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Aspects of the connection between Judaism and Christianity in Franz Rosenzweig's philosophy

The novelty in Rosenzweig's new ways of thinking lies in the fact that, unlike the traditional view, in his thought philosophy is the discipline containing a subjective element, whereas religion is more objective since it is founded on revelation. These complementary differences help the philosopher rethink Judaism and Jewish identity in the context of the spiritual crisis of the secularized Judaism of his time. Starting with the analysis of this reconstruction of philosophy, this text attempts to present a balanced perspective on Rosenzweig's vision of the relation between Judaism and Christianity. We will not single out the common elements or those that separate these two monotheist religions; setting Judaism and Christianity on the same level is considered to be a compensatory gesture towards Judaism and Jewish tradition. There is in Rosenzweig a significant moment of approach toward Christianity, especially to a Christianity without Christ, but Rosenzweig opts for a different solution, that of building a new philosophy based on Judaism. Moshe Idel's analysis suggests that it is the Kabbalistic mysticism that Rosenzweig redefines in order to propose a new way of thought based on both philosophy and religion. Thus, Rosenzweig gives new meaning to the balance of divine and human in the field of religion.

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Between philosophy and religion

Rosenzweig is a timely thinker. The thematization of death, the philosophy of daily life, the re-thinking of tradition, the placing of the individual at the center of all significant religious activities of a community, the philosophy of language, the new thinking, the new dialogical situation, the very personal way of analyzing the relation between Judaism and Christianity in the troubled 20th century, as well as many other themes present in his writings, have led historians of ideas to conclude that Rosenzweig is the most influential Jewish thinker of the century.

It is difficult to position him under any single label within Jewish thought. Moshe Idel tends to place Rosenzweig's thinking in the field of theology. This is best explained in relation to Idel's own interest in the mystical sources and dimensions on which

Rosenzweig's works are built. This interest reveals the theological dimension, deliberately neglecting, as of secondary importance, its philosophical relevance. But, the theological and mystical premises revealed by Idel and developed by Warren Zev Harvey and by Rivka Horwitz are used to build a philosophical view that, in spite of its speculative undertone, claims to be a philosophy of an experience lived as daily life.

Steven T. Katz also advocates a point of view that places Rosenzweig in the field of theology. Although he discusses Rosenzweig's thinking in terms of a Jewish philosophy, he shows that in *The Star of Redemption* the author "tries to formulate a 'new thinking' to outline a history of culture, and to propose a philosophical theology of Judaism and Christianity."¹

In turn, Samuel Hugo Bergman considers that "*The Star of Redemption* is an attempt at a Jewish theology."² Placing Rosenzweig's philosophy in its own cultural context, he tries to find an answer to the question: what can determine a young man to write a treaty of Jewish theology? and finds the answer in the situation of Judaism in Rosenzweig's times. Traditional Judaism stopped fulfilling the religious needs of a significant number of the members of the Jewish community. First of all, the traditional Jewish family, which was marked by religious practice and bore the responsibility of guarantor of the continuity of tradition, was showing signs of disintegration. Second, Bergman notices a general crisis determined by the modernization of Judaism, which in the end had the consequence that a considerable number of Jews showed a growing interest in Christianity. This orientation towards Christianity had a double motivation: on the one hand, it was the lack of religious practice in secularized families, and on the other hand the factual movement toward Christianity, revealed by Rosenzweig: „We are Christians in everything. We live in a Christian state, attend Christian schools, read Christian books, in short, our whole culture rests entirely on Christian foundations." In this situation, Rosenzweig notes, we should not be amazed to find that some Jews want to become Christians. In answer to this crisis, "Rosenzweig has become a man of faith."³ This option can be considered symbolic from the point of view of the new approach to the individual in Rosenzweig's thinking. Philosophical and theological elements are combined in a unique construct meant to explain the new position of the individual in the world and a new means of understanding the way in which one creates a destiny. This construction, in Bergman's opinion, is first of all a theological one. It concerns a theology in which Rosenzweig reaches the conclusion that: "a union of reason and faith is possible,"⁴ that a union between philosophy and theology is authentic, because *the new thinking* claimed by the cultural and religious situation of the beginning of the 20th century must be regarded from the point of view of a philosophy seen as an interest towards people in general and of a religion as an interest towards people as individuals. In this way, "Rosenzweig's philosophy and theology are based on the centrality of the individual."⁵

Philosophy must overcome its reservations about theology, just as theology should confront its fear of philosophy. Considering the fact that the human being must be understood in the context of the God-Man-World interaction, Rosenzweig believes that all the problems related to the human condition, which by implication includes the religious dimension, are much too complex to be left exclusively in the hands of theologians. That is why philosophy must start from the personal existential situation of the philosopher. In comparison with the old philosophy, the new way of thinking has to start from the human subjectivity, from the way in which the individual finds its own

self in the world. Thus the question: how then can we reach objectivity in knowledge? Rosenzweig asserts that in this situation, philosophy needs theology. Philosophy must begin from the premise that the humankind is recipient of revelation, that this revelation is manifested objectively in humanity. The complementarities between philosophy and theology are in fact the complementarities between subjective and objective. That is why Rosenzweig chooses a new way of thinking promoted by “a new type of theologian or philosopher, a type that stands between philosophy and theology.”⁶

The preoccupation of the philosopher with the religious and the effort to bind the two ways of thinking is characteristic of Jewish philosophy. This bond transforms philosophy and theology from *ways of thinking* to *ways of being*, meaning that it situates them under the sign of existential commandments. We cannot conceive of Jewish philosophy outside a specific way of understanding the relationship between philosophical meditation and religious tradition. Rosenzweig tries to avoid the situation created by the relationship between philosophy and theology as expressed in the medieval Christian way of thinking. Thus, “theology must not debase philosophy to play the part of handmaid, yet the role of charwoman which philosophy has recently assigned to theology is just as humiliating. The true relationship of these two regenerated sciences is a sisterly one, and this must necessarily lead to the personal union of those who deal with them. Theological problems must be translated into human terms, and human problems brought into the pale of theology.”⁷ Following this way, Rosenzweig offers philosophical solutions to issues that are quite evidently theological. This is the case insofar as the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is concerned; otherwise, from the perspective of the theological answer given to this problem, he could be considered a heretic by both traditional Christianity and Judaism. It is beyond any doubt that his analyses are integrated in a discursive logic other than that of theology.

An attempt to position Rosenzweig's philosophy can be found in the work of Ignaz Maybaum. Placing him in the context of his time, he asks himself, “Can we call Rosenzweig an existentialist philosopher?” He includes Rosenzweig's philosophy as a distinct voice within existentialism. This philosophy is revealed to Maybaum as being the last desperate attempt of 20th century thinkers to find a solution to the cultural, religious, and political crisis of their declining world. Preceding philosophies were not able to find an answer to the existential problems of humankind. Rosenzweig finds the right solution by binding the rational step of philosophy with the existential answers offered by faith. Thus, “where the philosophy of three and half millennia fails him, Rosenzweig turns to Judaism.”⁸

To help us understand the way in which Rosenzweig uses Judaism, Maybaum suggests that we remember an essential distinction that differentiates “between Jewish trust and Christian faith.” In this way Rosenzweig sustains arguments showing that if the Christian belief, in general, marks the limits of reason by underlining the conflict between reason and faith, in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible there is no such conflict. Thus, “The Jew has no need to defeat reason by faith, because his faith is not a philosophical faith. Jewish trust and Christian faith mirror two different situations: Jewish existence and Christian existence differ.”⁹ The results of Rosenzweig's critique of traditional philosophizing have no connection with a critique of the specific rational step of philosophy. Maybaum, among others, deserves the credit for noticing that this critique is oriented against that form of abstract thinking that tries to explain all aspects of life through an abstract category of the whole. This thinking does not take into considera-

tion the distinction between God, man, and world, and the specific relations created by these. These fundamental elements cannot be reduced to empty concepts, nor can they be reduced to one of empty concept. This reductionism is criticized as being dominant for views like mysticism, materialism, and idealism, each of which reduces the three aforementioned elements into one.¹⁰ Maybaum is preoccupied with finding a solution for philosophy, which “has arrived at a dead end.” He advises us to notice that the salvation of philosophy may lie in the solution proposed by Rosenzweig, who understood that “any progress, making philosophy again capable of participation in the tasks of our civilization, demands a union of philosophy and theology. If reason is not treated contemptuously and if theology accepts the discipline of philosophy, that is to say, of abstract thinking, the warning that a union of philosophy and theology heralds a return to the Middle Ages is unfounded. The union of philosophy and theology can be the New Philosophy for which our age is groping. ... The New Philosophy will mark progress or it will not be.”¹¹

