THE THEOLOGY OF ROBERT TRAVERS HERFORD (1860-1950) AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO JEWISH THOUGHT

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Robert Travers Herford is remembered today chiefly for his important research into the Judaism of the Second Temple period and the Talmud, especially as presented in his major publications: *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (1903); *Pharisaism: its aim and method* (1912); *The Pharisees* (1924 a); *Pirke Aboth* (1925); *Judaism in the New Testament Period* (1928); and *Talmud and Apocrypha* (1933 b). Herford was one of a number of important non-Jewish scholars such as George Foot Moore in America, Wuensche and Strack in pre-Nazi Germany who, in the words of Dr. J. H. Hertz (the British Chief Rabbi) found in the introduction to the Soncino edition of the Talmud, had "fallen under the spell of Rabbinic studies for their own sake, and recognised their indispensableness for the elucidation of fundamental problems in the world of Religion" (Hertz 2005). Herford's informed and even-handed presentation of the Pharisaic and later Rabbinical traditions revealed to many members of the Jewish community, both in the United Kingdom and the USA, a Christian who, in Hertz's words, had "dissipated false opinion and prejudice by the light of truth and informed conviction" (*Jewish Chronicle*, November 17th 1950). Dr. Alexander Altman[1] felt that "no Christian in our time had made so deep an impression on his Jewish contemporaries as the late Dr. Herford did" (from the *Manchester Guardian* quoted in McLachlan 1950, p. 22) and in his obituary of Herford Leo Baeck stated his opinion that his books "will remain classics in their sphere" (*The Synagogue Review* Vol. XXV, No. 5, January 1951). Baeck also revealed that Herford was not only admired as a fine scholar but also as a human being:

> In the death of Dr. Robert Travers Herford, the world of learning has been bereft of a scholar who within his particular province had scarce a peer, and the world of humanity, of a man who in his characteristic traits represented something singularly precious. In the person of Herford, the scholar and the human being were perfectly integrated. Never did his reason and judgement lack a noble human purpose, and never was his magnanimity unsupported by sober reflection and critical examination. To do justice was his aim, and to him true justice involved both mental effort and heartfelt generosity (*The Synagogue Review* (Vol. XXV, No. 5, January 1951).

But Herford was not only known as a scholar but also as an active and influential British Unitarian minister who wrote a number of short books, lectures and pamphlets

[1] The Communal Rabbi in Manchester and founder of the Institute of Jewish Studies at University College London.

in which he presented his own understanding of Unitarian Christianity. The most important of these were: *Unitarian Affirmations* (1901, 2nd ed. 1909); *Realities and Reconstruction* (1920); *The Religion of a Unitarian* (1924 b); *The Idea of the Kingdom of God* (1929); and *Some Ancient Safeguards of Civilisation* (1933 a). These books were never offered by him as being systematic expressions of his theological thought and represent, and are, instead, simply occasional writings. This coupled with the fact that some key expressions of his theology are to be found "hidden" within his academic books has meant that his overall theological position has never before been explored. Given that Herford's historical work has been so influential in the field of Jewish-Christian scholarship it is important that some preliminary attempt is made to explore his own theology in order to ascertain two things.[2]

Firstly, the relationship it had with Jewish thought both of his time (especially Liberal/Reform Judaism) and with that of the Pharisees and the Rabbinic tradition. In order to do this particular use has been made of four important works by leading Liberal Jewish/Reform thinkers and writers who were contemporaries and, in the case of Montefiore and Baeck,[3] personal friends of Herford: *Judaism as Creed and Life* (Morris Joseph, 1903); *The Essence of Judaism* (Leo Baeck, 1905); *Outlines of Liberal Judaism* (Claude G. Montefiore, 1912); and *Jewish Theology* (Kaufman Kohler, 1918).

Secondly, this paper seeks to discover whether Herford's theology has any continuing relevance for our own times.

Part one of this paper places Herford's theology in the wider context of European Liberal Protestant thought and suggests that all his writings (both the historical and the theological) contain a hitherto unrecognized overarching aim which can help us better understand the whole of his work. Part two then explores Herford's thought in four key areas which continue to be problematic in Jewish-Christian relations: (1) the nature of God; (2) the person and role of Jesus Christ; (3) the

[2] Part of the reason such a study has not been made before is simply that, because Herford did not present his theology in any systematic fashion, there is no single, easily accessible source, in which an outline of his overall position can be found. The present study, in consulting all his published historical and theological works, has, therefore, tried to present some of his leading theological ideas in a more systematic way.

[3] For a brief account of Baeck and Herford's meetings and conversations see McLachlan 1950, especially pp. 16-17.

authority and interpretation of the Bible; (4) tradition and the Kingdom of God. This section also seeks to uncover some of the relationships his thinking on these matters had with Jewish theology. Part three of this paper begins with a critical assessment of the relationship Herford's theology had with Judaism and the paper concludes by addressing what might be the chief implications it had and still has for contemporary Jewish-Christian relations. A few words of personal reflection are contained in a short Afterword.

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PART ONE
THE BASIC CONTEXT OF HERFORD'S THEOLOGY

Herford's theology belongs, for the most part, to the rather diffuse late nineteenth/early twentieth-century movement known as Liberal Protestantism; the chief figures of which were, in Germany, Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) and Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) and, in France, Auguste Sabatier (1839-1901) and Jean Réville (1854-1907). All of these thinkers were exceptionally influential upon Unitarian Christian theologians of the time. Indeed one of the most important of these, James Martineau (1805-1900), who taught Herford at Manchester College,[4] has been described by Bernard Reardon as "in truth, the one great English Liberal Protestant of his age" (Reardon, 1968, p. 58).

Although the movement is notoriously difficult to define, a number of important generalizations can be made about it into which, as we shall see, Herford's own theology clearly fits. Firstly, it laid great weight on the significance of historical time and the idea of progress. Secondly, there was a desire to bring Christian theology into accord with the discoveries being made by biblical criticism and the natural sciences. Thirdly, it accepted many of the insights into the human condition offered by psychology and sociology. Fourthly, it began to lay even greater weight upon the value of an individual's experience of religion than had even the earlier forms of liberal theology.[5] Fifthly, it centred upon the teaching and personality of Jesus over and above later doctrines concerning his ontological status. Ultimately, Liberal Protestants thought their particular viewpoint helped them both to continue the process of Christian reform and solve the complex moral and social issues raised by modern culture without, at the same time, losing what they believed was the abiding, universal *essence* of Christianity.

Herford's own constructive theological work is basically another attempt to articulate the essence of Christianity. In his *Religion of a Unitarian* he "lay[ed] stress of the word essential," believing that:

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[4] Herford said of Martineau that he was "a chief influence in my life" and that "he impressed me as the greatest man I ever met, great in intellect, and greater in spiritual power" (McLachlan 1950, p. 6).

[5] A tendency begun by Friederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) notably in his *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (Schleiermacher 1996) & *The Christian Faith* (Schleiermacher 1989).

> There are many things of secondary importance in religion which do not appear in the religion of Jesus, and some (also secondary) in his religion which do not find a place in any usual form of Christianity. But of that which is essential in man's personal relation to God and his consciousness of that relation and the consequent direction of his thought and will, the religion of Jesus is full and complete, lacking nothing (Herford 1924 b, pp. 10-11).

"The religion of Jesus, his own religion" was for Herford simply "that which is implied in the Lord's Prayer, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Parables" (Herford 1924 b, p. 8). Every thing hinges in this statement upon the verb "implied," for Herford differed from other Liberal Protestant attempts to express the essence of Christianity in one absolutely vital sense – he came to this task as someone with who had a profound knowledge of Judaism understood both as an historical and as a living faith and the recognition that when Jesus offered his teaching it was done so as a Jew. He understood clearly that there could be no chance of uncovering the essence of Christianity without first understanding Jesus' relationship with his own Judaism. The reason the profoundly Jewish implications of Jesus' teaching had not, hitherto, been properly understood was simple:

> [T]he relations between Judaism and Christianity, in the period covered by the New Testament, have always been presented by the Christian side, if only because the knowledge necessary to present them from the Jewish side has seldom, if ever been available; seldom indeed has it been recognized that there was or even could be a Jewish side at all, let alone one which could be and was seriously maintained by men who were deeply convinced of the truth and right of what they defended (Herford 1928, p. 186).

