WHAT DO WE WANT THE OTHER TO TEACH ABOUT US?

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What We Want the Other to Know About Us

In What Sense Can "We" Instruct the "Other" About Ourselves?

As the first speaker in this conference, I wish to not only address the conference topic from the Jewish perspective, but to make some general remarks about the implied assumptions of this conference, remarks which will obviously be relevant to the different perspectives represented in the conference. My own interest in our topic is twofold. On the one hand, as director of the Elijah School, Jerusalem, where world religions are taught, the question of how to teach world religions in an interfaith context is of obvious interest. The Elijah School's attempt to strike a balance between academic excellence and interfaith dialogue based on a committed faith stance presents a particular challenge. How does one represent a religion taking into account both its historical and developmental process and its faith claims? The former perspective can lead to a critical view of the religion that at times is at odds with its own self understanding, as formulated traditionally. To a large extent, we have here an expression of the insider-outsider problem in the teaching of religion.

The title of our conference assumes, to a certain degree, that the "we" who instruct the "other" how to teach about us, are in some sense in possession of a truer or better approach to the subject matter, by virtue of our being insiders. Indeed, the Elijah School's attempt to engage teachers who are insiders to teach their religions makes a similar assumption. Yet the approach at the Elijah School is not necessarily appropriate in other contexts, for one can distinguish between a context of

interfaith dialogue, where one must have an "other" to engage, and other types of academic settings. Can we always claim that only the insider has access to the true way of teaching? It seems obvious that the outsider may often bring not only critical perspective that is lacking in a tradition, but also insight and a new methodology, in light of which a religious tradition can be better understood. The insider-outsider issue will continue to occupy scholarly attention for generations to come. In the context of the present discussion, one must therefore define the sense in which it is considered that there is a "we" who somehow have a say in instructing the "other" in the teaching of religion. Three senses can be suggested:

1. The outsider's perspective may seem to the insider to be grossly mistaken, bearing false witness to the religion. Such errors are usually in the nature of a judgment upon the religion, and not simply in the order of a mistaken perception. To take the case of Judaism, the claim that can still be heard in certain circles down to present times, that Judaism is legalistic, is such a judgment. Such judgments are usually accompanied by an evaluation of one's own religion as superior to the religion of the other. Judgments form attitudes, and attitudes govern our relations with concrete others. This leads to the second point.
2. Due to the modern multicultural and multireligious context, study of religions is no longer a purely academic exercise. It bears upon the lives of peoples and communities in contact with one another. There are diverse communities of faith living alongside one another in all parts of the world. There is thus a need for the study of religion in a way that resonates with the lives of the faith communities. The fact that faith communities endow academic positions in the academy, primarily in the U.S. for the teaching of their respective traditions, gives further weight to the demand that the teaching of religions should further the interfaith situation. In other words, there is no purely neutral academic ground in which religion is taught, and the teaching of religion worldwide in some way reflects the interfaith situation. Now, to suggest that because "We" exist, "We" can determine the way in which our tradition is academically represented is far from obvious. It raises a series of problems that demand further consideration. Could there be multiple readings of

a tradition, that of the outsider and that of the insider, the one serving the purely academic study of religion and the other serving the interfaith situation? Might the study of religion controlled by the religious "We" be in some way less academic? And if so, in what way? Would it draw upon different sources? Would it make more room for experience? We have hit the insider-outsider problem here head on, and beyond pointing to the questions that arise for our discussion, I do not feel I have a significant contribution to make at this point. Let me then leave further reflection upon this point for our discussions, and move on to the third dimension, which to me is the most significant.

3. The third sense in which "We" have something to say that is unique, and that can be only heard from the insider's perspective touches upon the very act of presenting a religion. At this point, I wish to introduce the second perspective, to which I alluded earlier, that informs my presentation. This is not as director of an interfaith study program, but as a teacher of Judaism. Over the past three years I have had the privilege of teaching introductory courses on Judaism to Christian students. The first such course was taught at the Bet Jalla Latin Patriarchate Seminary, and for the past two years I have been offering such a course here at the Ratisbonne Institute. Most of what I have to say in the present lecture is in the nature of both a description and a reflection upon this dimension of my work. Hence, for convenience's sake, and in order to draw upon my personal experience, I shall for the remainder of the presentation address the question of the "we" and the "other" in terms drawn from my introductory course, and hence shall discuss the parameters and boundaries of the presentation of Judaism in such an introductory course. In parentheses, I should add that for the past months two titles for our conference have been circulating. The one has been what do we want the other to teach about us, suggesting it is the other who is doing the teaching. The second is what do we want the other to know about us. The only significant difference between the two touches on the issue of who is doing the teaching—the insider or the outsider. While the issues touched upon in my presentation are relevant for both titles, they do reflect more closely the concerns of the "to know about us" version of our deliberations.

Getting back now to the third sense in which I find it meaningful to speak of a "we" who have something to say to an "other," let me begin by sharing my experience that there is no simple and straightforward presentation of a religion. The assumption that there is something somehow "objective" in the way in which a religion is presented is fraught with complications. Rather, the presentation of a religion, in my case Judaism, is a matter of construction, as much as it is one of description. It is as much a matter of theology as it is of history of religions. It is as much a matter of the faith of the presenter as it is of laying out what are considered to be the key literary or historical facts. Hence, presenting a religion and teaching about it is ultimately a matter of sharing insight. My claim is that there is a theological insight that informs the work of the insider, and that enables the "we" to present the tradition in a way that will be significantly different from the way in which the religion will be represented by the outsider.

