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Who Is a Jew*

NO MORE IRONICAL SITUATION CAN BE ENVISAGED than for a people to be of several minds about the nature of its own identity. And yet such a sharp division of opinion was recently demonstrated by the changing attitudes of the government of Israel concerning the definition of a Jew. This definition is a practical necessity inasmuch as, in the absence of a written constitution, the "fundamental" laws passed by the Knesset include the so-called Law of Return which pledges the country for all future times to admit Jews to its borders. But that the definition of who is a Jew under the terms of that law should become a matter of political controversy, and that a changing coalition of parties composing the government should force a total reversal of a position taken by a previous cabinet is but another illustration of the extraordinary nature of Jewish life and the general impossibility to apply to it the prevailing criteria of religious allegiance.

Not that one need necessarily look for a generally acceptable clear-cut definition. Definitions are sometimes the most awkward means of reaching substantive agreements and understanding; they have more often than not generated endless controversies. Without looking for definitions we all have a fairly clear understanding of, for instance, who is an American, although opinions have diverged widely about who, or what, is "un-American." In the case of the Jews, however, there is indeed room not only for different formulations, but also for genuine differences of opinion on the underlying assumptions. In fact, the controversy over who is a Jew has had many facets throughout the history of the Jewish dispersion.

* Reprinted from *Midstream*, vol. VI, no. 2, spring, 1960.

Originally, of course, the term Jew was a derivative from the country of Judah, the southern of the two kingdoms of ancient Israel. With the disappearance of Northern Israel after the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C.E., Judah remained as the sole Jewish state which guarded its independence for another 135 years. The descendants of these ancient Judeans became the Jews of all following generations.

However, the controversy begins at this very point. Modern biblical scholars, particularly the adherents of the long-regnant Wellhausenian theories concerning the dating of "documents" in the Bible, have long ago begun calling the religion of ancient Israel before the fall of Jerusalem the Israelite or Hebrew religion. These scholars have claimed that only after the return from the Babylonian Exile, and the establishment of the new "theocracy" of the Second Commonwealth did the new priestly and law-centered religion of "Judaism" emerge under the leadership of Ezra the Scribe and his associates and disciples.

Characteristic of this entire school of biblical criticism was a distinguished work published in 1896 by Eduard Meyer, one of the leading ancient historians at the turn of the century. The very title of the book formulated a program. By calling it *Die Entstehung des Judentums* (The Origin of Judaism), Meyer clearly indicated that the period of Ezra had marked a complete break with the past of prophetic Judaism which had now been replaced by the new law and ritualism of the Priestly Code. As an historian, moreover, Meyer attributed the rise of that new "Jewish" religion and civilization to the new position of the Jews as a subject people of the Persian empire. It was, indeed, in the interest of Persia's Achaemenid dynasty which ruled, as the Book of Esther informs us, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to keep its multifarious racial, ethnic and religious groups under effective control with the aid of their own leaders. Under that policy, the early Achaemenid empire builders, including Cyrus and Darius I, endowed also the new theocracy of Jerusalem with much authority and thus helped to mold the new "Judaism." With complete abandon, Meyer exclaimed that post-exilic Judaism had thus been created "in the name of the Persian king and on the strength of the authority of his empire.

The effects of the Achaemenid Empire thus extend directly to our day with a power equalled by few contemporary phenomena."

Few biblical critics, to be sure, will subscribe today to this sweeping assertion, or even to its underlying theories concerning the chronological sequence of the relevant biblical documents. Yet Meyer's general outlook still dominates the minds of Bible students, particularly in the Christian world, and post-exilic "Judaism" still is frequently differentiated from the pre-exilic "Israelitic" faith. "Jewish" history has thus artificially been foreshortened by at least a millennium.

