

# The Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch

BERNARD MARTIN

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth, Emil G. Hirsch was one of the most important spokesmen of the Reform movement in America. His influence on its philosophical and theological direction, in that period, was considerable; and though the radical Reform he preached was sharply challenged by other liberal Jewish teachers in his own time, and has certainly not gained general acceptance in the present day, it deserves study as a significant element in the historical development of American Reform.

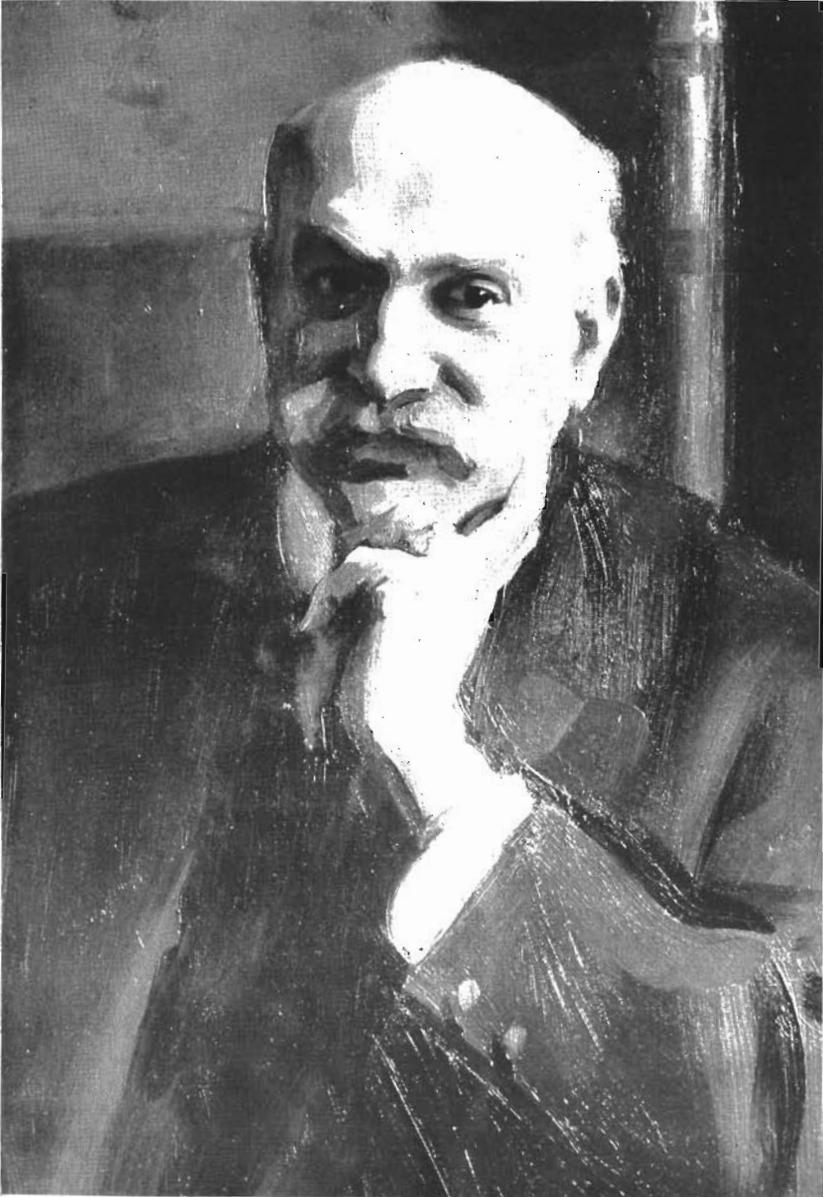
The purpose of this essay is to present the main facts of Hirsch's life, to sketch briefly some of the major elements in his theology and philosophy of Judaism, as reflected in his sermons and public addresses, and to relate these elements to some of the historical and contemporary intellectual currents to which he was subject.

Hirsch was born on May 22, 1851, to Samuel Hirsch, rabbi of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and Louise Michols Hirsch. Some years before, Samuel Hirsch had published his *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden* which, though essentially a defense of traditional Judaism, already contained ideas which ultimately led him to radical Reform. In the years that followed, until his departure from Europe in 1866, he gained increasing recognition as one of the outstanding philosophic exponents of European Reform. In the atmosphere of intense Jewish thought and learning in which his formative years were spent, Emil G. Hirsch absorbed much of the teaching of his father which, together with that of his future father-in-law, David Einhorn, was to become one of the dominant influences in the construction of his own religious philosophy.

When Samuel Hirsch came to Philadelphia in 1866 to assume the pulpit of the Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, left vacant by Einhorn, Emil G. Hirsch pursued his studies first at the Episcopal Academy in that city and later at the University of Pennsylvania. At the age of twenty he graduated from the University, on whose football team he had played, and was ready to return to Germany to complete his rabbinical studies, there being as yet no adequate Jewish seminary in America. From 1872 to 1876 he studied at the Universities of

---

Bernard Martin, rabbi of Sinai Temple, Champaign, Ill., is now a chaplain in the United States Army.



*Portrait by Louis Bettis*

*Courtesy of Chicago Sinai Congregation*

RABBI EMIL G. HIRSCH, RADICAL REFORMER

Berlin and Leipzig and at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, where he came in contact with such great German Jewish savants as Abraham Geiger, Israel Levy, Herman Steinthal, and Moritz Lazarus.