Herford was one of the very few Christian scholars and theologians who knew the Jewish side. He also knew only too well what the results of this lack of knowledge could lead to as there had been many influential publications by Liberal Protestants who, even though they valued the Old Testament in certain ways, had tended to see it (and by implication Judaism), at best, as entirely secondary to the personality and teaching of Jesus or, at worst, even as a potential threat to Christianity. The most famous and influential of those who took the latter view was Harnack who, in his lectures of 1900 published as *Das Wesen des Christentums* (published in English in 1901 as *What is Christianity?*), said that:

> . . . there was always a danger of an inferior and obsolete principle forcing its way into Christianity through the Old Testament. This indeed is what actually occurred. [. . .] Although whatever was drawn from the Old Testament by way of authoritative precept may have been inoffensive in substance, it was a menace to Christian freedom of both kinds. It threatened the freedom which comes from within, and also the freedom to form

> church communities and to arrange for public worship and discipline (Harnack, 1923, p. 161).

Harnack believed that the original form of Christianity was a liberal faith which was, in truth unrelated to the Jewish religious and cultural tradition. Although he was not beyond acknowledging that the Pharisees had, like Jesus, "proclaimed that everything was contained in the injunction to love God and neighbour" and that, in so doing, they "spoke excellently" he then went on to ask (rhetorically of course), "But what was the result of their language?"; Harnack answered that "their own pupils, condemned the man who took them seriously. All they did was weak and, because weak, harmful" (Harnack 1923, p. 42). In his overwhelming desire to show the originality of the personality of Jesus, and without any real knowledge of the Pharisees and their teaching, Harnack's work wholly denigrated them and their tradition. At its worst such a negative conclusion, although coming from an otherwise liberal and tolerant tradition, could all too easily be misused by those who wanted to make anti-Semitic arguments. Not surprisingly the Jewish response to Harnack's work was quick and Leo Baeck published in the following year his magnum opus *The Essence of Judaism*[6] consciously echoing the original title of Harnack's lectures.

Although Herford agreed with other Harnack and other Liberal Protestants that a definitive break had occurred between Judaism and Christianity he believed, as we shall see in later sections of this paper, that he could articulate this without claiming that the Old Testament, nor Judaism as a living faith, was superseded by, or remained in any way a threat to, Christianity. Not only that but he also came to believe that *both* traditions were required fully to interpret the fundamentals of religion found in the Old Testament. What struck Herford very powerfully in his scholarly studies was that *both* the Pharisees and Jesus had failed to make any real attempt to understand each other and to engage in constructive dialogue and, in consequence, a great opportunity for humankind had been lost:

[6] Baeck personally sent a copy to Herford. In his memoir of Herford, H. McLachlan relates the following story concerning the English translation of the work. "Later, when the book was about to be published in English, he and C. G. Montefiore, to whom the translation of 1936 was dedicated, agreed, on a point of difference in interpretation, to accept the view of the English Unitarian minister. Thus Herford was hailed as daysman in a friendly literary dispute between the leading representatives of orthodox and liberal Judaism in Europe (McLachlan 1950, p. 16)

> These two great spiritual powers [Pharisaism and the religion espoused by Jesus], the greatest that there were then in the world, might have learned something from each other, might even have strengthened each other in the service of God to which each was consecrated. Instead, a fierce controversy, ended for the moment by the death of one opponent, and leaving behind it a legacy of mutual hostility to the adherents of both (Herford 1924 a, p. 211).[7]

Herford never explicitly offered up his work as a Liberal Protestant critique of Harnack's views but such expressions as this coupled with his lifelong attempt to restart precisely this same dialogue in his own time suggest that it is helpful to see both his historical and the theological works in this overall context.

We shall see that, whilst as a scholar, he achieved remarkable and lasting success in his aim to show the intimate relationship between Jesus and Judaism, after his death his more obviously theological work very quickly disappeared from view along with the collapse of Liberal Protestantism in general, and Unitarian Christianity specifically, starting after the First World War and continuing to gather pace during the century.

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[7] Herford's last, grammatically odd, sentence is, despite appearances, accurately quoted.

PART TWO
THE NATURE OF GOD[8]

All Jewish voices are agreed that the belief in the absolute Unity of God is "the essence and foundation of Judaism" (Kohler 1968, p 82) and C. G. Montefiore, speaking directly to the Unitarian movement in 1918 during his Essex Hall Lecture,[9] *The Place of Judaism among the Religions of the World*, said:

> No phase of Judaism could claim the title which did not press and cling to the doctrine of the divine unity and the divine fatherhood . . . that the divine unity is flawless and complete; that there is both kinship and eternal distinction between man and God – these, and similar, doctrines must surely always form part of any religion which calls itself by the Jewish name" (quote in Edgar 1952, p. 20).

Christian conceptions of the nature of God are usually radically different, holding to a complex variety of Trinitarian theologies with three "persons" of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit variously understood as related in One Godhead. However, recent historical studies[10] have revealed that there was, from the outset, a variety of Christian conceptions of God some of which did not see Jesus and the Holy Spirit as belonging to the Godhead but instead as either created or begotten by the One God. The most notable and durable of these alternate tendencies came to be known as "Arianism." Arius (c. 250-336CE) himself wrote to his Bishop, Alexander, that "We acknowledge one God, alone unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone unbegun, alone true, alone having immortality, alone wise, alone sovereign" (quoted in Wiles 1996, p. 10). Within the Christian tradition this tendency has resurfaced in various forms throughout the centuries and, since the seventeenth century, one of these became known as Unitarian. It was to this tradition that Herford belonged and it predisposed him to view Jewish conceptions of God more highly than those held within Trinitarian Christianity.

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[8] See Drummond 1908 pp. 9-81 & 110-187. In the conclusion of this paper attention is drawn to the fact that Herford's basic theological ideas do not differ in any substantive way from the major British Unitarian Christian thinkers of his own day. Particular attention is drawn to James Drummond's work *Via, Veritas, Vita – Lectures on Christianity in its Most Simple and Intelligible Form* (Drummond 1895) and *Studies in Christian Doctrine* (Drummond 1908). A footnote will appear at the start of each of the four areas of thought this paper explores giving a reference to where Drummond explores the same questions.

[9] The Essex Hall Lecture was founded by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in 1892 with the object of providing a yearly opportunity for lecturers to speak freely on religious themes of general interest. Many well known people of the time both inside and outside the Unitarian movement gave these lectures.

[10] See especially Wiles 1996 and Ehrman 2003.

Hereford repeatedly and explicitly affirms his belief in One God who was "the very ground and foundation of all their [i.e. Unitarians] religion" (Herford 1909, p. 1). For him this foundational belief was perfectly summed up and confessed in the opening verse to the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6^{4}) offered by Jesus as the first of his two great commandments (Mark 12^{29-31} and parr.):

> Unitarians usually take their stand upon this undisputed teaching of Jesus, in regard to God; and refuse to add anything to it – refuse, i.e., to change the simplicity of the religion which Jesus taught, and which was his own religion, for that more elaborate doctrinal teaching of Paul and John, which finally led up to the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and also the Atonement. (Herford 1909 p. 21)

Whilst some Unitarian conceptions of God have tended towards the philosophically abstract (and one can point to certain forms of Rational Deism to illustrate this tendency) Herford, following the Jewish example of Jesus, did not view God as merely the "Absolute", the "Infinite" or some "mere Force or Power, or even mere Goodness" (Herford 1909, p. 2) but instead as, "Father," as a *personal* God "who thinks and knows, who is spirit, and who is good and loving" (Herford 1909, p. 2). Understanding God in this way also allowed Herford to describe God as having certain divine attributes and the manner in which he articulated this often points to Rabbinical sources:

> The fundamental belief in regard to God, alike for Christianity and Rabbinical Judaism, is belief in One who is supremely good, holy, righteous, just, wise, and loving; dwelling in high heaven and filling all space, yet near to everyone of his children, "near in every kind of nearness," as a Rabbi said. Neither the Jew nor the Christian ever believed in a cold abstraction of a God, a mere blank Almighty; that may be philosophy but it is not religion, and the chief concern of the Jew and the Christian was for religion as felt in the soul (Herford 1923, pp. 216-217).

A further example of how his profound knowledge and respect for the Talmud clearly influenced the way he presented his own understanding of the personal nature of God using what might seem to be anthropological, terms is seen in his *A Unitarian Minister's View of the Talmudic Doctrine of God*, which he wrote for *The Jewish Quarterly Review*:

> The anthropomorphisms [found in the Talmud] seem to me to be rather a species of cypher or symbolic language, liable indeed to be misused and misunderstood, but employed by those who were masters of it solely to denote great truths of their religion. [. . .] Assuming [. . .] the religion which lay at the foundation of the Talmud was strong and real, we maintain that the anthropomorphisms [. . .] are to be understood and interpreted, not literally, but in the light of the of the more spiritual conception of God, with which they

> are apparently at variance. Such, we believe, to have been the interpretation of those who framed these peculiar and startling statements of doctrine. [. . .] It is our conviction that the heroes of Israel, in Talmudic times, did well for their countrymen, so also they cherished a high and inspiring belief of God (*The Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol. II, No. 4, July 1890).