Nor is this concept entirely the result of modern critical approaches. In many ways it is but a variant of the old Christian concept which saw in the Jewish people and its religion a mere *praeparatio evangelica*, a preliminary phase before the advent of the Christian "redeemer." Eusebius, who wrote an entire book under this very title, and other Church Fathers untiringly underscored the difference between the old and the new dispensations. They taught that the Jew had indeed formerly belonged to the "chosen people" but, by repudiating Jesus, he had forfeited his chosenness which had been transferred to the Christian community. The new Jew might still be Israel in the flesh, but it is the Christian who had become Israel in the spirit. The term "Jew" thus gradually became among Christians a term of opprobrium. In discussing, for instance, the ceremony of circumcision, the Christian apologist Justin Martyr, a native of Palestinian Shechem-Nabulus living after the Roman suppression of the Bar Kocheba revolt, exclaimed: "[It] was given for a sign that you may be separated from other nations, and from us; and that you alone may suffer that which you now justly suffer; and that your land may be desolate, and your cities burned with fire; and that strangers may eat your food in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem."

So convinced had the Christians become that they were the genuine spiritual descendants of Abraham that no lesser a thinker than St. Augustine expressed the fear that, through this constant emphasis on the spiritual kinship between the two faiths, the distinction between Christian and Jew might be completely blurred.

To uphold this difference, Christian teachers began using the term Jew more and more in a pejorative sense. As early as the second century, Melito of Sardis used some fanciful Hebrew etymologies, in part borrowed from the Jewish philosopher Philo, to explain that the term Israel means a man who "saw God," and hence refers to a Christian. Judah, on the other hand, means an adherent of the synagogue of Satan, while finally Ishmael, who was later to play a great role as the alleged progenitor of the Arab world and the Muslim religion, really meant "one who obeys," that is obeys his own lust. Before long some Christian thinkers began denying the very indebtedness of their faith to Judaism. Invoking the accepted Christian doctrine that, as a son of God, Jesus was pre-existent and that, hence, Christianity and its teachings really antedated the very creation of the world, St. Ignatius of Antioch by a mental tour de force indulged the paradox that "Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism believed in Christianity."

Not surprisingly, the term Jew began losing some of its ethnic-religious connotations and served more and more as a means of name calling of any opponent. Just as today people indiscriminately label adversaries communists or fascists without necessarily attributing to them the belief in the specific doctrines of either totalitarian movement, so did many Christians classify any deviationist from their accepted dogmas a Jew. It is truly remarkable to find even in the measured legal terminology of Roman imperial decrees, in which every word and term were weighed with great care and juristic precision, the reiterated designation of "Nestorius, the Jew." This condemnation of the famous heresiarch, whose Nestorian sect quickly penetrated Iran and from there paved the way for Christianity's entrance into central Asia and the Far East, was ultimately incorporated in the Code of Justinian, one of the classical compilations of Roman law. A sixth-century patriarch of Antioch who, to the best of our knowledge, had no drop of Jewish blood in his veins and betrayed no friendly feelings towards Jews, was likewise recklessly dubbed by his enemies: Severus, the Jew.

With somewhat greater justice were those Christian sectarians who steadily invoked the Old Testament in support of their doc-

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trines styled Jews, especially by those of their antagonists who had been imbued with the Gnostic-Marcionite hostility toward the old dispensation. But in the heat of their arguments polemicists often forsook this distinction and dismissed as "Jews" even such adversaries of the Old Testament as the medieval French Catharists. This tradition continued into modern times when Charles Maurras, the well-known French anti-Semite and fascist sympathizer, condemned in one breath Judaism, the Bible-minded Protestantism, and Free Masonry as the three manifestations of the Jewish spirit diametrically opposed to the genuinely "Roman," and hence "Aryan" spirit of Roman Catholicism.