This philosophy is oriented toward exegesis, because only thus can it remain dynamic and alive. It discusses the power of the word, which has always had a prophetic dimension for Jewish thinkers. It is not only about the power of the prophetic word, which is derived from the fact that when the prophet speaks, “God takes possession of his lips,” but also about the existential transfiguration of the one that assumes the prophetic word. The fact that Rosenzweig will create a new philosophy of language, a philosophy of communication between the three fundamental elements (man, God, world), is not a simple coincidence. Rosenzweig writes: “Language stamps the sign of God and man upon all the things of this world”.¹² In Rosenzweig’s case, this is about the word that makes heard the interior voice both of philosophy and theology. In order to show the importance of this new engagement of the two spiritual creations in discourse and the impact of this cooperation, Maybaum integrates Rosenzweig into the history of Jewish philosophy, stating: “Our generation has to realize gratefully that what Yehuda Halevi and Maimonides were to medieval Jewry, Rosenzweig is to modern Jewry – a guide for the perplexed.”¹³

Back to Judaism

Both Judaism and Christianity hold the truth. This affirmation is one of the fundamental premises that lead Rosenzweig to try and build his own philosophical system. He takes one step further in claiming that in fact, each one of these, as religions, represents only a partial truth, because only God holds the whole truth. Rosenzweig makes this equality between Judaism and Christianity even more problematic by observing that God did not create religions but the world;¹⁴ thus, the relation between the truth of man, creator of religions, and the truth of God becomes relative.

However, this is not an attempt to advocate relativism: Rosenzweig’s thinking is orientated against both relativism and absolutism. This relativization is intended to emphasize Rosenzweig’s firm choice for the truth of Judaism that keeps him closer to God.

But it is not this relativization that surprises Rosenzweig’s readers. What is surprising is the setting Judaism and Christianity on the same level, a setting that on the one hand totally contradicts the theological Jewish tradition that has seen Christianity as a secondary creation and on the other hand, contradicts Christian tradition that sets

Christianity in a position of higher standing compared to Judaism and of fulfillment by outgrowing it. Far from being taken up by other thinkers, Rosenzweig's vision turns out to be disapproved by his Jewish friends and criticized, sometimes vehemently, by his Christian friends.

Despite all these, Rosenzweig represents a paradigmatic figure for a possible dialogue between Judaism and Christianity. His personal experience is convincing in this sense. He is representative of the modern Jew's effort to preserve his tradition and identity under the conditions of a twofold external temptation. On one hand, there is the pressure of illuminist ideology. Haskala advised the Jews to adapt and keep up with the renewing trend of Western civilization. On the other hand, as a consequence of this pressure, a part of European Jewry chose to convert to Christianity.

In the beginning, Rosenzweig is somewhere in between these tendencies. On one hand, despite the formal connection he had with religion, he was part of a secularized family. On the other hand, some of his friends and relatives had already taken the path of Christianity. Writing about Rosenzweig, one often mentions two of his most formative experiences: the night in Leipzig and the celebration of Yom Kippur.

"The night in Leipzig" was an event which became representative for the dilemma faced by many Jewish intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century. Members of many Jewish families strongly influenced by modernity chose to leave the religion of their fathers and convert to Christianity. One such person was Rosenzweig himself, who went to Leipzig to study law; there, he met the young philosopher and theologian Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, with whom he had a series of conversation. In 1912 he completed his PhD with a dissertation concerning the influential thought of Hegel on the problem of the state. In 1913, on the night of July 7th, the two friends had a conversation in which Rosenzweig, who was studying history and philosophy, defended the relativist point of view, and Rosenstock-Huessy defends the point of view of revelation, of the man that was the adept of prayer and wisdom, of practicing faith in the field of action.¹⁵ This conversation causes Rosenzweig to reflect upon the possibility of converting to Christianity.

Rosenzweig did not see this conversion as abandoning the faith of his ancestors, but more as a possibility of reawakening it. This thought was based on the observation that Judaism was no longer a living religion and on the need to find a bridge between revelation and personal daily life.¹⁶ His decision did not assume the rejection of his Jewish origins, but rather "the consummation of Judaism in Christianity."¹⁷ It is in this sense that he writes in a letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg that, "In this world, then, there appeared to be no place for Judaism. I drew the consequences from that, and, in so doing, imposed a condition on myself, a condition whose importance to me you know well. I declared that I could only become a Christian as a Jew, not by way of the intermediate status of paganism."¹⁸ Franz Rosenzweig, "Selections from the Letters" in *Jewish perspectives on Christianity*, ed. by Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: Continuum, 1996), 169.

In trying to understand Rosenzweig's steps, we must keep in mind this essential aspect: his conversion to the Christian faith would be different from that of a non-Jew. He expresses the belief that an authentic conversion is possible only in maintaining his own Judaism. This emphasis helps us adequately understand the reasoning of that the philosopher in so far as the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is concerned. In this sense, Rivka Horwitz's extremely subtle statements are very convincing: she noticed that Rosenzweig's dilemma was not triggered by his mistrust concerning the

truths of Judaism, or by his beliefs regarding the truth of the Christian faith. The new argument we find in Rosenzweig, which tells us that both Judaism and Christianity hold the truth, can be used to explain a series of biographical developments: "The possibility of a dialogue between the Jew and Christian convinced Rosenzweig that there was no necessity to convert."¹⁹

We need to mention the fact that, before actually converting to Christianity, Rosenzweig turned his attention to his own religious tradition. This renewed encounter with tradition, in 1913, was occasioned by Rosenzweig's participation to the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) celebration in a small synagogue in Berlin. In the Jewish tradition, this is a celebration with the highest degree of intellectual involvement and personal and communitarian experience. In this context Rosenzweig rediscovers himself and decides: "I will remain a Jew." In other words, he decides to stay within a Judaism he had not known well enough to practice. The process of this transformation may be seen in the exchange of letters he has with Rosenstock-Huessy: "How Franz defended his new position makes the contents of these letters, but in them, the pendulum swings from faith in the Christian revelation to a faith in Moses and the Prophets, and both faiths have their day in court."²⁰

There is a very complex element in the structure of Rosenzweig's relations both to Judaism and Christianity, as noted by Horwitz, we emphasized Rosenzweig's statements after he decides to remain Jewish where he underlined the fact that his faith was always the Jewish faith. From Rosenzweig's letters she learns that "he was not drawn to Christianity by Christ but rather by his Christian friends. Because he loved his friends dearly and was deeply attached to them, he did not want to leave them." This belonging to a community, this attachment to his friends, is very much considered decisive in Rosenzweig's experience, rather than his preference for the Christian truth in relation to that of Judaism. In this relation of sharing common experience with his Christian friends, Rosenzweig finds his own sense of fundamental virtues, such as faith, love, and hope. Regarding the importance of the very close relation Rosenzweig has with his friends, Horwitz concludes: "his relation to them he calls his love experience."²¹

Thus, beyond the theological background of his experiences and dilemmas, Rosenzweig's personal experience is translated more in terms of a new understanding of friendship than in terms of an experience of Christ that might have caused him to make the decisive step to actually convert to Christianity. In a letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg, Rosenzweig states that he agrees with what Christ's church states regarding John 14:6, "no one comes to the Father except through Me." But he is convinced that this mediation of the access to redemption through Christ does not refer to those who do not need to come to the Father, because they have always been with Him. Finding himself a member of the community of faith of his ancestors, Rosenzweig writes: "No one comes to the father – but it is different when one no longer needs to come to the father because he is already with him. And this is the case with the people of Israel (not with the individual Jew). The people of Israel, chosen by its Father, fixes its glance on that ultimate, most distant point, beyond world and history, where its Father, the father himself, will be the One and the Only – will be 'All in All!'"²²

From The Life of Jesus to a new understanding of Judaism

In the context of the present study, Moshe Idel makes the following pertinent statement: in the first text Rosenzweig writes after deciding to remain a member of the Jewish community, entitled *Atheistic Theology*, the author refers to David F. Strauss' "The Life of Jesus" and claims that Strauss' liberal vision on the birth of God out of man is borrowed from ancient mysticism.²³ Rosenzweig evokes Strauss and his work *The Life of Jesus*, to show that he opposes to an act of creation based on ancient mysticism another creation of mysticism, based this time on a mysticism of Kabalistic origin. Rosenzweig rejects the "atheist" premises of this theology because they presuppose the reduction of the transcendent God to an expression of the divine born out of human experience. Moshe Idel notes that "aided by a speculative interpretation of Jewish mysticism and myth, Rosenzweig is able to offer an alternative to *atheistic theology*."²⁴ This intuition of Strauss' mystical resorts was also confirmed by Albert Schweitzer, who wrote: "Hegel's philosophy had set him free, giving him a higher plane of Christological speculation, and opening his eyes to the mystic interpretation of finitude and infinity, God and man."²⁵