In consequence, it is not surprising to discover that Herford's way of describing God finds strong echoes amongst some of his Jewish contemporaries, as these words of Morris Joseph reveal:

> He [God] is not only our King, but our Father. Our Father who orders our lives lovingly. God is not the mere Force or Intelligence which some thinkers see in the universe, and which suffices to explain to them its existence and wonders. Nor is He a far-off, soulless Being, shut up in a remote Heaven, without thought or feeling for mankind. The God of Religion is a personal God, who is in close contact with the world he has made, and is filled with loving solicitude for its indwellers (Joseph 1958, p. 7).

Concerning God's "attributes" it is important to remember that Jewish thought has generally followed Maimonides in believing that they cannot really be ascribed *to* God. Where they are used they are simply thought of as "concessions to the needs of the human mind" (Joseph 1958, p. 74) rather than as being, in any way, philosophically accurate ascriptions. However, as Baeck notes, although the Jewish belief in a *personal* God necessarily manifested itself in words, they "do not so much describe the attributes of God" but rather "forms of human experience, the forms in which the living God reveals himself" (Baeck 1936, p. 104). This insight of Baeck's is one wholly shared by Herford who also believed that God was *only* known through forms of *human* experience. In consequence we find that his thinking here in no way runs counter to the basic Jewish position:

> If God reveals himself to all human souls, i.e. makes himself known, as the Father in Heaven whose love to his children is infinite, that revelation *can only come through and in a human soul* (Herford 1909, p. 58 – my italics).

Despite stressing very strongly humankind's personal, filial relationship with the One "near" God, Herford was also always concerned to make it absolutely clear that God had Himself "no visible outward form, so that we could see him[11] or touch him or hear him or otherwise perceive him by means of our senses (Herford 1909, p. 2)." His thinking on this matter is repeated in the Jewish context where, quite naturally, it is

[11] Perhaps surprisingly, given his commitment to the absolute primacy of God and knowledge of Jewish practice, the personal pronouns, "he" or "his," when used to refer to God, are not capitalized in this volume.

often offered in terms designed specifically to counter Trinitarian Christian theologies of incarnation:

> [Since] God is perfect, superior to all changes and chances, He must be Spirit only, without physical form or qualities. He cannot have a body – be a material being; for matter is the source, the very type, of imperfection – of change and decay and death. Religions . . . like Christianity, which declares that God once walked the earth in the guise of man, lived a man's life, and died a death of suffering, really affirm that God is imperfect. To think that the Almighty ever has or ever will, put on the garb of flesh, or that He is subject to any of the defects, physical or moral, inseparable from the flesh, is to degrade our conception of Him, in effect to deny Him (Joseph 1958, p. 61).

Trinitarian Christian theologians would, of course, have to reject such a viewpoint but we find that Herford's Unitarian Christian faith ensured that he agreed with this argument in full. Indeed he states very strongly that he could himself "not believe in a God who had once become visible" (Herford 1909, p. 22). Consequently he felt that *any* theology which proposed God incarnate was "far more a difficulty than a help" (Herford 1909, p. 22).

Although the foregoing exploration of Hereford's basic thinking on the nature of God reveals some striking relationships with Jewish thought it would be wrong to see them as simply resulting from a direct influence of Jewish thought upon his own. It is vitally important to remember that the basic Unitarian Christian position vis-à-vis God (which Herford inherited and left essentially unaltered) developed firstly *within* the Christian tradition itself. The possibility of reading the Bible in vernacular languages and outside the control of formal, orthodox ecclesiastical contexts from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, allied with the subsequent birth of historical-critical studies some two hundred years later, revealed to many thinkers that Jesus had not taught much of what the Church had later come to teach. In consequence a movement began which sought to remove what often came to be described by them as "the corruptions of Christianity,"[12] the chief of which was believed to be the doctrine of the Trinity with all its incarnational implications.[13] It must also be stressed that the Unitarian tradition taught the Unity of God primarily because they believed that Jesus had taught it and not, in the first instance, because Judaism taught the same thing. However, over time, the early

[12] See Priestley 1871

[13] See especially Wiles 1996, Wilbur 1947 and McLachlan 1951

Unitarian engagement in historical-critical studies[14] began to reveal to them that Jesus was a Jew and that he taught, of necessity, a form of Judaism. This inevitably began to draw some Unitarian and other liberal Christian scholars into closer relationships with Judaism both as an historical, as well as a living, religion. During the early to mid twentieth century, the most significant of these scholars was Robert Travers Herford.

In consequence, it is important to read the parallels we have explored above as examples of a slow *re-convergence* of thought on the Nature of God rather than as being the result of a direct influence of Judaism upon Unitarian thought in general and Herford in particular.

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[14] Herford importantly points out that from as early as 1847 Unitarians at Manchester New College were studying the work of scholars such as Eichorn and De Wette in their classes on the Hebrew language and its literature (Carpenter 1925, p, 143).

THE PERSON AND ROLE OF JESUS[15]

At the outset of this section it is important to reiterate that Herford believed Jesus was fully human and should, in *no way*, be thought of as God.[16] This understanding of Jesus was built primarily upon what he thought were Jesus' authentic words[17]: "Jesus, as we know him, on his own witness of himself never even remotely suggested that he was more, or other, than a human soul depending on God, a child looking up to his Father, and living his whole life in perfect obedience, trust and love" (Herford 1909, p. 40-41). Herford thought that Jesus' recorded statements (in the Synoptic Gospels) clearly pointed to "a relation between two – not the blending of two into one" (Herford 1909, p. 40 and 1924, p. 18). Naturally all Jewish writings about Jesus make this same point very strongly, as Klausner does here:

> So far was Jesus from teaching the dogma which later arose – that he was the Son of God and one of the three Persons in the Godhead – that when someone hailed him as "Good master," Jesus replied, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good save one: God"[18] (Klausner 1922, p. 364).[19]

Herford held to this basic Unitarian belief firmly which, when it was combined with his research into Jewish faith and practice of the first century, allowed him to see Jesus as a Jew far more easily and clearly than many other Christian or Jewish scholars of

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[15] See Drummond 1908 pp. 252-366.

[16] The "highest" Christologies held by Unitarians during Herford's lifetime saw Jesus as human and believed that only his *office* was unique and divine. The Unitarians in Romania, Hungary and Poland are the clearest examples of those who held this theological opinion. See particularly the *Racovian Catechism* of 1604 for the classic expression of this Christology (Rees 1818).

[17] Herford thought the authentic words of Jesus could be identified relatively easily. He thought that the synoptic gospel writers were themselves uninspired and that their writings *only* show brilliance and sublimity in their record of the sayings of Jesus. For example, about the Parable of the Prodigal Son Herford could write; "It is quite beyond the power of the average man to invent such a Parable . . . [the Gospel writer] merely wrote down the Parable; but we receive it on its own witness not on his" (Herford 1909, p. 35). However, when Paul and John (whom Herford thought *were* distinctive and inspired writers) wrote about Jesus we could clearly see that they were speaking with their own voices and not reporting those of Jesus. On the basis of this "method" Herford thought authentic "nearly all of the sayings in the earlier [i.e. the Synoptics] Gospels" (Herford 1909 p. 38) from which he only explicitly excludes the Parables of the Unjust Judge and the Unjust Steward. Regarding the authenticity of the deeds of Jesus Herford thought we were wholly dependent upon those who reported them – Jesus' deeds were not their own witnesses in the same way as were his words. It should be noted that, despite holding this view, Herford did not dismiss that Jesus may have done some of the things so reported but they were to him of far less importance than the sayings. His approach to this matter bears a close resemblance to that adopted by G. E. Lessing in his 1777 essay *On the proof of the spirit and of power* (Lessing 2005, pp. 83-88).

[18] Mark 10^{8}; Luke 18^{19}; Matthew 19^{17}

[19] For further examples see Weiss-Rosmarin 1977.

the time. This shaped decisively his own theological understanding of Jesus' person and role as well as his understanding of the ultimate relationship that existed between Christianity and Judaism.