If every act of presentation is also an act of construction, we must weigh the different kinds of construction possible. It is arguable that history of religion provides us with certain descriptive canons, certain guiding principles and questions by means of which we can describe religious traditions. If so, a Muslim scholar may be able to adequately describe Judaism using such academic descriptive canons. Presumably, were she to know all the facts concerning all world religions, our Muslim scholar should be able to proceed to equally describe all religions, completely bracketing her own personal belief. Now, while I seriously doubt that this is really how it is, and while I note that *de facto* we have fewer and fewer generalists, one must still acknowledge that scholars such as Ninian Smart and Huston Smith do seem to represent such a type of scholarship, where religions are described seriatim, with no concern for the personal belief of the describing scholar. And yet, even while acknowledging the validity of such scholarship, it is but one type of scholarship.

The alternative model, which I wish to present, is one in which theology and history of religions cannot be fully separated, and where religion is not simply presented as some objective data, but is constructed. Indeed, I would argue that there is no one presentation of a religion. There would be as many Judaisms as there would be presenters of Judaism, and as many Islams as there are presenters of Islam, perhaps for the simple reason that Judaism does not really exist. Religion is an

abstraction of the scholarly or theological mind. The historical, literary, and sociological reality that is being described is always far vaster and wider than anything we describe. Any description is an attempt to give structure and coherence to a mass of data that extends far beyond the confines of our description. In presenting we limit, define, and bring within the realm of our understanding a given phenomenon. At that moment we also create the phenomenon, and call it an –ism, in this case: Judaism. Presentation is thus an act of construction, and hence a theological no less than a historical moment. It is here that "we" have something to say. Because theology is a matter for the insider, because there is an insight that will allow for the shaping of the constructed system, and because ultimately we have the right to expect something more interesting from the theologically informed, that shapes how a tradition is constructed, than from the simple historical presentation of data. All of this suggests that in the "We" there is the power to construct religious traditions in ways that are more enriching, rewarding, and illuminating. It is this third level where I think the "we's" contribution to the study of religion is most significant. What "we" want the other to know about us is thus ultimately in some sense a construction of our own identity. The presence of the other thus serves as the context for the articulation of my own identity, expressed in the construction of a particular religious system and its presentation to the other.

Introduction(s) to Judaism

Let me do some backtracking, in order to account for how I have arrived at the above suggestion. In preparing for what I thought would be a very straightforward course, introducing Judaism to the Bet Jalla seminarians, I went over some twenty introductions to Judaism. I discovered there were no two introductions that were identical. While all of them described the same phenomenon, they did so in greatly diverging manners. The choice of sources, the ideology, and ultimately the image of Judaism that emerged in these different introductions were ultimately dictated by the personal belief or understanding of the presenter. There was no objective way of approaching the subject, and each presentation was equally subjective, or relative, in the sense of making a series of

choices within the tradition, choices that could have just as legitimately have been made otherwise. Ultimately, none of these introductions did the trick for me, which meant that in order to present Judaism I had to do my own presentation of the sources, and my own construction of the meaning of the system. I soon realized that in fact I am creating one more introduction to Judaism.

It is obvious that my introduction carries no greater authority than any of the other existing introductions. Indeed, the recognition that every construction is an act of subjective representation implies that all are equally valid, and that beyond the personal appeal of my subjectivity and its creative expressions there is nothing inherently more compelling about my approach, when compared to any existing approach to the subject. I did, however, note that in Israel's 50 years of existence no introduction to Judaism was written, that was geared at a non-Jewish audience. There were many introductions written outside Israel, obviously informed by local Jewish-Christian or other relations. There were also introductions to Judaism written in Hebrew for Israel's secular readers. But Israel has not produced a presentation of the Jewish religion, geared at a non-Jewish public. This is telling of the interfaith situation in Israel and of the fact that Israeli concern is largely taken up with internal Jewish affairs and with matters of Jewish physical and spiritual survival. At the same time this seemed to justify one more presentation of Judaism. For a different kind of Judaism might be constructed in independent Israel. Both the range of topics and the range of sources may differ from those featuring in "Diaspora" presentations of Judaism. To take two examples, the role of sacred space or Holy Land, and the theologies of modern Zionist religious thinkers may significantly alter how the tradition is portrayed. Thus, the debt of my own religious self to the thought of Palestine's first chief rabbi, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, obviously would come through my presentation of Judaism, coloring it in a particular way. Moreover, my choice to present Judaism as a story, to which I shall refer further below, makes the vantage point from which the story is told all the more significant.

The only way to deal with the subjectivity that I see as fundamental to the project of presenting a religion is to expose one's subjectivity. Thus, the Judaism I present is very much my brand of Judaism, informed by my own personal life choices and spirituality. It is a Judaism that is at one and the same time highly dialogical and open to conversation with others

from other traditions, but also drawing on the Jewish tradition's most inward resources. It is, if you will, very mystical, heavily informed by mystical thought, in its many manifestations in Kabbala, Hasidic thought, and the Zionist mystical ideology of Rav Kook. It is, to a certain degree, a unique blend, though perhaps to the same degree that every constructive act draws upon subjectivities that are equally unique.

Let me provide an example of how the subjectivity of the writer is expressed through the choices he makes in presenting his tradition. In my presentation of Judaism, I have included a discussion of the notion of the holy man in Judaism. Following a historical survey of different types of holy men in Judaism, which follows a historical survey of different types of holy men throughout the ages, I finally arrive at a discussion of the Hasidic Zaddik as a culmination of different lines of thought. Now, to feature the notion of the Hasidic Zaddik as normative and representative of Judaism is certainly unconventional. I know of no other presentation of Judaism that has done so. This is left to introductions to Hasidism, as though the Hasidic movement were something other than Judaism. And indeed, for the writers of all the introductions that I have surveyed, this is precisely the case. There is Judaism, defined through some canonical corpus, a definition of which is usually not given to the reader, and then there are other movements, which are somehow tangential to the "real" or "essential" Judaism. Now, the decision to omit reference to Hasidism, and in this case, to its notion of the holy man, and for that matter—to the very notion of holy man, in a presentation of Judaism, is as much of a choice as to include them. What is the basis for exclusion rather than inclusion? Ultimately it reverts to the writer's own sense of what is Judaism, and what is normative and representative about it. Yet, I would argue any such decision is subjective and ultimately arbitrary. It is not simply that one may represent the Hasidic movement and its ideological and social institutions as an equally legitimate part of Judaism as those parts of Judaism that are conventionally described. More significantly, one can argue that here we have a culmination of spiritual tendencies that are manifest throughout tradition, and that find their fulfillment in the Hasidic movement. The point is not which choice is proper. My point is that any decision is a choice, and any choice is ideologically, personally, and subjectively motivated. Rather than achieve the impossible task of describing a core or essential Judaism, one must present

consciously and openly one's constructed Judaism, laying bare one's assumptions and presuppositions.

