

TRANSLATION:

YECHÉZKEL KAUFMANN:

HISTORIAN AND PHILOSOPHER OF BIBLICAL MONOTHEISM

by

Prof. Benyamin Uffenheimer\*

*On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the death of Yechezkel Kaufmann (1889-1963) we present an adapted translation of a lecture given by Prof. Benyamin Uffenheimer at a memorial meeting held at the Haifa University on the first anniversary of Kaufmann's death.*

*Yechezkel Kaufmann was born in Podolia, Ukraine, studied at the famous modern yeshivah of Rav Tsair in Odessa, received a Ph. D. at the University of Berne (where he had studied under the O. T. scholar Karl Marti. In 1928 he migrated to Eretz Israel and became teacher of Jewish studies at the Reali Secondary School in Haifa. In 1949 he was appointed Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University, a post he held until his death.*

*His most important works are:*

*Golah we-Nekhar (Diaspora and Alien Lands), 4 volumes in 2, 1929-30, a sociological study on the faith of the Jewish people from ancient times to the modern period.*

*Toledot ha-Emunah ha-Yisre'elit (The History of the Faith of Israel), 8 volumes in 4, 1937-57, a history of Israel's religion from ancient times to the end of the Second Temple period. The first 7 volumes were condensed and translated into English by Moshe Greenberg under the title: The Religion of Israel, Chicago, 1960. The beginning of volume 8 was translated into English by C. W. Efrogmson under the title: The Babylonian Captivity and Deutero-Isaiah (1970).*

*The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine, 1953 (a Hebrew edition appeared in 1956).*

*Commentaries on the Books of Joshua and Judges, under the respective titles Sefer Yehoshu'a, Jerusalem 1959, and Sefer Shofetim, Jerusalem 1962.*

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## *In search of Israel's originality*

The young Kaufmann opens his book *Diaspora and Alien Lands* with these words: "The problem of the historical fate of the Jewish people – the question: why has the Jewish people trodden its particular historical path to which no other people and no other tongue in the world can compare – is a very complex one, giving birth to several directions in research and study. As with most of the objects of sociological research, the question is an academic one, on the one hand, and a practical one on the other. It probes into the past and its eyes are fixed on the present and the future. Its inception is in historical and even archaeological research and its terminal point – a complex of painful and pressing questions of life. Its point of departure is academic, and the end, it may be said: Blood and Fire and Pillars of Smoke." He ends his preface by reviewing his scientific method: "I also know that concerning the future I have to say things which will fall terribly hard on the ears of our generation. But it cannot be helped, I cannot say but what I have said."

In those sentences Kaufmann drew his spiritual self-portrait. From the youthful, fiery style, full of pathos, can be perceived the romantic trend of the generation of revival whose aim it was to integrate the whole past of the people for the fulfilment of its vision of the future. Historical research is not an end in itself. It is not a pure and independent science: its destiny is to make us aware of the uniqueness of the Jewish People in order to understand its fate and to enable us to direct its steps towards the future. The careful reader of *Diaspora and Alien Lands* will notice that the book, indeed, deals with both sides of the problem: the author carefully clarifies the nature of the people by far-going research of its past, and at the same time tackles the question of its future in his argumentation with other trends in contemporary national Jewish thought. As Kaufmann reached middle age, his interest in the past grew, especially the distant past, the period of the emergence of the nation. Kaufmann, the sociologist, the philosopher of national revival, struggling with the questions of present and future, became a Bible scholar, for he discovered that one can understand the character of this people only by a careful study of the Bible. This gave rise to his great scholarly work, *The History of the Faith of Israel*, which is the crowning glory of his literary and scientific work and of his historiosophic thought. The uncompromising adherence to the truth of his heart, which marks his polemical argumentation in *Diaspora and Alien Lands* sets its stamp on this work as well. In *Diaspora and Alien Lands* he fights the battle of truth inside the Jewish camp, as he takes cruelly realistic stock of the Diaspora. The purpose of his argument is to break down of illusions fostered by historians, philosophers and public figures to the effect that there was hope and future for the Jewish nation in the Diaspora of Eastern Europe as a national minority. In his forceful direct language he intended to open the