When during the Middle Ages the Jewish people was gradually alienated from the soil and had to turn more and more to commerce and moneylending as sources of its livelihood, the term Jew began assuming also a new socio-economic connotation. At first the identification of a Jew with a merchant was done without any animus. In an early German toll ordinance of 906 we find the matter-of-fact provision that "Jews and other merchants" should pay such and such a toll. Before long, however, the widespread Jewish credit transactions aroused sharp animosities not only among the borrowers, who readily took loans when they needed the money but heartily disliked the lenders when they had to repay their debts with interest. The very charging of any interest, however small, was generally condemned by the Church and public opinion. If an exception was made for Jews in their capacity of "infidels," this certainly did not enhance their reputation. Under the impact of the general religious fanaticism accompanying the Crusades, a leading French churchman, Peter "the Venerable" of Cluny, advised his king drastically to suppress Jewish usury by forcing the Jews into manual labor and, preferably, by eliminating them altogether. His far more distinguished and humane contemporary, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, successfully intervened in behalf of the German Jews then threatened by crusading mobs, but he did not hesitate to agitate against the newly elected Pope Anacletus II, the great-grandson of a Jewish convert, for the "Jewish offspring now occupies the see of St. Peter to the injury of Christ." At the same time,

perhaps unconsciously, he also coined a new memorable phrase. He declared that Christian usurers are wont *peius judaizare* (to judaize in a worse fashion) than Jewish moneylenders themselves. Phrases like "Jews and other usurers" (found, for instance, in a municipal ordinance of Forlì, Italy, adopted in 1359), were employed as a matter of course. Thenceforth the term "judaizing," without altogether losing its original meaning of practicing Jewish rites or converting someone to Judaism, was increasingly used as the equivalent of charging usurious rates of interest and, more broadly, of economically exploiting the weak masses of the population.

For centuries thereafter the term "Jew" appeared in all western literatures, even in some dictionaries, as a synonym for usurer, exploiter, and swindler. It even was used as a verb, "to jew," in the same objectionable sense. No lesser a leader of French Enlightenment than François Marie Arouet de Voltaire allowed himself the following intemperate outburst in the article "Juif" in his *Philosophic Dictionary*:

In short, we find them [the Jews] only an ignorant and barbarous people, who have long united the most sordid avarice with the most detestable superstition and the most invincible hatred for every people by whom they are tolerated and enriched. Still, we ought not to burn them.

All these debates affected the Jews to but a minor extent. Unperturbedly, the Jewish people considered itself part of an unbroken chain of evolution going back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The distinction between Israel and Judah appeared to it as but a reflection of the ancient purely political divisions between the two co-existing Palestinian kingdoms. Religiously and ethnically the whole people was a single unit, Amos the Judean preaching freely in the northern sanctuary in the name of their common God and their common sense of justice. Although he was expelled by the northern king as an undesirable alien, the people of Northern Israel felt such a deep kinship to the people of Judah that even today it is difficult for scholars to trace the actual boundaries between the two Jewish states. After the fall of Samaria, the Judeans laid claim to the north-

ern areas and, under Josiah, actually succeeded in recapturing much of the territory lost to the foreign invaders. Nor was the people ever mentally reconciled to any such permanent division; even when Jerusalem was occupied by enemies, prophet after prophet predicted the speedy reunification of the two branches during the forthcoming redemption. In the people's memory the fall of Samaria played but a relatively minor role, while that of Jerusalem assumed an almost cosmic significance. Permanently thereafter the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple loomed as major events within the general historic continuity of the entire people.

Forever after the Jews of the now growing dispersion considered themselves as but offshoots of the same united Palestinian community. They were prone to forget that there had existed a large Diaspora even before the fall of Jerusalem. True, the Babylonians prided themselves on the antiquity of their settlements and pointed to such monuments as a synagogue in Nehardea which had allegedly been founded by the exiled Judean king, Jehoiachin. During the Middle Ages they still made pilgrimages to the tomb of the prophet Ezekiel and boasted of other reputed survivals of their uninterrupted life in the Euphrates Valley since the Babylonian Exile. But they were prepared to overlook any evidence of still older vestiges of pre-exilic life. Egyptian Jewry, too, which had embraced far-flung communities from the Mediterranean to the borders of Ethiopia before the destruction of the First Temple and included the well-known Jewish military colony of Elephantine, placed there to defend Egypt against Ethiopian raids, forgot its early origins and considered itself as originating primarily from the Second Jewish Commonwealth.