The results of his scholarship revealed to him firstly that there was "nothing to suggest that Jesus or his countrymen regarded what he was doing as anything new, that is, anything contrary to ordinary Jewish ideas" and that "parallels can be found in the Rabbinical literature for perhaps as much as 90 per cent of the recorded sayings of Jesus" (Herford 1929, p. 187).[20] This enabled Herford confidently to go on to state that Jesus' basic *teachings* were *not* original to him even if, in their *formulation* and *presentation*, they showed great originality and brilliance. For example, concerning the basic teaching contained in Jesus' two great commandments, Herford wrote:

> [Jesus spoke] as a Jew to Jews. If those great words have been regarded ever since as the watchwords of Christianity, at all events the religion of Jesus, that was not because they were original to him, for they were not, but they expressed for him the essence of pure religion as they had done for ages past when uttered by Jewish lips and felt in Jewish hearts (Carpenter 1925, p. 163).[21]

Secondly, in so understanding Jesus' teachings, Herford was led to the point where he could also state quite openly that he thought that although Christianity, in any of its forms, was not the same as Judaism, "*it had nothing to alter in the foundation*" (Carpenter 1925, p. 163 – my italics). Indeed Herford went so far as to state that the Pharisees "had no quarrel with [Jesus'] teaching, which to a large extent was the same as their own Haggadah" (Herford 1928, p. 201). This brought Herford exceptionally close to the positions held by Montefiore and Klausner. For example Klausner said, that for Jews, Jesus was "a great teacher of morality and an artist in parable" and that:

> [I]n his ethical code there is a sublimity, distinctiveness and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code; neither is there any parallel to the remarkable art of his parables. The shrewdness and sharpness of his proverbs and his forceful epigrams serve, in an exceptional degree, to make his ideas popular possession. If ever the day should come and this ethical code be stripped of its wrappings of miracles and mysticism, the Book of the Ethics of Jesus will be one of the choicest treasures of Israel for all time (Klausner 1922, p. 414).

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[20] Herford was of the opinion that, although the Talmud was compiled some considerable time after Jesus' own lifetime, the traditions and teachings persevered therein are of much earlier origin and can, therefore, be brought into this discussion.

[21] Herford thought that "if [Jesus] had not had this common ground to begin with, he would never have been in a position where a breach would have been possible (Herford 1924 a, p. 198)."

Although the foregoing discussion reveals that Herford experienced a very real and deep rapprochement with Judaism on the matter of Jesus' teachings, when he turned to consider Jesus' person and role in the first century Jewish context he began to articulate, not a rapprochement, but instead a clearer understanding of a fundamental difference that existed between Christianity and Judaism.

It was C. G. Montefiore who noted that "[t]he position of Jesus, the place he fills, even in Unitarian Christianity, is impossible for the Jew" (Kessler 2002, p. 57). The reason for this, Montefiore continues, was that for the Jew the real interest in Jesus was to be found in his *teaching* "rather than in his personality or . . . life" and that Jews "persist in separating the one from the other, whereas to Christians they form a unity, a whole" (Kessler 2002, p. 56).[22] Even though Herford believed Jesus to be a man it is important to realize that he understood him as a "perfect man" and "revealer of God" to humankind (Herford 1909, p. 58)[23] a belief which led him to state that he "yield[ed] to no one in my reverence for Jesus; he is, to me, simply the greatest man who ever lived, in regard to his *spiritual nature*" (Herford 1912, p. 114). This phrase, *spiritual nature*, refers to Herford's belief that Jesus had a special "deep and overwhelming consciousness of God" which was in him, "raised to such an intensity unknown in any other person" (Herford 1924 a, p. 202). Jesus own religion was, Herford thought, "the outcome of his own immediate consciousness of God, apart from all forms of thought, apart from all traditional authority" (Herford 1924 a, p. 214) and that [Jesus] taught, not a "doctrine in words" capable of being passed from one person to another, but offered himself as a living and active example which allowed his followers to be "awakened to the knowledge of it [God], as they beheld him (Herford 1909, p. 42)."[24] As we shall see in

[22] Many liberal Jews were, of course, prepared to acknowledge the power of the personality of Jesus. Rabbi Hirsch (1815-1889), the leading figure of the Reformed movement in the USA, said: "The unusual attainment of Jesus lay in something that was far more than an idea, it lay in his personality. He understood, realized and fulfilled the idea of Judaism in its deepest truth – that was the greatness of Jesus" (quoted in Cohn-Sherbok 1997 a p. 65). However, Hirsch and the Jewish tradition as a whole believed that Jesus' personality did not overturn the central authority of the Torah (both Written and Oral) but rather confirmed it whereas, as we shall see, Herford stresses Christianity came to centre religious authority in Jesus over and above the Torah.

[23] See discussions on the basic Unitarian positions concerning the persona and role of Jesus in Henry Gow's essay *The Value and Significance of Jesus* (Carpenter 1925) and Alfred Hall's *Jesus & Christianity in the Twentieth Century* (Hall, 1915)

[24] As the Synoptic Gospels record, Jesus was perceived as teaching "as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7^{29}; Mark 1^{22}; Luke 4^{32}; see also John 7^{46}).

the section of this paper concerning the Kingdom of God that Herford thought Jesus' primary objective in awakening individuals to a personal knowledge of God was to bring about nothing less than the Kingdom of God itself and this Jesus "made the one supreme purpose of his ministry" (Herford 1929, p. 5).

Herford believed that the depth and power of Jesus' consciousness meant that he was something utterly unexpected and that "there had been nothing in the past history of Judaism to prepare men for the appearance of one such as he" (Herford 1924 a, p. 201). Indeed, it was so unexpected that he was not even fully understood by those who became his disciples and, later, followers. In consequence Herford rules out the usefulness of any of the titles attached by Christians to Jesus, whether "Teacher or Messiah or Prophet, let alone such theological conceptions as Saviour, Redeemer and God-man" because he thought these were simply attempts to try and describe Jesus exceptional nature in the "familiar language" (Herford 1924 a, p. 202) of the times.

Faced with such a person, and believing that "whatever was felt to be true in religion was held in closest association with the Torah, and was indeed Torah, the divine Teaching" (Teicher 1948, p. 8),[25] the Pharisees simply had no possibility of accepting Jesus himself or his *manner* of teaching, even though his basic teachings were the same as their own. In a passage, worth quoting at length, and delivered in his characteristically irenical manner, Herford sums the dilemma up as follows:

> The question of which of the two parties was right [. . .] is not worth asking, because each was right from his own point of view and on his own principles. But the principles on the two sides were fundamentally irreconcilable; and, while both parties took their stand on the doing of the will of God as the supreme duty, the one, viz. the Pharisees, maintained the Halachah as the defined way of doing the divine will, based on the Torah, which was God's own revelation of his will, the other, viz. Jesus, maintained the individual conscience as the only guide to the right doing of the divine will. The opposition was irreconcilable because there was conscience on both sides, not on one only. The Halachah was worked out as an attempt to read the Torah by the light of the moral discernment of the teacher who defined it, from age to age. It never was, at any time, a mere cast-iron legislation. It always had its base in ethical discernment; and the difference between the Halachah and what might be called the free conscience is that the one is worked out in terms of an Idea, viz. Torah, and the other in terms of a Person, whether that Person were Jesus or any one of his followers. Therein, indeed, lies the deepest root of the fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity; a difference which nothing can ever obliterate (Herford 1928, p. 206-207).

[25] Herford means by Torah both Written and Oral.

Herford concludes from this that, ultimately, Christianity was not, "even in the person of its founder, a reversion to prophetic Judaism. It was a movement in a wholly new direction, having no affinity with Judaism except at its point of origin" (Carpenter 1925, p. 168). Yet this statement requires an important caveat because Herford believed that this divisive breach, real though it was and remained, occurred *only at the level of interpretation* – the *fundamentals* of religion which were being interpreted by Jesus and the Pharisees in their different ways, Herford believed remained absolutely unaltered. These fundamentals, Herford thought, were: (1) that God is; (2) that man stands in some relation to God; (3) that intercourse of some kind is possible with God; and (4) that there is a desire to be in harmony with God (Jacks 1923, pp. 314-315).