eyes of a generation at a fateful crossroads of the national and socialist movements. On the other hand, in his work in the field of Bible, he fought the battle of the Jewish scholar defending the gates against Protestant biblical research. As had done David Hoffmann, in his way, as did Cassuto, Benno Jacob and Buber, so did he aspire to fill in what 19th century research of Judaism had left out by ignoring the Bible in building its historical structure of Judaism. Thus the Bible had become the heritage of Protestant scholars who lifted it out of the historical continuity of the Jewish People to suit the tendency of showing the organic link with the New Testament. Pharisaic Judaism, which has actually fixed the Biblical Canon, appeared to them through the tendentious eyes of the authors of the New Testament, and, needless to say, Judaism was considered to be an aberration from the ideas of the Bible, in particular the Prophets, as it had become a nationalistic "Church" locked up behind a wall of laws and stifling any spontaneous religious feeling with absurd legalistic polemics. The universal spirit of the New Testament, addressed as it is to every man as an individual, is in open contradiction with the narrow nationalistic spirit which had dominated the Jewish "Church" in the time of the Second Temple.

#### *A Jewish antithesis to Wellhausen's thesis*

Kaufmann unveiled with great perspicacity the liberal-Christian tendencies behind the approach of the non-Jewish scholars, which go against the grain of objective scientific study. The reader perusing the thousands of pages of *The History of the Faith of Israel* is amazed at the independent way of thought in which Kaufmann takes fresh stock of every problem without being hampered by conventional thinking, not even that which had become axiomatic in Bible research. Consistently and systematically he tears down the walls of the monumental structure Julius Wellhausen, the greatest of Protestant German Bible scholars, had erected, and sets up in its place a structure which was to be the Jewish antithesis. It must be emphasised, however, that Kaufmann was not an apologist in the dogmatic sense, for his whole work is based on the critical-historical approach.

What was the nature of the historical picture he aspired to undermine and what were the special characteristics of the new building he erected? As mentioned above, Kaufmann's severest criticism was against Julius Wellhausen, whose two books on the history of monotheism, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israel* (Berlin 1905) and *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (Berlin 1921), are the most outstanding expression of a research trend which first showed itself in Protestant scholarship from the middle of the 18th century when the French physician Jean Astruc assumed two literary sources to lie behind *Genesis*: one in which the name *Elohim* is used, another one using the Tetragrammaton.

In the wake of De Wette and K. H. Graf, Wellhausen sought to prove that the Pentateuch is made up of four sources whose time ranges from the 9th century B. C. E. until the Babylonian Exile. The most ancient sources are the so-called Jahvist (J) and Elohist (E). The later source is the Deuteronomist, which was presumably written during the 7th century B. C. E.; the latest, the Priestly Code (P) was written during the Babylonian Exile. Implicit in this literary assumption is an evolutionary construction of the history of monotheism.

Wellhausen claimed that the oldest sources, E and J, reflect the spontaneous-primitive stage of the popular religion of the Israelites. This stage was polytheistic. It recognised the existence and reality of the gods of other nations, on the one hand, and the tribal or national nature of the God of Israel on the other. These sources testify to the primal rootedness of the Israelite in his surroundings. The second stage is the prophetic one: the Prophets created the belief in the uniqueness of God. At the same time they emphasised the superiority of morality by their opposition to polytheism. The most important attribute of the God of Israel is, to their mind, his being a just judge in universal history. The third stage is embodied in the cultic and legalist religion of the so-called priestly source. Here we have a consciously artificial product of the Jewish "Church" in contrast to Prophetic religion which is the authentic expression of creative spontaneity. This creation, taking place as it did, divorced from the mother-country, lacks earthly vitality. Late Pharisaic Judaism sprouted out of the priestly source. The crowning glory in the history of biblical monotheism is, therefore, the faith of the Prophets, which is the antithesis to the popular belief. However, the universal non-ritual prophetic faith did not find a worthy heir in the priestly attitude, which was nationalistic and ritualistic in essence.

