

# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxiii

## PART 1. SHAPING JEWISH LIFE IN AN OPEN SOCIETY

1. A Response by Modern Orthodoxy to Jewish Religious Pluralism: The Case of Esriel Hildesheimer	3
2. German Orthodox Rabbinical Writings on the Jewish Textual Education of Women: The Views of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer	18
3. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch to Liepman Phillip Prins of Amsterdam: An 1873 Responsum on Education	31
4. An Ideology for the Liberal Jewish Day School: A Philosophical-Sociological Investigation	38
5. Denominationalism: History and Hopes	60
6. The Integrity of Reform within <i>Kelal Yisra-el</i>	71

## PART 2. SEARCHING FOR A BALANCED THEOLOGY

7. A Theology of Fear: The Search for a Liberal Jewish Paradigm	89
8. Eugene B. Borowitz: A Tribute on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday	108
9. Laws and Judgments as a “Bridge to a Better World”: <i>Parashat Mishpatim</i> (Exodus 21:1–24:18)	119
10. Heschel and the Roots of <i>Kavanah</i> : Responsibility and <i>Kavanah</i> in Postwar America	124
11. Rabbi Hayim David Halevi on Christians and Christianity: An Analysis of Selected Legal Writings of an Israeli Authority	145
12. Interreligious Learning and the Formation of Jewish Religious Identity	165



# 1

## A Response by Modern Orthodoxy to Jewish Religious Pluralism

### The Case of Esriel Hildesheimer

The Jewish community of Western and Central Europe experienced profound economic, social, and political transformations during the latter part of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth. Prior to this era, the Jewish community in Europe had largely adhered to the cultural values and norms of rabbinic teachings.<sup>1</sup> As the structure of medieval Judaism began to collapse in the late eighteenth century, new Jewish responses to the changed character of the modern world emerged. Indeed, the birth of Reform, Conservative, Zionist, and modern Orthodox movements throughout the nineteenth century testify to the birth of a Jewish pluralism. For the Reform and Conservative movements, the advent of religious pluralism within Judaism posed no real problem. As Charles Liebman has succinctly stated: “While Conservative and Reform see themselves as legitimate heirs to the Jewish tradition, neither claims to be its exclusive bearer.” On the other hand, Liebman observes: “Orthodoxy perceives itself as the only legitimate bearer of the Jewish tradition.” Consequently, it is fair to say: “Since neither the Reform, nor the Conservative lays claim to exclusive doctrinal ‘truth,’ they are free to cooperate with one another, with Orthodoxy, and even with secular Jewish groups. . . . The doctrines of Orthodoxy, on the other hand, . . . are by definition beyond compromise or even the appearance of compromise.”<sup>2</sup>

What type of relationship Orthodox Jewry will maintain with heterodox Jewish groups has been the subject of discussion since the rise of Haskalah and Reform until the present.<sup>3</sup> There is a broad spectrum of opinion ranging from cooperation to no cooperation with non-Orthodox Jewry. This paper will concern itself with one particular response to this problem: the attitude of Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer (1820–99) of Germany, the founder of the Berlin Rabbinerseminar in 1873 and one of the great leaders



went to Berlin in 1843. There he attended the University and majored in the study of Semitic languages two years. Transferring to the University of Halle in 1846, he received a PhD degree for a dissertation entitled, “The Correct Way to Interpret Scripture.” Hildesheimer became one of the few, perhaps the only, Orthodox rabbi in Germany up to that time to receive a secular doctorate. Armed with this degree, and thus capable of elevating “the estimation of our party” in the eyes of the public,<sup>9</sup> Hildesheimer felt himself capable of doing battle with those groups which had deviated from normative Judaism.

Hildesheimer returned to Halberstadt in 1847 and became secretary of the community. Reform came to Halberstadt in that year, and Ludwig Philippson (1811–89), the editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, began to campaign on its behalf in the pages of his journal. When Philippson convened a meeting of all the Jewish communities in Saxony on October 22, 1847, in the town of Magdeburg, for the purpose of adopting a reformed prayer book, Hildesheimer wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Necessity of Protest against the Actions of the Reformers* and circulated it among all the delegates who had attended the Magdeburg Conference.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Hildesheimer employed the Leipzig periodical *Der Orient* to defend Orthodoxy. Writing on November 20, 1847, Hildesheimer described the feelings motivating his involvement in this dispute.

