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Louis H. Feldman

BOOK REVIEWS

Everyman's Judaism

by S. M. LEHRMAN

(London: Shapiro, Valentine & Co., 1958)

Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period

Vols. VII and VIII: Pagan Symbols in Judaism

by ERWIN R. GOODENOUGH

(New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1958)

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Everyman's Judaism

by S. M. LEHRMAN

This volume contains a group of interesting, concise, and fluently written essays which are designed to whet the reader's appetite for Judaism by providing several intimate glimpses into its traditions, its classics, and its spiritual giants. From the literary viewpoint, the author performs his task in an admirable manner. His smooth, elegant, and flowing style, and his concise and compact chapters through which there moves with unceasing rapidity a sequence of stimulating ideas and attractive personality portraits, arouse the reader's interest and command his attention. Even more significant, however, is the warmth and vitality of his enthusiasm for a dynamic and dignified form of traditional Judaism which must inevitably impress the reader who is rooted to the Jewish past and, at the same time, sensitive to contemporary modes and tendencies.

But the spell cast by a seductive literary style and a strong emotional appeal frequently conceals flaws in reasoning and errors in analysis. We offer, by way of illustration, the author's chapter on prayer. Referring to what he regards as the *natural desire* to pray, he writes, "Man must pray, as he *must* breathe the air around him." If prayer involved nothing more than an expression of the personal wants of man and a petition for their fulfillment, it might be argued convincingly that there exists in man a natural desire to pray. But the author repudiates this view. He recognizes that "Prayer, since the destruction of the Temple, has become the substitute

for sacrifice." Furthermore, the main theme of prayer is not "personal wishes" but "the glory of One Eternal God and our duty to praise and worship Him." The reviewer knows of no *natural* desire to make sacrifices or to pronounce praises.

Another form of error committed by Rabbi Lehrman is that of overstatement. Enthusiasm frequently leads to exaggeration. In his chapter on the synagogue he writes, "The history of our survival is the tale of splendor and holiness unfolded by the synagogue." The answer to the perennial question as to how the Jewish people could preserve its identity through millenia of exile and persecution is located, by the author, in the house of worship and assembly. It cannot be denied that the institution of the synagogue was an effective instrument of survival but it has been argued with equal cogency that, among other factors, the dedication of the Jews to Torah was at least as powerful a force for preservation. The intricate and elaborate fabric of Jewish history whose texture and strength resulted from the interweaving of many fibers was not held together by the force of a single strand.

The reason for the commission of such errors is obvious. Throughout the volume, the author utilizes the homiletic method of appeal rather than the academic methods of accuracy and analysis. But the two are not and need not be mutually exclusive.

A few more remarks are germane. First, though the author's explicit intention is to present a bird's-eye view of traditional Judaism, his exposition is guided by still another aim — to display its vitality. Tra-

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ditional Judaism, he insists, is not inert, stagnant, and petrified. It has a history and is, therefore, dynamic, changing, evolving. This attitude culminates forcefully in his last chapter, in an argument for the re-establishment of the Sanhedrin in Israel. In his exposition, he avoids the *halakhic* controversy and debates the issue on practical grounds and as a matter of policy. The spirit of this chapter, if not all of its arguments, is admirable.

Secondly, this volume could be used effectively in an adult education program. It consists of two parts. The first part is devoted to an explanation of our customs and rituals and the second expatiates on what the author calls 'our spiritual legacy.' Brief and stimulating descriptions of Jewish classics and attractive biographical sketches of great Jewish personalities are ably presented. An adult student who is moving through the elementary stages of Jewish learning will profit considerably from Dr. Lehrman's volume.

S. R.

Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period

by ERWIN R. GOODENOUGH

Recent archaeological excavations of synagogues in Israel and in the Diaspora (especially that at Dura - Europus in Mesopotamia) dating from the early centuries of the Common Era, have raised the important question of the interpretation of the pagan figures and motifs found there. In a truly monumental work that has now reached eight volumes, Professor Goodenough of Yale, well known for his

work on Philo, has brought together and evaluated by far the most complete collection yet published of the art of Jews of the Hellenistic-Roman period. (The fairest and most detailed reviews of the first six volumes of this series are by A. D. Nock in *Gnomon*, XXVII [1955] 558-572 and XXIX [1957] 524-533.) Hitherto this art has been evaluated in the light of our literary (especially rabbinic) evidence; and where there were divergences from that tradition scholars usually concluded that the art was merely decorative. An alternative solution, seldom adopted, has been to conclude that the divergences represent real deviations from Orthodoxy. Goodenough refuses to accept the first explanation because he claims that at the time when they were used by the Jews these motifs were "alive" in the sense that they were employed in a similar way by early and contemporary paganism and by contemporary and later Christianity; and he discards the second solution because of evidence that he cites that the Diaspora Jews remained Orthodox. Hence, under the profound influence of the psychological theories of Suzanne Langer and others, he adopts a *tertium quid*, namely, that the figures had meaning as symbols, that these symbols constituted a sub-rational *lingua franca* among Jews and non-Jews alike, just as the Greek language provided a rational bond among them, and that these symbols represent a kind of allegorization through art of the sort that Philo attempted through philosophy. (Goodenough admits [Vol. VIII, p. 220] that much of his approach is necessarily subjective. He

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tends to be most fanciful when he is under the influence of the psycho-analytical school. But in fairness to the author one should read the most important single chapter in the entire study, Vol. IV, Chapter 2, "Method in Evaluating Symbols.") The fact that the number of motifs found on the monuments is so limited and so uniform throughout the Greco-Roman world shows that this was, in effect, a kind of language for the Jews. That these symbols are found not only on the individual tombstones and amulets but in communal places as well indicates that they had symbolic value for masses of Jews and not merely for scattered individuals. From all of this the author would have us picture a "popular," extra-talmudic Judaism, in opposition to the normative Judaism described by his teacher George Foot Moore — a Judaism that was, however, fully Orthodox.