One of the discoveries I made along the way was that not only is the presentation of Judaism itself a subjective act, but it is created in a context of intersubjectivity. The classroom situation out of which my work grew is here significant. Here I was a Jew, talking to Christians. The presentation of Judaism grew out of the exchange of these two subjective realities. I often asked myself how my presentation might have been different if I had to make it to Muslim students. Surely other topics would have emerged as foci of discussion. Would I have spent as much time on the notion of the Zaddik in speaking to Muslims as I did in talking to Christians, and suggesting affinities between certain Jewish notions of the Zaddik and certain understandings of Christ? One of the facts I noticed about existing introductions to Judaism is that their audience is not clearly defined. Are they addressing a religious other, a secular Jew, a generic intellectual? The question has immediate ramifications. Emil Fackenheim includes in his introduction to Judaism a discussion of whether God hears prayer. I find no need to discuss this topic in my introduction. But this is precisely because I envision a different reader at the other side of the conversation. So, what emerges is that there is no defined "we," in whose name one can talk with authority. "We" has become "we," consisting of a large collection of constructors of religion, presenting their own unique and original construction of religion, while the "other" cannot be simply thought of in the broadest terms, but must be clearly defined. My presentation of Judaism to Christians will look very different from Menachem Fruman's presentation of Judaism to Muslim clergy. Both will be equally valid.

The claim that multiple presentations of Judaism may be equally valid does not rely simply on postmodern sensibilities. Indeed, if there is one message that emerges from the history of Jewish reflection, and which I believe must be incorporated into any presentation of Judaism, it is that Judaism is multivocal. From the earliest strands of biblical thought down to modern times, Judaism supports a rich discourse in which multiple opinions coexist alongside one another. This does not mean, obviously, that any topic can be the subject of unlimited opinions, or that there is lack of consensus concerning everything. Were that the case, Judaism would completely disintegrate. Yet, Judaism cannot simply be presented as a single,

facile, univocal belief. Indeed, what characterizes noncritical, what we may for lack of a better term call fundamentalist, pictures of Judaism is precisely this lack of nuance, and the presentation of Judaism as a univocal message. Therefore, the constructive presentation of Judaism must also be faithful to Judaism's fundamental multivocality. Historical description tends to present the multivocality of the multiple historical Judaisms. The constructive presentation tends to a more unified presentation. A creative tension must be maintained between these two perspectives. Multiple voices must always be given expression. This expression may be in order to contextualize or to balance the dominant voice expressed in the presentation. Alternatively, the role of the presentation may be to suggest a synthesis between the multiple voices of tradition. In any event, while we cannot define a single position as definitive of Judaism, in terms of content, there is a discourse that is typical of tradition, and which must be captured in a presentation of Judaism. This discourse is itself a major factor by means of which any presentation of Judaism is authenticated. I would suggest this factor as an important complement to the awareness of one's own subjectivity, and the ways it governs one's presentation. A responsible subjectivity would be one that is articulated within the wider multivocal and multigenerational discourse of Judaism, expressing itself in dialogue with and in relation to the rich texture of earlier Jewish reflection.

On Jews and Judaism

There is a certain confusion that is characteristic of introductory works on Judaism. This confusion may be particular to Judaism, due to its fundamentally twofold nature. Judaism is both a peoplehood—an ethnic entity—and a system of religious belief and praxis, similar to the other religions discussed in our conference. Now, in the case of Judaism, beyond all the difficulties we have already discovered in our title, the definition of "us" is particularly problematic. Not simply because there are a variety of Judaisms. On a more fundamental level, does this "us" refer to a people or a religion, defined as a religious system of doctrine and action? Are we teaching about the Jewish people in their various historical manifestations, or about the Jewish religion? I take it the task at hand, and the task

which I set for myself in my introduction, is an introduction to a religious system. Hence, its method is theological and draws upon insight derived from the history of religions. Were my choice different, the method might be more heavily historical, attempting a historical presentation of the history of the Jews, including a history of their beliefs and religious practices. A presentation of the Jewish people's beliefs may be more descriptive. A presentation of Judaism as a religious system is necessarily constructive.

The understanding that what I am presenting is Judaism, and not a history of the religious life of the Jews, assumes I am able to locate Judaism somewhere. In which people do I locate it? What texts do I see as representative of a Judaism worth representing? These are matters of choice that are ultimately determined only by my own religious sensibility. The choice to describe Judaism implies one is describing not only a historical reality, such as was lived by the Jews, but rather one is presenting some ideal reality, perhaps an ideal that has never existed. The project thus involves selection. Certain elements of the system will be highlighted in the construction, while other elements that may have played a historical role may be ignored. Certain texts will be featured, while others may not be integrated into an ideal representation of Judaism as a religious system.

A further implication of the presentation of Judaism, over and against a history of the Jewish people's religious life, is that such a presentation of Judaism can become the source for a critique of diverse manifestations of historical Judaisms. If one presents a history of the Jewish people and their religious life, one need not pass judgment on the diverse forms their life has taken. The facts are what they are, and the historian can expose them for what they are. That Jews may have been religious syncretists or gangsters may be historical facts. Both may captivate the historian's imagination. However, both may be irrelevant to a construction of the Jewish religion. A construction of the religion, on the other hand, necessitates taking a stand. One may have the right to pass judgment on amulets as legitimate or illegitimate forms of religious expression. Given Judaism's own declared standards of what prayer should be, one may wish to examine the historical forms of prayer in Judaism, and expose them to criticism. The act of presenting a religion leads us not only to a selection amongst multiple forms of the religion and its texts, but also leads us to an examination and evaluation of the actual forms the religious life has taken.