Returning to America, Hirsch occupied pulpits in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Louisville. In the latter city he married Mathilda Einhorn. In 1880 he received a call to Sinai Congregation of Chicago. Here he remained, ministering to a constantly growing congregation, until his death on January 7, 1923.

Hirsch soon became known as the outstanding preacher in American Jewry. His renown in this field increased and became international. But it was not only in oratorical ability that Hirsch excelled. He was also a brilliant thinker and a thorough scholar. For many years he served as Professor of Rabbinic Literature at the University of Chicago. Many scholarly articles in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, which remains to this day one of the great cultural achievements of American Jewry, were contributed by him. In addition, he published numerous studies in Jewish history and philosophy in the *Reform Advocate*, a weekly journal which he edited for thirty years.

To the social and philanthropic activities of the Jewish and general communities of Chicago, Hirsch also gave generously of his time and talents. Perhaps his finest concrete achievement in this area was the founding of a manual training school to help prepare, for a useful vocational life, some of the thousands of Jewish immigrants who were streaming into Chicago, in the 1880's and 90's, after their flight from Russian despotism.<sup>1</sup>

Though the social message of Hirsch's sermons may prove to be his most permanent and valuable contribution, he also addressed himself in his preaching to a serious consideration of the basic theological and philosophical problems of religion; and in his own day his philosophy of Judaism was probably as widely reported and highly regarded as were his social teachings. To the student of Jewish thought it holds considerable interest as one attempt, of the many that have been made throughout Jewish history, to harmonize Judaism and the general intellectual tendencies of an age.

Numerous and diverse influences molded Hirsch's thinking on the nature of Judaism. The whole of the vast sacred literature of the Jewish past, a literature with which he was unusually well acquainted and for which he had considerable respect, if not reverence; German critical and idealistic philosophy which he had thoroughly imbibed in his student days; the teachings of his father and father-in-law; the stirring historical events of his own time; the revolutionary philosophic and intellectual developments in the America of his day; the new religious movements in contemporary Christianity, particularly

the Social Gospel movement in the Protestant churches — all these, and many other elements, went into the making of his philosophy of religion in general and of Judaism in particular. Out of them came a synthesis, unstable to be sure, and perhaps unsatisfactory to the present-day Jew who lives in a different intellectual environment and who has the advantage of historical hindsight, but in his own day highly impressive and widely influential.

One of the most significant achievements of the nineteenth century in the field of religion was the development of the new science of comparative religion. Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis had deflected attention from the formal analysis and evaluation of the specific dogmas and practices of the various religions to the quest for the basic sources, both in man and in nature, of the phenomenology of all religion. The search for the psychological, historical, and anthropological roots of religion, which had been urged long before by Hume in England and by Herder in Germany, received in the second half of the nineteenth century, under the impetus of Darwin's evolutionary philosophy, its most pronounced development. Rejecting all notions of divine authority or supernatural revelation in the field of religion, and pursuing what they considered a truly objective and scientific method, a host of investigators set about a critical study of the sacred literature, practices, and beliefs of every religious culture, from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the primitive cults of the Hottentots and Polynesians.

Hirsch was greatly interested in this new discipline of comparative religion, and avidly read the works of its chief investigators. His study of their writings, as well as his wide reading in the fields of philosophy and psychology, led him to the conclusion that there is a common source for all religions. This he conceived to be the inborn human yearning for the complete and perfect.

Somebody has styled religion the gnawing bitterness of homesickness in the human soul. This definition is not altogether a poetic simile. Religion is, indeed, like homesickness, a yearning for something which it seems we once possessed. The sense of imperfection, incompleteness, on the one hand, and the passion to become perfect, to grow into completeness; the consciousness of weakness and the dread to be annihilated unless strengthened; the striving to escape from the destruction; contrary as its single threads appear, religion weaves together, more or less perfectly, these discordant fibres.<sup>2</sup>

It appears that religion was, in Hirsch's opinion, rooted primarily not in fear or awe or love or a feeling of helplessness and dependence, though all these find expression in it, but in the basic and inescapable

human need to construct, through poetic concept and dramatic symbol, a unified view of the universe and of the ultimate significance of life. The construction of these, he believed, is essential for human existence on earth. As a student of history, Hirsch recognized, however, the social and environmental conditioning undergone by the various religions. From this he drew the conclusion that no religion is final and in exclusive possession of the truth. In the thought of Lessing, the celebrated eighteenth-century German exponent of rationalism and liberalism, Hirsch found this conclusion confirmed. Speaking of Lessing's view of religion, as expressed in the parable of the three rings in *Nathan the Wise*, Hirsch commented:

This instinct for totality, the counterpart of the feeling, gnawing and rankling, of dissatisfaction, is the germ of all religion. But man answers the craving need of a totality and a prospect into the future according to his historical conditions. Therefore all religions are genuine rings. None of them is a counterfeit, and none of them owns exclusively the truth and the whole truth.<sup>3</sup>

The critical and scientific temper of the age, whose spirit they had fully absorbed, destroyed for Hirsch and for many other religious liberals, both in the synagogue and in the Protestant churches, their faith in the absolute truth and unshakable validity of their religious traditions. Rejecting the notion of revealed religion as pre-scientific and mythological, Hirsch identified revelation with reason. However, reason was, in Hirsch's opinion, not a means of obtaining ultimate truth, but an instrument for the progressive yet never-ending refinement of ideas.<sup>4</sup> On such a view he could only take Jewish religious tradition, subject it to the test of reason, combine the residue left, after the application of this test, with other conceptions suggested by reason, and then fuse these elements to form a reconstructed faith which would be itself merely tentative and subject to constant revision. In adopting this method, Hirsch was in accord with the pragmatic philosophy which prevailed among the liberals of his day.