How did Kaufmann carry out his critical labours? His first step was the criticism of Wellhausen's literary construction of the Pentateuch. True, he did accept the assumption that it was composed from four sources written at different periods. But he emphatically rejected Wellhausen's chronological arrangement. He tried to show the antiquity of the priestly source, maintaining that it was written during the Hebrew Monarchy, and not during the Babylonian Exile or the Second Temple period. According to him, the latest source is Deuteronomy, which was concluded between the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. Again: here too he emphasises the word *concluded*, for Deuteronomy includes ancient elements whose beginnings are to be found in the days of the Judges; but only in Josiah's days were the laws about the centralisation of sacrifices in the elected locality, i. e. Jerusalem, added. This step of Kaufmann's carried central importance, for by pushing the time of the priestly source backward, he destroyed the triple system in the development of monotheism as Wellhausen had constructed it. The legislative background of the priestly source is pre-prophetic and part and parcel of the popular religion from which classic prophetism sprang.

## *Monotheism and polytheism*

Kaufmann went on by denying the relevance of the principle of evolution for explaining the growth of monotheism. For this end he showed the radical difference between polytheism and monotheism. He argues that this difference is not only a matter of the *number* of gods, but touches the essence of deity. Paganism is basically pantheistic, its gods and demi-gods being an indivisible part of the universe. The laws of matter, as well as the vicissitudes of fate (*anangké*), limit the power of the gods of other nations; the fate of the world is decided by war between the different gods. The myths of these wars are the essence of polytheistic theology. Contrarily, the God of Israel is transcendent; he is beyond the universe. Monotheism is a-mythological in essence, as God is not subject to the material laws inherent in matter. He is not subordinated to any system of laws and has no history. His principal attribute: his supreme and unlimited Will.

The transition from the polytheistic-pantheistic-mythological outlook to the monotheistic-transcendent one is not a matter of gradual development. No historical-evolutionary theory can explain the leap over the abyss dividing these two worlds. In no polytheistic religion, not even in the meditations of the Babylonian priests or the ideas of Akh-en-Aton, can there be seen any starting point whatsoever towards monotheism, for those are deeply steeped in the polytheistic-mythological background, while the uniqueness of the God of Israel is in the absolute superiority and sovereignty of his will over the universe. There is thus no historical continuity between polytheism and monotheism.

### *Monotheism: the basic creative force of Israel's culture*

He goes on to explain: the uniqueness of the God of Israel is not in his being abstract, as Maimonides had wanted to prove by his philosophical assumptions. Kaufmann makes it abundantly clear that not in abstract concepts but in concrete images and popular descriptions is the superior will of God drawn by the authors of the Bible.

As to the relationship between monotheism and the people of Israel, Kaufmann destroys yet another link in Wellhausen's structure: his historical interpretation of the term "popular religion". He denies the assumption that that religion had been polytheistic; on the contrary, it is exactly monotheism which was created by the national spirit, i. e. the "popular religion", and which is the outstanding contribution of Israel to humanity's spiritual history. Here Kaufmann took the leap from empirical history to philosophical anthropology by sequestering monotheism from the field of development in time and putting it in the sphere of the "creative spirit" of the nation. However, to his mind, even the creative spirit of the nation is an empirical-historical factor. Moses is the creator of monotheism and he was the one

who inspired the tribes of Israel in his generation so that they became a paragon of a monotheistic nation. This people shaped in the course of time its national culture and its social institutions by marking them with the stamp of monotheism. Thus, monotheism turns out to be the creative principle in Israel's culture.

At this point Kaufmann raises a new argument which roused numerous debates among the scholars, namely that the authors of the Bible had no knowledge of polytheism. The monotheistic idea so filled the innermost parts of the soul of the nation until her authors were not able to look at polytheism face to face. They were blinded by this new concept. In their struggle with polytheism they emphasised that it is none but the worship of stone and wood, a sort of primitive fetishism without reality – for the mythological theology of polytheism was alien to their mentality. This brings him to a further historical conclusion, namely that they had always been a complete separation between the Israelites' worship and that of polytheistic nations surrounding them. The widely accepted hypothesis of Wellhausen's school, according to which the popular religion was syncretic in essence, cannot bear up, according to Kaufmann, under historical criticism. There are, it is true, isolated, desiccated remains of primitive fetishism, but that is a barren and uprooted phenomenon without any organic link with religious life and the national culture as it was being generated in Israel and Judah. This culture in all its aspects is itself monumental testimony to the monotheistic character of the national genius. It is a commonplace that Israel's religion grew in the sphere of Canaanite-Mesopotamian culture, but according to Kaufmann, these influences were marginal and did not touch the essence of monotheism. The Israelites absorbed images, legends, laws etc. from those cultures, adapting them and accommodating them to their new concept of life. The ancient Eastern culture provided the bricks and mortar for the building; monotheism forged them into a new way of life.