Even after two hundred years,²⁶ Strauss remains a complex and controversial personality, as do his works. He may be seen as a theologian or as a philosopher, or as one of the fathers of the school of biblical criticism, among the "demonized" figures of anti-Christianity, or among the inspired authors of the 19th century. Albert Schweitzer states that a thorough understanding of his work requires a certain amount of empathy with his person and his thinking: "In order to understand Strauss one must love Him. He was not the greatest, and not the deepest, of theologians, but he was the most absolutely sincere. His insight and his errors were alike the insight and the errors of a prophet."²⁷

To understand the importance of David Strauss' work and to see what is still relevant today in his thinking, we can recall the five points in which Peter C. Hodgson synthesizes its meaning: 1) „*The Life of Jesus* represented a watershed in the development of a critical method for the study of the Gospels;" 2) „Strauss called radically into question the appeal to history as a basis of faith, and he seriously undermined the historical character of the Christian faith, not so much by frontal attack as by the cumulative weight of his minutely detailed analysis;" 3) „Strauss perceived the futuristic eschatology of primitive Christianity to be a fundamental stumbling block for the modern secular mind, and he attributed this eschatology to Jesus as well, depicting him as an apocalyptic enthusiast with whom we can have little the work a distinctively contemporary case;" 4) „The radically immanent theology Strauss proposed as an alternative to biblical eschatology, and his passionate critique of transcendence in any form, caught the essence of the idealist-romantic polemic against the transcendent, separated deity from orthodoxy, although it was probably based on a misreading of Hegel's dialectic;" 5) „As an 'alienated theologian' Strauss is representative of the Protestant theological movement from the beginning of nineteenth century to the present, and increasingly of Catholic and Jewish religious thought as well."²⁸

Another essential contribution to a better understanding of Strauss' work is brought forth by Christian Herman Weisse, based his approach on reconciliation between the philosophical and religious arguments.²⁹ It is important to remind here that Strauss is at first a Hegelian. And, as Marilyn Chapin Massey showed, one of Hegel's primary objectives is to reconcile religion and philosophy. In order to eliminate one of

the traditional images of philosophy and religion as being adversaries, Hegel proves that the Christian representation of the embodiment of God in Jesus and the context of philosophical concepts lead through a dialectic logic to the same truth.³⁰

Strauss formulates a strong critique of Hegel's temptation to reject religious and philosophical opinions that do not see in Jesus the manifestation of God, in other words, of divinity in the full sense.³¹ At the same time, Strauss draws our attention to three relevant features that characterize the Hegelian perspective on "the historical person of Jesus": 1) The recognition of divine presence in Jesus and his life as the life of God who had been embodied and appeared in a certain moment of historical evolution, a moment that was favorable for an adequate perception of the unity of human and divine in the sensible world; 2) there is no strict correlation between particular events in the life of Jesus and their meaning in the field of the "absolute relation"; 3) regardless, the historical person of Jesus himself manifests the unity between human and divine in a way that cannot be found in another person. Strauss emphasizes one element which seems to him essential in understanding Christianity: in the context of the Hegelian thought, the absolute content of the Christian self remains incomplete; according to Strauss, this develop further only within the Christian community.³² It is important to notice the relevance of this aspect of the development and the fulfillment of religious awareness through the community. Against this background we reach a better understanding of the way in which David Strauss interprets the transformations which occurred in the perception of Jesus, in the progressive development from the perception of Jesus as a historical character to the Christ of the Gospels and, finally, to the redeemer about whom the Christian churches teach.

This debate brings the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the supramundane Christ face to face. The relation is complex and emphasizes the fact that it is difficult to imagine "the long agony in which the historical view of the life of Jesus came to birth."³³ The history of the relations between Jesus and Christ is complicated, and it is relevant not only to understanding the life of Jesus, but also to the history of European civilization. Understanding the history of the relations of Jesus and Christ may lead us to a better understanding of the world built on Christian values.³⁴ But the investigation of the life of Jesus is important not only historically, but especially as a means by which we can turn to "the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of dogma."³⁵

A major preoccupation of the rationalist analysis of religion in the 19th century is this deconstruction of the traditional image of Christ found in Christian dogma. Schweitzer observed that Strauss believed that he did nothing else but used an interpretation practiced at that time. He applied a specific method practiced regarding the Old Testament to the interpretation of the New Testament and to the life of Jesus: that is, the method of biblical criticism. Thus, Strauss is among the authors who do not orientate their analysis against the person of Jesus but against the excessive supernatural aura that has grown around him: "They were eager to picture Him as truly and purely human, to strip from Him the robes of splendor with which He had been appareled, and clothe Him once more with the coarse garments in which He had walked in Galilee."³⁶

Strauss criticizes the previous methods of interpretation and based on this criticism reaches the conclusion that a mythical explication of biblical stories is necessary. Two principles are used to support this conclusion: 1) the external testimonies are not sufficient to sustain the stories of those that have witnessed the biblical events; 2) the prophecies of the Old Testament have been applied by the authors of the New

Testament to Jesus and the prophetic status with which he has been invested. Applying his method of interpretation, Strauss comes to the conclusion that: "The New Testament authors have an idea of the person and of the life of Jesus which cannot be harmonized with our concepts of human life and the laws of nature. They tell especially the supernatural about him, but we can accept only the natural in him."³⁷ Keeping account of this contextualization of the discussion, Edwina G. Lawler argues that it was not Strauss' intention to deny the content of faith; witness to that stands the way Strauss builds his argument. That is why in the third part of his book about Jesus, he will try to reconstruct the elements of faith he had deconstructed earlier. Even if from the point of view of Strauss' philosophy of religions the authenticity of biblical stories cannot be sustained, they do not lose their power of suggestion and their religious value.³⁸

Beginning here, Strauss' exegetes notice that, unlike traditionalists who consider the biblical stories as stories about the interventions of the supernatural, and unlike rationalists who give biblical events a natural explanation, Strauss persuasively suggests a third alternative: "The miracles stories are symbolic narratives (or myths) that make use of language and themes drawn from the Hebrew Bible in order to speak the religious truth about Jesus. Thus, the miracles stories didn't happen. But neither are they mistaken or false accounts of something the disciples thought happened or invented for the sake of exaggerating their portrait of Jesus. Rather, the miracle stories are religiously true, even though not factually true."³⁹

Thus Strauss is seen as an author that, due to his philosophical education, has freed himself from a series of theological obsessions of his predecessors. He is not among the authors that worried over the question of whether or not the life of Jesus as a historical character can still represent a solid foundation for religion. That is why Albert Schweitzer could state that it is not important to what extent "God-manhood" is present in Jesus' life, but rather the fact that the idea of unity between the divine and the human is alive in the consciousness of those ready to see it as a manifestation in the sensible world. Moreover, and on the other hand, the spiritual force of the unification of human and divine determines not only a changed consciousness, but also a transfiguration of the lives and actions of those who acknowledge it.⁴⁰

It is interesting that these statements were made by Schweitzer in 1906. At the end of the 20th century, speaking in the same spirit, Marcus J. Borg appreciates that not only the scientifically-proven historicity of Jesus matters for Jesus' followers, but of even greater importance turns out to be the necessity of promoting a vision about Jesus that will lead to the building of new structures of social relations based on a politics of compassion, that will lead to a society where radical economic individualism is counter-balanced by principles derived from the politics of compassion. The way to accomplish this seems simple in Borg's vision: "to take seriously the two central presuppositions of the Jewish-Christian tradition. First, there is a dimension of reality beyond the visible world of our ordinary experience, a dimension charged with power, whose ultimate quality is compassion. Second, the fruits of the life lived in accord with the Spirit are to be embodied not only in individuals, but also in the life of the faithful community."⁴¹

Another possibility of interpretation is that which arises from the discussion regarding the centrality of the figure of the genius, dominant during the 19th century. To discuss the role of the genius one can evoke an emblematical story of his/her standing during that time. In the subchapter called "Genius and the New Religion," of her book on David Strauss, Marilyn Chapin Massey tells the dramatic story of a person

drawn into the cult of the genius. In 1834, the young Charlotte Stieglitz creates a great sensation in Germany due to her ritual sacrifice. Her husband was a minor poet who failed to rise to creative significance. Convinced of her husband's talent, she decides to help him. So, she kills herself to give him a profound emotion and a spiritual impetus meant to trigger in him the full creative force of his genius. As expected, the husband remained a minor poet, but she became a legend that inspired many other souls of the era.⁴²

This story is mentioned by the author to show the force of the emblematic figure of the genius in the 19th century, which indeed Strauss associates with the figure of Jesus. Using the specific language of the era, Strauss states "that Jesus is to be regarded as a person, as a great – and as far as I am concerned, the greatest – personality in the series of religious geniuses, but still only a man like others, and that the Gospels are to be regarded as the oldest collections of the myths which were attached around the core of this personality."⁴³ The author believes that this will turn Jesus into a character that expresses the greatness of his century. Therefore we need to be cautious while reading the statements of those that see Strauss' thinking as being anti-Christian. In fact, this is a philosophical position that resorts to an extreme modality of spiritualization of Jesus as a historical character and to an unprecedented elevation of the divine in exemplary beings that is the genius. This placing yields the benefit of understanding Idel's intuition regarding Rosenzweig's interpretation of Strauss and places the latter in the field of ancient mysticism. The figure of the genius is representative for the spirit of a century, but it is also meaningful for the divinization of the human, or, more precisely, for explaining the way in which the divine element is born and fulfilled in man.