Yet, though no religion was final for Hirsch, he believed passionately that Judaism, at least his purified reconstruction of Judaism, was the most perfect religion then in existence. Like his father, Samuel Hirsch, who, though a Hegelian, had concerned himself with disproving Hegel's contention that only Christianity had realized the Absolute and with defending Judaism's claim to be the absolute religion, so Emil G. Hirsch also defended the superiority of Judaism over Christianity as well as over all other religions. Judaism, he believed, would ultimately make way for the more perfect religion of humanity which would be universal in scope. But Judaism already possessed most of the requisites of this universal religion.

With the basic theological problem, the nature of God, Hirsch

wrestled throughout his ministry, seeking to find both for himself and for those to whom he spoke an adequate and relevant conception of Deity. In his thinking about God he was subject to many conflicting doctrines and influences. At various periods in his life, and often at one and the same period, diverse conceptions appealed to him. In this matter no genuine development or real consistency can be discovered in his sermons. Radical humanism, personalistic theism, pantheism — these and other doctrines recommended themselves to him at different times and frequently at the same time. Believing that no theological formulation had absolute truth or ultimate validity, Hirsch adopted an eclectic method, choosing and rejecting ideas on diverse grounds — intellectual, moral, and esthetic. Assuredly it was an unsatisfactory method, leading to much confusion and contradiction, but it was shared by many liberal religionists of his day.

In his early thinking on the problem of God, Hirsch was almost completely under the influence of Kantian philosophy, as were many of his predecessors and contemporaries in the Reform movement. Kant, whose works he had studied thoroughly in his student days in Germany, was, in Hirsch's estimation, the most important religious thinker in modern times. "I at least know of none who, after Jesus, Moses, Buddha, Paul, and Mohammed, has so deeply cut the groove in which thought generally, and religious thought particularly, must henceforth run."<sup>5</sup>

Kant had demonstrated the invalidity of the classic philosophic proofs for the existence of God which had so delighted the minds of both medieval scholastics and Enlightenment era deists. With Kant's assertion that the existence of God was philosophically unproveable, Hirsch fully agreed.<sup>6</sup> He agreed with him also in maintaining that God could only be a postulate, the truth of which is based on man's moral nature.<sup>7</sup> Human conscience, man's innate sense of right and duty, Hirsch repeatedly declared, reveals God. This conception of revelation, that God is to be found in the still, small voice of conscience, calling to duty and sacrifice, he insisted, was the great creative insight of the Hebrew prophets.<sup>8</sup> Hirsch was fully aware of the variations in the manifestations of conscience in different cultures and of the relativity of moral standards in various times and places,<sup>9</sup> but this does not seem to have disturbed his Kantian outlook.

In accord with Kantian thought, Hirsch repeatedly emphasized that not theology, but ethics, is primary in religion in general, and in Judaism in particular. The power of man to achieve individual righteousness and social justice is the great doctrine of true religion. Theistic belief, he announced, is of importance only as it has ethical import.<sup>10</sup> The idea of God, he declared in 1896, is significant only as a factor which makes for the ennoblement of human life.

The question fundamental for man to ask is not "What is God?" but "What is He for us as men?" What is God for man is indeed the basic inquiry of Judaism, and to it Judaism gives a clear and definite answer: God for man stands in the consciousness of man's dignity, "little less than God," higher, immeasurably higher, than the brutes, and therefore for the appreciation that man's life is distinct from the brutes and dowered for ends higher than those that have come to the beast.<sup>11</sup>

As a preacher, Hirsch was primarily concerned with glorifying man and his moral possibilities, not with exalting God. Yet, though many of his extreme statements about God may be interpreted as exaggerations, made with a practical, homiletical intent, they are too frequent and regular in Hirsch's preaching throughout the 1890's not to be indicative of his real thinking about God at the time. A statement such as the following appears in a well-prepared and closely-reasoned sermon, and certainly reflects his real view at the moment (1893):

For the belief in God is merely the outcome of the belief in man. God is the apex of the pyramid, not the base. Man is the cornerstone; and from the true conception of man have the Jewish thinkers risen to the noblest conception of the Deity. Those are shallow who talk of their agnosticism and parade their atheism. No one is an agnostic and no one is an atheist, except he have neither pity for the weak nor charity for the erring; except he have no mercy for those who need its soothing balm.<sup>12</sup>

Again, in 1894, Hirsch identified theism with moral conduct. "The equation of atheism is selfishness. The equation of theism is love to others and self-development for the purpose of service to others."<sup>13</sup>

Yet, in the very years during which Hirsch was preaching this brand of humanism and replacing God with man, or at least making the doctrine of God subsidiary to the doctrine of man, he was aware of its weaknesses, from both a religious and philosophical standpoint. And, though he continued his humanist preaching, he insisted also that human life and action, in order to be ultimately significant, must be supported by a greater Creative Power, a Power which transcends man's creativity and is an actual existent.