The nature of this breach also allowed Herford to state something which had, and still has, huge import in the field of Jewish-Christian relations – that the "Christian religion, though it began in a Jewish atmosphere and on Jewish soil, was in *no sense the successor or superseder* of Judaism. [. . .] Christianity is in *no true sense the development or completion or fulfilment or lineal successor* of Judaism" (Carpenter 1925, p. 168 – my italics). [26]

To conclude this section there is perhaps no better summation of Herford's basic theology concerning Jesus and the relationship it had with Jewish thought than the following words written by his friend and colleague, Montefiore, in his *The Synoptic Gospels*. Montefiore does not explicitly offer them as Herford's own view of Jesus but given their friendship and intimate knowledge of each other's work, along with what we have seen in the discussion above, it seems reasonable to suggest that Montefiore particularly had Herford in mind when he wrote them:

> The Christian, even the Unitarian Christian, has received the highest conceptions of God and righteousness through Jesus. To the Christian, alike in his teaching and in his personality and life, Jesus reveals God. To the Christian, even the Unitarian Christian, the N. T. is the book which tells him the most truly and fully about the goodness and God, and within the N. T. it is the Gospels which tell him best of all. He fits Jesus with his purest thoughts of God; Jesus brings God near to him. Whereas to the Jews, Jesus – or any man – would be in their way in their relations with, and in their approaches to, God, to the Christian, even to the Unitarian Christian, Jesus smoothes the way to God and shortens it. He is the way. Without Jesus – if that fatality could for a moment be

[26] Herford points out strongly that Judaism as an independent living tradition would not have survived and continued to flourish if its basic way of interpreting the fundamentals of religion were not effective (Herford 1924 a, chps 8-9).

conceived – God, even to the Unitarian Christian would be more distant and more dim; without Jesus, God to the Jew, would be no less near and no less bright (Kessler 2002, pp. 57-58).

❦

THE AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE[27]

As the previous section revealed, the centre of gravity in Herford's theology was the personality and teaching of Jesus who, "as they beheld him", helped individuals to be awakened to a personal knowledge of God. This necessarily had important consequences concerning the authority of the Bible and how it should be interpreted. In the following discussion following the word "Bible" is used, as Herford used it, to mean the Old and New Testament together. In order to explore his view of the authority and interpretation of the Bible most fruitfully it is important firstly to outline the basic ways by which Herford thought humankind came to its knowledge of God.

Hereford believed there were four interdependent ways this knowledge of God was arrived at: through (1) the *intellect*; (2) the *conscience*; (3) the *affections* (especially of love and reverence) and lastly; (4) through *prophets and revealers* who had, in turn, derived their own knowledge of God through their own intellects, consciences, affections and encounters with former prophets and revealers (Herford 1909, p. 10).

(1) The *intellect* allowed humankind to observe the physical world and deduce certain things about God, the chief of which was that He was the eternally creative Creator.[28] The existence of the human intellect allowed for the development of a Natural Theology.

(2) The *conscience* revealed to humankind the reality of the moral realm and existence of the "ought" in human life. This, in turn, Herford thought revealed "a command from somewhere" and from "someone" (Herford 1909, p. 7) – a basic insight which enabled humanity to become "aware of a supreme moral authority resting in a Person [i.e. God] who has a right to claim obedience" (Herford 1909, p. 10).

(3) The *affections*, the highest being for Herford *reverence* and *love*, were the chief ways by which the individual human soul, without the need for any mediator or mediation (Herford 1909, p. 18), was brought into direct and immediate communion with God. Herford thought that "belief in God rests ultimately upon such personal

[27] See Drummond 1908 pp. 82-97

[28] In this mater Herford followed his tutor of Philosophy at Manchester College, Charles Upton, who stated that he believed God to be a *religious* eternal present cause and not as a *scientific* first cause sought by the scientist (Herford 1909, pp. 5-6).

knowledge of him" (Herford 1909, p. 10). The affections allowed for the development of a theology of revelation.

(4) The final way knowledge of God was arrived at was through human *prophets and revealers* – knowledge gained by example. The imperfect nature of human beings meant that "we learn of God not merely through our own experience of him, which may be very slight and feeble, but through the experience of others who have known more than we" (Herford 1909, p. 11). Jesus was for Herford, of course, the one exception to this, but *only* at the level of his *spiritual nature*.

Herford thought the primary and most valuable record of these prophets and revealers was the Bible. However, because he believed the Bible was simply a human *record* of the experiences of these prophets and revealers, he thought it could never supersede the authority of our own intellects, consciences and affections; the Biblical record simply revealed that "the experience of others repeats our own, and thereby helps to confirm it, as ours in like manner helps to confirm theirs" (Herford 1909, pp. 12-13). This meant that the teachings of any prophet and revealer, whether encountered directly or via the Bible (and that included for us, Jesus), was only authoritative in so far as they helped individuals better to experience God directly. Consequently, Herford thought the basic purpose of the Bible was "not to communicate knowledge of facts, but to make man feel with more than usual intensity the real presence of God with him" (Herford 1909, p. 91) and he believed that it "was *through* the prophets' words, not *in* their words" that we "feel the quickening touch of the spirit of God" (Herford 1909, p. 93 – his italics).

Because, as we have already seen, Herford thought humankind could only encounter God through human forms and categories of thought an important part of his own theological agenda was his desire to ensure that the Bible was restored "to its true place as a human book" (Herford 1909, p. 97) because humanity "cannot cut the Bible off from its living roots in human life and put it by itself as a thing divine, without doing fatal injury to it" (Herford 1909, p. 95). Consequently, in the writing of the Bible, Herford saw only the "natural working of ordinary human minds" and so saw no "necessity of calling in any theory of Divine control over, or interference with, the

process of collecting together the contents of the Bible" (Herford 1909, p. 81-82). Given the limitations of being a fully human book Hereford stressed that the Bible could not be understood as *directly* addressing "questions which should arise only centuries after their time" (Herford 1909, p. 86). An important way in which this understanding of the Bible affected his relationship with Judaism was that it ruled out for him the possibility of simply reading the Old Testament as a set of prophecies which were then fulfilled in the New:

> [The Old Testament was n]ot in the least . . . a mere preparation to be superseded when Christ had come, as it were the scaffolding to be thrown away when the new building was finished, but the record of the greatest achievement ever made by the human race or any part of it on the field of religion, the attainment of a great position never afterwards to be lost, and never to be abandoned whatever might be added to it (Carpenter 1925, p. 163-164).

Herford's belief in the essentially human nature of the Bible is, naturally, echoed in Liberal/Reform Jewish circles as we can see here from Montefiore's words concerning ordinary men and the prophets, in whom both:

> . . . we observe the same fact: the divine does not destroy or overwhelm the human. If it is a question of teaching, for instance, the teaching is always, as a whole, characteristic of the teacher. The divine does not drive out the human. It glows through it. But the human is still there, not merely in the form, but also in the substance. Hence the inevitable mixture in the result. The result is still relative in some measure to the age and place of the speaker. It is still a mixture of eternal and temporary; of gold and dross. We must neither exaggerate nor cheapen (Montefiore 1912, p. 174).

Although, as we explored earlier, Herford believed that the fundamentals of religion contained in the Old Testament were not dependent on the New, he did not shy away from openly expressing that he was part of a tradition which *interpreted* those fundamentals in the light of Jesus' life and teachings found in the New Testament, and not as a Jew would interpret them. This new tradition (whose Bible was the Old and New Testaments combined) revealed to Herford what he thought was an unfolding *progressive* story of inspiration and that it was a record of a "growing clearness" of the "gradual revelation" of God. For Herford it told a "long story that is unfolded [. . .] till it reached its full and perfect height in Jesus" which gave "unity to the Bible, and gather[ed] its several parts into one body of Holy Scripture" (Herford 1909, p. 96). The important point being that he thought Jesus clarified and expressed more simply what was already contained in full, although sometimes rather obscurely, in the Old Testament.

Herford's division of the Bible, on the one hand, into the authoritative and unchanging Old Testament which contained all the fundamentals of religion and, on the other, the New Testament as record of a new *interpretative* tradition which sought to understand the Old Testaments and continually relate it to the present age, clearly echoes Jewish thinking on the relationship between the Written and Oral Torahs. Leo Beack points out that for Jews the "Hebrew Bible is the most authoritative element in Judaism. But it is not the only one":

> Just as it was once preceded by one tradition [the Patriarchal tradition ending with Moses], so it was soon succeeded by another, the "Oral Law", which strives to penetrate into the soul of the written word and to relate it to all the events of existence, to regulate religiously, and to moralize, all the conditions and activities of life, to realize the ideal through the medium of the whole community. (Baeck 1936, p. 16)

What Baeck thought the Oral Law did for Jews, Herford thought the New Testament in essence did for Christians – especially in the record of Jesus' life and teachings. But for Herford the Old Testament always held the upper hand, with the New Testament and Jesus' teachings in particular bringing its fundamental meanings to light and so Herford can state that without the "Hebrew Scriptures [. . .] Christianity would have stood on a much lower level in the scale of absolute religion than it does now, and would, hardly at all, have been able to claim the rank of a world-religion" (Herford 1924 a, p. 230-231). We will return to what Herford meant by "absolute religion" in the following section on the Kingdom of God.