Edwina G. Lawler points out that in spite of and beyond this spiritualization, the historical element is not completely absent. Even when seen through a mystical lens, Jesus keeps his human quality, even if it is the exemplary, ideal man. Strauss is reserved in accepting the messianic dimension with which the New Testament invests Jesus, and based on the principles of speculative philosophy and historical criticism, he rejects any possibility of historically founding the dogmas of the church according to which "Jesus was the incarnate God." Strauss states that analysis from a historical perspective proves that, "the ideal of the dogmatic Christ on the one hand and the historical Jesus of Nazareth on the other are separated forever."⁴⁴

Strauss, whose vision was based upon the intellectual instruments that the philosophy of this time could offer, derives his conclusions assuming the relation between faith and historical reality. Thus, he works with the philosophical presupposition of an overlap between Jesus and the idea of God-man.⁴⁵

This overlap can be compared to a similar idea found in Ernest Renan, who believes that Jesus experienced so intensely the messianic myth that he identified himself with it. Even if we do not embrace Renan's vision of Jesus, we cannot overlook the favorable light in which he casts human nature, able to discover the depths of its divinity and live in the spirit of that which is profoundly divine in each person.⁴⁶

Convinced that a reconstruction of the image of Jesus according to the experience of the era is necessary, Strauss states about the image offered by the evangelists and the founders of Christianity that "our God is another, our world is another; also Christ can no longer be for us who he was for them."⁴⁷ But what alternative does he propose? In the spirit of his era, Strauss strives to express the essence of Christology by replacing the Christ seen as an individual, whose image is built on the basis of representation and

mythical experience idea that exists only in our minds in the Kantian sense with a Christ that represents an idea that exists in reality: the idea of humanity. "Humanity is the union of the two natures – God become man, the infinite manifesting itself in the finite, and the finite spirit remembering its finitude." The whole history of Christ is for Strauss a history of the becoming of humanity: "it is Humanity that dies, rises, and ascends to heaven, for from the negation of its phenomenal life there ever proceeds a higher spiritual life; from the suppression of its mortality as a personal, national, and terrestrial spirit, arises its union with the infinite spirit of the heavens. By faith in this Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, man is justified before God; that is, by the kindling within him of the idea of Humanity, the individual man participates in the divinely human life of the species."⁴⁸

Strauss' exegetes notice that according to the internal logic of his system, it is impossible for Strauss to find in the idea of the unity of the divine and the human a reality that can be fulfilled in Jesus. He was not yet ready to accept the divine-humanity as the highest idea of human thinking "actually realized in the historic personality of Jesus" but prefers to sustain the thesis that this idea is fully realized as the becoming of humanity⁴⁹ through a dialectical process reminiscent of Hegel, even though the path is different from Hegel's. The idea of the God-man of the absolute religions is adopted here to emphasize the historical dimension of the New Testament as well as to shed a new spiritual light on the historical nature of Jesus. "The image of man without sin, of the soul at one with God, is the ideal of humanity which has its origin in human nature and its ethical-religious foundation, which develops, refines, and enriches itself with it. The ideal of humanity was refined and enriched especially through Jesus, but it also underwent further development after him and will continue to do so," writes Strauss.⁵⁰

In *The Life of Jesus*, Strauss wants to see if the New Testament expresses a historical reality. His conclusion is that a great many of the biblical stories do not have historical value but rather a mythical one, they are "unconscious poetic creations of the earliest Christians, who shaped stories about Jesus to express their belief in him as the messiah promised to Israel."⁵¹

One discovers beyond Strauss' humanist vision, a natural preoccupation with Christianity and with the nature of religious experience. Thus arises the question: how does this criticism affect the image of Christ as the son of God and the relation of Christians to Him?

Marilyn Chapin Massey finds an answer at the end of the book "The Life of Jesus," where Strauss offers his own answer which shows that recognition of the presence of mythological structures does not thwart Christian faith, but rather provokes it to a new state of development. The realization that the Jesus of the 1st century is not identical to the Christ of the Christian faith leads to the discovery of Christ's true identity. "Christians have always struggled to understand the Christ of faith, how he is truly God and truly man, one person with two natures. The Life of Jesus ends the struggle. By dissociating Christ from the single human Jesus, it frees Christians to see that the true identity of Christ is the Hegelian idea of the human species."⁵² A contemporary answer to this problem is given by Marcus J. Borg: "Knowledge of historical Jesus is not essential. Being a Christian does not require having accurate historical information. Generations of Christians, taking the gospel portraits at 'face value' as historical accounts, have had incorrect historical beliefs about Jesus without harm to their faith or piety. Christianity does not consist primarily of having correct beliefs about the historical Jesus, but con-

sists of having a relationship with the living Christ.”⁵³

Thus, from the Christian point of view, the discussion about Jesus as a historical character seems superfluous. Today, it can no longer bring about something new in understanding Christianity, because of the dogmas formulated by the church regarding the unity of the human and the divine in the person of Jesus Christ. The discussion does not seem to offer any new solutions in so far as Judaism is concerned; neither does the analysis regarding Jesus as a historical character yield an increase of knowledge in studies of Jewish tradition. Rosenzweig has given a decisive solution in this sense, placing The-Life-of-Jesus-Theology in the perimeter of the ancient mysticism, where Strauss’ thinking receives the formulation of an atheist theology. It is obvious that for Rosenzweig the atheist theology, incapable of offering an authentic solution for the relation between the human and the divine, is not anti-theist. From the point of view of our theme, the relation between Judaism and Christianity, I believe that according to Rosenzweig, Jesus as a historical character cannot bring anything meaningful as a basis of the dialogue between the two religions.

In this sense Rosenzweig’s motive in writing *Atheistic Theology* is meaningful. Developing the perspective offered by Idel, Rivka Horwitz shows that “it was written in an attempt to replace the atheistic theory of the great and popular Martin Buber. *Atheistic theology* builds a myth around the life of Jesus, as one can see in the work of David Friedrich Strauss, or around the life of the Jewish people, as was done by Buber. Rosenzweig develops an alternative theory to that of Buber and Strauss. He considers their thoughts to be founded on ancient pagan myth that does not reach the absolute God. Rosenzweig instead uses Jewish mysticism for the structure of his philosophy.”⁵⁴

Reading Rosenzweig through the Lens of Moshe Idel

Moshe Idel has developed an original perspective on Rosenzweig. He tries to distance himself from the traditional patterns of interpretation by emphasizing the mystical aspects of Rosenzweig works. The novelty of this approach was well argued by Warren Zev Harvey who considers that Moshe Idel made “the first serious attempts to assess the relationship of Rosenzweig to the Kabbalah”⁵⁵. Later, Rivka Horwitz notes that “around 1980 Idel, one of the most important young Kabbalah scholars, discovered parallels between Kabbalah and Rosenzweig.”⁵⁶

The problem of the significant influence of Kabbalah on Rosenzweig invites a number of clarifications. Idel’s interpretation remains an open issue despite his very convincing arguments. It is significant that during his discussion with Gershom Scholem upon this theme, Scholem discourages Idel from further research on this line of interpretation because he does not believe in the positive value of Rosenzweig’s relation with Kabbalah. In spite of this, “Idel brilliantly analyzes the article *Atheistic Theology* and ‘The Germ Cell’ as they led to Rosenzweig’s thought in *The Star of Redemption*. He also develops the idea of theomorphism, an interpretation that has parallels in Kabbalah, and presents Rosenzweig’s theory of language.”⁵⁷

Idel’s analysis starts from *Atheistic Theology*, the first text written by Rosenzweig after his decision to abandon the idea of converting to Christianity. From the perspective of this text, it is important to point out that Idel’s analysis is based on the observation that Rosenzweig’s attempt to reconstruct Judaism comes as a reaction to a certain way of thinking developed within the Christian theology. Idel believes that