The doctrine of man as creator, as I can easily show to such as can think philosophically, necessarily leads to an assumption of a greater creative force immanent in nature. . . . Human life, weak as it is, shadowlike as undoubtedly it is, fleet-footed as it is, gains strength in the thought that the All-life lives and supports the individual life, which is not wiped away as the little ripples are in the broader stream.<sup>14</sup>

This teaching recurs frequently in Hirsch's preaching. Man, he argued, is not alone in his struggle to achieve the great ideal values

laid down by religion. Outside of, and independent of, man, there is a universal and eternal power working for the realization of these values. In essence, Hirsch repeated Matthew Arnold's celebrated formulation of the nature of Deity, namely, the power not ourselves which makes for righteousness. In 1892 he proclaimed: "The spirit of our God broods over the mighty waters of Time. It is the enduring right and justice; righteousness and truth are the goals for which a power not ourselves is making in the conflicts and the contentions, in the contortions of time."<sup>15</sup>

To the end of his life Hirsch remained primarily a humanist and a moralist. His religion was man-centered and morality-centered. But, at the same time, faith in a real God who is the eternal power making for righteousness seems to have become an integral part of his religion. In preaching, however, his aim was primarily practical; therefore, he emphasized that the power which is God works in large measure through man, who, in the recognition and acceptance of his share in the process, finds life meaningful and joyous. It is, in essence, the old rabbinic idea of man as the *shuttaf la-kadosh baruch hu*, the partner of God in the work of creation.

The Jewish God's symbol vocalizes the reality of an all-encompassing and controlling "Justice," the One world-power, the all-pervading world-process, the all-shaping world-purpose. This Power, Process, and Purpose, conceived and carried out in Love, is an end unto itself, but man is a means to it. By making this purpose his own day's intention man gives music and value to his life. . . .<sup>16</sup>

God, Hirsch declared, following a traditional Jewish teaching, is the omnipotent and omnipresent Lord who rules both nature and history.<sup>17</sup> Through His continuing work, which men can further by their own actions, the world is directed toward ethical ends. "The ages tremble under the weight of moral purpose—steady, unbroken, uninterrupted."<sup>18</sup> Hirsch's tremendous faith in progress was certainly confirmed by, and perhaps even grounded in, this view of Deity.

In general, Hirsch was not fond of theological subtleties. Yet he ventured at times, even in his preaching, to define the attributes of God. God, he declared, is personal, or so, at least, must human speech and thought, with their essential limitations, conceive Him.<sup>19</sup> Personality must be an attribute of God, not only because man naturally ascribes to God what is his own highest possession, but because God Himself is the great Mind in Nature. This is a far cry from Kantianism, which insists that God is to be discovered in the conscience of man rather than in nature. Yet, only a few years after preaching Kantianism, Hirsch was ready to accept Spinoza's pantheism and to make for it the same claim that he had previously made, and was to

make again later, for the Kantian conception of God, namely, that it is the essence of Judaism. God, he announced in 1897, is identical with nature, or, at any rate, with the personal-mental element in nature.

Nature and God for the Christian are antithetical, never so with the Jew. . . . Spinoza's doctrine is Jewish to the core. Nature and God, from the Jewish point of view, are not antithetical. They are not antipodal. They are different modes of one, what? Of one energy that spans the all. Nature is God. God is nature. But mind in man is also in nature. Mind in man being personal, mind in its development through the human taking on the personal, we have the right to urge that in nature is personality.<sup>20</sup>

Though Hirsch did, at times, indulge in abstruse theological speculation, he was never really convinced, it seems, of the validity of such speculation. His dominant theological doctrine, the one which recurs most frequently in his sermons, his belief in God as the eternal power making for righteousness, was not founded on the conviction that he had logically proved His existence. The deep-seated intellectual skepticism could not be so easily eradicated. Nor was Hirsch temperamentally capable of arriving at belief through commitment in faith. Reason was paramount for him, and, though reason could not logically prove God, it could suggest certain values realizable through a belief in God. In a sermon preached in 1916, Hirsch set up a thoroughly pragmatic test for theological ideas.

. . . this is the final test of the truth or untruth of a constructive or disintegrating philosophy of life. What increases man's sense of power, and therefore, for him, the content of life, is true. What tends to the diminishing of the store of moral resiliency and of the energy needed for resisting as well as for onward pushing is corrupting, and therefore marked by falsehood's taint.<sup>21</sup>

On the basis of such a pragmatic test, the idea of God as the eternal and universal power which makes for righteousness becomes supremely important for human life.

Value is given to our little limited lives. Our days are reckoned as movements in the sweep of the centuries. Their faint note belongs to the ocean of song to which worlds and ages have contributed. Our doings help and hinder, spread or retard, the pulsations of the universe's heart. We are a part of the eternities and have a part to play in their orchestrated symphonic movements.<sup>22</sup>

For Hirsch the way to God was, as has been observed, essentially through reason. Faith he could not accept. Nor was revelation, in its original, supernatural meaning, a significant concept for him. He completely accepted the most radical conclusions of Biblical criticism.

