CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE vii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION: HOW TO REINTERPRET THE GOD IDEA IN THE JEWISH RELIGION . . 1

1. How to maintain the continuity of the Jewish religion in a changing world (p. 1). 2. Refusal to recognize the chasm between the traditional and the modern world-view responsible for ambiguous theology of Conservative Judaism (p. 9). 3. Reformist theology irrelevant because of its failure to realize that religion must express itself in the context of a civilization (p. 14). 4. The synthesis of incompatible notions about God a heritage from the past (p. 20). 5. What belief in God means, from the modern point of view (p. 25). 6. God not known unless sought after (p. 29). 7. The Jewish Sabbath and Festivals as focal points in the context of Jewish life, which can yield a conception of God that is Jewish, modern and relevant (p. 34).

II. GOD AS THE POWER THAT MAKES FOR SALVATION 40

1. The traditional conception of salvation (p. 43). 2. What salvation must mean in our day (p. 51). 3. Why the Sabbath should serve as the symbol of this-worldly salvation (p. 57). 4. God as the creative life of the universe the antithesis of irrevocable fate and absolute evil (p. 61). 5. God as manifest in life's holiness which presupposes personality (p. 81). 6. Commitment to Judaism a source of salvation to the Jew (p. 90).

CHAPTER PAGE

III. God as the Power that Makes for Social Regeneration 104

1. The change in the conception of God's sovereignty necessitated by the modern emphasis upon God's immanence (p. 106). 2. The revaluation of the concept of God's sovereignty in terms of individual responsibility (p. 112). 3. The revaluation of the concept of God's sovereignty in terms of social reconstruction (p. 119). 4. The ethical versus the communist conception of social reconstruction as the alternative to the traditional one (p. 126). 5. What constitutes the religious attitude toward social evil? (p. 130). 6. How to cultivate faith in the possibilities for good in human life (p. 135). 7. Social crises an evidence of God's sovereignty (p. 140). 8. God fully manifest only in the maximum attainment of individuality and cooperation (p. 145).

IV. God as the Power that Makes for the Regeneration of Human Nature . . 149

1. The evolution of the sense of sin (p. 150). 2. The gradual moralization of the sense of sin (p. 154). 3. The traditional conception of the Torah not conducive to the complete moralization of the sense of sin (p. 158). 4. The ethical revaluation of the traditional conception of sin (p. 160). 5. The ethical revaluation of the traditional conception of atonement as symbolized by the ritual of fasting and the *'Abodah* (p. 166). 6. Repentance as the remaking of human nature (p. 178).

V. God in Nature and in History 188

1. The consciousness of history as an ethical influence (p. 188). 2. The continuity of the Jewish religion due to its emphasis upon the ethical conception of God (p. 192). 3. The ethical versus the utilitarian function of religion (p. 194). 4. The reason for retaining the nature aspect of the Pilgrimage Festivals (p. 199).

CHAPTER PAGE

VI. God as the Power that Makes for Cooperation 202

1. The original connotation of the *Sukkah* the basis of its significance for our day (p. 204). 2. The sacredness of human rights (p. 212). 3. The meaning of equality (p. 215). 4. How civilizations have destroyed equality (p. 218). 5. The dispensing of happiness as the norm of a civilization (p. 225). 6. Cooperation the chief source of happiness; competition its principal menace (p. 228).

VII. God Felt as a Presence 243

1. Public worship as a means to awareness of God's presence (p. 244). 2. Why individual religion is not enough (p. 250). 3. The arguments against public worship (p. 257). 4. The prerequisites to public worship as a means of experiencing the divine presence (p. 261).

VIII. God as the Power that Makes for Freedom 265

1. The meaning of freedom (p. 268). 2. The significance of individuality (p. 272). 3. The liberation of personality (p. 281). 4. The relation of freedom to life (p. 289). 5. The divine dialectic of freedom (p. 293).

IX. "God as the Power that Makes for Righteousness—Not Ourselves" . . . 297

1. The association of religion with the moral law (p. 299). 2. The Jewish contribution to the moralization of the God idea (p. 303). 3. How to recapture the consciousness of the divine sanction for the moral law (p. 306). 4. The moral law, as applied to the life of nations, in need of divine sanction (p. 311). 5. Righteousness to be translated into law (p. 315). 6. Why humanism is not enough (p. 320).

CHAPTER PAGE

X. JEWISH RELIGION AS A MEANS TO JEWISH NATIONAL SURVIVAL 330

1. The survival power of a religion that invests its *sancta* with universal significance (p. 332). 2. How Judaism met the challenge of one civilization after another (p. 334). 3. How Judaism should meet the challenge of modern occidental civilization (p. 347). 4. The reconstruction which the Jewish religion must undergo to function as a means of Jewish survival (p. 355). 5. The status of the Jews as a minority group a source of spiritual values (p. 360).

