the distinguished Orthodox rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, while dismissing the idea of a "continuum of revealed doctrines" between Judaism and Christianity, went out of his way to say that it was "quite legitimate to speak of a cultural Judeo-Christian tradition." The tradition had achieved secular academic legitimacy as well. The great art historian Erwin Panofsky could, in *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (1960), refer unselfconsciously to "classical motifs, placed in the service of the Judeo-Christian faith." On a humbler level, Prentice-Hall brought out a textbook in 1962, *Basic Sources of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition;* Harper and Row followed a few years later with Jack Hexter's *The Judaeo-Christian Tradition,* one of its series on Major Traditions of World Civilization.[38]

Yet by the mid-sixties a certain Hegelian twilight was beginning to settle over the Judeo-Christian tradition: writers pro and con became conscious of it as a historically conditioned concept. Thus, when he applied himself to

[37]Alexander J. Burnstein, "Niebuhr, Scripture, and Normative Judaism," in Kegley and Bretall, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr,* 412; Bernard Heller, "About the Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Judaism,* 1 (1952), 260–61.

[38]William F. Albright, "Samuel and the Beginnings of the Prophetic Movement," in Harry M. Orlinsky, ed., *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition: The Goldenson Lectures 1955–66* (Cincinnati and New York: Hebrew Union College Press, 1969), 166–69; Bruce Vawter, *The Conscience of Israel* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 186–87; Joseph Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition,* 6 (Spring/Summer 1964), 22–23; Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1960), 53–54. Hexter's book comprised one essay on ancient Judaism followed by another on Christianity from its origins until the reign of Constantine. Leaving out Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity from Nicaea on, it conveyed a distinctly limited view of the nature and meaning of the tradition; moreover, it summoned up the old apologetic image of Christianity as legatee and fulfillment of Judaism. In this respect it was inferior to the Prentice-Hall volume, which included medieval and modern texts from both religions.

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an extended discussion of the tradition in 1966, Robert Gordis felt called upon to account for the use of the phrase, which he attributed to three sociopolitical factors: the growth of the interfaith movement after World War I, fear of communism during the depression, and the rise of a pluralist ethic after World War II. Significantly, the neo-orthodox impulse, now rapidly fading from the scene, did not this time receive so much as a glance.[39]

In 1965 Milton Himmelfarb mounted a defense of the tradition that likewise ignored neo-orthodox theology.[40] A few years later he wrote an article assessing the current relevance of Matthew Arnold's ideas about Hebraism and Hellenism without either mentioning neo-orthodox Hebraism or relating present-day Hebraism, robust as he saw it, to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Even friends of neo-orthodoxy lost sight of what it had meant by the Judeo-Christian. In a 1966 article in *Daedalus,* the Catholic writer Michael Novak praised Christian neo-orthodox theologians for "increasingly detaching themselves from the Judeo-Christian world view of the past," which for him had been "constituted by confidence in the final rationality of history"—just the opposite of the Niebuhrian conception of it. Now, said Novak, with the true grimness and uncertainty of the cosmos revealed, "the illusions of Judaeo-Christian culture are passing away."[41] He was, in his very misapprehension, on to something.

In 1970 Arthur A. Cohen published a collection of his articles under the title *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition.* In freshly written introductory and concluding essays, Cohen asserted that the Judeo-Christian tradition was no *tradition* at all; the history of Jewish-Christian relations was fundamentally a history of social and theological antagonism, not of common cause. As for the idea of the tradition, its roots lay in the Enlightenment, which, hostile to all revealed religion, had linked Judaism and Christianity as sharing a common untruth.[42] The definition of the tradition "as such,"

[39]Robert Gordis, "The Judeo-Christian Tradition—Illusion or Reality," in his *Judaism in a Christian World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 154–55. This explanation, for which Gordis offered only vague and impressionistic evidence, is unsubstantiated by my findings except as regards postwar pluralism.

[40]Milton Himmelfarb, "On Reading Matthew," *Commentary,* 40, Oct. 1965, 55–65. Himmelfarb's defense was based (following, *mutatis mutandis,* Edmund Wilson) on a reading of Matthew in the original Greek. Focusing on the question of Christian origins, he attacked the polemical claims of some Israeli Zionists that Christianity was merely a Hellenistic invention and the Judeo-Christian tradition a self-justifying delusion of Jews remaining in the Diaspora.