It was this generally shared assumption of a constant stream of emigration from the Second Commonwealth which alone enabled the aforementioned biblical critics to reconcile the allegedly late post-exilic origin of the biblical canon with the fact of its universal acceptance by the Jewish people throughout its dispersion. In any case, the Diaspora's physical links with the Jerusalem community were reinforced by the frequent pilgrimages of its members to the

Holy Land and its annual collections of half shekels and other gifts for the Second Temple. In its own consciousness these historical and practical links were so strong that the unity of the whole people and the unbroken community of its descent and destiny were never subject to doubt.

This feeling of unity, wholly independent of changing political constellations and the subjection of important segments of the people to different local and imperial sovereignties, helped the Jews overcome the greatest crisis of their history, including the second fall of Jerusalem. In those centuries they became inured to living in a world divided between Rome and Parthia, and later between the Roman and the Persian empires. Nor were these sentiments of integral unity in any way affected by the large-scale influx of non-Jewish proselytes and semiproselytes in the period before the rise of Christianity. Anyone born to Jewish parents, or rather because of the biological certainty, born to a Jewish mother, was considered a Jew; a Jew remained a Jew even if he sinned and converted himself to another faith but subsequently repented. The proselyte, on the other hand, was by legal fiction declared a newly born child who, through the performance of prescribed rituals, was transformed into a member of the Jewish community not only spiritually but also physically. To underscore this total transformation, the rabbis emphasized that a proselyte automatically divested himself of all his family ties and hence had no blood relatives whatsoever. In pure theory he should be allowed to marry his own mother without committing incest. In practice, of course, the rabbis outlawed such incestuous unions, but they had to use the subterfuge that outsiders, unfamiliar with this legal fiction, might otherwise consider Judaism less inimical to incest than it really was. Because of this total rebirth, the proselyte has been technically considered a physical descendant of the Jewish patriarchs, and in his prayers, at least according to the majority opinion, he was supposed to recite the respective benedictions referring to "our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" on a par with a born Jew. Although in his own lifetime he still faced some minor discriminatory provisions of a social character retained on the statute books—a woman proselyte, for instance, could not

marry a "priest"—all knew that such distinctions would be wiped out with respect to the proselytes' offspring. In short, in Jewish eyes, a Jew was a member of the community by virtue of both faith and descent; he was permanently linked together with other Jews in a community of destiny as willed by God.

In the Emancipation era, however, this singleness of purpose was deeply undermined through the acceptance by the Jews themselves of the views regnant in their environment. Emancipation meant not only equality of rights, but also the integration of the Jewish minority into the fabric of the majority peoples. With that integration went also a greater or lesser surrender by Jews of their own attitudes to those dominant among their neighbors. The more "progressive" Jews were, the more emotionally they had become involved in the struggle for emancipation and integration, and the more likely they were to accept the judgment of their Christian neighbors in all matters, including the latter's low appreciation of Jews and Judaism. One of the first manifestations of that inferiority feeling was the avoidance by many champions of Jewish equality, both Christian and Jewish, of the term "Jew" which had, as we recall, become in the Christian world an objectionable term. It now became customary to describe the Jewish minority by the less noxious terms of Hebrews or Israelites. Even in free America, we have had such journals as the *American Hebrew* or the *American Israelite*. It was a sign of the growing Jewish self-assertion and pride when, as early as 1830, Gabriel Riesser, the then leading protagonist in the struggle for Jewish equality, defiantly called his new magazine *Der Jude* (The Jew).

More significantly, many Jews were prepared to accept from their liberal neighbors certain basic assumptions concerning Judaism. Over a period of several centuries and through a series of sanguinary wars of religion between Catholicism and Protestantism, the Western world reached a concept of nationality and statehood as divorced from religious allegiance. Religion now began to be treated more and more as a private affair of each individual, to whom complete liberty of conscience was guaranteed by states which often embraced a variety of religious groups. In extreme cases the state divorced

itself completely from the Church. In this era of an ever more rampant secular nationalism the nations demanded total subservience of all their citizens in the cultural-ethnic sense, regardless of their religious denominations. Under these new conditions of the Western world—they did not fully apply outside the Western sphere even in the twentieth century—Jews, too, began to be viewed as but one of the many religious communities, sharing with their fellow Americans, Englishmen, Germans, and so forth, not only a political and civic allegiance to their country but also the same national culture. In short, the Jews were to become, if they had not yet so turned, merely Germans or Frenchmen of the “Mosaic persuasion,” different from their fellow nationals only by their religious observance.

