

Response

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First of all, I want to thank you, Yehoyada, for your inspiring lecture about Franz Rosenzweig, his view of religion, and his attitude towards Jewish preaching. I am very glad that you directed our attention to Franz Rosenzweig in the homiletical context, which is surely not obvious at first glance, as Rosenzweig was not a preacher. But – as you have shown impressively – there are possibilities for rich homiletical learning in Rosenzweig's thought.

In my response, I would like to stress three points and add some questions.

1. The intellectual background of Franz Rosenzweig's writings

All of Franz Rosenzweig's words and attitudes must be understood – as you have shown in your lecture – in a specific historical and intellectual background. World War I marked a considerable shift in Germany's 'Geistesgeschichte', in the German intellectual history. This shift can be discerned in Christian circles as well as in Jewish ones. On the Christian side theologians like Karl Barth or Eduard Thurneysen are outstanding examples of this shift away from classic liberal and enlightenment theology towards a fresh re-lecture of one's own old sources, of the sacred texts and traditional dogmatics. Theologians like Barth and Thurneysen yearned for a new thinking and a new theology – and found it theologically in the radical antithesis between God and world and aesthetically in an expressionist way of writing. The circumstances in this time of an experienced crisis produced a specific "Theologie der Krise", "theology of crisis", as an answer.¹

¹ Rosenzweig was very aware of these theological developments, cf. e.g. *Franz Rosenzweig, Sprachdenken im Übersetzen*, vol. 1: Jehuda Halevi. Fünfundneunzig Hymnen und Gedichte (Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften 4,1 [Rafael N. Rosenzweig, Ed.]), Haag/Boston (MA)/Lancaster 1983, 68–71, esp. 70.

Almost the same development can be seen in Jewish intellectual history as well – and all this had homiletical consequences, too. The Jewish reform of the 19th century produced as one of its offspring the German-Jewish sermon, which was taken over with varying emphases by the various movements which began to be differentiated in Judaism around the middle of the 19th century. The Jewish reform movement was upheld by the central paradigms of rationality and universality and also by a fundamental belief in progress. All this became questionable early in the 20th century when the irrational (the “holy”; the “subconscious/unconscious”), the particular, and the return to tradition became more and more fascinating.² This being the case, the modern Jewish sermon in the pedagogical form established only a few years previously in Siegmund Maybaum’s “Jewish Homiletics”³ lost much of its acceptance. Numerous young rabbis considered it a relic of past times. Consequently, looking back at the 1920’s Sinai Ucko writes:

“As far as they [i.e. the younger generation of rabbis – AD] were aware, the sermon was no longer so central and one looked somewhat ironically on the homiletical rules still being taught in the rabbinic seminaries.”⁴

Instead, many attempted – thus once more Sinai Ucko – “often to replace the sermon by a lecture in order thus [...] to take up the old tradition of ‘learning’.”⁵

The return to tradition and the recent turning to the sources of Judaism, to the Talmud and Midrash, also shaped the new hermeneutics and congregational-educational conceptions which are connected with names such as Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber and which belong to a trend often called the “Jewish Renaissance”. In his famous article “*Zeit ists*” (Hebrew: ...ל נא, English: ‘It’s time now!’), published in 1917, Franz Rosenzweig claimed that after 100 years of Jewish emancipation and new freedom nowadays most of the Jews were outside: outside of their own tradition, outside of Torah. What had to be done – according to Rosenzweig – was to find a new way in: into the tradition, into

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- 2 Cf. *Michael Brenner*, *The Renaissance of Jewish culture in Weimar Germany*, New Haven (CT)/London 1996; *Steven E. Aschheim*, *German Jews Beyond Bildung and Liberalism. The Radical Jewish Revival in the Weimar Republic*, in: *Klaus L. Bergahn* (Ed.), *The German-Jewish Dialogue Reconsidered. A Symposium in Honor of George L. Mosse* (German life and civilization 20), New York et al. 1996, 125–140; 277–287 (notes).
 - 3 Cf. *Siegmund Maybaum*, *Jüdische Homiletik. Nebst einer Auswahl von Texten und Themen, Praktische Theologie 1*, Berlin 1890.
 - 4 *Sinai Ucko*, *Der Rabbiner in der Kleingemeinde*, in: *Schlomo F. Rülff* (Ed.), *Paul Lazarus Gedenkbuch. Beiträge zur Würdigung der letzten Rabbinergeneration in Deutschland*, Jerusalem 1961, 73–78; quotation: 73.
 - 5 *Ibid.*, 73f.

Torah. What had to be sought was a new way of teaching so that all the Jews alienated from their tradition could rediscover the richness and power of Torah and Jewish tradition.⁶

There are three interesting questions for me at this point: First: is it right to see Franz Rosenzweig as one of the many children of a large movement during the World War I-period and in the early Weimar Republic – or is he much more unique? Second: is his analysis of the hermeneutical situation of his own Jewish people correct? Did Jewish emancipation, did Jewish liberalism lead people out and away from Torah? And third: what about our situation nowadays in Germany, in Europe, in Israel, in the United States? Is it the same as it was in 1917? Are we all ‘out’ – and have to find new ways ‘in’? And if this be the case, could we – Christians and Jews – help each other to do so?

