

## BOOK REVIEW

### CHRISTIANS AND JEWS IN THE "SECOND REICH" (1870-1914): A STUDY IN THE RISE OF GERMAN TOTALITARIANISM

by

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Historians and social scientists rightly find fascination in the links between the destiny of Germany and the fate of its Jews. The Jewish consciousness of emancipated German Jews has also been subjected to scrutiny in an effort to comprehend what their German-ness meant to them as Jews, and what their religion represented to them as assimilated Jews. (See, for example, Gordon Mork on Eduard Lasker in *Societas*, I, No. 1, esp. p. 32.) The present work by Uriel Tal of the Tel Aviv University performs the converse by examining how the Jews and Judaism were perceived by the Germans, especially scholars, intellectuals, and clergy. It is essentially an intellectual history of Germany's encounter with its Jews and Judaism, and one which by no means neglects Jewish thought. By any criterion (except that of easy reading) it is the most important study yet made of the history of German-Jewish relations in modern times, and constitutes a significant contribution to the intellectual history of Europe. The fact that it is written in the Hebrew language makes it inaccessible to most readers, and one purpose of this review will have been served when Tal's book appears in English or another western tongue.

Tal finds intellectual and religious history more important than the annals of the antisemitic parties whose accomplishments were meagre before the rise of the Nazis. He observes that their programmes differed very little from those of the professedly Christian parties of Bismarckian and Wilhelmine Germany. He infers that it was the antisemitic parties' secularist or anti-Christian character which repelled voters whose dislike of Jews could find adequate expression in the mass parties. It is one of his basic points that society in the Second Reich never quite became as secular as it did in France or Britain, and that except in the case of the Socialists, secularisation led to paganism and the ideology of the return to primal man. In ever-widening circles, blood became in the early twentieth century what Tal calls

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an ontic category, an absolute value. The "Jewish" conscience of Christianity, crystallised in the person of the crucified "weakling", was hated for its implicit but unequivocal rejection of the new pagan myth. Yet de-Christianisation in the direction of "natural" romantic paganism was nonetheless tied to Christianity's historic anti-Judaism, an outlook which was firmly held in Germany. Nor was this the sole common ground on which modern pagan met old-style Christian. They both yearned for the earlier rural, pre-industrial society, and detested the Jews whose emancipation and ascent symbolised the changing social order. Mommsen, in a memorable paragraph in his *Provinces of the Roman Empire*, described the Jews of Julius Caesar's day as an element of dissolution in the Empire (*ein wirksames Ferment des Kosmopolitismus und nationalen Decomposition*) and, in a passage elsewhere, referred to the Jews in contemporary Germany as *ein Element der Decomposition der Stämme*. That great historian and liberal intended to compliment the people who supposedly led the move away from tribalism and provincialism towards cosmopolitan, universal, libertarian culture. One can readily imagine the ambiguity of Mommsen's praise in Germany, where the dominant political and cultural views were utterly different from those he ascribed to ancient and modern Jews.

Altogether, as Tal makes clear, the Jews were confronted with unfulfillable requirements for being German. The mainly Lutheran heritage of German Protestantism emphatically interpreted Pauline Christianity's conception of freedom as obedience in spirit. Such a doctrine of obedience could easily be interpreted to mean subjection to the existing state and to exclude tolerance for autonomous group life within it. Thus conservative Protestantism disdained Judaism for traditional religious reasons and because Jews could be no more than tolerated aliens in a Christian German *Volksgemeinschaft*. The Reform Jewish doctrine of a mission to the nations was regarded as the effrontery of cultural and religious inferiors, while secular and irreligious Jews were resented as subverters of the moral orders of society. What is particularly new is Tal's consideration of liberal Protestantism's view of the Jews. (See his article in *Jewish Social Studies*, XXVI, 1964.) After the decline of Kantian religious apriorism around the 1860's, Protestant thinkers sought to base the truth of religion upon the results of studies in history, philology and anthropology, from which the essence of Christianity would be distilled for modern men. They spoke against antisemitism while firmly counselling the Jews that the only tolerable form of Jewish life in the "national community" was communal worship according to their "inferior" religion. For liberal Protestantism automatically accepted the denigration by their numerous and eminent biblical higher critics of *Spätjudentum* (Judaism after the Babylonian Exile, more particularly around the time of Jesus). One of the greatest Protestant liberals, Adolf von Harnack, provided the much-desired *Wesen des Christentums* which took a rather anti-Jewish view of the

development of Christianity. However, Harnack's polemic provoked Jewish counter-statements, one of which, Leo Baeck's *Wesen des Judentums*, became a classic.

The *Kulturkampf* and the Jews is the subject of a brilliant chapter, in which Tal shows how earlier Jewish support of Bismarck's policy, in the National Liberal pattern, was slowly transformed in thoughtful Jewish circles to doubt and to an appreciation of the Catholics as vindicators of the right to group distinctiveness within the national state. These Jews, most of them rabbis and scholars of Judaism, sensed uneasily that the rhetoric of anti-Roman German nationalism could easily be turned on Jews. However, no Catholic-Jewish concert was founded on the basis of this common interest. Once Rome and Berlin were reconciled, German Catholics and their hierarchy became enthusiastic patriots while the Church held to its ancient anti-Jewish outlook.

The reader of Tal's book will roam through disciplines which few modern historians command. Tal is not only at home in modern German and Jewish history but possesses traditional and critical Jewish erudition. He demonstrates philosophic grasp of the history of Christian and Jewish religious thought, a subject which he regards as central to the history of Christian-Jewish relations, and he employs broad and exact learning to guide the reader through the intricate byways of German biblical scholarship, Kantian religious thought in its decline, and the polemics over the "essence" of Judaism and Christianity. As methodologically scrupulous as he is, Tal recognises that even his great bibliographical sweep through general, denominational and intellectual German journals and state and church archives does not comprehend the thoughts of the masses, and so he has gathered evidence from the correspondence of private persons, addresses to teachers' meetings, and even schoolboys' notebooks. With so many intellectual strata painstakingly explored, one especially misses some brief attention to German and Jewish political and economic life. These fastidiously researched pages even include the German original of every quotation rendered into Hebrew, and a classified bibliography which guides prospective researchers folder by folder through archival holdings.

Such bibliographic breadth and loving attention to the smallest technicalities are the basis upon which this great work rests. Its densely detailed, tightly organised pages exhibit a mastery of the currents of political and religious thought, and a deep awareness of the paradoxes and ultimate tragedy of the subject. Historians must clamour for a translation.

Review by Lloyd P. Gartner  
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