This formula, largely subscribed to even by some of the most loyal Jews in the early decades of the nineteenth century, did not stand up under the harsh realities of the contemporary world. To begin with, even as a religion Judaism had always embraced a great many ethnic ingredients. If, after centuries of struggle between State and Church and between various religious denominations within each country, Christendom itself could not entirely suppress the link between nationality and religion, this was doubly true in the case of Judaism, whose ethnicism had always been deeply rooted in religion and vice versa. The very attempt of extreme Reform to suppress these ethnic elements of the Jewish faith proved ineffectual and of relatively short duration. More, the realities of millions of Jews living in East-Central Europe, in their overwhelming majority speaking Yiddish and living their own cultural life, rendered illusory any declaration, however well-meaning and sincere, concerning the Jewish faith being a “pure” denationalized religion. Before long the new Jewish nationalism and Zionism defiantly took up the cudgels in behalf of the existing Jewish national group.

Simultaneously, the rise of the modern anti-Semitic movements proved that Jews, whether believers or unbelievers, were victimized alike by their assailants. Ultimately, racial anti-Semitism proclaimed the permanence and immutability of the Jewish group by virtue of blood and descent regardless of individual religious beliefs and

observances; indeed even regardless of conversion to a non-Jewish faith. In 1933, many thousands of born Christians, including hundreds of Catholic priests and Protestant pastors, discovered to their chagrin that, because genealogical research had detected that they had a single Jewish grandparent, they were officially stamped as members of the “non-Aryan” group.

Under these circumstances, the term “Jew” achieved many new connotations. To the racial anti-Semite a Jew was a person of Jewish descent, wholly or partially. To the spokesmen of the religious groups, the Jew remained principally, if not exclusively, the believer, however nominal, in the tenets of the Jewish faith. This was particularly true in the western countries where the majority of Jews were genuinely assimilated to the cultures of their environment. To the secular nationalists, especially in Eastern Europe, a Jew was primarily a member of his national group.

Logically, such national spokesmen would have to consider a Jew any member of their community who had turned Christian or Muslim. It was rather inconsistent on the part of Zionist leaders when, under the pressure of public opinion, they withheld admission to the Zionist organization from Jewish converts to another faith. They rationalized this refusal by arguing that in the contemporary world relatively few conversions were taking place because of genuine spiritual convictions; most of them were undergone for careerist or amorous reasons. An embattled minority like the Jewish could indeed view all religious “renegades” for such external, secular reasons as deserters with whom it wished to have no dealings whatsoever. But there were not lacking voices which demanded the recognition of genuine religious differences within the Jewish camp, just as they had long been recognized within other national groups.

Matters became further complicated by the lack of universally accepted objective criteria for national allegiance. In the Western countries the term nationality was used largely as a political synonym for citizenship, and being of French nationality, for example, meant being a citizen of the French Republic; but in East-Central Europe, the Balkans, and other areas of mixed nationalities, it became perfectly manifest that, for instance, a Pole by nationality could be,

and usually was before 1914, a perfectly good Austrian, Russian, or Prussian citizen. Since all other criteria, such as territorial concentration, use of a common language, racial descent, and community of religious beliefs had broken down as the clear differentiating elements of nationality, leading nationalist thinkers of the late nineteenth century came to the conclusion that objective criteria must be abandoned in favor of some such subjective concepts as that of a nationality being merely a group linked together by a community of descent and destiny. This definition of a *Schicksals- und Kultur-gemeinschaft*, first propagated by the Austrian Social-Democrats in order to secure peace within the nationalistically riven Austro-Hungarian Empire, fit the Jewish situation in many lands quite well, and was enthusiastically adopted by both proletarian and bourgeois nationalists. With this new definition, the accent was laid not on such objective ascertainable facts as one's ancestry, speech habits, or religious observance, but rather on the emotional feelings of each individual and his subjective sense of belonging to a particular group.