Rosenzweig's statements concerning *atheistic theology* are important not only for a better understanding of the work of David Strauss, but also for the understanding his own approach to theology. He wants to answer the question of whether we can see Rosenzweig's theology, which posits an intimate relation between man and God, as being at the same time influenced by an ancient mysticism that Rosenzweig suggests as an alternative to *atheistic theology*.⁵⁸ Idel affirms the existence of a mysticism in which the relationship between man and God is confirmed by God himself: "Rosenzweig hereby offers a theistic perspective that assumes the existence of a transcendent, revealing God. Not insignificantly Rosenzweig claims that the maxim illustrating this theological presupposition is that of a kabbalist."⁵⁹

However, Rosenzweig's interest in Jewish mysticism is not limited to this single article. Moshe Idel shows that resemblances can be establish between Rosenzweig's statements in *Atheistic Theology* and statements in *Star of Redemption*. Thus, in the first work he notices that one of the Kabbalah masters affirms: "God speaks: if you do not bear witness to me, then I am not."⁶⁰ This interconditioning between the divine and the human is also found in *The Star of Redemption*: "If you testify to me, then I am God, and not otherwise - thus the master of the Kabbalah lets God of love declare."⁶¹ We could easily conclude that Rosenzweig expresses a relationship similar to that which animates Strauss's formulation of his theory of ancient mysticism. A detailed analysis made by Idel enables him to show that Rosenzweig introduces a very important distinction: "the divine is not born in the soul, it is only renewed in the soul."⁶² We find here the expression of Rosenzweig's departure from *Atheistic Theology*. The great problem with which this theology confronts us, is the fact that it relativizes or even eliminates the distinction between human and divine. This causes difficulties in understanding the religious experience. For Rosenzweig the distinction between divine and human is essential to understanding the complexities of religious life.⁶³ While criticizing the 'spirituality' of some Jewish philosophers,⁶⁴ he is positive about a philosophy that deals with the dichotomy between an ideal meta-historical Judaism and its historical expression. This distinction is not only a game of theological ideas. It is a distinction that is vital for Judaism because in its ultimate stratum of meaning it expresses the distinction between God and the people of Israel.

Moreover, this distinction between what is divine and what is human expresses itself in the terms of Israel's vocation of reflecting in the immanence of life the unity of divine transcendence. Idel is convinced that the mystical resources that are used by *atheistic theology* lead Rosenzweig to find the resources for a reconstruction of Judaism beginning with another form of ancient mysticism. His analyses reveal the fact that the three basic concepts of creation, revelation, and redemption, are formulated by Rosenzweig under the influence of Kabbalah. Based on the *atheistic theology*, he introduces a radical turnover: without giving up the mythical foundation, Rosenzweig, according to Idel, "instead of anchoring the myth in the changing flow of life he anchors it, following the kabbalistic mythology, in the life of God Himself, giving it an absolute speculative character."⁶⁵

Idel's argumentation is substantiated by other authors, as well. Thus, Warren Zev Harvey stated that "Idel has demonstrated that there was a meaningful Kabbalistic influence on Rosenzweig."⁶⁶ In turn, Rivka Horwitz reveals the fact that Rosenzweig builds his vision on kabalistic myths, the Talmud, Midrash, and prayer. Furthermore,

based on the well-known triadic structures of God-man-world and creation-revelation-redemption and an entry in Rosenzweig's diary (June 30, 1922), Horwitz uncovers the fact that when the former talks about God, man, and world, he sees them as being a kabbalistic structure. This hints at the fact that such abstract structures as *Ein Sof*, *the Yes* and *the No*, could be associated with God, man, and world, and suggests a perspective in which kabbalistic elements are important.⁶⁷

In his effort to demonstrate the profoundly Kabbalistic structure of Rosenzweig's thinking Moshe Idel focuses on four issues. The first of these is the fact that Rosenzweig's theory of creation was inspired by a Kabbalistic perspective. To understand the explicit way in which Rosenzweig relates to Jewish mysticism, it is enough to remember the fragment: "Jewish mysticism bridges the gap between the 'God of our fathers' and the 'law' in a manner all its own. It replaces the general concept of creation with that of the mysterious creations, the 'tale of the chariot' as it is called in an allusion to the vision of Ezekiel."⁶⁸ We notice here the fact that Idel has the right to sustain the existence of a special connection between the story of the chariot and the story of creation, a relation that was suggested to Rosenzweig by the mystical literature. At the same time, it is useful to remember that Rivka Horwitz points out the fact that Rosenzweig's interpretation of creation as being based upon the Kabbalah surfaces only in 1917 in a letter to Rudi Ehrenberg called "The Germ Cell of the Star of Redemption."⁶⁹

A second issue related to the mystical thought underlined by Idel is the way in which Rosenzweig formulates the doctrine of revelation. He turns to the Kabbalistic image represented by the Shekhina and points out a relevant fragment in which Rosenzweig states: "Mysticism bridges the gap between the 'God of our fathers' and the 'Remnant of Israel' with the doctrine of the Shekhina. The Shekhina, God's descent upon man and his sojourn among men, is pictured as a dichotomy taking place in God himself...The idea of the wanderings of the Shekhina, of the sparks of the original divine light being scattered about the world, this casts all of revelation between the Jewish God and Jewish Man, and thereby anchors both, God as well as the remnant, in all the depth of revelation."⁷⁰ The move of Sekhina into exile opens the door to revelation. This fact leads Idel to affirm that the philosopher's choice for terms taken from the Lurianic Cabala is not accidental. Despite the critical attitude that Rosenzweig has towards mysticism, he values in a positive way the essential elements of kabbalistic mysticism. In this way, the exile is viewed as a path towards revelation and is connected with the idea of redemption.⁷¹

The third level of Idel's discussion of Rosenzweig is oriented toward the problem of redemption. The view of redemption seems to have numerous kabbalistic elements. We can grasp here the strong correlation that exists between "God of our fathers," "law," and "the Remnant of Israel." This correlation is seen by Idel as a way in which the idea of unifying the whole existence in God through the process of redemption is transferred from the domain of the dogma to that of morality. The emphasis is on the dimension of reciprocity. Jewish thinkers cannot conceive of a separation between morality and God's truth. That is why this unification can be seen as love, in virtue of a Jewish tradition in which the assumption of law and love is a unique reality.⁷²

Idel notices that, although in the *Atheistic Theology* Rosenzweig does not give details concerning the nature of the union between the human and the divine and the entire creation in God (that is, *redemption*), in *The Star of Redemption* the kabbalistic idea has an important meaning and is explicitly expressed: "for the sake of uniting the holy

God and his Shekina.”⁷³ This unification is based on the continuous assembling of the divine sparks spread throughout the whole creation. Through his authentic experience, the Jew must participate in the realization of this reunification that will be fulfilled only at the end of the times. Idel’s conclusion concerning this eschatological perspective is obvious: “What we have here is clearly a version of Lurianic Kabbalah, which places the idea of tikkun at the center of Jewish religious experience and makes the keeping of the commandments the key to achieving the unity of God.”⁷⁴

A fourth element correlated with kabalistic thought is the way in which Rosenzweig relocates anthropomorphism. One of the most important things revealed by Idel is the fact that Rosenzweig finds himself, within the context of his era, well posed to offer a solution that lies somewhere between Philo’s spiritualized God and “the complete humanization of God found in Christianity,” solution suggested by the Kabbalah.⁷⁵

In spite of the seemingly negative aspects supplied, Moshe Idel observes that Rosenzweig believed that the superabundance of interpretation practiced by the Kabbalah is preferable, even from a religious perspective, to the negative effects of the absence of imagery which faced Judaism during the emancipation of the Jews. The traditional rejection of anthropomorphism and of representation in the Jewish mentality is considered here to be one of the motivations that determined, during the 19th and the 20th century, a sort of fascination and an attraction of Jews towards Christian anthropomorphism, which in some cases even ended with the conversion of Jews to Christianity. That is why the assumption that Rosenzweig uses Kabbalah to offer an alternative to Christianity is plausible. I believe that Idel has the right to affirm that the excess of spiritualization in Judaism that lead some Jews to depart from Judaism and join Christianity, is balanced by Rosenzweig through his demand for abundant anthropomorphism inspired by Jewish mysticism.⁷⁶

It is obvious that the acceptance of such a representation does not establish the connection between the Christian and Jewish mentalities: the acceptance of the idea of representation and the revealing the importance of representation in Kabbalah, should not be seen as being the same as the anthropomorphic representation of divinity in Christianity. Rosenzweig is not fascinated by the image of God embodied in a human Jesus. The representation Rosenzweig seeks in the Kabbalah is not meant to directly connect Judaism with the God-Man representation of Christianity, but rather to offer an alternative to this. Thus, it becomes obvious that through “comparative” effort, Rosenzweig puts Judaism next to Christianity mainly with the purpose of finding a consistent element of comparison through which he could underline the special value of Judaism.