Its major premise, namely, that the Bible is not the word of God literally revealed to men, was axiomatic with him. Moreover, he could not see any real justification for the idea of revelation. "A revelation that transcends man's intellect can indeed bring sound, but no sense. And if man is capable enough to connect with revelation sense, then revelation, again, is unnecessary, for that which we can understand, we can also discover."<sup>23</sup>

Revelation, for Hirsch, is synonymous with reason. Its instrument is human genius.<sup>24</sup> With the procession of the suns, there is progress in religious thought, for men of genius arise and discover new insights. Whether a new insight may be termed revelation, declared Hirsch, can only be discovered pragmatically. "One whose speech was of and about the truly divine will set adrift a call that the ages cannot hush but will ever anew and anew take up."<sup>25</sup> Hirsch was aware of the difficulty in making revelation man-centered and identifying it with reason, but insisted that there was no way of avoiding the difficulty. The skeptic and agnostic strain in him was dominant. God in Himself, he declared, is ultimately unknowable. He can only be for man a representation, perhaps corresponding to reality and perhaps not, created by man's own mind. In the final analysis, theology, Hirsch believed, is not science, but poetry. It makes its own truths. "But is not this poetry? Is not hereby admitted that man makes his God? Let it be so! Beyond the limitations of our humanity even our thought cannot push. We lean on such crutches as the poor symbolism of human speech provides to represent what is finally unrepresentable."<sup>26</sup>

It has already been noted, in the discussion of Hirsch's conception of God, what a high place he accorded to man. In his very generous and optimistic estimate of man Hirsch was thoroughly in accord with one significant trend in contemporary American thought. The effect of Darwinism on the religious conception of man had been, at first, revolutionary and destructive. From his noble position in the center of the universe as the divinely created child of God, man was unceremoniously degraded, at least in the popular understanding of the theory, to the level of the ape. And the fixed and ordered universe in which man had been the culmination, and which had furnished such pleasure to the children of the Enlightenment, gave way to a universe which could be conceived only as being in a constant state of flux and evolving from an unimaginable beginning to an equally unimaginable end. But though, in its first impact, destructive to many of the long-cherished certainties of the past, Darwinism did not prove permanently so, nor did it affect adversely all old ideas. In the fields of philosophy and religion a group of thinkers of the Spencerian school — notably, in America, John Fiske<sup>27</sup> and his dis-

principles — adapted Darwinian concepts to corroborate the received verities. These men insisted that the evolutionary hypothesis only confirmed the faith of the Enlightenment in Man, Reason, and Progress. Man, they held, was still to be regarded as the consummation of creation, but instead of coming at the beginning of the process, he was now conceived as the end toward which the creative power of the universe had been tending throughout all time. Man's reason was still to be regarded as the divine spark, giving him uniqueness among mundane creatures and insuring his unbroken material and moral progress. Progress itself was exalted by these thinkers into an absolute, a metaphysical entity inherent in the very structure of the universe. Evolution, they declared, was the central fact in nature, and evolution was synonymous with progress.

Following their interpretation of evolutionary philosophy, Hirsch likewise insisted that Darwinism had not degraded man from his supreme position in creation. He was still the highest creature in nature and ever progressing further on the road of perfectibility.<sup>28</sup> The growing tendency in imaginative literature, especially among the French, German, and Scandinavian realists, to lower man to the level of the beast, found no favor in his eyes.<sup>29</sup> Contemporary science was of religious value, according to him, in that its achievements can give man a deepened sense of his own dignity and glory.<sup>30</sup> The idea that man is godlike and perfectible is, Hirsch declared in his inaugural sermon at Sinai in 1880 and reiterated numerous times in later years, one of the chief cornerstones of Judaism.<sup>31</sup> The doctrine of fatalism and determinism popularized in his time by philosophers like Haeckel and biologists like Loeb did not recommend itself to Hirsch, who insisted that man is a creative being with relative, though not absolute, free will and power of self-determination.<sup>32</sup>

Believing, as he did, that man is a self-ennobling creature, capable of rising from his primordial animal state to the heights of moral excellence, Hirsch reinterpreted the idea of sin in non-theological terms and in opposition to the Christian doctrine of inherited depravity.

Sin is not offense against God, but against our humanity. It is not a state which came to us and which we cannot throw off; it is an act of our own. Sin is anti-social conduct, due to the want of resistance on our part to the influences of the animal world behind us, selfishness, or to the legacy of a phase of civilization over which and beyond which we should have passed on.<sup>33</sup>

Judaism, Hirsch never wearied of repeating, is the supreme religion. It had, he maintained, avoided the errors which made other religions inferior. It had escaped the tendency, so marked in other religions, toward mysticism and emotionalism, which serve, he declared, only

as opiates or intoxicants but do not further redemptive work or struggle in the great conflicts of life. For mysticism and emotionalism Hirsch had no use, and his denunciation of them was frequent and vitriolic.<sup>34</sup>

Judaism, Hirsch argued, had also avoided the dogmatism and the creed-forming mania which made other religions intellectually impossible in modern times. Furthermore, it never really succumbed to bibliolatry.<sup>35</sup> Liberal Judaism, especially of the radical variety, is particularly free from all these defects. It is not creedal; it is not emotionalistic; it does not worship the Bible; it is not otherworldly. It is rather concerned, as were prophetic Judaism and talmudic Judaism, with regulating human life and conduct according to moral ideals. Its chief theological cornerstone is the idea of man made in the image of God, and its chief sacrament is the concept of duty.<sup>36</sup> In Hirsch's view, Judaism dissents from the primitive pagan outlook which sees man as the plaything of inscrutable and immoral powers who may be appeased by the magical rites of religion. It disagrees also with religions such as those of India which recommend negation of the self and conceive the highest good as non-being. Christianity, which also negates and despises this life, but holds forth the promise of true life in the world to come, is likewise antithetical to Judaism. For Judaism, Hirsch maintained, is essentially a religion which affirms life and the world, holding both to be the creation of a God of righteousness. It calls upon man to find meaning in his existence through the realization of his capacities for righteousness and justice and mercy and duty.<sup>37</sup>

Hirsch insisted that Judaism upholds an aggressive ethical ideal, completely opposed to the Christian ideal of non-resistance to evil.<sup>38</sup> Justice, he urged, must be fought for, and Judaism proclaims an ideal of justice for which it is worthwhile to fight.