The Choice of Sources—Normativity and Subjectivity

Let me expound further on the problem of the selection of sources. For the historian, all forms of Jewish life may be relevant. Indeed, if our perspective was that of presenting the historical phenomenon of Judaism to Christians, we might find special interest in certain historical phenomena that may have had particular impact upon Christianity. From a Christian perspective, interest in the Qumran sectarians makes perfect sense. Indeed, any serious historical presentation of historical Judaisms—and I use the term in the plural—following the lead of Jacob Neusner, cannot overlook the community whose theology is captured in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yet, when we speak theologically we speak of Judaism, in the singular and not in the plural. And when such a Judaism is constructed, there will probably not be room for the Dead Sea Scrolls in it. That is, unless the writer has constructed a Judaism that in some way resonates so deeply with the world view of the sectarians as to revive their world view and to span Judaism from its roots, through the works of the sectarians and down to later manifestations of Judaism that represent a related world view. And yet, if such a Judaism were constructed would it be recognized as Judaism? For that matter, Christian kabbala might also be constructed as a form of Judaism. Are there then any minimal conditions that govern what can and cannot be presented as Judaism, beyond the subjective choices of individual writers?

Two approaches may be taken to this question. One is based on self-understanding, the other is an attempt to apply notions of canonicity and normativity to the description of a religion. The first criterion is probably the ultimate factor that determines what historical Judaism fall within the scope of a theologically constructed Judaism. Ancient Christianity, no less than Qumran covenantors, considered itself to be a Jewish movement. Yet, what ultimately determines the boundaries of Jewish self-definition, as well as of Jewish continuity, is the historical memory of the community, as it carries its own self-identity through the generations. It is important to recognize the utter subjectivity of this category. Yet, at the same time there is probably no other category besides self-understanding that ultimately governs what falls within the scope of Judaism. From a purely phenomenological point of view, the Biblical origins of Judaism may be unrecognizable to present day Judaism. Yet those roots, as well as

the diverse stages and forms of Judaism's Judaisms, are held together by a sense of continuity supplied by the tradition itself through memory and through the continuous recasting of past in terms of present. To take a more contemporary example, Jewish self-identity has decided that the Sabbatean movement is beyond the boundaries of Jewish self-definition, even if the historical study of Judaism is fascinated with the Sabbatean movement. Hence, Sabbateanism is one of many historical Judaisms. It should not, however, figure in a theologically constructed presentation of Judaism. Contemporary secular Zionism presents a challenge in a different direction. While historically one may make an argument that secular Zionism is not really a Jewish movement, indeed some of its own ideologues have argued in that direction, from the theological perspective one might decide to view the Zionist revival as another legitimate expression of Judaism, bearing continuity with Judaism's long story. The criteria are far from historically objective. They reflect ideological choices of a community. Yet, to the degree that the very act of presenting Judaism is itself theologically and ideologically motivated, it must rely on the self understanding of the religious community, and the way in which it shapes its memory to construct its identity.

There is, however, a second factor that lends the presentation of Judaism a dimension of objectivity. The reason the Dead Sea Scrolls should not come within the purview of a constructed Judaism is not only that the sectarians' memory did not become part of Israel's self identity. It is because their writings did not become part of Judaism's canon. Now, applying notions of canon to the diverse religious phenomena of Judaism is complicated. It is not even clear that some of the classics are canonical. I would refer to Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* or the Rabbi Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari* as classics. I would not refer to them as canonical. I would reserve the term canonical for those texts that are universally accepted by all parts of the Jewish people. In this context, it seems to me there are two literary corpora that enjoy such a status. The first is the *halacha*, from its foundational formulation in the Mishna down to its later articulation in the Shulchan Aruch and its commentaries. Hence, if we seek to portray Judaism we must take into account the place of *halacha* in its different manifestations, as these shape Jewish life. The second corpus, which for the purpose of the presentation of Judaism is more convenient than the *halacha*, is the Siddur, the Jewish prayer book. My Christian

friends have taught me that *lex orandi* is *lex credendi* (literally, the law of prayer is the law of belief). The Siddur is probably the most canonical of all Jewish texts. It is significant because, unlike law codes that are read only by scholars, even if these comprise a significant portion of Jewish intelligentsia, and even if significant portions of the Jewish people are trained in reading such codes, the Siddur is read by every single member of the Jewish community without exception. Normative Jewish prayer practice mandates regular prayer, three times daily. While some women practice less than the full halachic mandate, they are nonetheless exposed to the Siddur on a daily basis. The Siddur, along with other liturgical standards, like the Passover Haggada, articulates the community's aspirations as it faces God. It is thus the single most important source for understanding the Jewish religion.

Now, obviously not everything in the Siddur necessarily measures up to the highest religious ideals of a given construction of Judaism. Maimonides' understanding of Judaism and the perfected religious state may not recognize the contents of the Siddur as the ultimate expression of the perfected philosophic-prophetic state. Nevertheless, I would argue the Siddur, along with the *halacha*, provide any construction of Judaism at the very least with checks and balances. I believe, in fact, that they provide much more. I would argue that the ultimate test for the viability of a presentation of Judaism is its ability to make sense of the liturgical heritage, to grow out of it. From the insider's perspective, the good presentation of Judaism should allow the member of the community to reidentify with greater vigor with the liturgical life. In this sense, liturgy not only provides the orienting principle for the entire constructive venture, but also the arena where the theological usefulness of a given theological construct is tested and bears fruit.