It is small wonder, then, that the term "Jew" now meant many things to many different people. I still remember how many of us awoke with a start when we read in the press the first reports concerning the results of the census conducted in 1921 by the newly created Republic of Czechoslovakia. In accordance with the peace treaties, as well as with the long professed desires of its leaders Masaryk and Beneš, the new Republic recognized the rights of its several national, as well as religious, minorities to full cultural self-determination without in any way restricting the equal rights of all citizens. From the outset Jews were recognized as both a national and a religious minority and answered, in this vein, the pertinent queries of the census enumerators.

The results were truly surprising. The official figures showed that there were 336,520 Czechoslovak nationals (in addition to 17,822 foreigners) professing the "Israelitic" religion. Their majority, 180,616, declared themselves to be members of the Jewish nationality (this majority was larger in Slovakia and Carpatho-Ruthenia but it turned into a minority in the main provinces of Moravia,

Bohemia, and Silesia). Of the rest 73,371 signed up as members of the Czech nationality, 49,123 as Germans, 29,473 as Magyars, 3,751 as Russians, 74 as Poles and 112 as belonging to other nationalities. In addition, there were 100 persons who professed no religion but were members of the Jewish nationality. More astonishingly, there also were some members of the Jewish nationality who professed the Roman-Catholic faith (74), Greek Catholicism (23), Greek Orthodoxy (12), Protestantism (19), and one, a woman, who was an adherent of the new Czechoslovak national faith. Thus the 180,616 members of the Jewish nationality who also professed the Jewish faith were joined by 229 co-nationals who professed other religions or none. There probably were many more thousands of Jews who never signed up as Jews by either nationality or religion and thus did not appear as such in the census.

Nevertheless, some of these unrecorded, and hence statistically non-existent Jews, probably contributed to one or another Jewish cause and perhaps were ultimately buried in a Jewish cemetery. Certainly a great many were considered as Jews by their neighbors, Jewish as well as Christian. What happened in Czechoslovakia in 1921 was multiplied several times over in other censuses of the newly created or enlarged states from the Baltic to the Aegean.

Even more radical was the transformation in the Soviet Union. Almost immediately after its seizure of power, the Soviet regime proclaimed the principle of national minority rights for the entire Union. New nationalities were actually discovered and alphabets created for them by the Soviet leaders. From the outset, Jews were treated as such a nationality and Yiddish was recognized as an official language in some local town councils, courts, and particularly in schools. At the same time, religion in general was now denounced as a mere opiate for the people. The law of July, 1918, subsequently rephrased in 1929 and ultimately taken over into the Soviet Constitution of 1936 (Art. 124), provided: "Freedom for the conduct of religious worship and freedom for anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens." With full government support the Godless Societies were spreading their anti-religious gospel, especially among the youth. The latter, unable to receive religious



instruction in any school—such instruction to children under eighteen was prohibited by law—grew up without any knowledge of religion except as inadequately imparted by some parents at home under great difficulties.

Not surprisingly, Jews were now counted primarily as members of the Jewish nationality, rather than as adherents of the Jewish faith. As early as 1926, the first Soviet census listed some 2,750,000 "Jews" among the Soviet residents, but it used this term as an exclusively national designation. In the ultimate sense, of course, the decision as to whether he was a Jew had to be left to each individual. For instance, Leon Trotsky seems from the outset to have changed not only his Jewish name, Bronstein, to the Russian Trotsky, but also to have abandoned completely both his Jewish faith and his Jewish nationality. His passport probably always read "Russian" in the rubric assigned to nationality. On the other hand, I was told on good authority, although I could never authenticate it, that upon his arrival in this country as Soviet ambassador, Maxim Litvinoff carried with him a passport showing his "Jewish" nationality. It appears that in the latest census of 1959, too, the approximately 2,250,000 who registered as Jews thus styled themselves only by virtue of their nationality, although no more than one-fifth still declared Yiddish as their spoken language. By a curious inconsistency, however, it may be noted, the leaders of the Soviet Jewish communities—whatever the meaning of this term may be—refused the invitation to the World Jewish Congress meeting in Stockholm in the summer of 1959 under the remarkable excuse that, being in charge of purely religious congregations, they had nothing to do with the political affairs which were to be discussed at the Congress sessions.