However, the question naturally arises, how far does Rosenzweig’s acceptance of representation and anthropomorphism go? With an excellent intuition of the text, Idel reveals the fact that anthropomorphism is important because it gives the theologian the privilege of observing the realization of an encounter. Anthropomorphism becomes acceptable if it does not refer to the essence of divinity, but rather speaks of a particular way that makes an encounter between man and God possible. The answer given by Idel leads to the conclusion that: “This distinction between the revealed side of God, which can be described in anthropomorphic terms, and the hidden side, which transcends all description, has a certain parallel in Kabbalah, where the anthropomorphic descriptions of the revealed God are seen in the form of the Ten Sefiroth or of the Adam Kadmon.”⁷⁷

This anthropomorphism appears as a reversed one. God is represented not as a reflection of what is human in the mysterious mirror of the divine, but as a confirmation of the fact that what is human has a divine origin. God is the archetype of all possible representations. He does not appear as a human representation extrapolated on a divine level, as we can find in 19th century thinkers and as we can partially depict from the perspective of a birth of the divine in man found in the writings of David F. Strauss. Thus, the reconstruction in a mystical perspective of Judaism can be associated again in Rosenzweig with an alternative to the Christian thought of Strauss.

Taking all these points into consideration, Idel clearly affirms that for Rosenzweig the acceptance of anthropomorphism does not mean an acceptance of personification; but on the contrary, he refuses a representation of God that begins with a human being (although the concern for the understanding of Kabbalah can be seen as an attempt to emphasize elements in Judaism that are similar to those that had drawn it towards Christianity).⁷⁸

The departure from Christianity

Rosenzweig is not just a thinker who simply tells us that Judaism and Christianity are both true religions, he reveals more than that: his statements must be viewed from the political and religious perspective of his times, as well as from the perspective of some personal experiences of his. On the one hand, he makes this statement in a political context in which anti-Semitism becomes stronger and acquires new dimensions

On the other hand, Rosenzweig's vision is set in a religious context in which Christian theology affirms that Judaism is something old and obsolete and that its entire legacy was transferred to Christianity. As Bernard Martin put it: "Rosenzweig clearly hoped that this view would lead to abandonment on the part of the Church of missionary activities directed toward Jews"⁷⁹.

Last but not least, we have to take into consideration the fact that we cannot separate Rosenzweig's favorable perspective on Christianity from his personal experience and from his journey towards the Christian church, no matter the reasons behind this gesture. It is as important as his decision of remaining a Jew.

Rosenzweig's radical point of view appears in this context. We are not exaggerating in saying that this valorization of Judaism and Christianity is in fact a "No" addressed to Christianity or more precisely to its tendency to confiscate the entire heritage of Israel. The placing of Judaism and Christianity on the same level must be viewed as a reparatory gesture towards Judaism, as a gesture of regaining the dignity of Judaism in connection with Christianity. This is the profound meaning of Rosenzweig's statements that sustain the truth of Christianity and Judaism and of the fact that Judaism and Christianity are both eternal.

One of the metaphors used by Rosenzweig to reveal the relation between Judaism and Christianity is that of the archaic symbolism represented by the Star of David, *Maghen David*. The symbolism of the star reveals a relation in which Judaism and Christianity are represented as the living fire that burns in the middle as well as the rays that are spread towards the exterior. "The life of this people, alone, burns with a fire that feeds on itself, and hence needs no sword to supply the flame with fuel from the forests of the world. The fire burns through and in itself, and sends forth rays which shine out into the world and illumine it; the fire is not aware of the rays, nor does it have need

of their light for itself. It burns silently and eternally”⁸⁰, says Rosenzweig.

Thus, there is no dependency between Judaism and Christianity. More over, we find here a significant observation in the context in which he talks about “The Eternity of the Promise”, Rosenzweig uses the phrase “Only the eternal people”, words through which the authentic vocation, the special mission of the people of Israel is differentiated. As a result, the philosopher writes: “Only the eternal people, which is not encompassed by world history, can – at every moment – bind creation as a whole to redemption while redemption is still to come.”⁸¹

One of Rosenzweig’s reasons not to embrace ultimately motives concerning his separation from Christianity is the fact that “Christianity recognized the God of Judaism, not as God, but as the “Father of Jesus Christ”. It embraces the “Lord”, but only because it knows that he alone is the way to the Father”.⁸² Or, as we have seen, Rosenzweig thinks that the participation in the life of the community of Israel leads to the closest and most direct relationship with God.

The Jewish religious life does not need any structures of mediation. Even when it is about the two religions, Rosenzweig states that his reunion with Christianity is fulfilled in a different way than the one obtained through Christ. His perspective concerning Christ is a humanist one that recuperates his image under the sign of fraternity and compassion: “Thus Christ is a friend to the man, a spiritual bridegroom to the woman, a holy infant to the child. Tied to the historical Jesus, Christ may forego this identification with the familiar figure of the neighbor, the object of brotherly love; but there the saints substitute for Christ himself”.⁸³

Although no other theologian or Jewish philosopher until Rosenzweig has proven a greater acceptance towards Christianity, he still raises two objections to Christianity. One of them has been revealed by Bernhard Casper who shows that Rosenzweig reacts to the Christian phenomenon of spiritualization of the divine, that he perceives as being exaggerated, in a process in which he leaves no place for a difference between Jesus, the son of man, and the returning Messiah.⁸⁴

A second objection concerns the reaction to the tendency to anthropomorphize divinity. The critique of Christian spiritualism and personalization suggests that Rosenzweig associates Christianity with the forms of an archaic mysticism that is alien to monotheism, and which does not take into consideration the necessity of an adequate connection between what is human and what is divine. From Rosenzweig’s point of view, by acting in the sphere of the Church, the Christian reaches an extreme spiritualization of God. Because of the fact that it is a community of belief, the Christian community, in its religious practices, lets itself absorbed entirely by the element of the belief in Christ (what counts for it is faith and only faith), forgetting about the existence of Christ’s historical figure. Perceiving Christ through the filter of faith leads to a pious attitude of unseen spiritualization. The church is, in the philosopher’s opinion, incapable to promote a religious life that brings together Jesus and Christ.

Rosenzweig considers that to this spiritualism is added a radical personalization of divinity, which does not take into consideration the distinction between man and God. This derives from the fact that in Christianity there is always a human mediator who is projected in the divinity. In the logic of Rosenzweig’s thinking this is a confusion of the divine reality and its representation connected to the mentality of the old mysticism unknown to Judaism. This spiritualization has negative consequences for religious experience and for the understanding of the coherence that accompanies the process of

knowledge.

Thus, Rosenzweig considers that a good understanding of the connections between God-Man-World and Creation-Revelation-Redemption can be corrupted by three dangers, that he names “the Christian dangers”: “That the Spirit leads onto all ways, and not God; that the Son of man be the truth, and not God; that God would become All-in-All and not One above all ... Thus they are dangers which Christianity never overcomes – spiritualization of God, apotheosis of man, pantheification of the world”⁸⁵

Rosenzweig focuses his critique on Christian spirituality and on the tendency of some Jewish thinkers to use a Christian way of thinking and to apply it to the Jewish reality. Although he grants an equal dignity to Judaism and to Christianity, Rosenzweig pays attention also to the differences between the two. We saw that his exegetes have shown that the critique is in fact addressed to Martin Buber and to his way of interpreting Judaism. The fact that the text from the *Atheistic Theology* “was originally written for a yearbook, *Vom Judentum* (On Judaism), at Buber’s invitation but was rejected as inappropriate because of its implicit criticism of Buber”⁸⁶ is of importance in this context. We should briefly remember also that Levinas too speaks about the derogative spiritualism of the relation between “I” and “Thou” in Buber. As it has happened in other situations, the fact that Rosenzweig influenced Levinas in establishing these opinions cannot be overlooked.

In this context, we can see that Rosenzweig is preoccupied by liberal theology, by the Life of Jesus theology, by the human life of Jesus, by the way in which *religion about Jesus* is replaced specifically by the *religion of Jesus* to emphasize a phenomenon that takes place in the Christian theology and is adopted with certain modifications by the Jewish thought. He is interested in this case in Christianity precisely in order to reveal the fact that under the influence of a cultural and Christian theological trend in Judaism, it becomes impossible to think the balance between what is human and what is divine in a specific religious relationship. Rosenzweig tries to avoid a Christian way of reading Judaism or the use of a Christian ideology in order to explain a Jewish reality.⁸⁷ For this, he regains, in a philosophical way, the theological and anthropomorphic structures borrowed from the cabbala.