Hirsch summarized his own conception of the essential nature of Judaism in these terms:

In the common sense of the word, Judaism is not a religion, it is not a system of dogmas, of sacramental grace; it is not a bundle of rites and ceremonies; it is not a road to happiness in the hereafter; it is not a scheme of salvation from original sin; it does neither stand nor fall with our views as to the character of those books we call sacred, and as to their authorship. But it is a message to the world that righteousness must be its own reward, and is of that force which builds the world and shapes the courses of men.<sup>39</sup>

In his attitude toward rite and ceremony Hirsch followed the tradition of radical Reform. While markedly antagonistic to that pseudo-liberalism which expressed itself chiefly in ridiculing and satirizing ancient customs, he himself cherished no romantic longings for

the traditional rites of Judaism.<sup>40</sup> He considered most of them as outmoded products of a bygone age. Furthermore, elaborate liturgy and ritual were intrinsically repugnant to his temperament. His faith, in which ethical ideals were primary, could find little use for ritualism, which he believed to be the by-product of mysticism and emotionalism. His antipathy to the latter has already been noted above.

Yet, being a rabbi and the leader of an organized congregation, Hirsch had to find a justification and rationale at least for the public worship of the synagogue. One of the major reasons for public prayer, he held, is that it expresses the sense of Jewish identity and community.<sup>41</sup> But essentially the purpose of prayer and ritual is an ethical one: "We pray and have ritual to remind us of our dignity and worth as men, of the fact that one man must live with others and through others."<sup>42</sup> Prayer, he declared, is not a dialogue between man and God; it is an address of the lower to the higher within man. "True worship is not a petition to God; it is a sermon to our own selves. The words which are its raiments are addressed *to us*. They speak of God and the divine in man, and thus make man find in himself the God that so often is forgotten when the battle rages and the batteries roar."<sup>43</sup>

Hirsch proclaimed that the essential function of the synagogue is to serve as a place of moral instruction. This is also the basic purpose of the sermon, which is itself the most important element in the synagogue service. Prayer is of secondary value in that it prepares the mind and the soul to receive the religious and ethical message of the pulpit.<sup>44</sup>

Hirsch's conception of the function of organized religion and of the synagogue was very probably influenced by the Social Gospel movement which arose in the Protestant churches of America in the second half of the nineteenth century as a response not only to the humanists and the followers of Ethical Culture, but also to the urgent problems created by the new urban and industrial order. Many serious-minded men within the churches — men like Wendell Phillips, Josiah Strong, and Walter Rauschenbusch — urged that the true mission of Christianity is the humanization of society. Dissatisfied with the old view which had made the church primarily an instrument to insure the otherworldly salvation of the individual, these men insisted that the church must address itself to the correction of social abuses and the amelioration of social ills. The pronouncements of the Social Gospel leaders undoubtedly influenced Hirsch and many other Reform rabbis to proclaim a similar mission for the synagogue.

A central doctrine in Emil G. Hirsch's philosophy of Judaism was the concept of the mission of Israel. As in the theology of David Einhorn and of Samuel Hirsch, so in his the mission idea served as

the basic justification for the preservation of Judaism and of the identity of the Jewish people.

Hirsch insisted that the idea of assigning a special mission to the Jewish people — and that the Jews constituted a people he did not question — is an entirely naturalistic one. For every civilization and every nation that have existed in human history have had a unique destiny and a unique mission. All have somehow contributed to the spiritual or material possessions of present-day society.<sup>45</sup>

Hirsch clearly stated what he conceived the historical mission of the Jew to be: "The Jew was by history called to be the proclaimer of an ethical view of the universe and of man, of ethical monotheism."<sup>46</sup> Hirsch argued that throughout its history Judaism has been called upon to challenge unworthy conceptions of the universe and of life. Thus, in the time of the Maccabees, the duty of the Jew was to hold fast to his ethical religion. If Hellenism, which, though the mother of art and of speculative thought, had no great ethical message, had succeeded in destroying Judaism, there would have been no Christianity. But even with the triumph of Christianity, it was still necessary for Judaism to survive. Its purpose now is to challenge the errors of the church: its dogmatism, its narrowness, its theology of sin.<sup>47</sup> To protest against the doctrines of the corruption of man, of the impossibility of human goodness and justice, and of the otherworldliness of God's kingdom — all orthodox Christian tenets — is still, Hirsch argued, the mission of the Jew.<sup>48</sup>

Essentially Israel's present-day mission, Hirsch preached, is to continue its suffering existence as a protest against the idols of the contemporary world. By continuing to suffer for the wrongs of the nations Israel serves to prick their conscience. For this it must bear their enmity, but the suffering which this enmity entails is of supreme importance and value.