### *Monotheism and prophecy*

Here he raises the question concerning the contribution of the Prophets to monotheism: Did they not have just that most important historical function which the Protestant scholars adduced to them contending that they created monotheism? Kaufmann's answer is completely different from that of Protestant Bible research. First of all: prophecy is not a relatively late phenomenon which came to Israel from Canaanite influence, as is still held: its rise coincides with the beginnings of Israel. Secondly: it is not defined by its ecstatic characteristics. Its outstanding characteristic is the idea of personal election: the Prophet is charged with a mission; he is sent to the people to bring it the word of God and his command. The first prophet-missionary was Moses, who was also the father of monotheism. As for the classical prophets from the time of Amos onwards, their significance is not

for the novelty of their ideas, but rather because of their ethical explanation of traditional faith. While criticising society, they became aware of the priority of the moral claim on man as opposed to the secondary importance of ritual ceremony.

However, this innovation was not fundamental either, for the priority of morality is the assumption of the ancient stories about Sodom and Gomorrah and that of the Flood. The classical prophets only transferred the moral vision implicit in these stories to the actual historical sphere of Israel by turning them into a relevant political-social demand. Their rather critical approach to actual historical reality also brought them to an eschatological interpretation of history. Thus we learn that the Prophets only underscored the significance of the moral demands implicit in the ancient sources by evaluating the reality of their times by the standards of their moral idealism. This process of unfolding of the innermost moral essence of monotheism is fundamentally different from any kind of evolution. The theatre of their activity is not an abstract humanity made up of individuals, but rather the family of all nations, the spiritual centre of which is Israel.

### *Kaufmann's view of the Conquest*

Kaufmann's last years were devoted to the elucidation of Israel's antiquity in their Land. To this subject he devoted his interpretation of the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges and his monograph *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine*. There he contends with the reigning German school of biblical research (Alt-Noth) which maintained that the conquest of Israel as described in the Book of Joshua is a late idealisation and does not fit the actual historical reality. According to this version, there had never been a one-time conquest by the Israelites' army under Joshua bin-Nun, since in the 13th and 12th centuries B. C. E. there was not yet a People of Israel as a defined and united ethnic entity.

According to this school, the historical truth of the conquest of the Land of Canaan is mostly to be found in the first chapter of the Book of Judges. From this scholars conclude that the penetration of the Hebrew tribes into Canaan was a complex process which lasted for generations; during this

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during their sojourn in the Land of Israel. There they merged into one nation. Their national consciousness was shaped at the various amphycyonic centres where they met at festivals and other cultic ceremonies. Kaufmann rejects this construction of history, for the decisive factor in the crystallisation

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of national consciousness was the belief that had been planted in the hearts of the tribes by Moses, i. e. it preceded their settlement in Canaan, where they were exposed to the relentless influence of a polytheist culture. This nation did not "grow out of its soil" as the polytheistic myth describes the growing of other nations: God bequeathed this land to the People of Israel which had already previously existed as an historical entity with its own self-consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Taking as his point of departure the assumption that monotheism is the collective creation of Israel, Kaufmann denied the historical authenticity of the tradition which saw its beginnings in Abraham. The stories of the Patriarchs are considered by him as a late construction of early legends aspiring to ante-date the beginnings of monotheism to a pre-historic period of the nation.