With the rise of the state of Israel a further element was introduced into this conceptual confusion. One can, of course, be an Israeli citizen without being a Jew by either nationality or religion. There are, indeed, some 200,000 Muslim and Christian Arabs who enjoy the status of Israeli citizens. Most Christian wives of Jewish citizens are also Israeli citizens without being counted as either members of the synagogue or the Jewish ethnic group. On the other

hand, many a young Israeli has become impatient with the Jewish heritage of the last two millennia which, as he has usually been taught in school, has mainly consisted of the nightmare of unremitting persecutions. In his eagerness to start a new life, he is prepared to consider the history of his people as relevant only insofar as it relates to the First and Second Jewish Commonwealths and then start it over again in 1948. At best he may allow the preceding half century as a sort of prehistory of his new state. At the same time the Law of Return specifically admits all "Jews" to free immigration, thus opening to them also the gates for speedy naturalization. It is the difficulty of defining a Jew under the terms of this law that has played havoc with the country's domestic policies and led to the aforementioned divergent interpretations by the Israeli ministries during the last two years.

One may see, therefore, how complicated the conceptual situation has become. Let us, for the sake of argument, assume that three Jewish brothers, identical triplets, were born early in this century in Odessa and they are still alive today. One of them has settled in New York, another in Tel Aviv, while the third has remained in Odessa. Under the prevailing environmental concepts, the New York Jew is primarily a Jew by religion; the one living in Odessa is likely to disclaim any religious allegiance, but to consider himself a Jew by nationality; the resident of Tel Aviv, finally, may be neither religious nor particularly interested in national problems, but be completely satisfied with his Israeli citizenship. Under exceptional circumstances he may even have joined the fringe movement of so-called "Canaanites" who demand that the Israelis develop their own native Palestinian culture at total variance with the "Jewish" cultures of the dispersion. And yet the three brothers still are essentially the same persons and it is a sheer accident as to which of them resides in which country.

What then is a Jew today? Evidently theory cannot be imposed upon realities but it must adjust itself to them. Since the Jewish realities are such that they make Jewishness differently meaningful to different people, the concept Jew must become wide enough to embrace all these variations. Clearly, in this country a Jew will be

so regarded by both himself and most of his neighbors so long as he was born a Jew and has never formally joined another religion. He may be a total agnostic or atheist, he may participate in no Jewish communal endeavor and yet, short of his public declaration of a change of faith, he will be universally considered a Jew. Even after his conversion some Christians, particularly of the unfriendly variety, will still style him a Jew. In Israel, on the other hand, his religious allegiance will play a relatively minor role, but his Jewish descent and cultural conformity, superimposed upon his Israeli citizenship, will be the decisive criterion. In the Soviet Union, finally, he will still be considered a Jew primarily by nationality.

True, under the oppressive system of the post-war years, the Soviet Jew finds but few avenues open to his national self-expression. The Yiddish elementary and secondary schools, which thirty years ago had accommodated 250,000 Jewish children, are now closed. The once flourishing Yiddish press and theater have disappeared, with the exception of a very tiny provincial paper in Birobidjan. Even in Russia, therefore, the main avenue for self-realization as a Jew still is the synagogue, however anemic an institution it may appear to us. In general, too, national minority rights, once the white hope of the non-Zionist secular Jewish nationalists, have been losing ground since the Second World War. Unless supported by strong territorial and linguistic buttresses, they have not proved genuinely viable under the conflicting imperial and nationalist systems of our age. Deprived of such territorial and linguistic concentration, the Jews outside of Israel can, indeed, entertain little hope for the adequate development of their culture in divorce from religion. Outside of Israel, therefore, even the definition of a Jew seems to be veering back somewhat toward the traditional concept of the pre-Emancipation era, but with the strong modification that today there are millions of Jewish "sinners" who are yet considered religious Jews.