INDEX 369

DEDICATED TO

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

ON THE OCCASION OF ITS SEMI-CENTENARY

1. Religious Naturalism

The history of religion may be said to be the history of the different interpretations which men have given to their experience of the environment or the cosmos as dependable, from the standpoint of what they regard as salvation. The modern-minded person wants particularly to know which interpretation of this experience is compatible with a naturalistic philosophy of life.

There is a naturalistic philosophy of life with which religion or spirituality of any kind is incompatible. That is the philosophy which reduces all manifestations of life, including thought, to mere operations of matter and physico-chemical causes. In such a philosophy, there is no room for belief in spiritual values as having any inherent reality.

But there is a type of naturalism which recognizes qualitative distinctions between lower and higher orders of being. That type of naturalism allows for creative or emergent evolution, and for the autonomous functioning of mind and spirit. For that kind of philosophy, the data of rational and spiritual experience are not merely by-products of sense experience. Truth, justice, love are conceived as operating in their own right and helping to bring order out of chaos. Hence there is no reason for dismissing the experience of selfhood or personality as illusion. By the same token, we must accept as genuine the experience of Godhood, which is to the environment or cosmos what selfhood or personality is to the body. To these two spiritual qualities, selfhood and Godhood, we must add "society," which occupies a position intermediate between them and shares something of the nature of each. Though all these three are data of natural experience, they transcend the brief life of the individual human being, and redeem it of its merely temporary character, in that they enable him to lay up resources and create potentialities that outlast him.

Questions Jews Ask, p. 95.

2. Religion and Magic

Genuine religious symbolism is a late development in religion. It comes into being when rites and observances are practiced for what they do to stir the mind and the heart religiously. They are a means of enabling man to commune with himself, or with his fellow men, about things divine. On the other hand, if they are supposed to influence directly any supernatural being to extend help, or to withhold from doing harm, they are theurgic.

Theurgy* assumes the presence of mysterious forces in animate or inanimate objects, or in the environment generally. Those forces, it is assumed, can be summoned or exorcised by means of prescribed formulas or actions. Whether regarded as invisible or as residing in visible objects, they are of an impersonal or demonic character. They lack the kind of superhuman personality that is associated with divinity. A god is worshipped, but a demon is feared. Demons are supposed to act automatically, in response to theurgic rites or formulas, just as the electric lamp lights up or the bell rings when an electric button is pressed. The fact is that to most people God is not really God but a magnified demon. That is why they cannot dissociate religion from supernaturalism. . . .

Before the advent of modern science and technology, it was difficult even for the mentally gifted to abandon entirely the theurgic habit of mind. They noted that language, which articulates man's will, effects changes in the human and physical environment. Therefore words were to them not merely symbols that enabled the mind to think, remember, and imagine, but actual realities, or forces, that could put other realities or forces into motion. The tendency of the human mind to reify, that is, to treat as a thing whatever it has a name for, grew so strong that it gave rise in the Middle Ages to a type of thinking known as "realism," in contrast with the view held by those who refused to reify words or concepts, the view known as "nominalism." That philosophical quarrel had an important bearing on the idea of God.

Judaism Without Supernaturalism, pp. 38–40.

*Theurgy is the performance of magical rites designed to coerce supernatural powers into fulfilling human desires.—eds.

3. Supernaturalism

The supernaturalist conception of salvation is based, in Jewish tradition, upon the following series of assumptions:

1. In the first place, divinity completely transcends humanity, of which it is the absolute antipode. God is not subject to any empirical law of nature. Having created the world and having fixed its laws, He can, at any time, destroy the one and suspend the other. Such is the logic inherent in all of Jewish supernaturalist tradition, down to our own day. From that standpoint, the miraculous events recorded in the Bible, including the theophanies, particularly the one on Mount Sinai, are extraordinary but by no means impossible phenomena. In fact, such phenomena are needed to demonstrate not only the power but the transcendence of God.

The existence of a transcendent God is not to be proved by abstract philosophical reasoning, but by the sensate experience afforded by miracles and theophanies. It therefore goes without saying that no attempt should be made to detract from the literal description of them, as historical events which are in contravention to the regular course of nature. All interpretations of them that try to render them comparable to ordinary experience must be ruled out. Thus, when the crossing of the Red Sea is said to have coincided with the ebbing of the waters at its most northern point and the death of the pursuing Egyptians to have been caused by the return of those waters, the sense and purpose of the miracle narratives are completely falsified.

2. Secondly, according to the tradition, God's intervention in the regular order of the world is not only a demonstration of His existence and power. It is also an evidence of His special love for the people of Israel. For no other people does God work miracles, and to no other people does He reveal Himself or declare His will. Prophecy is exclusively for Israel. Even when He vouchsafed the gift of prophecy to Balaam, it was for the sake of Israel.