When I began to fight with Philippson and his lawless peers . . . I was very bitter that no one else seemed to be upset over the situation, that no great man stood up in order to overturn these licentious persons who disrupted the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts. . . . Finally, when I saw that no one acted, I felt that this was no time to refrain from expressing my thoughts on account of embarrassment or humility.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, Hildesheimer not only attacked Philippson and Reform in journal articles but when eight members of the community wished to secede from the general community in 1848 on grounds of religious conscience, Hildesheimer, in conjunction with the rabbi of the community, issued a legal responsum forbidding these Reformers to withdraw and threatening them with loss of all communal rights (e.g., burial) if they did.<sup>12</sup> Secession was thus prevented and the unity of the community maintained.



Graetz teaches one class there [the Breslau Seminary] in Talmud. What a mockery under the guise of being Judaism. It is an unprecedented disgrace. Anyone who witnesses this needs to overcome a feeling of genuine grief. One sees innocent children being led there to the slaughter, one after another, and they are reduced to a lower level than that of common sinners in Israel. They are made into hypocrites, Jesuits, and heretics just like Graetz, who, as I know from a reliable source, waves the *lulav* in his hands on *Sukkot* as if he were a Hasidic rebbe.

It is therefore not surprising that Hildesheimer upbraided a classmate from his Berlin schooldays for teaching at Breslau, for he boasted: “For a long time I have had the merit of dissuading youth from going to Breslau to study, for they can only be transformed there into hypocrites and worse.”<sup>17</sup>

Finally, to the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the Reform rabbinical seminary established by Abraham Geiger in 1872, Hildesheimer applied the words, “Raze it, raze it to its very foundation.”<sup>18</sup> Hildesheimer’s fierce opposition to the notion of religious pluralism in modern Judaism is reflected in his condemnation of both the moderate and extreme reformers. Hildesheimer wrote: “How little is the difference between these reformers [the Breslau people] who do their work with silk gloves on their hands and the Reformer Geiger who strikes with a sledgehammer.”<sup>19</sup> Though Hildesheimer recognized distinctions between Frankel and Geiger, both, in Hildesheimer’s judgment, practiced and taught an inauthentic Judaism, a Judaism which, because of contemporary conditions, had to be tolerated, but which could not be seen as legitimate. Moreover, even to cooperate with these other branches of Judaism on religious matters was, according to Hildesheimer, unthinkable, for to do so might lead the unsuspecting into thinking that Orthodoxy sanctioned non-Orthodox varieties of Judaism. Consequently, under Hildesheimer’s direction, the Orthodox rabbis in Germany, in 1897, seceded from the General Union of Rabbis in Germany to form the Union of Torah-Faithful Rabbis.<sup>20</sup> And in 1883, when a group of non-Orthodox rabbis issued a circular to counteract the charge that Judaism promulgated an internal and external morality, Hildesheimer argued that Orthodox rabbis should not sign it, for to do so would have implied that non-Orthodox rabbis could legitimately speak for Judaism. Instead, Hildesheimer offered another memorandum for Orthodox rabbis to sign.<sup>21</sup>

Hildesheimer's opposition to religious pluralism within Judaism was clearly evidenced by his support of Samson Raphael Hirsch over the issue of Orthodox secession from the general Jewish community in the Germany of the 1870s. As the struggle between the Reform and Orthodox continued throughout nineteenth-century Germany, the discord between them escalated. The Orthodox, soon outnumbered in most large communities by followers of Geiger or Frankel, felt that their religious needs could not be achieved so long as they remained a minority within general Jewish communities. Religious pluralism, however, was not sanctioned in Germany: all Jews were required by law to pay a tax to the Jewish community regardless of their personal religious beliefs. Indeed, the Prussian Jew Law of 1847 raised each Jewish community to the "status of a public body" and required each Jew "to become a member of the community of his place of domicile."<sup>22</sup> The only way to escape this obligation was to convert to Christianity, an alternative unpalatable to most Jews.<sup>23</sup>