Having suggested liturgy and *halacha* as canonical cornerstones for the presentation of Judaism does not mean that all we need to do is a theology of the Siddur or a theology of the *halacha*, and this will provide us with the appropriate presentation of Judaism. Rather, these two canonical bodies provide the basic structure, upon which, historically, multiple superstructures have been created. These superstructures include philosophy, mysticism, piety, and various expressions of Jewish spirituality. Thus, one introduction to Judaism is structured around Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith. One cannot contest the legitimacy of such a presentation. However,

reference to any of the superstructures is ultimately a choice, and, as such, is subjective. There is nothing inherently more compelling about a Maimonidean presentation of Judaism than a kabbalistic representation of the religion. Both are equally valid ways of making sense of the canonical texts, the law, the liturgy and the people's story. That they are radically different from one another suggests the wide range of ways in which Judaism can be constructed.

Let me spell out the implications of the above to our guiding question: what we would want the other to teach, or know, about us. In light of all the above, one can only say there is no one single way of teaching about us. Nonetheless, whatever way is chosen for the presentation of the religion, it must take into account those elements deemed fundamental to the tradition and its self-understanding. That is, it must convey continuity of identity of the different historical Judaism, presenting them as links in an ongoing chain, forming memory, giving rise to identity. It must also take into account the canonical texts of Judaism, and enable one to make sense of the two key corpora—the halachic corpus and the liturgical corpus. Beyond that, the same diversity and variety that characterize Jewish thought, it must also characterize the way it is presented to those outside Judaism.

Apologetics and Criticism

To present a religion is not a value-free activity. It is not a purely descriptive task. It involves value judgments concerning the subject matter. I originally approached the task of presenting Judaism as a purely descriptive task. As work proceeded, I discovered the work involved me in two types of activity, both of which implied value judgments that went far beyond the presumably neutral task of description. On the one hand, I became aware at certain points that what I was engaged in was a form of apologetics, which led me to reflect upon the place of apologetics in the descriptive work. On the other hand, I also found myself critical of the tradition. By critical I mean expressing a judgment on the concrete historical phenomena of Judaism and of Jewish life, in light of the wider perspective from which my view of Judaism was constructed. It is immaterial whether it is my perspective that is adopted, or some other perspective.

The significant issue, at this point in our discussion, is that the process of presentation of a religion also involves us in making value judgments upon certain historical manifestations of the religion, judgments that are unfavorable. Let me now offer some of my reflections on how I have come to understand the task of presenting my religion with regard to both the positive apologetic perspective and the negative critical perspective.

The first time I considered that what I am engaging in is apologetics rather than a scientific presentation of Judaism, I was horrified. I had, after all, entered this project assuming there was a neutral descriptive, hence scientific, way of presenting Judaism, which would be value-free. That Judaism had to be constructed rather than described meant that I had to read it, to interpret it, and to offer my interpretation as a presentation of Judaism. While engaged in interpretation, I realized it was my task to give Judaism the best possible reading. If you will, this is the famous principle of charity, as formulated in Dworkin's *Law Empire*. In reading a system we strive to give it the best possible reading. Indeed, the interfaith context may be taken as the context par excellence for apologetics in their highest form. Apologetics is the task of presenting our reality to the other. In the process, we discern, discover and present what may have been hitherto hidden from our own awareness. The apologetic context does not call for invention of false explanation, but for the uncovering of deeper structures of meaning. These become available precisely though the presence of an other who challenges us to the new insight that such a construction provides. If the fruit of the interfaith context is the highest form of apologetics, where does the academic or scientific background of our work come to play?

Two answers come to mind. The first is that in an important way my project differs from that of the uncritical introduction to Judaism. My presentation does not seek to present a truth, a complete system or something final. When Judaism is approached from a perspective that couples theological reflection carried out in an interfaith context, and historical awareness of the varieties of historical Judaisms, what ensues is not a statement of truth but a presentation of forces, movements and tensions, that have to be put together and constructed to create a whole. That constructive moment does not lose touch with its origins. It is a postcritical constructive moment that remains aware of the historical complexities

that are its building blocks, rather than a precritical construction that presents Judaism in a facile and one-dimensional manner.

The second answer is a consequence of the first, and of still greater value. As a reader of Judaism, I am willing to criticize alongside the attempt to give the best possible reading. Offering the best reading does not equal condoning everything in the religion as it is. As already suggested, the formulation of the best possible reading may itself serve as the source of criticism of elements within the tradition. Hence, the presence of the other is not only occasion for uncovering and presenting the finest of the tradition. It is also a context for addressing those parts of the tradition that are problematic. The presence of an other may be necessary to bring those parts out to light in their fullness, as part of cleansing the religion. In other words, precisely because I present my religion in a context that is inescapably apologetic, I will sooner or later find myself making the distinction between positive and negative elements in the tradition, and the corresponding distinction between Judaism, viewed as a complete and ideal system, and the historical reality of the many Judaisms, lived by Jews at different times. The imperfections will be acknowledged as historical realities of the many lowercased judaisms, thus leaving my constructed uppercased Judaism free of the taint of human imperfection. Thus, the apologetic act of presenting my religion to the other provides an opportunity for self examination and for the raising of an ideal form of religion, that serves not only the outsider to whom I present, but the insider, who thereby is confronted with a new vision of his own tradition.

Let me provide two examples of apologetics, illustrating the difference between the type that is necessitated in the act of presentation of Judaism, and the kind of apologetics that is better avoided. In thinking of the Sabbath and the meaning of the commandment to refrain from labor, one is confronted with the task of introducing the outsider to a fundamental dimension of Jewish spirituality. How the Sabbath is celebrated is radically different from how a Christian or Muslim conceives of his or her own holy day. In presenting the Sabbath, one is engaged in a form of apologetics. Yet, the apologetic task is to bring forth and articulate the internal reality of the religious life in a way that can be understood by someone on the outside. The process is not one in which the reality is distorted or made to look other than what it is. The process is one of sharing and explaining, striving to capture the inner essence of a dimension

of the religious life and to present it to the outsider. What is said to the outsider is, therefore, essentially what is said to the insider, and the apologetic moment is one in which one attempts to convey the inner sense and experience as lived by a member of the religion.