In summary Herford believed that for the Christian (whether Unitarian or Trinitarian) their Bible contained both the primary and unchanging record of religious fundamentals bequeathed, *for all time*, to *all* humanity (the Old Testament) *and* an account of the birth of a new tradition of *interpreting* and *clarifying* those same unchanging fundamentals as taught to us by Jesus the perfect spiritual man, prophet and revealer (the New Testament). On the basis of all this he thought the Bible taught one great lesson:

> O ye of the latest days, God is with you as he was with us; we in our time, as you in yours, had our trials and temptations, our sorrows and our joys, our days of toil and hours of ease. Trust in him as we did, and you shall find, as we found, that he is refuge and strength; he is our light and our salvation, the strength of our life, and our portion for ever (Herford 1909, p. 99).

So, we can see that for Herford the Bible was not understood by him as an independent authority in itself but as one vital part of an authoritative matrix which was centred on the reality of God made known through Jesus' personality and teachings (encountered through the Bible) which was, finally, understood and interpreted by individuals through the use of their intellects, consciences and affections.

TRADITION & THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN/GOD[29]

One might expect that here would follow a simple exploration of Herford's lifelong commitment to Unitarian Christianity some of whose leading ideas we have considered above. However, Herford followed a tradition within Unitarian Christianity that understood the religion of Jesus as being a universal "pure" or "absolute" religion that would, ultimately, help to transcend all sectarian divides – not only those between different Christians but also those that existed between all other faiths.[30]

Herford's thought on this matter reaches its apogee in what Leo Baeck called "an impressive tract", *The Idea of the Kingdom of God*. Baeck, in his obituary of Herford, emphasized that the Kingdom of God, as outlined in this work, was to Herford "the final answer" and that on their last meeting together "again and again he emphasized this hope. This faith was the core of his life" (*The Synagogue Review*, January 1951).

In common with the rest of Herford's theology nowhere do we find a full and systematic presentation of his universalist understanding of the Kingdom of God. However, when the various aspects of his thought on this matter found in his various books are brought together, it is possible to see some remarkable parallels between how he came to understand the Kingdom and Solomon Schechter's[31] tripartite understanding of the *malkuth shaddai* or *malkuth Shamayim*. However, as we shall see, what that tripartite division ultimately meant for Herford, differed greatly from that held by Schechter or any other Jewish theologian.

Schechter believed the Kingdom of Heaven was to be understood and brought about in three ways. Firstly, through the adoption of the "yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven" which the Mishnah understands as the reading and acceptance of the Shema. This was the kingdom understood from an *individual's* perspective. Secondly, the kingdom was understood in a *collective or nationalistic* sense as being Israel's freedom to

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[29] Herford stresses that these different titles meant the same thing (Herford 1929, p. 3-4) and that when Heaven was used instead of God it was simply out of respect for the Divine Name. See also Drummond 1908, pp. 463-523 and Drummond, 1895 pp. 123-166.

[30] The use of the phrases "pure" or "absolute" religion or morality to describe the "religion of Jesus" is to be found in Unitarian circles most notably in the work of the influential American theologian Theodore Parker (1810-1860). See Wintersteen 1977 pp. 48-54.

[31] Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) was the leading thinker, scholar and theologian of Conservative Judaism. See Jacobs 1995, pp. 443-444.

worship the One God in its own land. Thirdly, there was the future hoped for personal Messiah or Messianic age which would establish God's kingdom over all.[32] This is the kingdom understood *collectively* and *universally* (summarized in Jacobs 1995, p. 306).

1. The individual sense

Herford believed that by the phrase the "Kingdom of God" Jesus had simply meant the "the rule of God in the heart" which was to be "consciously owned in the mind and conscience of every man individually", and not by men collectively, "except as individuals grouped together" (Herford 1929, p. 3). Jesus' central teachings, that is to say the two great commandments to love God and neighbour (which included, of course, the opening of the *Shema* itself) were his own expression of the yoke[33] of the Kingdom of Heaven. Herford thought that only when the rule of God was established in every person's heart would come to be established the "ideal state of humanity, the perfect order of social life" (Herford 1929 p. 5). In other words, the kingdom of God as a *universal human phenomenon* could only visibly come into existence through the joining together of *individuals* who had first accepted the rule of God in their hearts.

In seeking to be a follower of Jesus, Herford, therefore, believed in the necessity of adopting something very similar to Schechter's Jewish understanding of the "yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven."

2. The collective or nationalistic sense

As an historian and Biblical scholar Herford spent most of his life reflecting on the meaning of history and he believed firmly that God could be seen to be continually working within it. Herford thought, as we have just seen, that a collective or nationalistic expression of the Kingdom of God could only come about where and whenever enough individuals owned the rule of God in their hearts, mind and conscience. In his Essex Hall Lecture of 1933, *Some Ancient Safeguards of Civilization* Herford revealed to his audience what he thought were three of the most important post-biblical occurrences of this through which "the means were provided by which the treasures of the higher life of humanity were safeguarded, and enabled to survive the

[32] See Jacobs 1995, pp. 342-344 for a description of distinctions made between beliefs concerning the coming of either a personal Messiah or a Messianic age.
[33] See Matthew 11^{29-30}

great tempest of the Dark Ages" (Herford 1933, p. 40). They were, the Closing of the Talmud; the consolidation of the Catholic Church; and the Codification of the Roman Law. Herford thought that these three examples were linked together by "the truth which includes them all" (Herford 1933, p. 5) which was that they revealed to us, individually and most powerfully when viewed together, that "there is the sure ground of trust that as God was working in that olden time, so He is working now" (Herford 1933, p. 46).

His belief that God was *continuously* working within time through both the good and bad times led him to believe that the Kingdom of God, in its collective or nationalistic sense, would not come about after some sudden catastrophic apocalyptic event[34] but instead would "only be reached by *successive and gradual* bringing in of *all* men under the sway of the one comprehensive idea, or rather under the sway of the one God, owned and obeyed, trusted and loved" (Herford 1929, p. 5 – my italics). He explored this belief most fully in his post First World War book *Realities and Reconstruction* which was written to counter those who thought the horrors of the war had destroyed the of believing that human kind could any longer be seen as moving successively and gradually towards the creation of the Kingdom of God.[35] He reveals his natural bias towards Old Testament insights by grounding his argument upon a comparison between the apocalyptic language used by the author of the book of *Revelation* who "saw a holy city, the new Jerusalem *coming down out of heaven* from God" (Revelation 21^2 – his italics) and the vision of the author of second Isaiah: "Prepare ye *in the wilderness* the way of the Lord" (Isaiah 40^3 – his italics). Herford preferred the latter vision over the former because he found there a call for sustained human efforts to bring about the Kingdom of God in this *present world* (i.e. the *wilderness*) – no matter how bleak and hopeless things might seem to be. Herford did not only point to Biblical examples to argue this but also to such present signs as the founding of the League of Nations

[34] Herford remains uncommitted on whether or not Jesus was himself ever "distracted by such vain dreams of speedy attainments" but states that he did not think that such a belief represented "what lay deepest in his thought or what in it has most permanent value and power" (Herford 1929, p. 6).

[35] The end of the First World War marks the beginning of the end for Liberal Protestant theology and the beginning of Karl Barth's conservative Protestant Neo-Orthodox theology.

(Herford 1929, p. 15) and the Labour Movement (Herford 1920, pp. 45-46).[36] Four years after this publication, in his 1933 lecture, he additionally pointed to the three previously mentioned examples.

But Herford's life spanned, not only the First World War but also the Second in which the took place the horror, the Shoah. But even this tragedy did not cause him to loose his faith and, in an article entitled *The Survival of Israel* written as the Jewish State was being created, he stated quite categorically that he believed "Israel has [not only] survived both by its own courage and loyalty, but also because it was, and is, *an instrument in the hand of God for working out some great design towards the human race*" (Teicher 1948, p. 10 – my italics). It is at this moment that Herford comes closest to Schechter's own Jewish understanding of the collective nationalist nature of the Kingdom and if Herford had ever come to revise his 1933 lecture it seems likely that he would have added the creation of the Israeli State to his earlier list of events by which the treasures of the *higher life* of humanity were safeguarded.

Although he believed the creation of the Israeli State in which the people of Israel were once more free to worship the One God in their own land was one more real glimpse of the Kingdom of God, we must be clear that, for Herford, it did not represent, in any way, the *completion* of the story. For what that was to be we must now turn to his understanding of the universal sense of the Kingdom.

