

## SUMMARY

### FRANZ ROSENZWEIG'S PLACE IN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

by

Dr. Moshe Schwarcz

Introduction to the Hebrew translation of *'The Star of Redemption'*\*

Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* is not a "Jewish" philosophical work in the ordinary sense. "Jewish" philosophical works are mostly apologetic, and lean upon ideas and conceptions alien to Judaism without thinking them through to the end. Both Maimonides and Mendelssohn take the philosophical ideas of their time for granted and try to reconcile them to Jewish thought. The only exception to this way of thought is, according to Rosenzweig, Hermann Cohen who, after having absorbed Western philosophy, achieved the measure of freedom necessary for a non-apologetic theology.

*The Star of Redemption* can only be understood as a book concerned with a new method of thinking which casts doubt on all hitherto accepted philosophical categories.

Rosenzweig, born in 1886 in Kassel in an assimilated family, was strongly influenced by the historian Meinecke. He learned to view the problem of Jewish existence in West European culture as the problem of the gap between extensive and intensive historical reality, between history as a totality of facts and history as the biography of the individual. Christianity, on the other hand, had seemingly bridged this gap and offered a harmony not to be achieved in Judaism. Many of Rosenzweig's contemporaries actually converted to Christianity. What restrained Rosenzweig from taking this step was mainly a change in his philosophical outlook. Revelation, a "historical/meta-historical" conception, became a central idea in his thinking. Only revelation can bridge the gap. In *The Star of Redemption* Rosenzweig presents a theology transcending both the abstract theistic theology of liberalism and the national-historical atheistic theology represented at the time by Buber. *The Star of Redemption* is not a "philosophy of religion". This becomes obvious from Rosenzweig's discussions with contemporaneous Protestant theology – also in its Jewish guises! – especially with Schleiermacher, for whom the essence of religion was the feeling of absolute dependence. This theology of religious experience destroyed the relation

\* Jerusalem, The Bialik Institute and The Leo Baeck Institute, 1970; pp. 9-42. The Hebrew Translation of "Der Stern der Erlösung" is by Dr. Joshua Amir.

between past and present. The past became an object for historical knowledge only, whereas religious experience was confined to the present. This old philosophy is therefore basically a-historical, alienated from the past. Rosenzweig's new philosophy of dialogue creates a new relationship to historical reality. The former is a monologue, the latter a dialogue. The possibility of dialogue with the past is the essence of revelation. Revelation is not a philosophical conception, but a new orientation through which subjective experiences receive a quality of durability.

This new philosophical method had been prepared by the philosophers of subjectivity like Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. But for Rosenzweig philosophy, though rooted in individual experience, needs revelation to escape the danger of subjectivity.

Though Rosenzweig's original approach is far from traditional Jewish theology, which was always apologetic, similar trends have been known in the history of Jewish thought. Rosenzweig himself felt great affinity to Yehuda Halevi. In the *Chuzari*, Yehuda Halevi deals with the central theme of Jewish theology, the election of Israel, but without theoretical reflection. According to Rosenzweig this is the essential difference between Christianity, which needs a continuous reflection upon and formulation of its dogmas, and Judaism for which existence is its own interpretation, not in need of theoretical reflection.

Ludwig Steinheim, a 19th century Jewish theologian, though not mentioned by Rosenzweig, also represented a similar trend in Jewish thought. His systematic theology also opposed the generally accepted philosophical ideas originating in Greek philosophy and alien to Judaism. For him too, revelation is a source of guidance not elsewhere or otherwise available. But the ways in which Steinheim and Rosenzweig propound this basic common conception differ considerably.

The third thinker who should be mentioned in this connection is Rosenzweig's contemporary and friend, Martin Buber. The philosophy of dialogue is the central theme of both. But whereas for Buber this philosophy is rooted in the religious situation here and now, for Rosenzweig it is anchored in the objective religious experience. Buber confines the dialogue to the immediate I/Thou relationship. The mystic, wordless relationship becomes the legitimate expression of religious experience and the cultic aspect of religion, including the mitzvot, becomes superfluous.

That Rosenzweig, in spite of his affinity to Buber, rejected and opposed these views, will be obvious to the reader of *The Star of Redemption*.

Summary by Yochanan Eldad