How then are the other nations ever to know God, and how can they be expected to render Him allegiance? The answer is: Let it be Israel's task to proclaim those miracles and divine self-manifestations to all the world. When prophecy was still in vogue, the Prophets performed that role in behalf of their people. When prophecy was silenced and psalmody took its place, the Psalmist calls upon Israel to "make known His [God's] deeds among the nations" (Ps. 105:1). This is the theme, for the most part, of the *Hallel* psalms.

This exclusive privilege granted to the people of Israel, to have witnessed the many miracles which God performed in their behalf, is what renders Israel a chosen people. That should be sufficient to prove that the

doctrine of Israel's chosenness is rooted in supernaturalism. Any interpretation which attempts to sidestep that fact and to give the impression that the chosenness of Israel is merely a way of stressing Israel's having chosen God to be *its* God, or Israel's having been the first to have come upon the profounder truths of religion, is as much a misinterpretation and falsification of the truth as is the "naturalization" of the miracles.

3. This brings us to a third aspect of supernaturalism: That all the great miracles and theophanies took place in the beginning of Israel's career and were not repeated in later years is no mere accident. The logic behind that fact is that there was something intrinsically sacrosanct about the past which rendered it worthy of having harbored all those eyewitness proofs of the reality and greatness of God. Not all who lived then were worthier than their descendants. Indeed, only two—Joshua and Caleb—out of the entire generation of the Wilderness did deserve to enter the Promised Land. But the mere fact that God chose to reveal Himself in the early past, and has remained "hidden" ever since, is sufficient to sanctify that past.

Judaism Without Supernaturalism, pp. 21–23.

4. God and the Nature of Man

The only alternative to the traditional and supernaturalist conception of God's self-manifestation that can make a difference in people's lives is not the metaphysical approach but the social-behavioral one. It may well be that the human mind is forever and intrinsically incapable of grappling *existentially* with ultimates and is permanently and inherently limited to theorizing about them *conceptually* or by means of ideas—which are abstractions from reality. That God, as ultimate reality, is unknowable is a commonplace of all thinking other than that which is entirely naive. Theologians constantly remind us that all our affirmations concerning God have to be translated into negatives, if they are to approximate the truth. Consequently, religion which aims to improve human nature and the conditions of human living cannot be based on the ultimate nature of God. Its field of operations must be the nature of man. It has to focus its attention on that aspect of man's nature which is in need of being fully humanized, on what the human being ought to become, if he is to reflect the image of God. It is the business of religion not to give a metaphysical conception of God but to make clear what we mean by the belief in God, from the standpoint of the difference that belief makes in human conduct and striving.

Judaism Without Supernaturalism, pp. 26–27.

5. How Believing in God Functions

Since the experience about the world and ourselves is determined by the society and civilization into which we are born, the conception of God should be related to them and they should be made more meaningful by it. This discussion being carried on by us, as Jews, what we have to know is: How did the conception of God function in the consciousness of the Jewish people and in the various stages of the Jewish civilization? In short, how did the conception of God function in Judaism? To this question, the following is the answer:

The conception of God in Judaism has not functioned either as a philosophical truth or as a theological dogma. It is not a philosophical truth, because it is not the product of reflection or reasoning. It is not a theological dogma, because it is not the product of any attempt to reconcile the traditional idea of God that came down from the past with any particular philosophy or world outlook. The conception of God in Judaism is historical and functional. It is historical and functional in the sense that (1) it has fostered the unity and individuality of the Jewish people, (2) it has made for the good life, and (3) it has held out hope for the future. Such is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the belief in Him is the product of the universal need of human nature for courage, hope, and self-improvement.

1. To foster the unity of the Jewish people, the conception of God in Judaism is given concreteness through the extraordinary events in the career of Israel, beginning with Abraham's migration from Ur of Chaldea. To foster the individuality of the Jewish people, the God of Israel has been conceived as demanding undivided loyalty and complete severance from the worship of any other deity.

2. To make for the good life, the God of Israel is assumed to have revealed to His people the Torah with its laws concerning what man is to do and what refrain from, and with its teachings concerning God's dealings with man.

3. To hold out hope for the future, God is conceived as certain to send the Messiah for Israel's redemption and to establish His Kingdom over mankind in the age to come.

All of the foregoing belongs to the thought-world of traditional Judaism. How far it can be retained and reinterpreted, and how much of it has to be rendered in the vocabulary of our thought-world, is subject to trial and error. This is part of the birthpains of a tradition in the making.

Questions Jews Ask, pp. 88–89.