3. The universal sense

Herford thought that *anyone* who realized their true relationship to God and who, "set himself to order his life accordingly" would come to know that "the Kingdom of God has a present reality" (Herford 1929, p. 5).[37] So, despite all the horrors and setbacks he had witnessed, both as an historian and as a man of his own age, his own faith and realization of his true relationship with God enabled him to sustain a genuine belief in the ultimate reality of the Kingdom of God. This enabled him to acknowledge that, although the

[36] For similar mainstream Christian ideas on these movements see Richardson et. al. 1983, pp. 317-318.
[37] Herford's position shows similarities to ideas contained in the work of British Idealist philosopher F. H. Bradley, especially as found in his *Ethical Studies* (Bradley, 1988, pp. 313-344). The British Idealists were exceptionally influential upon liberal religious thought prior to the First World War and influenced many Unitarian ministers' thinking. See also Boucher, 1997.

kingdom was always to be built and worked for within time, it was also, necessarily, always and everywhere real, if as yet mostly *unrecognized*.

Like the Hebrew prophets of old, he firmly believed that God's continuous presence in the whole world was seen, not only in one's own faith's history, but also through the actions of other nations and faiths – hence his willingness to see the glimpses of the Kingdom of God even in the codification of the Roman Law. As Herford's thought on this matter developed he began to believe that, alone, neither Judaism nor Christianity could fully grasp and articulate this universal understanding of the Kingdom of God and that the proper interpretation of religious fundamentals and the Kingdom of God:

> . . . required the presence and influence of *two* types of religion, not one only. It would have failed if the one religion could have been superseded by the other. Therefore the two types had to be mutually incommensurable, though not necessarily antagonistic. The hostility arose [between them] only through human inability on each side to read the deeper meaning of the relation between the two contrasted opposites. It was surely no accident which produced these two types of religion, of which neither could be changed into the other, and neither could convert or destroy the other. Both were necessary and both in due time appeared in the world (Herford 1924 a, p. 236 – his italics).

Yet, no matter how valuable and important Herford thought Judaism and Christianity were, nor how much he praised the value, insights and wisdom secured by events such as the closing of the Talmud, the consolidation of the Catholic Church, the codification of the Roman Law and the creation of the State of Israel, it is clear that ultimately, as a man of faith, the fact that *any* individual who realized their true relationship to God also experienced the Kingdom as a present reality meant that in principle, and in practice, *any* faithful person in *any* religious tradition could take on the yoke, manifest the kingdom in their own lands and societies and in their own hearts. He begins to articulate this Universalist vision through a thoroughgoing and radical criticism of the "the Christian Church" which he thought "never was the same as the Kingdom of God, either in fact or intention" (Herford 1929, p. 1). This failure occurred because of the Church's decision to preach:

> "Jesus and the resurrection"; they did not preach what he [Jesus] preached. And what gradually came into being, as the result of their labours, was the Christian Church; it was not the Kingdom of God – the Christian Church, as a society of those who "believed on their Lord Jesus Christ," and interpreted their belief, as time went on, in terms of

> doctrinal propositions about him rather than in efforts themselves to do the things that he said (Herford 1929, p. 1).

Reflecting upon this failure of the Christian Church Herford went on to state in the same lecture that:

> No one but a Christian ever did, or ever could, work for the Church. But all can work for the Kingdom of God, not Christians only but all who consciously own God, whether Christian or Jew, Mohammedan or Brahmin, or any other of those to whom God has revealed himself "by diverse portions and in diverse manners" (Herford 1929, p. 12).

So, in his final years we begin to see Herford understanding himself as belonging ultimately, not to Christianity or Judaism, but instead to a universal religious tradition whose greatest teacher he thought was Jesus and whose greatest teaching was the Kingdom of God.

Herford believed this "Universalist" Kingdom of God was always present to the individual person of faith. Their realization of the reality of this Kingdom was what called them into action to help progressively build it in this world. At the present time this ancient work carried out by countless hands had resulted in the creation of a number of vital and powerful religious traditions, of which Judaism and Christianity were but two. However, certain individuals within these traditions (the perfect example being, for Herford, Jesus), always had a vision of God's final Kingdom that was truly unifying and it was this that Herford is referring to when he speaks of the "far-off divine event/To which the whole creation moves"[38] (Herford 1929, p. 4 – see also 1924 a, p.239). Herford, like many Liberal Jews, had no sense of the reality of a personal Messiah but in these words, it is clear that he hoped and believed that human kind was working for something akin to a "Messanic age" in which, as Louis Jacobs puts it, "the human drama will one day find its culmination on earth" (Jacobs 1995, p. 343). Herford's thought on this matter strongly echoes that of the influential American Idealist philosopher Josiah Royce who said that "we can look forward, then, to no final form, either of Christianity or of any other special religion. But we can look forward to a time

[38] From *In Memorium A. H. H. by* Alfred Lord Tennyson.

when the work and insight of religion can become as progressive as is now the work of science" (Royce 1913, Vol. II, p. 432).[39]

It is clear that such an ultimately "Universalist" understanding of the Kingdom of God would be unacceptable to most forms of Judaism. Indeed we have one recorded example of Herford's own position on this matter being directly challenged by an important Liberal Jew, Rabbi Leslie I. Edgar,[40] in his Essex Hall Lecture of 1952 on the subject of *Co-operation Between World Religions*. Although he is extremely positive about Herford's overall contribution to mutual Jewish and Christian understanding he is extremely critical of Herford's assertion that, "*ultimately*, Judaism – as well as Christianity – will make contributions to the 'the larger whole' in which both will be taken up" (Edgar 1952, p. 14). Edgar thought that the ultimate "emergence of a single world-faith" was "wholly undesirable, and those who are engaged in it, no matter how excellent are their intentions, are, in fact, hindering – not helping forward – the probable next stage in mankind's religious development" (Edgar 1952, p. 5).

Despite this great final difference between his own theology and that expressed by the majority of Jews it is possible to point to a real influence of Jewish thought upon the way Herford chose to express his thinking about the Kingdom of God. He thought that the owning of God's sovereign rule in every individual's heart, mind and soul was, quite simply, the most important duty he and his own church tradition had to fulfil:

> We [i.e. Unitarian and Free Christians] take our place alongside of all who are listening to the voice that spoke in Galilee proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was at hand. On us, as on all who hear that voice, is laid the charge to do our part, to *be* what children of God should be, and so to bring nearer the time when "the Kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our God" (Herford 1929 p. 15-16).

[39] Royce was another important influence on pre-First World War Unitarians and had delivered the lectures, which sum up his mature thinking, *The Problem of Christianity*, at their own College, Manchester College Oxford in March 1913.

[40] Edgar was the Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London.

PART THREE
CONCLUSION

To conclude we can now ask what was, ultimately, the relationship between Herford's theology and Jewish thought?

The first thing we need to be aware of is that, having explored some of his leading theological ideas, we find in them nothing that had not already been expressed in greater depth and more systematically in the theological writings of his own Unitarian teachers at Manchester College, James Martineau, C. B. Upton, James Drummond and J. Estlin Carpenter. Even a brief look at James Drummond's two systematic presentations of the Unitarian Christian position, *Christianity in its most simple and Intelligible Form* (Drummond 1895) and *Studies in Christian Doctrine* (1908), reveals this to be the case. Every subject explored by Herford is also explored by Drummond and the conclusions reached by Herford differ *in no way* from those reached by Drummond. Footnotes throughout the essay have draw the reader's attention to the places in Drummond's books where he discusses these issues. That this was so should come as no real surprise, for the content of Drummond's books formed an important part of Herford's own theological education whilst he was at Manchester College during the years 1880-1883. His constant commitment to Unitarian Christianity and the thought of his forebears was revealed clearly by Herford in 1924 in his lecture, *The Religion of a Unitarian*:

> I am myself a Unitarian born and bred; what I learned from my father and mother I now hold with settled conviction of all my years of maturity. It does not cross my mind as in the least likely that I shall ever abandon it; not knowing, indeed, not being able to imagine, any other religion which I could regard as "a more excellent way" (1924 b, p. 5)

Although there is no doubt that the *content* of Herford's theology was in no direct way influenced by his life long contact with Judaism we can, however, point to a considerable influence in the way he chose to *express* it, in its overall tone and ambience. As McLachlan notes, unfortunately without naming his source, "so close a student of Jewish writings had Herford become that a Jewish scholar once declared":

> In his style we can recognize here and there the influence of the Talmudic idiom, with which he is so familiar that it affects his thought. Herford has shown us that it is possible to be a faithful critic of a religion without belonging to it. We see one whose race and religion are not ours; yet how intimate is his feeling for the secret things of the Torah? He

> is quite like one of us; whose soul has derived nourishment from all the resting places of the Shekinah, whether Jerusalem, or Yabneh,Wilna, or Ladie (McLachlan 1950, p. 17).