2. Franz Rosenzweig and his homiletical hermeneutics

In Yehoyada Amir’s description of Rosenzweig’s homiletical approach, preaching appears as a very specific kind of “mutual listening” – and mainly “mutual listening” to the biblical texts.

In Rosenzweig’s remarks about his own translation of the poems of the medieval author and poet Jehuda Halevi (1075–1141), he stressed that he wanted to show in these translations that Halevi was *not* a German writer. He wanted to make the readers feel the difference between Halevi and us. He did not want to “Germanize” Halevi’s Hebrew, but to make the German sound foreign and unknown to us. He wanted to respect the difference – and this respect is according to Rosenzweig the indispensable condition for us to leap over the gap which exists between Halevi and us. And sometimes, Rosenzweig writes, there would be moments in which the wall between translation and text is broken down – magic moments for the translator and reader.⁷

In my opinion these remarks on the Halevi translation could easily be read with homiletical eyes as well. Preaching – according to Rosenzweig – would then mean *not* to bridge, but on the contrary to enlarge the gap between us and the biblical texts, to make us feel the

6 Cf. *Franz Rosenzweig, Zeit ists*, in: *Idem, Zweistromland. Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken (Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften 3 [Reinhold and Annemarie Mayer, Eds.])*, Dordrecht/Boston (MA)/Lancaster 1984, 461–481.

7 Cf. *Franz Rosenzweig, Vorwort zu Jehuda Halevi*, in: *Idem, Sprachdenken*, vol. 1 (v. supra, n. 1), 1–18.

difference, to make us listen – and thus to make the texts alluring and attractive to us.

Rosenzweig was – as Yehoyada Amir stated – attracted by the sermons of Nehemia Anton Nobel (1871–1922). These sermons were resolutely located in the context of the synagogue liturgy and drew the biblical text anew into the centre. Rosenzweig writes of a *Kohelet*-sermon by Nobel:

“He delivered almost his entire sermon in a quiet manner, possibly for a whole hour. It was as if he were conversing with someone. But this someone was not sitting among us. Suddenly I noticed: he was not really speaking to us – in every sentence he addressed *Kohelet* directly, he did not speak *about*, he spoke *with Kohelet*. And then I saw him [i.e. Kohelet – AD] ...”⁸

If we follow Rosenzweig’s description, Nobel produced a kind of dialogue with Scripture in which the listener, Rosenzweig, became a participant.

Can the implicit homiletics of Rosenzweig be characterized as a homiletics of the strange and unknown text? A text which can never be understood completely? And could we learn from this as well? Could we find a new and attractive homiletical hermeneutic in Franz Rosenzweig’s traces? A homiletical hermeneutic which does not try to bridge us and the text – but instead shows us its difference and strangeness?

3. Franz Rosenzweig: The sermon in prayer context

As we have heard in Yehoyada Amir’s lecture one of the main problems Franz Rosenzweig had with the Jewish sermon was that it just did not really fit in the context of Jewish prayer. Sermon always means that *one* person speaks and addresses his words to the others. The community addressing the one God and praising the one God no longer exists when one out of the community stands before the others preaching. The *bet ha-tefilla* changes its shape and becomes a specific kind of *bet-midrash*.

Actually, I think, Rosenzweig marks a fundamental problem of each sermon – as sermon can be defined as human words addressed to human beings with the purpose of edifying or interpreting or teaching in liturgical context – a context which is characterized by jointly addressing the one God in praise and lament. Especially in Protestant

8 Franz Rosenzweig in: Vorstand der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main (Ed.), *Nachrufe auf Rabbiner N. A. Nobel*, Frankfurt/M. 1923, 44–46, here: 45f.

circles the problem of a rivalry between worship and sermon is obvious. Since the early 19th century (Schleiermacher was one of the protagonists), quite a number of Protestants have terminologically separated *Liturgy* and *Sermon*, calling liturgy everything that happens in the worship apart from the sermon.⁹ The consequence in many Protestant circles is clear: liturgy somehow seems to be dispensable; the sermon of course is not!

I think Rosenzweig is right to stress this problem. And to demand a sermon which deliberately locates itself *in the context of prayer*. A sermon which does not only teach tradition or try to somehow educate the congregation in a moral sense or give its commentary on what happens in the world – but a sermon which fits in the liturgical context. Like the sermons of Nehemia Anton Nobel seem to have fitted in prayer context, because he – according to Rosenzweig's description – did not speak about Kohelet, but with him.

I ask: is the connection between sermon and liturgy or sermon and prayer still a topic in Jewish and Christian homiletical and liturgical discussions? How necessary or how dispensable is the sermon in the liturgy? And how could a sermon be shaped that really fits into its liturgical context?

⁹ Cf. Friedrich Kalb, Art. Liturgie I. Christliche Liturgie, in: TRE 21/1991, 358–377, here: 367.