6. God as Process

Without entering into a detailed and difficult analysis of the possibility of knowing what God is and how He acts, let the reader consider the case of Maimonides. No one in his senses can question Maimonides' genuine piety and belief in God or the greatness of his mind and character. To whichever of his writings we turn we find that he keeps on repeating that God and His attributes are one. He then goes on to explain that statement as follows:

When, for example, we are told that God is living, we should not take that to mean that God is a being who possesses the attributes of life, which He shares with other living beings, but that He is life itself. God and life are one and the same. Likewise, when we are told that God is good, we should realize that God and goodness are one and the same. Or when God is said to know all things, we should understand that to mean that God and knowledge are identical. For in the case of God, the knower, the act of knowing, and the object known are one and the same. Nor was Maimonides the first or the last to affirm that fact about God. Many other religious thinkers before him and after him affirmed the same about God.

The conception of God as cosmic Process has been subjected to considerable misunderstanding and misplaced resentment, as though it constituted a complete break with the traditional, or conventional, idea of God. Not only has its validity or truth been attacked but its very claim to being religious in character and compatible with prayer and worship has been challenged. Many an ill-informed critic has even charged that conception with being atheistic. What are life, knowledge, goodness, if not processes? They are certainly not beings or entities. Since God is life, knowledge, goodness, what else can He be but Process?

Modern scientific and philosophic thought regards all reality not as something static but as energy in action. When we say that God is Process, we select, out of the infinite processes in the universe, that complex of forces and relationships which makes for the highest fulfillment of man as a human being and identify it by the term "God." In exactly the same way, we select, among all the forces and relationships that enter into the life of the individual, those which make for his highest fulfillment and identify them by the term "person." God and person are thus correlative terms, the meaning of each being relative to and dependent on that of the other, like parent and child, teacher and pupil, citizen and state. God is the Process by which the universe produces persons, and persons are the processes by which God is manifest in the

individual. Neither term has meaning without the other. So to conceive of God is to regard Him as personal, in the sense that He manifests Himself in our personality, in every effort of ours to live up to our responsibilities as human beings. At the same time He is not a person, since He cannot be compared with a human person, any more than the human person can be compared with one of his momentary acts.

Questions Jews Ask, pp. 102–103.

7. God and Spiritual Values

Much of the wisdom and aspiration of our ancestors is lost upon us because we no longer speak their language, though we may speak to the same purpose. The effort to recover the permanent values inherent in traditional religion is handicapped by the lack of imagination. An inflexible mentality takes every word in texts of ancient origin literally and ignores the *nisus* [effort, impulse] which created the word. If we disengage from the language of adoration the spiritual desiderata implied therein, we discover that the attributes ascribed to God represented the social and spiritual values formerly regarded as all-important. Those attributes are by no means limited in their meaning and application to the theurgic conception of God.

Just as the God-idea progressed from a perceptual image to a conception like the one which identifies God as the sum of all those factors and relationships in the universe that make for unity, creativity, and worthwhileness in human life, so can the attributes of God, which once were externalized and concrete, be translated into modern terms and made relevant to modern thinking and living. Men attributed to God their own highest desires and aspirations. They called Him creator, protector, helper, sovereign, and redeemer. These terms can now be identified with the highest and most significant aims of human existence and achieve a new force and vitality through this conscious process of identification. We can no longer believe that God is a mighty sovereign or that the universe is the work of His hands. In the light of the present development of the God-idea, however, we can see that God is manifest in all creativity and in all forms of sovereignty that make for the enhancement of human life.

Let us take, for example, the attribute of God as creator. Were we to approach it from the standpoint of medieval metaphysics, we would at once involve ourselves in the complicated problem of *creatio ex nihilo*, and land in a philosophic *cul-de-sac*. If we proceed by the functional method of interpretation, we can discern in the belief that God created

23 A Definition of Jewish Religion

GOD IS IN NEED OF MAN

We have tried to understand religion as a universal phenomenon. It is now our task to define the Jewish conception of religion. As noted above, religion—its human side—begins with a sense of obligation, "with the awareness that something is asked of us," with the consciousness of an ultimate commitment. It is furthermore an awareness of "God who sues for our devotion, constantly, persistently, who goes out to meet us as soon as we long to know Him." Accordingly, religious consciousness is to be characterized by two features—it must be a consciousness of an *ultimate commitment* and it must be a consciousness of *ultimate reciprocity*.

There is only one way to define Jewish religion. It is the *awareness of God's interest in man*, the awareness of a *covenant*, of a responsibility that lies on Him as well as on us. Our task is to concur with His interest, to carry out His vision of our task. God is in need of man for the attainment of His ends, and religion, as Jewish tradition understands it, is a way of serving these ends, of which we are in need, even though we may not be aware of them, ends which we must learn to feel the need of.