Let me contrast this with an example of apologetics I would wish to avoid. In discussing *mitzvot* and women's obligations to fulfill *mitzvot*, one might be tempted to offer explanations that were suggested by modern apologists, to account for women's exemption from time-bound commandments. One such explanation is that women need not observe time-bound, positive commandments, such as Sukka and Shofar, because due to their physical nature they have a different relationship to time. Men are in need of sanctification of time through ritual actions. Women have a particular relationship to time through their monthly cycles, and, therefore, do not need the time-bound commandments to shape their attitude to time and its sanctity. Now, in this case apologetics is an attempt to justify a fact of the religion, and to shelter it from criticism. Yet, there is no accompanying educational or spiritual direction that actually directs women to live their relationship to time in light of their feminine physiology. The apologetic moment here serves to justify, protect, and preserve. Beyond providing an interesting and intelligent rationale, it does not filter into education or lived spirituality. I would, therefore, claim that the kind of apologetic move that can be condoned must stem from the attempt to share the inner meaning and experiences as experienced by the practitioners of the religion with the outsider. What is difficult in the eyes of the other must be described, along with the presentation of how it is lived by the insider. Here, justification must give way to testimony. The testimony of the insider as to his or her understanding of the meaning of his/her religious life is the ultimate apologetic move. Improper apologetic seeks to demonstrate something is right or true. Proper apologetics seek to share the experience and significance of the queried fact to the life of the believer. Where such meaning cannot be found, the door is open to querying the ultimate meaning of those portions of tradition. Apologetics must seek to present religion in its best possible sense, in relation to God, while at the same time not seeking to justify all in it that is concretely present, remaining open to exposing the human frailties of the religion.

The difference between the two types of apologetics ultimately boils down to the question of whether in presenting my religion I must present it as perfect. I would argue that one of the factors that distinguishes an academically based approach to religion from a traditional one is the willingness to not view one's religion as something perfect. This is not a necessary consequence of academic training, and there may be individuals or even intellectual communities who may not draw such consequences. Yet, there is something sobering in the academic approach to religion. The historical approach brings to light portions of tradition that the traditional approach may comfortably overlook. The comparative approach suggests that much of what my religion does is claimed by other religious traditions as well. All religion, including my own, is thus recognized for its human component, alongside being a divine revelation, in some sense. The upshot of recognizing religion's humanity is the recognition that it is not perfect.

In the case of my understanding of Judaism, there is still another factor on account of which I approach its presentation without the preconceived idea that it is "perfect." This is my understanding that Judaism is a religion in process. In my presentation of Judaism, I offer the definition of Judaism as the story of Israel's life in God's presence. Story is very different than system. Systems need to be perfect. Stories are essentially in the process of striving toward perfection. Until the story is completed, one cannot speak of perfection. If Judaism is thus still in the process of becoming, I may approach it through a dual perspective. On the one hand, I seek to offer an image of its larger sense and meaning, striving to offer my best possible reading. On the other, I do not seek to justify all that is in Judaism as perfect, and as commensurate with its ultimate goals.

Let me offer some examples of this. Understanding Judaism's notion of election is one of the most difficult subjects, especially when such understanding is not articulated to an audience of insiders, but to an audience of non-Jews. Now, some ensuing attitudes of Jews to non-Jews are problematic. In reflecting upon Judaism as a whole, its larger spiritual vision, and its ultimate message for the non-Jewish world, I am led to consider to what extent some of the negative attitudes to the non-Jew are commensurate with Judaism's own higher ideals, and to what extent they should be considered products of a historical, and hence human, process. A different subject for scrutiny might be prayer. The fact that I present

Judaism to others makes me aware of how these others themselves relate to the same ideals that I present. I find it difficult to speak of Jewish prayer to a non-Jewish audience without feeling a certain embarrassment regarding the way in which prayer is experienced in the traditional Jewish service. Now, Jewish sources themselves make me aware of higher ideals than those that find expression in the concrete circumstances of history and community. In presenting Jewish prayer, do I simply limit myself to the written expressions of the spiritual aspirations of mystically minded authors, or may I also use the occasion to express my reservations concerning the concrete expressions of the communal Jewish life of prayer?

As I understand the moment of presenting a religion to the other, it is a moment of coming to terms with one's own reality, in the presence of the other. The presence of the other forces me to both present my religion in the best possible light, and also to come to terms with its problematic elements. If there are portions of my tradition of which I am ashamed, or that are problematic, how do I handle these in presenting my religion? One strategy might be to ignore them with the goal of presenting my religion in the most favorable light. I consider this to be insincere. Assuming my fundamental attitude to my religion is one of appreciation, admiration and love, these would communicate to my audience throughout my presentation. However, these will be all the more appreciated when accompanied by an open acknowledgement of the difficulties that my tradition historically presents.

At this point an important difference emerges between the insider's presentation of his own religion and the outsider's presentation of a religion. It is only the insider who, in the act of honest and open communication with an other, can question the tradition and draw attention to its imperfections. Were an outsider to do this, he would be accused of judging the other in a vein of triumphal religious polemic. Returning then to the insider-outsider issue, we emerge with one further important distinction between the teaching of the insider and the teaching of the outsider. The insider's presentation, relying, as I suggested, on theological insight in its construction of the religion, may include the type of self-examination and reflection that should be avoided by the outsider.

In thinking of what we want the other to teach about us, I, therefore, do not see the problem primarily as one of locating errors and misconceptions the other may hold, and trying to correct those. These are

potentially endless, and must certainly be corrected as they arise. Yet, the ultimate significance of having an "other" in front of whom I present my religion is that it provides me an honest context for reflection and introspection, allowing me to both offer tradition's highest vision and the frailties of its historical manifestations.