The Jew protests by his very existence against the doctrine that might makes right, that numbers decide truth, and that possession condones every offense. The Jew, by his very presence, preaches that every man can be virtuous, regardless of a miraculous redemption, whether he accepts the vicarious atonement or not. . . . The Jew, by his very presence, protests against narrow nationalism. . . . The Jew also disproves the now much ventilated theory of favored races. He is the living protest against the theory which says that blood will tell. . . . It is not true that on account of our sins has the world today risen against the Jew, but true it is that the world is not what it should be, and therefore the Jew is an irritant that brings forever and ever to the conscience of the people their shortcomings. This is the source of the hatred against the Jew.<sup>49</sup>

Much of Hirsch's marked antagonism toward Zionism was due to his conception of the mission of Israel. Political Zionism, he held, assumed too narrow and materialistic a mission for the Jew. Its avowed purpose was merely to help the Jew escape from misery and poverty and to find material comfort. But the Jew, Hirsch maintained, must have a greater purpose and mission than this. He has a messianic duty and obligation to work for the creation of the spiritual Zion—the great ideal of universal humanity and righteousness—though he suffer direst persecution and oppression in the attempt.<sup>50</sup>

Though he sympathized with the suffering of East European Jewry and appreciated the fact that the Zionist movement was directed primarily toward the alleviation of that suffering, he could not bring himself to accept Zionism as a Jewish movement valid from an ideological standpoint, apart from its humanitarian and philanthropic aspects. In his mature thought on the subject, presented in a sermon preached in 1917, Hirsch repeated that his antagonism to Zionism was due basically to its conflict with his conception of the greater mission of Israel.

For me Israel's destiny foreshadowed in its very martyrdom and heroism is to be of greater service and meaning to mankind than what it can be if our rerise as a small political nation in a corner of anterior Asia is the ultimate of our checkered, tearwet, and bloodred career. I cannot bring myself to believe that with Jerusalem only another Bukharest, let us say with stage open for Hebrew plays whether moral or not, with articles of toilette placed on sale in show windows of shops bearing names spelled in Hebrew, and other triumphs of Hebrew sartorial art, yea with universities where chemistry talks Hebrew and economics adds a few technical terms to the Hebrew dictionary, we have justification for singing *Lo Amuth Ki E'hyeh*, I shall not die, I am alive. I cannot forget to add *Weassaper Ma'ase Yah*. The purpose of my survival is to witness to the doings of God.<sup>51</sup>

Hirsch's conception of the mission of Israel led him to an extremely radical conclusion, namely, that the ultimate purpose of Judaism is to transcend itself. Judaism must strive to bring about that era of universal harmony when creeds and forms will no longer divide mankind, but all men will be united under one religion whose cornerstones shall be justice, truth, and peace. Such is Israel's messianic mission and destiny.

This idea had been an essential element in Einhorn's philosophy of Judaism. In the *Neilah* service of his prayerbook *Olat Tamid*, Einhorn had reinterpreted the prayer "Open unto us the gates" as, in Hirsch's words, "a prayer for the coming of the time when *Judaism shall no longer exist*. It states that Judaism is but the gate through

which humanity may pass to a broader field, and a higher, nobler life. Judaism itself is not the end; it is but the means."<sup>52</sup>

Hirsch considered this one of Einhorn's greatest insights and one with which he could fully agree.<sup>53</sup> He contended that the time had not yet come for Judaism to sink its own identity in the greater life of humanity, but that it would surely come, and not in some far-off, impossible age.<sup>54</sup> Hirsch seems never to have lost his optimistic faith in the coming of the era of united humanity. Israel, he believed, still had much work to do before the universal religion of humanity would arrive, but when it does come, Israel will be no more. Its mission having been fulfilled, it will gladly give up its separate life. But it must be careful not to give up its life too soon. Until the very threshold of the hour when the universal religion is born, Israel must stand apart and continue to labor for the fulfillment of its historic destiny.<sup>55</sup>

## NOTES

RA=*The Reform Advocate*

<sup>1</sup>For biographical sketches see Hirsch's *My Religion*, pp. 11-23; *The Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, Vol. 33, 1923, pp. 145-54; *The American Jewish Yearbook*, Vol. 27, 1925-26, pp. 230-37; and *RA* for January 13, 1923, and May 26, 1923.

<sup>2</sup>"Pentecostal Gifts," *RA*, Vol. 1, 1891, p. 229; cf. "The Three Rings," *RA*, Vol. 2, 1891, p. 85, and "The New Religious Attitude," *RA*, Vol. 18, 1899, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup>"The Three Rings," *RA*, Vol. 2, 1891, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup>"The New Religious Attitude," *RA*, Vol. 18, 1899, pp. 161-62.

<sup>5</sup>"The Centennial of a Book on Religion," *RA*, Vol. 7, 1894, p. 468.

<sup>6</sup>"Pentecostal Gifts," *RA*, Vol. 1, 1891, p. 229; "The Centennial of a Book on Religion," *RA*, Vol. 7, 1894, pp. 467-70.

<sup>7</sup>"Pentecostal Gifts," *RA*, Vol. 1, 1891, pp. 228-30.

<sup>8</sup>"God in Nature," *RA*, Vol. 13, 1897, p. 359.

<sup>9</sup>"Individual and Society," *RA*, Vol. 1, 1891, pp. 247-50; "A Growing Conscience," *RA*, Vol. 13, 1897, pp. 241-44.

<sup>10</sup>"The Ethical Import of Theism," *RA*, Vol. 10, 1895, pp. 766-69.

<sup>11</sup>"The Sociological Center of Religion," *RA*, Vol. 11, 1896, p. 162.

<sup>12</sup>"Old Age," *RA*, Vol. 5, 1893, p. 244.