In 1873, however, the Prussian Parliament promulgated a bill "Concerning Secession from the State Church," which granted to every Christian the right to secede from the State Church without thereby severing connection with Christianity.<sup>24</sup> The passage of this law granted an excellent opportunity for modifying the Prussian Jew Law of 1847. As Salo Baron notes:

Eduard Lasker, the Jewish leader of the then powerful National Liberal Party, suggested on March 19, 1873, that, in accordance with the general principle of equality of all citizens, the government also be asked to submit a bill on the right of secession from the Jewish community. When a conservative deputy . . . objected that the Jewish community would thereby lose a precious privilege safeguarding its unity Lasker argued that this prerogative, based upon the denial of the liberty of conscience, was a *privilegium odiosum* and that the Jewish community itself should concur in its removal. The government promised to prepare a bill in due course.<sup>25</sup>

Lasker's proposal provoked great controversy within the Jewish community itself. Non-Orthodox Jews and representatives of both the Hochschule and the Breslau Seminary opposed it, claiming it would lead to the destruction of the Jewish community.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, political liber-



als and certain Orthodox Jews, notably Samson Raphael Hirsch, labored long and hard on its behalf.

Hirsch himself appears to have been the major catalyst behind Lasker's proposal. Taking advantage of the Christian Kulturkampf and the dominant general trend that favored religious freedom, Hirsch wrote a pamphlet, *The Principle of Freedom of Conscience*, arguing that compulsion could not bring a religious community into existence. Only a sense of shared religious duty could do that. Hirsch concluded:

The divergence between the religious beliefs of Reform and Orthodoxy is so profound that when an individual publicly secedes he is only giving formal expression to convictions which had long since matured and become perfectly clear to himself. All the institutions and establishments in the care of a community are religious in nature, and they are . . . intimately bound up with the religious law.<sup>27</sup>

Hirsch viewed Judaism solely in religious terms.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, it was logical for him to serve as the catalyst for the bill and urge its passage. When, on July 27, 1876, the Lasker Bill was passed, the lion's share of the credit for its success was attributed to Hirsch. The bill stated:

Every Jew is entitled, without severing his religious affiliation, to secede, on account of his religious scruples, from the particular community to which he belongs by virtue of a law, custom, or administrative regulation.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout this struggle Hildesheimer supported Hirsch and urged passage of this law. To the Prussian Chamber of Deputies in 1875 he wrote:

The gulf between the adherents of traditional Judaism and its religious opponents is at least as deep and wide as in any other religious faith; in fact, it is larger than in most and much bigger than what is permitted by law.<sup>30</sup>

Hildesheimer, like Hirsch, believed that compromise involving issues of religious principles was impossible. No less than Hirsch, Hildesheimer denied the validity of religious pluralism in modern Judaism, and in light



wrote: “This sad matter has distracted me from my work many hours, and it has caused me many sleepless nights in which I have shed many tears.”<sup>37</sup>

Hildesheimer refused to comment publicly on the dispute between Bamberger and Hirsch for fear that no beneficial result could be derived from public comment. Moreover, while he acknowledged that Hirsch had “restored the traditional Judaism of our day to its place of prestige,”<sup>38</sup> in a letter to Hirsch he said:

I do dissent from several passages [in your open letter] directed against Bamberger, which appear to me to be too strong. They make it even less likely for a bridge to be built from your congregation to those who are “secessionists.”<sup>39</sup>

Hildesheimer’s obvious ambivalence toward secession and its attendant division of the Jewish community indicates that he was not the sectarian that Hirsch was. His greater sense of Jewish solidarity is reflected in several other actions he took. While Hirsch wrote, “An Orthodox Jew must not consider joining a B’nai B’rith group, for it threatens traditional Judaism,” Hildesheimer became an active participant in the Berlin lodge.<sup>40</sup> Another incident is even more telling. Hirsch noted that Hildesheimer delivered an address at a meeting of the Berlin chapter of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a Paris-based Jewish educational and charitable organization. Non-Orthodox Jews, including graduates of the Breslau Seminary, were members of the group, and its Paris head, Adolph Cremieux, was not only non-Orthodox but permitted his wife to have their children baptized.<sup>41</sup> As a result, Hirsch wrote:

I have absolutely no connection with the Alliance, . . . I fail to see how a man imbued with proper Jewish thought can attach himself to a group founded for the sake of a Jewish task, when its founder and administration are completely removed from genuine religious Judaism. . . . Indeed, it is very painful for me to see an honored name like Dr. Hildesheimer united with the Alliance and the men of the Breslau Seminary.<sup>42</sup>

Hirsch concluded by stating that this was not the way of the pious men of old who dwelt in Jerusalem and separated themselves absolutely from the rest of the community for the sake of preserving Judaism.









21. *Hildesheimer Briefe*, 195–97.
22. Schwab, *The History of Orthodox Jewry in Germany*, 60.
23. Salo Baron, “Freedom and Constraint in the Jewish Community,” in *Essays and Studies in Memory of Linda R. Miller*, ed. Israel Davidson (New York, 1938), 12.
24. Schwab, *The History of Orthodox Jewry in Germany*, 66.
25. Baron, “Freedom and Constraint in the Jewish Community,” 12–13.
26. *Ibid.*, 14. For a fuller discussion of this whole matter against the background of the times, see Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914*, trans. Noah Jacobs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), chapter 2.
27. Schwab, *The History of Orthodox Jewry in Germany*, 68–69.
28. Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870–71* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 10.
29. Quoted in Baron, “Freedom and Constraint in the Jewish Community,” 15.
30. *Hildesheimer Briefe*, 109.
31. Isaac Unna, “Ezriel [sic] Hildesheimer,” in *Jewish Leaders*, ed. Leo Jung (New York, 1953), 227.
32. Quoted in Meir Hildesheimer, “Contributions towards a Portrait of Esriel Hildesheimer,” 72.
33. Esriel Hildesheimer, *Rabbiner Dr. I. Hildesheimer: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Meir Hildesheimer (Frankfurt, 1923), “Das biblisch-talmudische Recht.”
34. Isaac Unna, “Ezriel Hildesheimer,” 226.
35. Azriel Hildesheimer, ed., “A Selection of Letters between Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and Samson Raphael Hirsch and His Supporters” (Hebrew), *Yad Shaul* (Tel Aviv, 1953), 236.
36. *Ibid.*, 236–38. Also see Schwab, *The History of Orthodox Jewry in Germany*, chapter 9.
37. *Ibid.*, 238.
38. *Ibid.*, 233.
39. *Ibid.*, 240.
40. Quoted by Isaac Heinemann, “Rabbi Marcus Horovitz,” in *Jewish Leaders*, ed. Jung, 263.
41. Azriel Hildesheimer, ed., “An Exchange of Letters between Esriel Hildesheimer and Samson Raphael Hirsch on Matters Relating to the Land of Israel” (Hebrew), *HaMaayan* (1954): 50. Hereafter cited as “Hildesheimer and Hirsch on Israel.”
42. *Ibid.*, 48–49.
43. *Ibid.*, 48–50.
44. *Hildesheimer Briefe*, 199.
45. See Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism*, 35, where he describes Hildesheimer’s friendship with Samuel Kristeller, a nonobservant Jew. Also note his attitude toward Graetz as described below.



- 46. This report is found in J. Meisl, *Heinrich Graetz* (Berlin, 1917), 101–5, 142–51.
- 47. *Hildesheimer Briefe*, 205.
- 48. *Ibid.*, 244.
- 49. “Hildesheimer and Hirsch on Israel,” 41.
- 50. *Hildesheimer Briefe*, 54 (Hebrew section).
- 51. “Hildesheimer and Hirsch on Israel,” 44.
- 52. *Ibid.*, 45.
- 53. *Hildesheimer Briefe*, 90–91.
- 54. “Hildesheimer and Hirsch on Israel,” 44.
- 55. *Hildesheimer Briefe*, 48 (Hebrew section).