*Monotheism: intuitive creation of the national genius*

From our discussion so far, it is clear that Kaufmann proposed a critical Jewish antithesis to the work done mainly by Protestant scholars. According to this antithesis, monotheism is the intuitive creation of the national genius of Israel rather than the product of historical development. Its principal characteristic is the a-mythological image of God who is transcendent, having an absolutely Superior Will. Monotheism was the creative foundation of Israel's culture. Accordingly, he rejected Wellhausen's assumption that the classical prophets rebelled against national popular religion; on the contrary, they were completely immersed in it. Their living contribution was only to expound traditional belief in terms of moral priority. From such a point of view it seemed that Christianity, which centred around the myth of the son of God, was a regression into mythology, an attempt to belittle the transcendent, the a-mythological character of the God of Israel. In this connection he underscores that the universal trends inherent in biblical monotheism are part and parcel of Israel's ancient culture and their realisation does not demand a breaking-out of the national framework. The most vigorous expression of this trend is found in the Book of Isaiah, who was himself deeply entrenched in the popular religion.

*Yechezkel Kaufmann and Hermann Cohen*

When studying Jewish thought of the generation preceding ours, we find that the Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen attacked Christianity with similar philosophical assumptions. In his posthumous work, *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Leipzig 1919), he develops a similar viewpoint of monotheism. He preceded Kaufmann in emphasising the unbridgeable gap between polytheism, which is by definition mythological

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed objective presentation of this controversy comp. J. Bright, *Early Israel in recent History Writing*, SCM Press, London 1956.



and pantheistic, and a-mythological monotheism with its idea of transcendence. Furthermore, the philosophical idealism of Hermann Cohen, who found the uniqueness of the Jewish People in its monotheism, helped Kaufmann in his youthful rebellion against Achad Ha'am's biologicistic-positivist point of view – a rebellion with which he started out on his scientific career at the age of nineteen. A comparison of whole passages from Cohen's book with the most important passages in *The History of the Faith of Israel* gives support to our assumption.

Cohen also connects the spirit of the Jewish nation with the monotheistic idea and tries to divorce it from the concept of evolution. Kaufmann the historian actually wanted to translate these ideas into the language of empirical history. He parted ways with Cohen when the latter placed the difference between monotheism and philosophical polytheistic pantheism on the Platonic twin-concepts of Being-Becoming (*Sein-Dasein* as he put it) which he had absorbed from German idealism.

Cohen argues that only God's existence is Being, i. e. absolute total existence, for it is not dependent on any conditions outside itself. The existence of the world, on the other hand, is illusionary, for as it was created it is due to vanish. Against these ontological distinctions Kaufmann understood the voluntary nature of biblical monotheism; the Superiority of the Will of God. Indeed, this argument of Kaufmann's is in line with Jewish rational tradition whose principal representatives are Maimonides in the Middle Ages and Hermann Cohen in the modern period. All three aspired to cancel, or at least mitigate, the importance of irrational elements in monotheism. Maimonides fiercely objected to the sensual concept of God. The tool he used was philosophical Midrash, by means of which he identified the anthropomorphic images of God with the abstract concepts of the Aristotelian system. Hermann Cohen, on the other hand, who was forced to acknowledge these images as they were, cancelled their importance by means of historical criticism, that is to say he considered them to be desiccated pre-historic remains to monotheism. Kaufmann made a fundamental distinction between abstractness and transcendence. Biblical faith is *not* a philosophic one, since it is the outcome of popular intuition. It therefore contains no abstractions, but does have transcendence in its aim to elevate God above and beyond the world. The instrument by which the Bible expresses this non-mythological transcendence is the political-legendary language drawn from popular tradition. Kaufmann the historian points out to us the inner paradox of monotheism which he considers to be essentially a-mythological, but making use of pictorial-mythological language to express its basic idea. He tries to minimise the importance of the paradox in two interesting ways: a) by accepting the limited definition of the term *myth* as denoting only stories about the history of the gods; b) by avoiding the term "mythological expression" when describing the inner world of the Bible. Instead he uses

the words "symbolic expression" when discussing the basic idea of monotheism, and so bypasses the problem of mythological thought in the Bible.

*Monotheistic mythology (a critical evaluation of Kaufmann's theory)*

Is historical monotheism actually as described by him? In this paper we will not discuss the many historical, literary and exegetical problems raised in the mind by a perusal of Kaufmann's great work. We will focus on the fundamental theological problems: does the abyss between polytheism and monotheism not leave any room for historical continuity, or does historical reality know of an in-between phenomenon? Secondly: does the rationalistic definition of monotheism as a non-mythological creation fit historical reality? Thirdly: is the characterisation of the Jewish People given by Kaufmann according to the historical facts, considering that the Bible itself complains again and again about the common people's being drawn to idolatry?