All of this is not intended to deny the right of the Israel Cabinet to decide upon its own definition. One of the prime prerogatives of national sovereignty is for any state to regulate immigration to its territory. Having in a most generous vein decided to curtail some-

what its own sovereignty and to bind itself for all future time (or at least so long as the fundamental law is not abrogated) freely to admit all Jews who seek admission, the State of Israel is entitled, in fact obliged, clearly to define the category of persons who are thus to be admitted. The more clarity in definition, the less equivocation there is in the administration of the law, and the less it is subject to arbitrary decisions. However, such a definition adopted for practical, legal, and administrative purposes does not necessarily have to cover all possible variations in the existing realities nor does it necessarily have to be accepted, on theoretical grounds, by a majority of the Israelis themselves. Outside Israel such a declaration may with equal freedom be accepted or rejected by Jews and non-Jews, according to their own experiences and the dictates of their own consciences.

In short, in the present situation of the Jewish people, whether one calls it history-made or God-willed, objective criteria are no longer exclusively valid. In our age of Emancipation, there are indeed profound differences among various segments of Jews living in different lands and even among those who share the same citizenship. The Jewish people is nevertheless held together by such intangibles as its basically common heritage, the positive will to survive on the part of a large number, probably the majority of its members, the realistic observation that there exists a genuine interdependence of fate among the Jews throughout the world, and last but not least, the outward pressures of discrimination and anti-Semitic attacks which draw no line of demarcation between one kind of Jew and another.

Under these circumstances Jews may have to abandon, at least for a long while, the quest for an all-inclusive objective formula. As a permanent minority outside of Israel, we are insisting upon the right of Jews and other minorities freely to pursue their own religious and cultural aims in a pluralistic society. We shall similarly have to learn to get along with much cultural pluralism in our own midst. I for one am prepared, therefore, to recognize, even for practical purposes, everyone as a Jew who (1) is born of Jewish parents and has not been converted to another faith; (2) is born

of mixed parentage but declares himself a Jew and is so considered by the majority of his neighbors; and (3) one who by conscious will has adopted Judaism and joined the membership of the Jewish community. In the ultimate sense, it is thus the subjective decision of the individual concerned and the equally subjective opinion of his neighbors which is almost as important as the objective facts of descent and religious commitment.

World Dimensions of Jewish History*

BOTH JEWISH AND WORLD SCHOLARSHIP have long recognized that Jewish history, particularly during the two and a half millennia of the dispersion, cannot be fully understood without the background of the various civilizations under which Jews happened to live. By giving his ten-volume Jewish history the telling title, *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes*, Simon M. Dubnow announced that he wished to treat his subject within the framework of world history. Referring to this title which he had undoubtedly chosen in cooperation with his German translator, Aaron Steinberg, Dubnow wrote in his Introduction:

World History of the Jewish People is perhaps an unusual title, but it corresponds fully to the content and scope of this unusual segment of the history of mankind. It is customary to speak of "World History" in conjunction with the general history of highly developed nations, as distinguished from the history of single countries and peoples. The destiny of the Jewish people, however, has unfolded in such a way that it possesses a world history of its own in the literal sense of the word. It embraces in a physical sense almost the entire civilized world (except India and China) and it coincides chronologically with the whole course of the historical existence of mankind. Judaism represents a true historical microcosm, and thus there is excellent justification for speaking of world history of the Jewish people.¹

* Reprinted from *Simon Dubnow—The Man and His Work*, ed. by Aaron Steinberg (Paris, 1963), pp. 26-40. First published without notes as The Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture 5 (New York, 1962).