[41]Milton Himmelfarb, "Hebraism and Hellenism Now," *Commentary,* 48, July 1969, 50–57; Michael Novak, "Christianity: Renewed or Slowly Abandoned," rpt. in William G. McLoughlin and Robert N. Bellah, eds., *Religion in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), 399, 393, 401.

[42]Arthur A. Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), xv–xviii. As he indicates later (199), Cohen here had in mind the views of Voltaire,

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Cohen claimed, was the work of the nineteenth-century German Protestant scholars engaged in the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament. Their aim was at once to acknowledge the Jewish dimension of Christianity while cutting away those aspects of Judaism antipathetic to their "pure, virtuous Kantian" Protestantism. The result was a "de-Judaizing of Christian theology."[43]

Even if true this account would have been something of a red herring. "De-Judaized" liberal theology was precisely the enemy of the "Hebraism" that had animated Protestant theological usage in the present day—when, as Cohen allowed, "the Judeo-Christian tradition" had "come to full expression." He wanted, moreover, to blame exponents of the tradition for the moral collapse of the German churches during the thirties.

> The consequence of the de-Judaizing of Christian theology could not be more evident than in the pitiful inability of the Protestant (and to a slightly—but only slightly—lesser extent, Catholic) Church to oppose German National Socialism.[44]

That, of course, was to turn the political history of the idea inside out, for it was just in order to combat Nazism that "the Judeo-Christian tradition" was first pressed into service.

Diderot, and D'Alembert. He might with greater plausibility have sought Enlightenment roots in the thought of Lessing and Mendelssohn, which, while likewise critical of revelation, portrayed Judaism and Christianity as positive religions partaking equally of the same truth. "Die Unentbehrlichkeit einer positiven Religion, vermöge welcher die natürliche Religion in jedem Staate nach dessen natürlicher und zufälliger Beschaffenheit modificirt wird, nenne ich die innere Wahrheit derselben, und diese innere Wahrheit derselben ist bei einer so gross als bei der andern." Gotthold Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften,* 14, eds. Karl Lachmann and Franz Muncker (Leipzig: G.J. Goschen, 1898), 313. "In welcher glückseligen Welt würden wir leben, wenn alle Menschen die Wahrheiten annähmen und ausübten, die die besten Christen und die besten Juden gemein haben!" Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften,* 3 (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1943), 114–15. The best-known expression of this point of view is Lessing's play *Nathan der Weise,* an adaptation of the story of the three rings from the *Decameron.*

[43]Ibid., xviii, 199. Cohen offered no support for his claims about the German Higher Critics and the Judeo-Christian tradition. The passage in question is worth quoting at length:

> It was only in the late nineteenth century in Germany that the Judeo-Christian tradition, as such, was first defined. It was introduced by German Protestant scholarship to account for the findings developed by the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament and achieved considerable currency as a polemical term in that period. There, quite clearly, the negative significance of the expression became primary. The emphasis fell not to the communality of the word "tradition" but to the accented stress of the hyphen. The Jewish was latinized and abbreviated into "Judeo" to indicate a dimension, albeit a pivotal dimension, of the explicit Christian experience.

Precisely what term did the German scholar introduce? The latinized "Judeo-" occurs in English and French but not in German, which permits no invidious distinction between the two hyphenated adjectives by using "jüdisch-christlich" for "Judeo-Christian" (as in the pamphlet *Jüdisch-Christliche Gottesdienst,* published in 1977 by the Evangelische Akademie in Hessen und Nassau). The Higher Critics were deeply concerned with the Jewish sources of Christianity, but I can find no polemicizing over a "jüdisch-christliche Uberlieferung" per se.

[44]Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition,* xviii, 199.

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Cohen did, by implication, take note of the tradition's neo-orthodox sponsorship. The concept had thrived, he said, on a Christian desire "to affirm a renewed connection with the Hebrew Bible" and a Jewish desire to join with Christianity in a battle against secularism.

> It would appear that the conviction of liberal theologians, Jewish and Christian, is that the temptation of man to sin is so great and so abiding that the truth itself must be made less dangerous, less blunt, less absolute that the demonic be kept at bay.