It is of course true that every historian of significance needs philosophic and sociological hypotheses without which he cannot begin to shape his work. In most cases these hypotheses are *a priori*. He uses them to measure, evaluate and elucidate the living reality. The greatness of a historian is not in that he approaches his material without any hypotheses, as some naive or quasi-naive people have it, but that he always remains open to the historical facts and is always ready to abandon assumptions that do not square with reality. Under no circumstances should he force his categorical framework on the historical reality; it seems to us that Kaufmann was not always successful in avoiding this trap.

One must express doubt about his emphatic claim that there was no idolatry and no syncretism in Israel. The truth is that the Bible straightforwardly describes the polytheistic view of life of the common people (Judges 6:30-32; 17:3; Hosea 4 and 10). On the other hand we have a poetical layer in the Bible which is a transition stage from the mythological-polytheistic outlook to the monotheistic one. I am referring to that layer which Cassuto called "Israeli Epos". This poetry, which tells about God's primeval struggle with the sea-monsters, uses mythological imagery which has been divorced from its polytheistic meaning and has been purified in the fire of the monotheistic faith. There is here evidence of *monotheistic mythology* of a special popular character. Even in the most intellectual passages of the Bible - I am referring, among others, to Genesis 1 - there are mythological elements; Kaufmann's definition of myth as legends about gods does not quite fit the reality of this widespread phenomenon of human consciousness. It seems that only this narrow definition can create the impression of an unbridgeable abyss between polytheism and monotheism. One cannot define a spiritual phenomenon by its material contents alone, in this case stories of the history of the gods. One has to discover the structure

of consciousness and the modes of thought which were at the back of it. Before we deal with myth, we have to define the peculiar characteristics of mythological thinking as opposed to the discursive way of thought. We will come to see that the term is much broader than the narrow span which was allowed for in the material definition Kaufmann inherited from rationalistic western tradition. As far as I can see, the outstanding characteristics of mythical thinking are the personal and dramatic explanation of Being and Becoming. These two elements are found in the Bible as well. Thus we find mythological elements in monotheism. Polytheism and mythology are not identical concepts, as Kaufmann would have it.

This leads us to another historical conclusion: the idol worship of the simple people, though it is without any reflective element and not connected with Israeli legends about the history of God, cannot be separated from the concept "polytheism" as Kaufmann does when calling this worship fetishism. Only by means of the artificial distinction between polytheism and fetishism does he succeed in covering up the testimony of idol worship in Israel. And when the text is so explicit that there is no covering up of the facts, as in the many places in the Book of Hosea which testify to a syncretic popular ritual, he reverts to historical criticism and "proves" the existence of two prophets whose books are included in the present Book of Hosea. The prophet who describes idolatry lived in the time of Ahab. This idolatry certainly did not originate in the nation's soul but was a foreign import whose source was in the royal house. In this way Kaufmann succeeded in saving, as it were, the proclaimed monotheistic essence of the soul of the Nation.

The theoretic historical problem that faces the student of biblical monotheism is one of distinguishing between polytheistic and monotheistic mythology. Not by chance did Kaufmann reject Buber's theory of the ancient Kingdom of God, as a concrete perception of God-the-King who rules over all the national aspects of life, for the rationalist God is convenient only as long as he is beyond the world: the instant he starts to interfere with aspects of life and fills the whole earth with his glory, he acquires concrete mythical forms that cannot be assimilated by intellectual expression alone. As a matter of fact, Kaufmann never succeeded in gainsaying the historical assumption of the ancient mythic concrete perception of the Kingdom of God.

