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Introduction

Rational religion is religion whose beliefs and rituals have been reorganized with the aim of making it the central element in a coherent ordering of life – an ordering which shall be coherent both in respect to the elucidation of thought and in respect to the direction of conduct towards a unified purpose commanding ethical approval. . .

Rational religion appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions, and to the elucidatory power of its concepts for all occasions. It arises from that which is special, but extends to what is general.

Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*

RELIGION AND MODERNIZATION

Rationalization is immanent in man's intellectual urge to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos through symbolic ideational patterns, and to take a unified stance toward it through patterns of norms and value-orientations.¹ According to Talcott Parsons, "Every sharp break with traditionalism involves rationalization, for the breaker of tradition is by his very act forced to define his attitudes towards that with which he has broken."²

The need to rationalize Judaism in relation to modernization arose in Orthodox Jewry in response to Jewish Enlightenment and Emancipation of the nineteenth century. For it was when these two movements opened the world at large to the Jewish people that Judaism was pressured to justify participation in the general cultural and social life, after being turned inward toward its traditional past for many generations.³ This is when Orthodox Jews broke partially, but consciously, with the traditional world and sought to extend the range of their religious values by reappraising the Jewish place and duties within the modern world.

Ideologues of the Orthodox modernizing movements sought to reconcile modern culture with tradition by drawing upon mechanisms of change within traditional religious culture; in other words, upon Torah in the sense of religious charisma.⁴ The charismatic breakthroughs that they precipitated – under such slogans as “Torah and civic life” and “Torah and labor” – had to be rationalized before they could be consolidated into new symbolic patterns to legitimate cultural and social change.⁵ By integrating their view of the world within the perspective of Torah, these ideologues were able to crystallize a modern Orthodox identity.

The classic case of religious rationalization in relation to modernization – which may be defined as the process of systematic social change whereby people continually increase their knowledge of, and control over, their environment through rational means – is that of the Protestant ethic, as expounded by Max Weber.⁶ According to Weber, the Calvinist stream of Protestantism played a crucial role in the breakthrough of European society to modernity, by replacing the medieval perception of God as demanding that humankind adapt itself to the existing world, with the idea that it was God’s will that man should labor in the world so as to establish the Kingdom of God. By redefining the sacred, Calvinism fostered a religious ethic of world transformation based on self-control, rationalism, self-awareness, and an impulse toward activism. This, in turn, created a new channel of salvation divested of spiritual and mystical dimensions.

Although Weber focused his investigation on the nascent rational capitalist system that underwent consolidation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, his overall intention was to show how the Protestant ethic promoted the rational aspects of modernization – science, technology, and the bureaucratic systems that were also becoming established in that period – and reinforced their transformative thrust.

While Weber’s study of the Protestant ethic was concerned with religion as a driving force behind modernization, later study – which has greatly expanded since the 1950s – examines the ability of traditional religions both to sustain and to advance it.⁷ It is within these parameters that we shall examine Judaism.

Shmuel Eisenstadt expanded upon Weber’s thesis in relation to traditional religious cultures. In his analysis of the linkage between the development of Protestantism and the consolidation of modern

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institutions, Eisenstadt identified four elements that can be seen as enhancing the ability of religious culture to undergo rationalization in respect to modern life. These elements, which Eisenstadt calls “transformative capacities,”⁸ enable cultures to undergo inner change and then to legitimate modern symbols, roles, and institutions. The first two elements are implied in the Protestant ethic: (1) the culture must be capable of cultivating individuals with a developed self-awareness and sense of personal responsibility; (2) these individuals must be able to act in the world under the inspiration of a transcendent religious worldview where the religion is divested of mystical and ritual elements; then (3), the religion must be one that grants its adherents freedom to redefine the sacred without relying on institutions that mediate between the individuals and the divine; and (4) it must consider openness to the greater social world as legitimate. Eisenstadt implies that the more a traditional religious culture possesses these four qualities, the greater will be its ability to sustain modern life.

How these transformative capacities can be applied to modern ideological systems is of special interest to the potential of Judaism to undergo rationalization. Nationalism, socialism, and liberalism constitute the principal vehicles of modernization.⁹ The combination of nationalism and socialism – which occurs in the kibbutz – is one of the most powerful motivational forces for directed social change; socialism and liberalism are important elements in the traditional culture’s capacity to absorb the Western ethos of progress as a source of both motivation and legitimation of social change.¹⁰

JUDAISM AND MODERNIZATION

The capacity of traditional Jewish culture to sustain modernization has not yet been systematically assessed by sociologists. While classic studies by Werner Sombart (1911) and Max Weber (in the second decade of this century) hint at the close connection between historical Jewish religious culture and the rise of modern capitalism, these studies deal with the pre-Emancipation period, and their conclusions have not been examined in the light of modern Jewish reality.