Rosenzweig’s theological, political and personal experience is not used by the author to justify the existence of a covenant for Jews and another one for Christians. He is preoccupied to find a Jewish identity, to resolve the spiritual crisis of secular Jews or of those tempted by Christianity. The central focus of his work is “that of Jewish authenticity in the face of modern secularity”⁸⁸

As an answer to the challenges of his time, Rosenzweig introduces us through his philosophy to a profoundly religious world. This fact has been revealed by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy when he affirms that the great merit of his correspondence with Rosenzweig is that it demonstrates the fact that a Jew and a Christian have put aside their divergences and have fought together against the humanist relativism very present in the academic background of those times.⁸⁹ In his turn, Emmanuel Levinas underlines the religious and philosophical value of Rosenzweig’s thought affirming that *The Star of Redemption* “puts us right in the middle of a thought that carries a philosophical signification going well beyond the one it obviously has for theology and religious philosophy, this at a time when the death of God is being ceaselessly spoken about, a death which is that of the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition”⁹⁰

Some say that if we analyse various aspects of his work, especially those that transform Rosenzweig into a visionary, or the ones related with our theme concerning the complementary relation between Judaism and Christianity, one might conclude that “Rosenzweig’s philosophical and theological contribution was forever buried in the rubble of Nazism”. With all of these, as it becomes clear from Steven T. Katz and the analyses of other authors, Rosenzweig invites us to this very day, to a renewed lecture and reflection upon his work, which is practically a never-ending source of meanings insofar as Judaism and the western civilization are concerned. We can conclude by saying, together with Steven T. Katz, that “his creative genius for subjecting the consensus position to vigorous interrogation, his passion for truth, his philosophical probity and existential integrity, his recognition and reclamation of elements of the Jewish tradition rejected by modernity for its own reasons, his unwillingness to settle for things in time when he could reach for eternity, are programmatic and existential lessons to us still.”⁹¹

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Notes

¹ Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem LTD, 1975), 185.

² Samuel Hugo Bergman, *Faith and Reason: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought*, Translated and Edited by Alfred Jospe (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 56.

³ Bergman, *Faith and Reason*, 59.

⁴ Bergman, *Faith and Reason*, 59. On relationship between philosophy and religion, reason and faith in Jewish philosophy see Michael Zank, „Zwischen den Stühlen? On the Taxonomic Anxieties of Modern Jewish Philosophy”, *EJJS* (Leiden Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 105-134; Sandu Frunză, „Jewish Philosophy and the Metaphor of Returning to Jerusalem”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 13 (Spring 2006): 128-138.

⁵ Bergman, *Faith and Reason*, 55.

⁶ Franz Rosenzweig, „The New Thinking” in *Franz Rosenzweig: His life and Thought*, ed. by Nahum N. Glazer (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 208.

⁷ Rosenzweig, 121.

⁸ Ignaz Maybaum, “Franz Rosenzweig and the Existentialist Philosophers” in *Jewish Philosophy and Philosophers*, ed. by Raymond Goldwater (London: The Hillel

Foundation, 1962), 178.

⁹ Maybaum, 179. "Trust cannot come into conflict with reason. Trust is rooted in existence. Existence is mute but it cannot err. That is the strength of existence. It is meaningful to speak of Jewish existence", writes Maybaum in "Franz Rosenzweig and the Existentialist Philosophers", 181.

¹⁰ Maybaum, 180.

¹¹ Maybaum, 180-181.

¹² Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy. A View of World, Man, and God*, Edited with an Introduction by N. N. Glazer (New York: The Noonday Press, 1954), 61.

¹³ Maybaum, 200.

¹⁴ Rosenzweig, "The New Thinking", 201.

¹⁵ Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "Prologue/Epilogue to the Letters – Fifty Years Later" in *Judaism Despite Christianity. The "Letters on Christianity and Judaism" between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1969) 72-73.

¹⁶ Revelation is a central concept in Rosenzweig's thinking.

¹⁷ Katz, *Jewish Philosophers*, 184.

¹⁸ Franz Rosenzweig, "Selections from the Letters" in *Jewish perspectives on Christianity*, ed. by Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: Continuum, 1996), 169.

¹⁹ Rivka Horwitz, "From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig's Attitude Toward Kabbala and Myth", *Modern Judaism*, 26, 1 (2006): 48.

²⁰ Rosenstock-Huessy, "Prologue/Epilogue to the Letters – Fifty Years Later", 75.

²¹ To describe this experience, Rivka Horwitz cites one fragment from Rosenzweig's letters: "I have not experienced at that whole time, from August to September 1913 for one moment Christ himself, but always Eugen and next to Eugen a little bit you. But primarily Eugen. If it had been otherwise, then I would certainly, after all what I know be a Christian. But it was not so. My whole experience was also then [1913] not Christ, (an experience of faith) but Christians (an experience of love). My experience of faith remained all the time Jewish, as you know. And in the moment when I experienced for the first time the hope, once and for all, on the first day of my arrival in Berlin, there I found the objective basis: the contradiction between my love experience and my faith". Horwitz, 50.

²² Rosenzweig, "Selections from the Letters", 170.

²³ Moshe Idel, "Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah" in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. by Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), 162. Other texts by Idel in JSRI: Moshe Idel, "«Unio Mystica» as a Criterion: Some Observations on «Hegelian» Phenomenologies of Mysticism", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 1 (spring 2002): 19-41; Moshe Idel, "Abordări metodologice în studiile religioase", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 18 (Spring 2007): 5-20. About Moshe Idel see Sandu Frunză, "Aspecte ale raportului dintre filosofie și esoterism în interpretarea lui Moshe Idel", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 10 (spring 2005): 102-115.

²⁴ Idel, "Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah", 168.

²⁵ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of Historical Jesus. A critical Study of its progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, With a preface by F. C. Burkitt (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1910), 79.

²⁶ David Friederich Strauss was born on the 27th of January 1808.

²⁷ Schweitzer, 68.

²⁸ Peter C. Hodgson, Editor's Introduction: Strauss's Theological Development from 1825 to 1840 in David Friederich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, Edited and with an Introduction by Peter C. Hodgson, Translated from the Fourth German Edition by George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), xvii-xviii.

²⁹ Commentary in Schweitzer, 121.

³⁰ Marilyn Chapin Massey, Introduction in David Friedrich Strauss, *In Defense of My Life of Jesus Against the Hegelians*, Translated, edited, and with an introduction by Marilyn Chapin Massey (Connecticut: Archon Books, Hamden, 1983), xiv.

³¹ Strauss, *In Defense of My Life of Jesus Against the Hegelians*, 21.

³² Strauss, 37.

³³ Schweitzer, 60.

³⁴ Of course there are voices that claim that European civilization is built on Judeo-Christian values. This statement is true only if by that we understand the way by which Christian civilization has confronted Judaism and tried in various ways to repress it. We must have in sight here a great variety of attitudes: the promotion of the idea of The New Israel to replace the old Israel, the expulsions, and the ambiguous attitude of Christians when European Jews were exterminated. "Judeo-Christian" is a phrase that suggests the idea of confrontation rather than the idea of living together; it expresses an unbalanced relationship between the two, which makes the dialogue difficult. Concerning some aspects of these confrontations Paula Fredriksen writes: "Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew. The crowds who heard him, his earliest disciples, the apostle Paul – all were Jews. The holy days and sacred writings of the earliest community were the festivals and Scriptures of Israel. Yet, as it grew, Christianity became a community conspicuous for not living according to Jewish law and tradition. Gentiles, not Jews, dominated the movement. As a religion, Christianity came to be defined – and, indeed, defined itself – by its hostility toward Jews and Judaism." Paula Fredriksen, "The Birth of Christianity and the Origins of Christian Anti-Judaism" in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism. Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust*, ed. by Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 8. See also, Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

³⁵ Schweitzer, 4.

³⁶ Schweitzer, 4.

³⁷ David Friedrich Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History. A Critique of Schleiermacher's Life of Jesus*, Translated, edited, and with an Introduction by Leander E. Keck (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), 159.

³⁸ Edwina G. Lawler, *David Strauss and His Critics. The Life of Jesus Debate in Early Nineteenth-century German Journals* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 41-42.

³⁹ Marcus J. Borg, "The Historical Study of Jesus and Christian Origins" in *Jesus at 2000*, ed. by Marcus J. Borg (Colorado: Westview Press, Boulder, 1998), 128.

⁴⁰ Schweitzer, 79-80. Schweitzer considers that "A purely historical presentation of the life of Jesus was in that first period wholly impossible; what was operative was a creative reminiscence acting under the impulse of the idea which the personality of Jesus had called to life among mankind. And this idea of God-manhood, the realisation of which in every personality is the ultimate goal of humanity, is the eternal reality in the Person of Jesus, which no criticism can destroy." Schweitzer, 80.

⁴¹ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus A New Vision. Spirit, culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 199. See also Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time. The Historical Jesus & the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1994).