Already at the beginning of this century, Buber had claimed the existence of mythological Judaism. Jewish scholarship of this generation did indeed pull down the rationalistic illusion that Israeli monotheism lacks mythology. The historical-empirical research of Jewish mysticism by Gershom Sholem showed that mythological Judaism has a firm foothold in monotheism. Not only that, but more: it seems that non-mythological monotheism is so lacking in vitality that it cannot become a real power in history. Much to

our surprise, Kaufmann had doubts about the rigid conceptual framework he himself built and in one of his last essays he tried to soften his position, admitting the existence of a legitimate myth in the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

Finally I would like to say a few things about the assumed monotheistic creativeness as the outstanding trait of Israel's national soul. A study of our sources shows that the historical People of Israel is much more complex than Kaufmann had described it. No doubt, monotheism was created within its ranks. However, according to the sources, the beginnings of monotheism were the religious experiences of individuals – Abraham and Moses – whereas the people as a whole was not able to bear the immediate presence of God and needed Moses's intervention (Deut. 18:16). A short time after the Revelation there burst forth from the depths of its soul the longing for idolatry and it submitted to the tempting influence of the Canaanite gods, (cf. Ex. 32; Num. 25; Josh. 24:23; Judges 6:30-32; I Sam. 25; II Kings 1:3; 17:7; Hosea 4ff; Isaiah 2:6; 5:19; Ezek. 8:16 etc.). Moreover, in the sources from the Second Temple period we also find indirect proof that monotheism was not accepted by the mass of the people at the time of the First Temple. I am mainly referring to the words of the Sages to the effect that only during the Babylonian Exile was idolatry uprooted and exterminated. According to the description in the sources, the history of the First Temple was the history of monotheism within the Jewish People, the creators of the faith being elect individuals who forged the mind and mentality of the generations.

There is nothing in these criticisms to lower Kaufmann's original contribution towards a new historical-philosophical synthesis of biblical religion without subjecting the evaluation of the Hebrew Bible to theological standards of New Testament religion like, for instance, von Rad's or Eichrodt's theologies which are clearly steeped in Protestant German tradition.

In the fields related to Bible research there lived in our generation only one historian-philosopher whose approach can be compared with Kaufmann's: Henry Frankfurt, the Ancient Near East scholar. His aim was to combine positivist-analytic research with a synthetic-philosophical approach, which bears the mark of Ernst Cassirer's philosophy. An historical synthesis can also be found among scholars who belong to the so-called Scandinavian school. Their *a priori* hypothesis is that Israeli civilisation grew out of a ritual pattern common to all Ancient Near Eastern civilisations. On this pattern all the myths of the different nations were based. Kaufmann paid only little attention to these scholars and even that with a tone of scorn. He totally rejected their hypothesis that monotheism grew out of ritual experience which focussed on an assumed polytheistic festival where YHWH

<sup>1</sup> Y. Kaufmann, The Bible and Mythological Polytheism, Journal of Biblical Literature, LXX, 1951, pp. 179-197.

ascended the throne. This school went far afield from the sources, interpreting the Bible as one of the expressions of mythological polytheism of the Ancient Near East. Its representatives even succeeded in breaking out of the bounds of critical philological research in their claim that the Old Testament is a late crystallisation of anonymous popular traditions which were handed down orally. No doubt their work will be evaluated as an interesting explanation by twentieth century Christian scholars who see the Ancient Near East in the light of western civilisation, which is essentially universal, and who want to find in the Hebrew Bible the soil from which the myth of Jesus of Nazareth grew. This school aimed at blurring the tension of monotheism and polytheism, for according to it ancient Israeli civilisation bore a polytheistic character. Kaufmann, the Jewish rationalist, who put a clear dividing line between mythological-polytheism and a-mythological monotheism, aspired to loosen the inner tension existing in the faith of Israel. The Scandinavian school missed the mark by wanting to blot out the uniqueness of Israeli civilisation; Kaufmann took the ancient Eastern background of the Bible too lightly. This is the source of his ignoring the inner problematics which bothered the authors and poets of the Bible. They were tossed between rationalistic and mythological expression. The literal meaning of many passages and their connection with ancient Eastern civilisations give evidence at this point against Kaufmann's rationalism. Added to this testimony there is an important historical fact: the mythical layers, suppressed by the Bible's editors, erupted into history in the time of the Second Temple and influenced the shape of Judaism. To unveil the inner problematics of the biblical faith is, therefore, one of the tasks still upon us to fulfil.

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