Editorial

European Judaism at 50

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This issue marks the beginning of the fifty-first year of publication of the journal, something to be registered with a degree of pride and not a little wonder. We have been served over this time with a remarkable series of editors, beginning with our founding editor Rabbi Dr Ignaz Maybaum z'l (1897–1976). In those early years the direction of the journal was led by Rabbi Michael Goulston z'l (1931–1972) as Managing Editor before his tragic early death. His vision for the journal is well expressed in his words:

Despite numerical depletion, the dangers of destructive assimilation, and the alienation of many in the wake of the European catastrophe, a Jewry with a will to independent existence has a future. We already possess enough intellectual and spiritual strength to achieve a great deal if we can focus it and give it a clear direction. For there can be no successor to the great European heritage except a reborn European Judaism itself.¹

He was succeeded as Managing Editor by Anthony Rudolf (1972–1975), who shared Michael's European vision and, as a poet, translator and critic, brought literary and political dimensions to the journal. We open this issue with his memoir of those early days. Rabbi Marcel Marcus (1976–1978) succeeded him and in an early 'personal view' noted the journal's understandable preoccupation with the Holocaust, but that now 'a new generation has arisen. A generation which does not *know* the Holocaust, but only knows *of* the Holocaust'. He invited authors of the 'new generation' – 'it is time for us, having established, to look into the future'.²

The same issue included an in memoriam for Rabbi Dr Maybaum by Rabbi Dr Albert Friedlander z'l (1927–2004), who took over as editor in 1979 and guided the journal for the next quarter century. During that period, with occasional guest editors, including Evelyn Friedlander and Esther Seidel, the journal extended its range of subjects to include

interfaith dialogue and the relationship between Judaism and psychotherapy. Though the Leo Baeck College, through its graduates and students, had long supported the journal informally, under his editorship the College logo was added to the cover. Having shared editorial responsibilities with Rabbi Friedlander for a number of years, the current Editor succeeded him in 2004.

The ‘wonder’ is that the journal survived at all with a shaky financial foundation from its inception, though with a welcome degree of independence. The first publisher was the Dutch firm of Polak and van Gennep thanks to the generosity of the owner Johan Polak. When he was unable to continue, through the support of Dr Elisabeth Maxwell, Pergamon Press agreed to take over publishing from 1987. When Pergamon became part of Elsevier, with its greater emphasis on ‘hard science’, the journal did not really fit any more, and again was at risk. Fortunately, Marion Berghahn, who was in the process of establishing a new publishing house at the time, recognized that our interests coincided, and since 1994 the Berghahn Books logo has adorned the cover.

The current issue reflects another development in the journal’s recent output, providing an opportunity to publish proceedings of conferences on topics relevant to our broader remit.

A familiar adage has it that ‘Judaism is not a religion but a way of life’. Like most such generalizations it is both true and not true. If ‘religion’ is understood to be restricted to the sphere of private or community spirituality without reference to wider social responsibilities, then clearly Judaism, as the faith of a particular people deeply engaged with the world, is not that kind of ‘religion’. But if ‘a way of life’ is understood in purely cultural, ethnic or humanist terms, without taking seriously the spiritual and intellectual dimensions that inform and underpin it, then Judaism is much more than just ‘a way of life’.

The continuing resonance of traditional Jewish teachings today, especially messianic hopes and values, is reflected in the three terms that make up the title of the conference featured in this issue: ‘Justice, Hope and Redemption’. In different ways the authors address them in their modern, often secular, guises, sometimes seeing reflections of older debates between Judaism and Christianity. Alana Vincent examines the misunderstandings that arise when Jews and Christians discuss the apparently common term ‘redemption’ without recognizing that their traditions have very different understandings; the Jewish one being dialogic and the Christian one theocentric. Jayne Svenungsson addresses the tendency of neo-Marxian thinkers to echo familiar Christian supersessionist stereotypes. She analyses the political messianism that Agamben extrapolates from Paul’s letters, depicting the law as an obstacle rather than a means

for emancipation. In Göran Rosenberg's study of Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis we encounter a man based firmly in traditional Judaism seeking to create a new Jewish-European self-assertiveness. A secularized version of Jewish universalist messianic teachings is explored in Michael Löwy's study of the early writings of Erich Fromm. Brian Klug reflects on a question posed by the Israeli novelist David Grossman: 'Are we a people of place or of time?' He turns to the Hebrew Bible in exploring the nature of diaspora and the meaning of the Promised Land. In a more personal article about the importance of memory, Victor Seidler argues that we need to rethink relationships between the secular and the spiritual so that we can name the sufferings, harms and injustices of the past that destroyed minds as well as bodies, and spirits as well as souls.

The articles on 'Catholic-Jewish Relations Today' also reflect the challenge posed to interfaith dialogue when those who prioritize 'religion' encounter those who prioritize 'a way of life'. Approaching Judaism from a Catholic perspective, which seeks to define Judaism within Christian theological terms and criteria, must inevitably stumble across the problem of the physical embodiment of Judaism in a specific people. The dimensions of this challenge can be found in the articles discussing the document 'The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable', marking the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, introduced by the conference organizers Philip McCosker and Ed Kessler. The background is described by Fr. Henry Wansbrough and the document is evaluated by the Catholic philosopher Gavin D'Costa. Two Jewish writers respond to the document: Anna Sapir Abulafia from a historical perspective and the Editor from the perspective of the presuppositions of interfaith dialogue.

The article by Ilana Korber brings some of the broader issues discussed above down to the practical domestic level. What is an appropriate way for an avowedly secular Jewish family to mark the traditional Jewish rite of passage, the bar mitzvah? Similarly, Gwendolen Burton seeks new liturgical forms to address very personal issues affecting women. We fill our occasional study of traditional Jewish thought with Robyn Ashworth-Stein's discussion of Maimonides on the problem of evil.

Shortly before going to press we learnt of the death of Sir Sigmund Sternberg z'l at the age of ninety-five. His public achievements are well recorded in the British press and in the tributes from the many international forums, where he played a significant role. But for this journal it was his enormous, pioneering contribution to the field of interfaith dialogue that is particularly important. His creation of the Three Faiths Forum, together with the late Sheikh Zaki Badawi and the Rev. Marcus Braybrooke, marked a significant breakthrough in Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations. In his foreword to Marcus Braybrooke's

book *Meeting Jews* (Christians Aware, Leicester, 2010) Sir Sigmund wrote:

In an age in which mass population movements frequently lead to fear and insecurity which in turn seek refuge in age-old attitudes of suspicion and bias, Marcus Braybrooke's new book will serve as a valuable pointer as to how prejudice can be defeated by truth and perspective regained in our relations with the other.

We are grateful to Rabbi Professor Tony Bayfield for allowing us to print the respectful and affectionate *hesped* he gave at the funeral, which captures so much of the personality of Sir Sigmund and indicates something of the pressures that drove him. That same month marked the death of Rabbi Dr Nathan Peter Levinson, one of the architects of the postwar revival of Jewish life in Germany. A brief in memoriam in this issue lists some of the stages in his career and gives an indication of his courage and dedication and of the warmth of his personality.

The issue is completed with book reviews.

Notes

1. 'Editorial', *European Judaism* 1, no. 1, Summer 1966, 2.
2. 'Personal View', *European Judaism* 10, no. 2, Summer 1976, 3–4.