⁴² Marilyn Chapin Massey, *Christ Unmasked. The Meaning of The life of Jesus in German Politics* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 119.

⁴³ Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*, 161.

⁴⁴ Strauss, 169. Marcus J. Borg has an opposite position from that of Strauss. From Borg's perspective, such a statement disregards an essential element that brings together the two characters. Borg singles out the existence of a founding experience of the transformation of Jesus as a Galileean into Jesus as a face of God: „By Easter, I do not mean a particular day or an experience confined to a few weeks after the death of Jesus. By Easter, I mean most centrally and simply that the followers of Jesus continued to experience him as a living reality after his death, but in a radically new way. Namely, they experienced him as being a spiritual, nonmaterial reality, and, increasingly in the years and decades after his death, as having the qualities of God," writes Marcus Borg in Marcus J. Borg, "From Galilean Jew to the Face of God: The Pre-Easter and Post-Easter Jesus" in *Jesus at 2000*, ed. by Marcus J. Borg, 13.

⁴⁵ Edwina G. Lawler, *David Strauss and His Critics*, 45.

⁴⁶ Ernest Renan, *The life of Jesus*, introduction by John Haynes Homes, (New York: The Modern Library, 1955).

⁴⁷ Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*, 162.

⁴⁸ Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 780.

⁴⁹ Schweitzer, 79; Edwina G. Lawler, *David Strauss and His Critics*, 42.

⁵⁰ Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*, 166.

⁵¹ Marilyn Chapin Massey, Introduction in David Friedrich Strauss, *In Defense of My Life of Jesus Against the Hegelians*, x.

⁵² Marilyn Chapin Massey, Introduction, p. xi.

⁵³ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus A New Vision. Spirit, culture, and the Life of Discipleship*, 13.

⁵⁴ Horwitz, 33.

⁵⁵ Warren Ze'ev Harvey, "How Much Kabbalah in The Star of Redemption?," *Immanuel*, 21 (1987), 129. In his response to the paper presented by Moshe Idel in 1980, Harvey wrote: "Students of Rosenzweig's theology have as a rule downplayed, ignore, or denied outright its relationship to Jewish mystical tradition ... This reticence has surely been encouraged by several anti-mystical remarks of Rosenzweig's, but these are far less in number than his anti-philosophical remarks, and no one would think of denying that Rosenzweig was influenced by the philosophic tradition. Harvey, 128.

⁵⁶ Horwitz, 32.

⁵⁷ Horwitz, 33. "Theomorphism is the theory of language that Rosenzweig develops in his writings. Idel told me that this theory impressed him deeply and was even the catalyst that brought him to study Kabbalah in Rosenzweig's work. This theological linguistic theory of Rosenzweig's appears daring in its opposition to the rational Spinozistic Hegelian approach that was accepted in Rosenzweig's time. Whereas Spinoza is the peak of rationalism and rejects biblical anthropomorphism, Rosenzweig supports it, calling his theory theomorphism. God does not speak in the language of the human, but the human speaks in the language of the divine (see below). When language originates in God it is most real. Rosenzweig rejects the rationalist claim that the Torah speaks in human language but shares the Kabbalists' claim that the human being speaks in God's language. For Rosenzweig this theory is central in his interpretation of the dialogue", writes Rivka Horwitz, 42.

⁵⁸ Franz Rosenzweig, "Atheistic Theology" in Franz Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, Translated and Edited with Notes and Commentary, by Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 15.

⁵⁹ Idel, „Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah", 163. Idel's starting point is that: „the opinion expressed by Rosenzweig is important: One may contrast the ancient mysticism from which atheistic theology draws its inspiration, with another form of ancient mysticism - namely Kabbalah - from which insight may be obtained for the understanding of the theology Rosenzweig sought to construct". Idel, 163.

⁶⁰ Idel, „Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah", 163; See Rosenzweig "Atheistic Theology", 23.

⁶¹ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 171.

⁶² Idel, „Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah", 163.

⁶³ Idel, 163.

⁶⁴ See Franz Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 10, note 1. Rivka Horwitz, „From Hegelianism to a Revolutionary Understanding of Judaism: Franz Rosenzweig's Attitude Toward Kabbalah and Myth", *Modern Judaism*, 26, 1 (2006), 31-54. See also Rivka Horwitz, *Buber's Way to "I and Thou". The Development of Martin Buber's Thought and His "Religion as Presence" Lectures* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

⁶⁵ Idel, „Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah", 168. Moshe Idel considers that we can depict also an influence from the christian mysticism. He cites a fragment from Pico della Mirandola that says: "Just as the true astrology teaches to read in the book of God, so the Kabbalah teaches to read in the book of the law". These words seem to Idel similar to those in *The Star of Redemption*, in which Franz Rosenzweig writes: "For the Jew, the book of the law can thus, as it were, replace the book of nature or even the starry heavens from which the men of yore once thought they could interpret terrestrial matters by intelligent omnes". Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, Translated from the 2d ed. of 1930 by William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 409. This comparison between the astrologist who reads the book of the sky and the cabbalist that reads the book of law reminds Idel of Mirandola. The similes are obvious. Even so, the influence of Christian mysticism is more likely a secondary one. They show the fact that Rosenzweig was familiar with this type of mysticism, more than the fact that they constitute elements that influence the philosopher's way of thinking.

⁶⁶ Harvey, 134.

⁶⁷ Horwitz, 40. Also, Harvey mentioned that “the Kabbalah influenced Rosenzweig’s approach in all three of his primal relational concepts”. Harvey, 130.

⁶⁸ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 408.

⁶⁹ Horwitz, 37.

⁷⁰ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 409-410.

⁷¹ Idel, „Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah”, 66. Warren Zev Harvey pay attention to a point that was not mentioned by Idel: “Professor Ernst Simon has called attention to a similarity between certain Kabbalistic view of Revelation and Rosenzweig’s statement in a letter to Buber in 1925 that ‘The only immediate content of Revelation ... is Revelation itself’”. Harvey, 132.

⁷² Idel, „Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah”, 164. In her turn, Rivka Horwitz writes: „In the central book of *The Star of Redemption*, the interpretation of the Song of Songs is presented. It is seen as a dialogue between the lover and the beloved, the king and the shepherd, the bride and the bridegroom, an expression of the love between the human and God. The human being is the bride, and God is the unfaithful bridegroom. The very special Jewish interpretation of the divine love is in the end of *The Star*. The love is not only the secret biblical story of the Song of Songs, the love between the human soul and the divine, but the love of the entire Jewish people, “the Remnant of Israel,” and “the God of our Fathers.”” Horwitz, 37.

⁷³ In *The Star of Redemption* Rosenzweig writes: „The Jew, however, fulfills the endless customs and percepts „for the sake of uniting the holy God and his Shekina.” With this formula, the individual, the remnant, prepares his heart, „in awe and love”, to fulfill, „in the name of all Israel” whatever commandment is at the moment incumbent on him. He will gather the glory of God, dispersed all over the world in countless sparks, out of the dispersion and one day bring it back home to Him who has been stripped of his glory. Every one of his deeds, every fulfilling of a commandment, achieves a portion of this reunion. To confess God’s unity - the Jew calls it: to unify God.” Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 410-411.

⁷⁴ Idel, „Franz Rosenzweig and Kabbalah”, 165.

⁷⁵ Idel, 170.

⁷⁶ Idel, 171. On anthropomorphism see Franz Rosenzweig, *God, Man, and the World. Lectures and Essays*, Edited and Translated from the German by Barbara E. Galli, With a Foreword by Michael Oppenheim (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

⁷⁷ Idel, 170.

⁷⁸ Idel, 169.

⁷⁹ Bernard Martin, *Great Twentieth Century Jewish Philosophers. Shestov, Rosenzweig, Buber*. With selections from Their Writings (London: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 156.

⁸⁰ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 335.

⁸¹ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 335.

⁸² Rosenzweig, “Selections from the Letters”, 170.

⁸³ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 345.

⁸⁴ Bernhard Casper, Introduction to Franz Rosenzweig, “Selections from the Letters”, 164.

⁸⁵ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 402.

⁸⁶ Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan in Franz Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 10. On relationship between Christianity and Judaism in Martin Buber's philosophy see Iulia Grad, "Two Paradigms of Faith. Martin Buber on Christianity and Judaism", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 17 (Summer 2007), 34-46.

⁸⁷ Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 16.

⁸⁸ Katz, *Jewish Philosophers*, 190.

⁸⁹ Rosenstock-Huessy, 71.

⁹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, Preface to Stephane Moses, *System and Revelation. The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, Foreword by Emmanuel Levinas, translated by Catherine Tihanyi (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1992), 18.

⁹¹ Steven T. Katz, "On Historicism and Eternity: Reflections on the 100th Birthday of Franz Rosenzweig" in Steven T. Katz, *Historicism, The Holocaust, and Zionism. Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 22-23.