Yet Cohen avoided direct engagement with their thought, waving it away as a "swarm of fideist passion" which omitted "the sinew and bone of actuality": the rift between those for whom the Messiah was yet to come, and those for whom he had come already. This rift was so wide that even those "compatible truths" shared by Judaism and Christianity were insufficient grounds to suggest "the presence of something more, a *tertium quid* to which both communities appeal and to which both seem more respondent than their historical enmity." Gone was neo-orthodoxy's renunciation of exclusivist theology; if each religion was to remain true to itself, the theological antagonism had to be preserved. "The only authentic Judeo-Christian tradition is that God bears both communities down to the end of time unreconciled." That did not necessitate fratricide. Cohen concluded by hoping for a "Judeo-Christian humanism" through which anger could be set aside and the common task embraced of working for a better world.[45]

The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition was received with enthusiasm. *Commentary* gave its imprimatur by printing excerpts prior to publication. The reviewer for the liberal Catholic weekly *Commonweal* applauded Cohen's assault on a concept that was "the catch-all of textbook writers, Western Civ. lectures, Brotherhood Week toastmasters, and Jews and Christians who cannot think of anything else to speak of to one another when it comes to religious convictions." Writing in the Jewish periodical *Midstream,* Jacob Neusner announced that Cohen was, among American-born writers, "the most brilliant contemporary theologian of Judaism, without qualification or exception," and praised the book as a "landmark in the formulation of a Judaic theology of Christianity." To be sure, John Oesterreicher, whose Judeo-Christian Institute was flayed in one of the chapters, lodged a protest, attacking the collection for its polemical style as well as for its substance. "I thus beg to dissent from the eulogists of Mr. Cohen's book."[46] Yet his was the voice of another day; the Judeo-Christian tradition had lost its charm.

[45]Ibid., 196, 201, xii, 200, 217, 222.

[46]Walter Arnold, *Commonweal,* 96, 2 April 1970, 96–97; Jacob Neusner, "Beyond Accommodation," *Midstream,* 16, March 1970, 77–78; John Oesterreicher, *America,* 122, 6 June 1970, 617.

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In social and political terms it is easy to see why: the old causes were no longer capable of sustaining the concept. In 1973 Nathan Rotenstreich, professor of philosophy and former rector of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, wrote that the notion of a "Judaeo-Christian civilization," which had taken hold in the United States alone, was simply a "device" to convince gentiles that they shared a common tradition with the Jews, and to convince Jews that they partook not only of the universal secular culture but of the universal Christian one as well. "There seems to be a kind of suspicion, vis-à-vis the Jews, that they have to be convinced of the identity between themselves and the surrounding world, lest they cultivate their own distinctiveness." Yet in the 1970s America experienced a new enthusiasm for ethnic particularism; Jews, accepted as never before in American society, were expected to cultivate some distinctiveness. The protection of "Judeo-Christian" became superfluous or worse, and gentiles learned to see the term as an affront to Jewry. The liberal Catholic theologian Rosemary Ruether would title a discussion of Jewish-Christian relations "Unmasking the Myth of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition"; for her, the concept of the tradition was a disguise for what was really a history of Christian anti-Semitism. Michael Harrington would feel compelled to justify his use of the phrase: it did not *have* to be "a device to assimilate an authentic Judaism to an arrogant Christianity."[47]

Meanwhile, the Judeo-Christian mantle of anticommunism was worn thin, especially in light of the United States adventure in Vietnam. We had met the enemy and he was us. In a post-Vietnam diatribe on American mistreatment of nonwestern peoples from the Indians to the Southeast Asians, the historian Richard Drinnon dismissed "Judeo-Christian teleology with its reified time, which had and has little or nothing to do with the cycles of organisms."[48] From signaling a world-saving mission, "Judeo-Christian" had become an emblem of things wrong with the West.

The Judeo-Christian concept had arisen in a search for consensus, and consensus itself, after the sixties, was a bad word. Theologically, there was a kind of justice in this; as an expression of consensus, the neo-orthodox invocation of the Judeo-Christian tradition had always been problematic. It had centered on the persistent prophetic need of Judaism and Christianity to lay bare society's false absolutes and sanctimonious self-righteousness. If such was in fact the Judeo-Christian tradition, then its proponents were

[47]Nathan Rotenstreich, "Emancipation and Its Aftermath," in David Sidorsky, ed., *The Future of the Jewish Community in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 52; Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 43–56; Michael Harrington, *The Politics at God's Funeral* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), 6.