In his analysis of rabbinic culture, Sombart concludes that the Jewish ethic, thanks to its central legal component, is strikingly similar to, and fosters the same value-orientations as, the Protestant

ethic. He views the commandments of the Torah – or *mitzvot* (divine precepts) – as leading the Jew to subdue and control his natural feelings in order to rationalize the world through a religious perspective. According to Sombart, it was Judaism rather than Protestantism which provided the religious impulse for rational capitalism that paved the way for the evolution of the modern world.¹¹ Indeed, Weber viewed biblical Judaism (which preceded rabbinic Judaism) as having made the cultural breakthrough that eventually led to modernization.¹² According to him, this arose from two characteristics of the Jewish world view: (1) the perception that the world was created *ex nihilo* and would be transformed in the messianic era, and (2) the view that the relationship to God and His world is grounded in man's duty to observe religious precepts in his everyday life. By differentiating between man and the world and conceiving the world historically, the first perception allowed for the possibility that the world can be changed, and by focusing on the divine precepts to be performed in the mundane world, the religious perception of the world was divested of magic. The concept that religious salvation can be attained through everyday activity was specifically expressed in the Sinaitic revelation and was enlarged upon by the prophets, who presented God as a deity who demands moral activity in the world, in order to perfect the world in accordance with a universal legal order. The prophets thereby created the world-rationalizing mode of salvation.

Although Weber accepted the general thrust of Sombart's thesis – that rabbinic Judaism fosters a rational ethic – he rejected Sombart's contention that the Jews created modern capitalism. He denied that rabbinic Judaism implied the systematic self-control capable of supporting a religious ethic that could lead to the creation of capitalism, and “above all,” he argued, rabbinic Judaism lacked the motivation to create a new economic system.¹³ The Jewish people, according to Weber, were a “pariah people” who segregated themselves from the rest of the world during the rise of capitalism; they shifted the biblical focus of salvation from the human action that might transform the world, to the meticulous observance of the commandments, through which the world would be transformed by a divinely ordained miraculous act: the advent of the Messiah. According to Weber, then, rabbinic Judaism repressed the ethos of world transformation.

This book will demonstrate the reopening of Judaism's world-

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rationalizing path of salvation. For, by carrying the Weberian theoretical perspective a step further, it can be argued that when Emancipation dissolved the segregation of Jewish society from universal society, it enabled Judaism to re-establish its link with the world and thereby revive its biblical transformative ethos. And once this ethos was restored, Judaism proved eminently capable of assimilating the idea of progress. Following the analyses of both Sombart and Weber, modern Jewish Orthodoxy can be shown to nurture an autonomous, self-aware person who is motivated to transform the world through everyday activity, governed by self-discipline and a rational orientation. Indeed, in regard to Judaism's ability to foster a systematic ethic through self-control, Sombart's view seems to be borne out.

I further intend to demonstrate how Orthodox Jewish culture allows for individuals and groups to develop new religious symbols and reinterpret the religious culture according to the values of the present, without the need for institutionalized religious authority. Indeed, we shall see how the central position of *halakhah*, or Torah law, in the religious culture allows Judaism to undergo far-reaching rationalization. We shall also see, however, how the ritual aspect of religious law curbs the momentum of modernization.

Judaism's potential for modernization, as pre-eminently manifest in the RKF, will be analyzed at the three levels, or spheres, of rationalization that Talcott Parsons enumerates.¹⁴ These levels, that were central to the breakthrough of Orthodox Judaism into modern life as they were to the breakthrough of the Protestant ethic, are:

1. The symbolic-ideational level, at which rationalization involves creating a systematic, lucid, and coherent worldview.
2. The motivational-commitment level, which involves cultivating religious value-orientations that co-ordinate with the orientations of modern – particularly economic – activities and thereby link the ethos of world mastery with a life based on methodical conduct.
3. The normative level, which involves establishing a hierarchical pattern for both religious and secular norms that is directed towards systematizing all behavior into one unified ethical pattern in the service of God.

A second theme in this study relates to the religious ideologies created by the Orthodox modernizing movements. Both religion and ideology endow human life with meaning and identity; the boundar-

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ies between the two, however, tend to become blurred.¹⁵ Characteristics that differentiate religion and ideology, and their general relationship as they integrate into a unified meaningful system, will also be considered.

To sum up: an underlying theme of this study is the impulse of the Orthodox Jew to co-ordinate his religious consciousness and his rationalizing drive as a result of traditional Judaism's opening up to the modern world. Each of these components thrusts towards existential unity from a different direction. Religious consciousness, inspired by transcendent reality, seeks to encompass all realms of value-bearing existence within its orbit, in terms of charismatically-inspired Torah. The rationalizing drive, deriving from the immediate intellectual urge of the Orthodox Jew to order reality meaningfully, seeks to objectify the values of the renewed religious consciousness and build a modern life under their guidance; this involves elaborating Torah in accordance with the three levels of rationalization enumerated above.

The existential-phenomenological perspective which regards human consciousness as its field of research is the method of inquiry best suited to our inquiry.¹⁶ Since the data most relevant to us are the thoughts of people who expressed their religious responses to their experiential situations in writing, we use their own words to learn about the ways their consciousness traversed in their quest for existential order.