The Power of Questioning

Let me return to an important implication of the notion that to speak of Judaism is to speak of a story, and not of a system. Constructing Judaism necessarily involves one also in projecting the future of the story. Now, Judaism has long envisioned the future. In fact, it has, over the ages, projected multiple images of the ideal future. As long as one is simply engaged in the act of describing historical Judaism, one can content oneself with a historical presentation of diverse messianic expectations. Presenting in a theologically constructive fashion presents challenges here. Let me illustrate one such challenge. In my presentation of Judaism, the temple plays a major role. It is the central spiritual institution through which God's presence is mediated. Its destruction engenders a series of alternatives and substitutes. One cannot understand Judaism's evolution and vision without considering the centrality of the temple. One fundamental expression of its continued relevance and centrality is the continued prayer for the rebuilding of the temple, a pivotal element in traditional prayer. And yet, what is it that one prays for? If I follow the guidelines I suggested above, then the liturgy points to an aspiration of what Gerschom Scholem has termed a "restorative nature." The future is a restoration of the past. This would include the reestablishment of animal sacrifices. Must I, in order to be faithful to Judaism, present this as part of Judaism's future vision? The question is raised in part by my own discomfort with the notion, but only in part. For there are visions of the future temple that see an ideal time in which no animal sacrifices will be offered. How do I go about presenting Judaism in a way that is both faithful to the tradition and to my own positioning or identification within the range of possibilities tradition presents? In my work I have taken the direction of posing questions. We may make proclamations about the past. Concerning the future we may raise questions and possibilities.

These will be informed by several factors: first, our understanding of the overarching concerns of the religion, the larger contours of the story; second, by the range of possibilities furnished by tradition; and third, by the personal choice of the writer, a factor I have already suggested is crucial to the entire enterprise of presenting a religion. Thus, in the example just offered, rather than assert the nature of worship in the future temple, I preferred to highlight the aspiration for the future temple in light of what seems to me to have been its primary function—mediation of divine presence. If temple is for presence, then the aspiration for a future temple is an aspiration for the full reestablishment of God's presence amidst His people. The specific forms the future will take must be left up to divine providence and direction. We can only pose the questions to which God must provide the answers.

In my work, the method of posing questions has emerged as an important element in my presentation of Judaism. To understand this, let me return to my thematic approach to Judaism. My work begins with an attempt to define Judaism. My premise is that the religion should be defined in a way that is descriptive of itself, and unique to it, rather than simply as one more instance of a wider category, not clearly defined as such, that we call religion. Hence, my definition of Judaism as the enduring story of Israel's life in the presence of God. There are several points I hope to make through this definition. The first, which I have already addressed, is that Judaism is not a system. The second is that Judaism is related to Israel, and in view of this special relationship should be seen as story. Third, this story is still incomplete and still in process of becoming. It is precisely for this reason that Judaism should not be thought of as a system or even a worldview. On the other hand, it is not simply a story of a people, a matter for folklore or ethnology. It is the story of Israel's life in the presence of God. There are thus two components to this story, Israel's life and the ways in which divine presence is mediated and anchored in and through Israel's life.

There are several implications to this working definition. The first is that in speaking of Judaism we must somehow retain the element of story. It is important to present Judaism as a continued story. The opening chapter of the story is in the book common to Jews and Christians. Its later chapters form the unique story of Judaism. Yet, those chapters should be seen as an extension and a continuation of the foundational

chapter. Hence, in my presentation, which is consciously addressed to a Christian audience (indeed, it may be even inappropriate for a Muslim audience), I try to not simply present Judaism as it is, but as it grows and emerges out of its biblical roots. To tell the story is also to realize that Judaism is multilayered. The Jewish culture of study maintains vital conscious links between the different strands of Jewish tradition. Hence, entry into the story is also entry into a dialogue and conversation among the different layers of tradition, as these relate to one another. The texture of approach to Judaism is not only, as stated above, multi vocal, but also rich in stratification of the conversations of generations. To tell the story is thus to incorporate Judaism's growth and development into the story of the people and their life in God's presence.

A further implication of this definition of Judaism brings us back to posing questions. The two poles of my presentation, Israel's life and divine presence, along with the recognition that we are listening to a story, allow me to juxtapose Judaism and the Jewish people. The spiritual reality of Judaism, as expressed in the points of highest aspiration and contact with divine presence, and the concrete historical manifestations of Judaism, as expressed in the actual manifestations of historical Judaisms are connected in dynamic tension. And there is a danger in the tension that I present. By what authority do I classify certain dimensions of Judaism as belonging to its higher and ultimate essence, manifesting God's presence in Judaism, and other dimensions as "merely" the concrete historical manifestations of the history and life of the people? Indeed, I would hope I avoid the pitfall of classifying and passing judgment in such a facile manner. Nonetheless, the recognition that religion is composed of these two dimensions does allow us to reflect upon the highest ideals articulated within tradition itself, and upon their relationship to concrete historical manifestations. It is here that the method of posing questions emerges as a significant reflective tool. While it may be wrong of me to pass judgment on certain issues or phenomena, I can pose the question to what degree these phenomena accord with Judaism's own stated highest vision. Because the story is not complete, I may pose questions regarding its unfolding, questions that may themselves point to the future unfolding of the story.

To what extent does the life of the people, including spiritual, moral and religious life, accord with the higher guiding sense of divine presence?