[48]Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1980), xiii.

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duty-bound to call into question the civic order that celebrated Brotherhood Weeks, enjoined citizens to worship at the church of their choice, and adopted "the Judeo-Christian tradition" as its anticommunist shibboleth. So it was: in *Protestant Catholic Jew,* for example, Herberg both blessed and cursed the consensus that neo-orthodoxy was helping to create. "Authentic Jewish-Christian faith," he wrote, had less to fear from "overt and avowed unbelief" than from the secularized piety of "the contemporary religious revival."[49] That the greatest threat to the Judeo-Christian tradition should have come from "the Judeo-Christian tradition" was an appropriately Niebuhrian irony.

A related irony extended beyond theology to the historians who, in the postwar period, came to challenge the reigning progressive historiography, in some cases under Niebuhr's direct influence. American history was not the story of good fighting evil in an ongoing battle to achieve the American Dream. There was, rather, one American culture dappled with light and darkness, and characterized more by paradox than progress. Deeply interested in, and at times critical of, the rhetoric of consensus that flowed through so much of that American culture, the counter-progressives were for their pains labeled "consensus historians" by New Left adversaries, who accused them of ignoring the real conflicts of race and class. To speak of consensus was to become its apologist.[50]

Yet as consensus was falling into disrepute, the prophetic impulse was reasserting itself in society at large, though without much sense of historical irony: in the struggles for civil rights, the social programs of the Great Society, and in the movement against the Vietnam War. America's postwar idolatries, not only anticommunism but also the cult of the presidency and the cult of the university, were cast down; the Establishment was scourged. To the neo-orthodox it might have served as a reminder that western religion, in its wisdom, possessed a priestly as well as a prophetic side.

The rhetoric continued to stumble along. In its heyday, "Judeo-Christian" had keynoted political professions of faith; during the 1976 presidential campaign, Malcolm Boyd used it to decry them.

> All candidates could well choose to address issues from a broad moral base rooted in Judeo-Christian ethics. But when a politician publicly invokes an association with either the Hebrew prophets or Jesus, it is inescapably suggested that goodness uniquely rubs off on him.[51]

[49]Herberg, *Protestant Catholic Jew,* 271.

[50]On the fortunes of consensus historiography, see Gene Wise, *American Historical Explanations: A Strategy for Grounded Inquiry* (Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1973). Donald Weber's introduction to the Amherst edition of Perry Miller's *Jonathan Edwards* demonstrates the extent of Miller's indebtedness to Niebuhr and deftly conveys the feeling of the counter-progressive moment in American historiography.

[51]Malcolm Boyd, *The New York Times,* 30 May 1976, IV, 15.

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There is more than a hint here of the old neo-orthodox warning against self-righteous religiosity. To this end, however, the term must stand bare of its own prophetic antecedents, the clue to a faith that can barely be spoken. For the faith spoken most loudly in recent years has been of the born-again variety. There, the prophetic witness has not been wanting. Conservative Jeremiahs are heard in the land, denouncing sin even, on occasion, for the sake of the ecumenical name. The Rev. Jerry Falwell's tabloid reports a "systematic pattern of discrimination against . . . [books] which display philosophical positions rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition"; while at the top of the masthead sits that ancient idol of all democratic societies: a moral majority.[52]

In 1974 the sociologist John Murray Cuddihy published a study of "the Jewish struggle with modernity" entitled *The Ordeal of Civility.* To him, the idea of a Judeo-Christian civilization was merely "ecumenist public relations" which bore testimony to "the cultural and theological illiteracy of our times." His heroes were "the great unassimilated, implacable Jews of the West," "proud pariahs" like Marx, Freud, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who exhibited "a principled and stubborn resistance to the whole western 'thing.'" Most Jewish intellectuals, though, had succumbed to the gentilities of a western civilization that is no other than "an incognito or secularized form of Christianity."[53]

Thus in late twentieth-century America does a lapsed Irish Catholic Jeremiah of the academy summon Jewish colleagues to overthrow the idols of their tribe. There can be few odder injunctions to keep the faith, and few more striking witnesses to the persistence, under whatever name, of the Judeo-Christian tradition in American life.*

[52]*Moral Majority Report,* May 1983, 8.

[53]John Murray Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 231.

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