This helps us understand that the basic relationship that existed between Herford's theology and Judaism was one based on *feeling* and *attitude* rather than on any theological or doctrinal issues. It was because Herford expressed his own beliefs in a way that resonated with Jewish modes of speech that he inevitably made many Jews, especially Liberal Jews, *feel* Herford was, "quite like one of us." It was not only a matter of feeling, of course, because as our study has revealed there were many real theological relationships between his own and Jewish thought. But we must remember that Herford always remained a Unitarian Christian and we must not forget that he consistently maintained that the difference between the ways Jesus and the Pharisees interpreted the fundamentals of religion was one that "nothing can ever obliterate (Herford 1928, p. 206-207)."

This *feeling* of closeness, this *emotional* relationship, could, at times have a powerful impact upon Herford and, as we shall see in a moment, also upon his friend Montefiore. We catch a tantalizing glimpse of this in a private letter Herford wrote to his wife during the summer of July 1923. Herford was in New York at the invitation of Rabbi Dr. Stephen Samuel Wise (1874-1949) to deliver a course of lectures at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, a school of Liberal Judaism in which were found together both orthodox, conservative and reform scholars and rabbinical students. Part of the letter contains Herford's description of the short prayer service which preceded each lecture, which included the saying of the Shema together; he then continues:

> The men, all young Rabbis, seem thoughtful and earnest. One or another will come up and talk with me before or after the lecture – not about the weather but about their problems. They seem to look upon me as some sort of prophet who has come across the ocean to enlighten them. It is rather overwhelming, but I try to keep my head from being turned. I think I may truthfully say that I am not disliked here; but modesty compels me to leave it at that. Certainly I have never had any experience to put alongside of it. I will tell you more when we are alone. Such things are not to be written (Letter dated 28 July 1923 in the *Osler-Herford Collection No. 26* held at Harris Manchester College, Oxford).

Such powerful personal experiences, which clearly had a real spiritual content, would have been enough to turn anyone's head but Herford's awareness of the real differences that existed between his own faith and Judaism naturally made him wary of

reading too much into the experience of being felt to be "one of us." Yet such experiences clearly strengthened his basic faith in the reality of the ultimate universal nature of the Kingdom of God whose members were discovered, in Upton's words, "only by spiritual and not by theological, tests" (Upton 1895, p. 153). His ultimate hope that the breach between the faiths could, somehow, be progressively healed, is echoed by his friend Montefiore in his *The Old Testament and After*. Once again, what characterizes these words is *feeling* and of being in *emotional relationship*.It is hard not to believe that he had Herford in mind when he wrote them:

> We do believe that the doctrines of Liberal Judaism, purified and developed, will win their way more and more to larger and larger acceptance. They may do that without even assuming a Jewish name. There are thousands of persons to-day who would call themselves Christians; in one sense Christians they are, and Christians they have a right to be called, even as Christians they feel themselves to be. But in another sense, these men are nearer to Liberal Judaism as it is, and as it will be, than they are to *that* Christianity against which Judaism has been bound to offer its protest for so many generations in the past. And their descendents will, as *we* believe, be nearer still. We do not mind about the name (Montefiore 1923, p. 568 – his italics).

In the light of the forgoing it seems reasonable to suggest that we can best understand the relationship between Herford's theology and Jewish thought was at the level of a *general sympathy* rather than in any a true doctrinal relationship.

The real danger that always presents itself when *feelings* and *sympathy* come to play an increasing role in a person's theology is that self-deception can all too-easily set in. This need not result in anything unpleasant but it can result in the creation of a faith that does not entirely square with either the historical facts or the present situation. In so many ways Herford avoided this danger but, in the matter of his personal discipleship of Jesus he fell victim to a similar trap that caught Harnack. As Father George Tyrell scathingly observed, the Christ Harnack saw "looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness" was "only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face seen at the bottom of a deep well" (from *Christianity at the Cross Roads,* quoted in Wigmore-Beddoes 1975 p. 10-11). It might have been thought that Herford, with his profound knowledge of first century Judaism could have done much to correct this dangerous tendency. Yes, he saw Jesus was a Jew, but the Judaism he tended to see Jesus as living out was not that of a first-century Jew but, in truth, a type of Liberal Judaism. It is deeply ironic to suggest this but it may well be that his only original contribution to Liberal

Protestant/Unitarian Christian thought was that, because the language in which he expressed his faith was so close to the way Liberal Jews expressed theirs, that the Jesus Herford saw down the deep well of history was as much the reflection of the face of an early twentieth century Liberal Jew as it was of a Liberal Protestant.

THE RELEVANCE OF HERFORD'S THEOLOGY FOR CONTEMPORARY JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

Ultimately, this quite unique Jewish-Christian encounter, came completely to an end because it was too tightly tied to a particular individual who, for a Christian, had an unusually deep knowledge of Judaism (Herford); to a particular transient intellectual milieu (Liberal Protestantism); and to a particular small subset of that same milieu (Unitarian Christianity). The horrific events of the Two World Wars helped bring about the rapid decline of Liberal Protestantism and, in the resulting chaos, the confidence of Unitarian Christianity also collapsed – along with the confidence of many other liberal movements, both secular and religious. In the years following the end of the Second World War and after Herford's death in 1950, the national Unitarian movement swiftly began to loose theological coherence and unity and the chief theological tendency within this fast dwindling group of churches in Britain and the USA since then has been away from Unitarian Chrisitanity and towards either a vague universalistic theism or a non-religious humanism. Within Britian and the USA, Unitarian Christianity as a distinct, confident and influential voice has today almost entirely disappeared and, in consequence, Liberal Judaism (which also suffered a loss of confidence along with all other liberal theologies) lost a valuable dialogue partner.

With Unitarian Christians it was at least possible for Liberal Jews to explore the possibility of developing some kind of shared *expression* of faith. With their demise as a coherent and influential body the only Christians left to talk to, no matter how liberal they are, are those who in some way still hold to doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atoning work of Christ. Examples of such discussions may be found in the recent book, *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Frymer-Kensky et. al. 2000), produced shortly after the publication of *Dabru Emet* in September 2000. Today, all significant Jewish dialogue with Christians is undertaken with Trinitarian traditions. Although it is true that since the early 1990's there has been a revival of a liberal movement within

Christianity, its flavour is quite different from that proposed by early twentieth-century Liberal Protestantants and Unitarian Christians. This new liberal Christianity does not to abandon key Christian doctrines but, instead, seeks to *re-interpret* them. Perhaps the most influential example of this new liberal tendency is Marcus Borg.[41] This re-interpetation (often using the language of metaphor)[42] clearly makes it easier for Jews and Christians to engage in meaningful dialogue but, the continued use in their theology and worship of clearly Christian language, means that the dialogue can never *feel* as intimate as the one Herford engaged in.

A mere passing and personal *feeling* probably cannot be seen as being of lasting importance in the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue. However, it is important to conclude with two observations. Herford's ground-breaking historical research, even though it contained many personal theological beliefs and hopes, clearly contributed to the development of a tradition of impartial Christian scholarship that took seriously the Jewish context of Jesus and early Christianity.[43] Secondly, although his own Unitarian Christian theology (and those of his teachers) has all but disappeared from view, his willingness to try to *sympathise* with and so come *understand* those who differed from him, remains an inspiring model to follow for any one who seeks to be creative and effective in the field of contemporary Jewish-Christian relations.

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APPENDIX – BEING A FEW WORDS OF PERSONAL REFLECTION

As an active minister on the Roll of the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches who, in addition to being actively engaged in contemporary Jewish Christian relations, is concerned to rediscover and re-articulate a coherent Unitarian Christian theology, the researching of Herford work has been, at times, inspiring. It has also revealed how much hard work still needs to be done. Although it is clearly unlikely that Unitarian Christian theology will ever be restored to the influential position it held in the early years of the twentieth century, and so once more take part at the highest levels

[41] Borg has written many books (see for example Borg 1991, 1994 and 2001) but has recently summed up his basic position in *The Heart of Christianity* (Borg 2003).
[42] See for example Hick's re-interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity in his *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (Hick 1993).
[43] An important figure to mention here is E. P. Sanders particularly his *Jesus and Judaism* (1985) and *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63BCE-66CE* (1992).

of Jewish-Christian dialogue, at the local level, as a minister seeking good relations with the neighbouring Jewish communities, Herford's theology and love for Judaism in general still offers the writer of this paper a powerful model of liberal faith to follow.

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