<sup>13</sup>"The Radical's Religion," *RA*, Vol. 8, 1894, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup>"Man's Position in Nature," *RA*, Vol. 6, 1893, p. 220.

<sup>15</sup>"The Two Books," *RA*, Vol. 4, 1892, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup>"Or," *RA*, Vol. 25, 1903, p. 502.

<sup>17</sup>"The Omnipotent," *RA*, Vol. 17, 1899, pp. 632-37.

<sup>18</sup>"The Omnipresent," *RA*, Vol. 17, 1899, p. 695.

<sup>19</sup>"The Personal God," *RA*, Vol. 18, 1899, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>"Where Does God Dwell?" *RA*, Vol. 13, 1897, p. 73; cf. "The Doctrine of Evolution and Judaism," in *My Religion*, p. 252.

<sup>21</sup>"In Thy Hands Are My Tides," *RA*, Vol. 52, 1916, p. 231.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>"Sinai Congregation's Radicalism," *RA*, Vol. 1, 1891, pp. 195-98.

<sup>24</sup>"God's Revelation," *RA*, Vol. 14, 1897, p. 518.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 519.

- <sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup>For an excellent discussion of Fiske's place in American thought, see Com-mager, *The American Mind*, pp. 82-90; see also Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, Vol. 3, pp. 203-11.
- <sup>28</sup>"The Last Half Century's Thought and Judaism," *RA*, Vol. 53, 1917, pp. 357-62.
- <sup>29</sup>"Modern Prophets," *RA*, Vol. 13, 1897, pp. 293-96.
- <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup>"The Crossing of the Jordan," in *My Religion*, pp. 343-58; cf. "What is Truth?" in *My Religion*, pp. 78-95, and "The Conclusion of the Matter: A New Religion or the Old?" in *My Religion*, pp. 208-22.
- <sup>32</sup>"Man's Position in Nature," *RA*, Vol. 6, 1893, pp. 217-21.
- <sup>33</sup>"The Psychology of Sin," *RA*, Vol. 7, 1894, p. 135.
- <sup>34</sup>"The Radical's Religion," *RA*, Vol. 8, 1894, pp. 104-08; "The Sanctuary," *RA*, Vol. 15, 1898, pp. 95-98; "Is Judaism a Religion of Dry Bones?" *RA*, Vol. 17, 1899, pp. 296-301.
- <sup>35</sup>"Sinai's Anniversary," *RA*, Vol. 9, 1895, pp. 408-12.
- <sup>36</sup>"Views of Life," *RA*, Vol. 2, 1892, pp. 369-72; "Wanted: A New Religion," *RA*, Vol. 8, 1894, pp. 233-37; "The Value of Life," *RA*, Vol. 9, 1895, pp. 231-34; "God Is Our Rock," *RA*, Vol. 17, 1899, pp. 72-76; "The Mystery and the Mastery of Life," *RA*, Vol. 22, 1901, pp. 82-85.
- <sup>37</sup>"Interpretations of the Universe," *RA*, Vol. 8, 1895, pp. 382-84.
- <sup>38</sup>"The Fight for Justice," *RA*, Vol. 4, 1893, pp. 499-502; "Moses and Jesus: On Reform Judaism and Unitarianism," *RA*, Vol. 9, 1895, pp. 345-48; "Justice and Judgment," *RA*, Vol. 15, 1898, pp. 192-95.
- <sup>39</sup>"The True Victor and His Arms," *RA*, Vol. 3, 1892, p. 129.
- <sup>40</sup>"Sinai Congregation's Radicalism," *RA*, Vol. 1, 1891, pp. 195-98.
- <sup>41</sup>"The Function of Prayer and Ritual in My Religion," in *My Religion*, p. 125.
- <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.
- <sup>43</sup>"The Function of Worship," *RA*, Vol. 3, 1892, p. 109.
- <sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup>"Conflicting Tendencies," *RA*, Vol. 2, pp. 51-54; "Why Am I a Jew?"—Part II, *RA*, Vol. 10, 1895, pp. 722-26; "The Soul of the Nation," *RA*, Vol. 13, 1897, pp. 341-44; "The God of Israel," in *My Religion*, pp. 296-310.
- <sup>46</sup>"Humanity or Judaism?" *RA*, Vol. 2, 1891, p. 68.
- <sup>47</sup>"Was It and Is It Worthwhile to Save Judaism?" *RA*, Vol. 4, 1892, pp. 379-82.
- <sup>48</sup>"The Philosophy of the Reform Movement in American Judaism," *RA*, Vol. 9, 1895, p. 362.
- <sup>49</sup>"Israel's Natural Mission," *RA*, Vol. 1, 1891, p. 425.
- <sup>50</sup>"Spiritual or Political Zionism?" *RA*, Vol. 16, 1899, pp. 384-86.
- <sup>51</sup>"The Last Half Century's Thought and Judaism," *RA*, Vol. 53, 1917, p. 362.
- <sup>52</sup>"Our Great Reformers," *RA*, Vol. 2, 1891, p. 190.
- <sup>53</sup>"Universal Religion and Judaism," *RA*, Vol. 6, 1893, pp. 137-40; "The Philosophy of the Reform Movement in American Judaism," *RA*, Vol. 9, 1895, pp. 359-65.
- <sup>54</sup>"Judaism a Living Religion," *RA*, Vol. 15, 1898, p. 241.
- <sup>55</sup>"The Philosophy of the Reform Movement in American Judaism," *RA*, Vol. 9, 1895, p. 364.