This is a key question that informs my thinking and my presentation of Judaism. Thus, in presenting Torah study and prayer, and in juxtaposing them, I am not content to simply describe Jewish prayer alongside the practices of Torah study. Rather, I must pose the question of how these practices also mediate divine presence. In so doing, I seek to ground the historical religious manifestations in what I see as their ultimate point of reference. Yet, this attempt goes beyond the description of the phenomena, for it introduces questions, and can serve as a source of religious critique. Has the culture of Torah study affected the life of prayer adversely? How is divine presence related to these religious practices, both in theory and in practice? In what way are these practices ultimately adequate to their own stated goals, or to the perceived inner logic of Judaism? It is because I pose such questions that my presentation is not merely an uncritical praise of Judaism, but a presentation that struggles to uncover the higher sense of Judaism, while presenting its objective manifestations. It is on account of this struggle that the work is theological, not simply descriptive. And rather than the other needing me to explain Judaism to them, I believe I need the other in order to better articulate the questions, issues and struggles, in light of which and through which I can construct one specific, unique presentation of Judaism.

Presenting Judaism—Key Topics

Having presented the wider methodological issues that are implied in my presentation of Judaism, as well as the larger thematic framework from which I have described it, let me now conclude by listing the chapters that I saw fit to include in my presentation. The chapters were chosen with a specific Christian audience in mind. Once again, it is conceivable that someone writing for a Muslim audience might have chosen other subjects for his introduction. The choice of chapters also reflects the balance I found between a purely descriptive approach and a theological-constructive approach to the subject. I open my presentation with a definition of Judaism, the one I have already shared with you: how the story of the people and the divine presence unfolds is then presented through the notion of covenant, and then through other models that are relevant for later periods of Jewish thought. Similarly,

different historical and theological models of understanding are presented in the next chapter devoted to the subject of God. Covenantal, philosophical and Kabbalistic doctrines are seen in historical context and as they apply to a contemporary Jewish attitude to God.

My next section is devoted to *mitzvah*, commandment. I chose to focus upon *mitzvah* due to the centrality of the notion of *mitzvah* to Jewish spirituality. I am also aware of the charge of legalism, with which Judaism is charged, and therefore see the importance of highlighting the role of *mitzvah* in ways that would counteract this charge. Perhaps the most important factor to bear in mind is this section necessarily follows the first; namely, *mitzvah* is grounded in relationship. A further approach to the problem emerges as different senses of the term *mitzvah*, as these unfold in different strands of Jewish thought, are brought to light. These illustrate that the spirituality of *mitzvah* is not simply one of commandment, but one through which communion is achieved between God and Israel. The next section focuses on one particular *mitzvah*, one that has indelibly stamped Judaism, and which shapes its spiritual profile for the past two millennia and longer. I refer to the study of Torah. My choice to open with discussions of *mitzvah* and Torah reflects a choice to begin with the particular and with that which is specific to the religion, rather than with general categories that are universal to religions. Indeed, I would not even title the section on Torah "Scripture," for I understand the type of activity that is Torah study to be in some ways so specific and unique that I wish to preserve its uniqueness by use of internal categories, rather than resorting to more conventional and general categories of description.

This is not necessarily the case throughout my presentation. The following chapter is devoted to prayer, by all means a universal phenomenon. Of course, in the present context it is juxtaposed with Torah study, in order to highlight its functioning within the systemic appreciation of Judaism. Now, the tension between internal and external categories is obvious in the next three chapters. The next three chapters are devoted to sacred time, sacred space and holy men, in the case of Judaism conceived as indeed primarily a matter for humans. The discussion in these chapters attempts to strike a balance between two modes of discourse. On the one hand, there is a history of religious type presentation that offers categories for understanding how the holy is mediated in these

three contexts. Such a discussion may indeed be relevant for students of other religions. Here, Judaism may indeed be seen as one example of the wider phenomenon of religion, and lessons may be drawn from it that are relevant to a wider appreciation of the phenomenon of religion. On the other hand, I also try to present the internal and specific logic of holiness of Judaism. Sacred time is broken down into Sabbath and Festival, following a fundamental traditional distinction in the nature of sacred time. Sacred time is discussed in relation to specifics of Israel's story, as expressed primarily in liturgy. Sacred space is presented in relation to Jewish history, and the ongoing quest for the temple and its substitutes. Reference to sacred space is significant in view of the fact that Judaism has been said to downplay sacred space in favor of sacred time. My discussion suggests that if anything, the opposite is true. The discussion is particularly relevant in the contemporary context of Israel's resettlement in their own designated homeland, God's space set apart and made holy for them to live on, in accordance with the divine code of holiness. Holy men too are presented as part of the inner, at times unconscious, quest for divine presence and its mediation through changing religious institutions.

The final two chapters are less descriptive and focus on two questions that I believe an outsider would want to understand, and at the same time are fundamental Jewish belief and identity. The first is the notion of election. Following a presentation of holy men and the various ways in which the sacred is expressed in time, space and humanity, a discussion of the holy people fits well both theologically and phenomenologically. Finally, the subject of the messianic hope and the vision of the future is discussed. While the messianic vision is no doubt central to Judaism, I am not convinced that it must find its place in any presentation. Once again, it is clear to me that my choice to conclude the presentation of Judaism with this topic stems from the fact that this issue is central to Christians, whose very name is rooted in Jewish messianic aspiration.

The list of topics covered in the introduction is the fruit of a dialectical awareness that informs my entire work. I speak as an insider, who must adopt a particular perspective in order to talk to an outsider—one specific and particular other, the Christian. In doing so, I both describe and construct. I must speak a language that is at one and the same time the external language of description and the internal language of presentation, with its indigenous categories and particular emphasis. I must at

one and the same time present a history and a theology. I cannot testify to how successful or how unsuccessful my effort has been. In the very least, the significance of the work lies precisely in its conscious attempt to straddle this dual perspective. Its uniqueness is the outcome of the conscious recognition that I speak as a unique individual Jew addressing specific Christian audiences. The type of presentation that emerges in this interpersonal situation is a fruit of the two poles in the process of communication. What emerges is, therefore, necessarily unique. Its ultimate value lies in the way both my self-understanding and the other's understanding of me are formed in an interrelated moment of common understanding. It is such understanding that makes the entire enterprise worthwhile.