Whereas earlier volumes had dealt with such Jewish items as the *menorah*, *lulav*, and *shofar*, in Volumes VII and VIII Goodenough examines a number of pagan motifs prominent in the Jewish art: the bull, the lion and other felines, the tree, Victory and her crown, rosettes, wheels, "round objects," masks, the gorgoneum, cupids, birds, miscellaneous fertility symbols, psychopomps (i.e. guides of the soul to the next world), and astronomical symbols.

Perhaps we can illustrate the author's method by reviewing his treatment of the lion motif (Vol. VII, pp. 29-86). After listing, with numerous illustrations collected at the back of the volume, occurrences of lions both painted and carved in

the round, particularly in Hellenistic synagogues and on Jewish amulets, Goodenough then notes similar appearances of the lion in the art of the Near East generally, Egypt, and Greece. He cites, for example, a number of instances in the art of these other countries of two identical lions facing each other on either side of a central object. He is convinced that the guarding animals are to be identified with the central object and that the Jews had borrowed this symbolism from the non-Jews. When the Jews borrowed the symbol of the lion for their graves, they utilized it as a symbol to express "their hope in a saving divine force whose beneficence would be the reverse side of its obverse ferocity" (p. 78) — the same notion that is found in contemporary pagan representations of the lion. He admits that the lion is frequently mentioned in the Bible and hence goes back much further than Hellenistic times, but he contends that the lions took on "nuances of contemporary values" (p. 81). He dismisses the possibility that the rabbinic comments on Judah the lion and on Daniel and the lions had particular influence on the use of this symbol. Philo, moreover, abhors the notion of the lion as a symbol of God because of his contempt for the animal worship of the Egyptians. Hence, Goodenough concludes, the lion as a symbol of God or of a savior is an importation from the pagans.

But is this conclusion justified? Goodenough thinks that the Rabbis would have objected to the depiction, even on a flat surface, of such objects as lions. This is not the place to enter into the controversial sub-

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ject of the nature of the prohibition on images; but there is much evidence, despite Goodenough's discussion (Vol. IV, pp. 11-23), for the view that such objects as lions would have been permitted. (This may be inferred from *Avodah Zarah* 43b; see also Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Avodat Kokhavim*, 3: 11; and *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, Avodat Kokhavim* 141:6.) That the lion as a symbol has similar connotations in both pagan and Jewish art is not surprising in view of the very nature of the lion. But similarity does not prove influence; and the references to the lion's qualities in the Bible and in rabbinic literature (especially the Midrashim) *per se* are sufficiently rich to explain the symbolism in the monuments.

The real problem arises, however, in the explanation of such obvious violations of Jewish law as the depiction of cupids on Jewish sarcophagi and even over the main door of the synagogue at Capernaum, as well as on numerous Jewish charms. Some critics of Goodenough have noted that, just as in Jewish marriage documents since the Renaissance cupids are often found as a mere decoration, so these cupids are merely decorative. But Goodenough is, I believe, justified in rejecting this parallel since the cupid of the Renaissance is a dead symbol which has been revived, whereas the cupid on Hellenistic Jewish monuments is a live symbol which must have had meaning as such to the Jews, even as it did to pagans. Goodenough's conclusion (Vol. VIII, p. 219) is that "most probably while Jews borrowed the symbols we have discussed, they did so with a sense of the religious

value of the symbols, and with the feeling that that religious value, which had come to be part of their own religiosity, properly belonged in their Judaism." Thus while rejecting summarily Wolfson's thesis that Alexandrian Judaism represents a collateral branch of Pharisaic Judaism, he argues that this Hellenistic Judaism was not just a Jewish form of paganism but "Torah-true" in its own right.

Is there not, however, another possible inference from this "picture book without text?" Because such pagan writers as Tacitus insist on the piety and cohesion of the Jews, and because the Hellenistic Jews could hardly have remained Jews if they had used these images in pagan ways, Goodenough refuses to admit that there was any sizable defection from Orthodoxy. But the majority of Roman writers obviously had erroneous information about the Jews; for example, they believed that the Jews worshiped an ass's head and fasted on the Sabbath. And Philo (*De migratione Abrahami* xvi. 89 ff.) mentions that the extreme allegorists did deviate from the practices of the Torah. Moreover, the papyri of the Egyptian Jews regularly show violations of Jewish law (see, e.g., Tcherikover and Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, Vol. I, numbers 20 and 24) in that they contain loans from Jews to Jews with interest at the normal Egyptian rate of 24%. And the fondness of Alexandrian Jews for theatres and circuses (see London Papyrus 1912) is in direct violation of the Jewish tradition (see *Avodah Zarah*, 18b). One can cite much more. The Rabbis in those days had to cope with

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more ignorance and with more heterodoxy than Goodenough is willing to admit. Syncretistic cults were common in Hellenistic - Roman times; and the amulets may be those of Jews who had succumbed to this trend or of non-Jews who adopted what they thought were magical elements in Judaism.

The author does not pretend to have us believe that these magnificently printed and illustrated volumes constitute the last word. They are a thesaurus for further investigation. But they will hardly be surpassed for originality of insight and for verve of style.

L.H.F.