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PART ONE

Prologue

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CHAPTER I

Conceptual and historical background

The goal of the pioneering communities established by the Religious Kibbutz Federation – to give “rebirth” to the Torah on a community level – involved a confrontation between two modes of religious charisma: an innovative religious consciousness, and institutionalized religious elements, especially elements of *halakhah*. In the words of a participant in the RKF experience, this was a confrontation between

two main aspirations latent in the premise of a pioneering religious movement: a dynamic, which impels towards active creation through a revolt against the accepted and the sacred, and spiritual submission, which demands the preservation of the extant, of the sacred in religious tradition.¹

By integrating modern ideological elements and traditional religion operationally, in the process of building its pioneering communities, the RKF sought to outstrip the rationalization of religion attained by the modernizing Orthodox movements that preceded it. And, indeed, the RKF kibbutzim seem to have reached the farthest inner limit of the rationalization process.

In this chapter, I shall explore the nature of religious charisma in general and the spontaneous charisma that was used in the RKF; survey traditional Jewish society and the changes that followed Emancipation; and set the scene for discussing the modern religious-ideological Orthodox movements that culminated in the RKF.

THE TRANSCENDENT CENTER AND CHARISMA

According to Edward Shils, the “vital layer of reality” in the transcendent sphere of human experience derives its vitality from the “center of the universe.” He perceives this transcendent center as the “locus of the sacred,” the source of order in all existence, human as

well as cosmic, and the bearer of ultimate authority.² Man, in his effort to fulfill his natural aspiration for a meaningful life, turns to a transcendent order for inspiration and guidance; he draws upon the vitality of the transcendent center, in its manifestation as charisma, to order his existence.³ But the charisma that orders human existence may be either spontaneous and intensive, or institutionalized and regulated by routine.

Spontaneous or primeval charisma manifests itself in situations of extreme cultural change and social disintegration, when accepted symbols and norms are no longer sufficient to sustain human existence from either the cognitive-meaningful or the practical standpoint. It is at such times of tension, chaos, blurring of identity, and even anomy, that those who are disoriented by the upheaval are attracted by the message of charismatic personalities, who are animated with a sense of power and mission by the sacred vitality that emanates from transcendent reality to reorder existence.

On an individual level, the innovative ideology presented by the charismatic personality provides the disoriented with a new symbolic order, that reintegrates their worldview and builds a bridge between transcendent and earthly reality. As individuals experience and express transcendence unitedly by their common use of the new ideological symbols, the value-content of these symbols becomes part of their conscious “objective” reality.⁴

On the collective level, the charismatic personality strives to order experience by directing the building of a new social order in accordance with, and under the inspiration of, the vision of the transcendent order. By casting primeval charisma into new social norms and roles that allow the individuals to fulfill themselves through a new social dimension, the charisma is transferred to social institutions. The new social order then strengthens the “objective” validity of the symbolic order by establishing what Berger and Luckmann call a “plausibility structure”⁵ for it. In other words, the charismatic message recrystallizes the identity of the disoriented in accordance with their place in the new worldview, and their social role within the realization of the transcendent vision.

Whereas spontaneous activity characterizes the personality infused with primeval charisma, institutionalized charisma stabilizes the new social order by routinizing the activity of those who occupy the roles in which the charisma has been cast. When the new social norms become institutionalized, they compress activity that bears

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the stamp of the primeval charismatic message into defined, fixed patterns. Just as pure charisma may express spontaneous sacredness, so institutionalized charisma may express a sacredness that has crystallized in cultural and social elements or even in an independent social order. But these elements may also become sanctified as they become the contents of tradition, and thus directly connected with the sacred, at the center of the universe.⁶

Once charisma has been institutionalized, existence is ordered by a social center, consisting pre-eminently of cultural and political elites who are imbued with authority by public recognition of the legitimacy of their central roles.⁷ The cultural elite or center is then perceived as interpreting the sacred to the rest of society, enabling them to partake of it, usually through institutionalized patterns. The political elite or center leads and regulates the social order in a defined geographical territory under the general guidance of the ultimate values.

However, charisma has a dialectical nature in that its force can both build and destroy. In the words of Shmuel Eisenstadt:

This charismatic fervor is rooted in the attempt to come into contact with the very essence of being, to go to the very roots of existence, of cosmic, social and cultural order, to what is seen as sacred and fundamental. But this attempt may also contain a strong disposition to sacrilege: to the denial of the validity of the sacred, and what is accepted in any given society as sacred.⁸

Thus, when the validity of a society's accepted symbols and norms weakens, charismatic groups may serve as new cultural centers by creating a fresh, direct channel to the sacred, through which they claim authority to redefine sacredness. The enthusiasm of such groups melts down the institutions in which crystallized sacredness has resided and inspires values for building new institutions, and even a new social order, that are perceived as more valid and true than the routinized institutions or order. Those who are attracted to the charismatic message then become committed to the new cultural center, which presents a fresh path to salvation.

TORAH AS CHARISMA

The transcendent center of Jewish religious existence is identified with God, the giver of the Torah at Mount Sinai. It is through