Editorial

Jonathan Magonet

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With the current refugee crisis affecting Europe, it is timely to publish the proceedings of a conference entitled 'Welcome to Britain? Refugees Then and Now', organized by Dr Susan Cohen and timed to mark the seventieth anniversary of the death of Eleanor Rathbone, the so-called 'MP for Refugees'. In her introduction, Dr Cohen provides a biography of Rathbone, who was raised in a family committed to philanthropy and political reform. An early advocate of women's rights, she entered parliament in 1929 and became a powerful backbencher. Dr Cohen, in her article 'In Memory of Eleanor Rathbone', addresses Rathbone's commitment to the rescue and welfare of refugees, especially Jews, in and from Nazi-occupied Europe. Diana Packer provides the historical background to the 1905 Aliens Act, a response to the large influx of Jews fleeing from Russia, which laid the basis for immigrant law in the UK. Rachel Pistol and Lesley Clare Urbach examine the changing popular opinions about, and political attitudes towards, accepting refugees. One potential model for the current situation that has been evoked is the Kindertransport, but Jennifer Craig-Norton raises questions about some of its long-term effects. Pierre Makhlouf describes how the wartime experience of the persecution of minorities led to the creation of customary international human rights law that sought to protect the fundamental rights and civil liberties of all individuals. However, the UK government procedures offer a 'hostile environment' to would-be immigrants and the media reinforce negative attitudes. Nevertheless, Maurice Wren notes how public opinion in the summer of 2015 became very positive in favour of the refugees, forcing the UK government to make a significant policy change.

Two articles look at the refugee experience through personal histories. Eugene (John) Heimler (1922–1990), a poet in his native Hungary, survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and found a home in England after the war. He wrote a powerful book about his experience in the concentration camps, *Night of the Mist*, and after the war trained as a psychiatric social worker, going on to devise an important psychotherapeutic tool, the Heimler Scale of Social Functioning. A conversation between him and Elie Wiesel, shared with two of the then editors of this journal,

Michael Goulston and Anthony Rudolf, appeared in *European Judaism* Vol. 6/1 (Winter 1971/1972), 4–10. Professor Heimler had a profound influence on the early rabbinic graduates of Leo Baeck College in the UK. His first wife was a victim of the Nazis, and his second wife died of cancer. He later married a former student, Miriam Bracha Heimler, who informed us of her recent visit to Hungary when Professor Heimler was honoured posthumously by his native town. This seemed a good opportunity to invite from her a broader, personal account of his life and achievement.

Within her article on the challenges of post-Shoah theology from Jewish and Christian perspectives, Angela West offers a biography of Jan Fuchs (1912–2008). Born in the Czech lands of the Habsburg Empire, he was rescued from the Nazis in Denmark and settled in England after the war, where he worked as a travelling salesman. On retirement, he became the *shammes* at the Sephardi synagogue in Manchester and worked as a hospital chaplain. He became deeply committed to interfaith dialogue. Despite the undertaking he had to sign never to return to Germany when he left in the 1930s, and the death of his father in Theresienstadt concentration camp, he made the decision to visit Germany and regularly attended interfaith conferences there. He was not a public figure, but in his quiet, private way he became a teacher and inspiration to many. In later years, he began to write poetry, some of which entered the prayer books of the UK Movement for Reform Judaism. They often play on familiar liturgical or biblical phrases:

You prepare a table for me
set a place for my enemy
so that we shall be friends.

We complete the common theme underlying the above materials – the way in which a committed and dedicated individual can influence society on a political, social or community level – with the article by Christine Cohen Park. She writes about a visit to Israel and Palestine to meet individuals who work across boundaries to encourage mutual understanding and promote peace, who offer ‘pockets of hope’.

In Vol. 47/1 (Spring 2014), we published four papers from a symposium discussing André Schwarz-Bart’s novel *The Last of the Just*. Kathleen Gysels further examines the themes of the novel in the light of issues explored in his posthumously published novels set in the Caribbean, jointly authored with his wife Simone Schwarz-Bart.

Our occasional series of studies of traditional Jewish texts continues with Admiel Kosman’s analysis of a Talmudic tale, Jeremy Schonfield’s

article on the Hallel Psalms, and Andrew Levy's reading of Ecclesiastes in the light of contemporary philosophical thought.

Three book reviews complete the issue.

In December 2016, Rabbi Lionel Blue, a member of the founding editorial board of this journal, a leading figure in the British progressive Jewish movement and a very popular 'radio rabbi' in the UK, died at the age of eighty-six. In order to do justice to his life and achievements, the spring 2018 issue of the journal will be dedicated to his memory.