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**“... every shepherd is an abomination ...”: Liberal Arts and Jewish Voices**

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When Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:33-34, ESV).

There is an emerging renewed interest in the Liberal Arts across Europe, and both traditional and contemporary curricula encompass a wealth of literature and learning from ancient times to modernity. However, the scarcity of Jewish texts reveals an under-representation that suggests, at the very least, they have been overlooked. At worst, it is the innate fruit of the long history of anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism rife in Western culture. Either way, Liberal Arts students are impoverished by the absence of Jewish voices.

Marijk van der Wende has well highlighted the similarities and differences between the long-

established Liberal Arts programmes in the USA and the more recent developments in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Whilst European and American models differ in many regards, they can both be traced back to a common beginning with ancient Greek philosophy and the medieval European university. European and American models also appear to omit Jewish sources, and a good example of this omission can be found in 'Great Books' curricula. Introduced at St. John's College, Annapolis, in 1937 by Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, and derived from John Erskine's 1916 Columbia College program, the books chosen were based on the classic Liberal Arts 'trivium' (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and 'quadrivium' (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy).<sup>2</sup> In 1952 Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler edited a 54-volume collection entitled *Great Books of the Western World*, believing that the best liberal education was to be achieved through 'the greatest works the West has produced', where the 'voices of the Great Conversation' would address society's problems with the 'wisdom that lies in the works of its greatest thinkers'.<sup>3</sup>

However, it has been rightly asked: which books are 'Great Books', who chooses them and who reads them? In 1992 a survey of 77 American colleges and universities offering Great Books curricula sought to answer these questions. The most frequently assigned authors were Plato, Shakespeare, Aristotle and Homer.<sup>4</sup> With the exception of a small number of biblical texts, Great Books curricula are generally founded on ancient Greek philosophy and literature. Thereafter, the periods of Antiquity and medieval history are silent with regard to Jewish voices. There is no mention of the Talmuds or the Midrashim. No Philo, no Maimonides.<sup>5</sup>

What happened, then, to these classic Jewish texts? I believe there are at least two major factors responsible for their absence. Firstly, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, especially as it manifested in the works of the Church Fathers, created a disdain for Jewish exegesis. Secondly, a Christian theology divorced from its Hebraic origins and shaped instead by Hellenistic philosophy sought to establish its superiority over Judaism.<sup>6</sup> The patristic period produced a unitary voice in expressing anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic views, from Greek Fathers such as John Chrysostom to Latin Fathers

such as Augustine.<sup>7</sup> Augustine was one of the main architects of supersessionist theology.<sup>8</sup> Seeds of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism were sown deep into Christian thinking, and Christians were taught to have nothing to do with Jews or their texts. The Latin Catholic church began its anti-Talmudic campaign in the 1230s, culminating in the 'trial' of the Talmud in Paris.<sup>9</sup> The trial resulted in the burning of 24 cartloads of Jewish texts. Thereafter, the Talmud was regularly confiscated, burnt or censored throughout medieval Christian Europe.<sup>10</sup> In 1233 Dominican inquisitors burnt copies of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* at Montpellier.<sup>11</sup>

The Reformation brought little change. Luther's early warmth towards the Jews eventually gave way to the latent anti-Semitism which had shaped his pre-Reformation world. In his 1543 publication, *On the Jews and their Lies*, there was no mistaking his view of the Jewish writings: 'I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them.'<sup>12</sup> Both Catholic and Protestant messages were clear: Jewish texts were inferior to Christian texts, and worse still, they were cursed.

Not only were Jewish texts absent during the formative period of the 'Great Conversation', but Jews themselves were physically excluded from the dialogue. Charles Murray notes that only two examples of great Jewish accomplishment emerge between 800 B.C.E. and the first millennium of the Common Era, namely the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. However, the apparent absence of Jews in the fields of science, philosophy, mathematics or the arts does not signify inactivity during this period.<sup>13</sup> No Jewish scientists are mentioned in medieval histories of science, but George Sarton's 1927-1948 monumental work: *Introduction to the History of Science* found that out of all the known scientists working in all the known world between 1150 and 1300, fifteen percent were Jews, which as Murray points out, was 'far out of proportion to the Jewish population.' From medieval times to beyond the Renaissance, most Jewish voices, including philosophers, poets, religious thinkers, scholars, physicians, and rabbis, are obscured to all but those within the Jewish world. Murray could only find seven Jews between the years 1200 and 1800 among the inventories

of significant figures in arts and sciences. This systematic exclusion and discrimination accounts for the under-representation of Jews during the 'flowering' of the European Liberal Arts.<sup>14</sup> The Jews have always been people of the 'Book', educated, literate and textual. Murray tracks this back deep into their ancient history, and this leads him to ask: 'Why should one particular tribe at the time of Moses, living in the same environment as other nomadic and agricultural peoples of the Middle East, have already evolved elevated intelligence when the others did not?'<sup>15</sup>

The development of the modern university can be traced back historically to the early medieval universities of Europe. By the thirteenth century the University of Paris had established faculties of arts, medicine, law and theology. The medieval Latin word 'universitas', however, meant 'corporation' or 'guild' rather than a centre for learning.<sup>16</sup> Alongside universities of scholars, there were universities of 'butchers and barbers'. The universities of Paris or Bologna were actually guilds of teachers. The university faculties formed separate guilds with separate admission. Herein lay the problem for Jewish participation in the university. In medieval Christian thinking Jews epitomised the 'classic stranger' and, in the words of Steven Epstein, they became 'a fixture of the outside world in many regions of Europe and a potential challenge to the spiritual and economic basis of the guild.'<sup>17</sup> Jews were forbidden admission to the guilds, and as the conferral of degrees was granted by the Catholic Church, they were also denied any hope of gaining qualification. Occasionally, a few Jews were granted permission to study science, medicine or Hebrew in the medieval university, but this was rare.<sup>18</sup> There was little change in the situation until the nineteenth century, but restrictive admission policies remained in Europe and America which were only really challenged after World War Two.<sup>19</sup> Effectively, a Jewish presence was kept out of the university from its medieval beginnings, thereby excluding Jews from the crucial formative stages and subsequent development of the Liberal Arts.

A number of Liberal Arts colleges and universities developed 'Jewish Studies' courses, where Jewish history, culture and literature are taught as discrete subjects.<sup>20</sup> However, according to Daniel

Goffman, this tends to create a polarisation rather than an integration, whereby Jewish Studies attracts mainly Jewish students, and leaves non-Jewish students feeling 'intimidated, even ostracised'. Jewish Studies programs, he argues, 'too easily become ghettoized' instead of building 'cultural bridges by cultivating the non-Jewish student'.<sup>21</sup> This approach still leaves the Jewish voice on the outside. It designates Jewish texts as elective or a specialisation, rather than including Jewish voices within the 'Great Conversation'.

Whilst some biblical texts may appear in Liberal Arts curricula, the rightful interpreters of those texts are absent. When we claim to have built our western societies on Judeo-Christian foundations, what we really mean are Greco-Christian foundations. When we dig deeper, we discover the Christianity we are talking of is so far removed from its Jewishness, so unrecognisable in its authenticity, that we might just as well concede that our foundations are Greek. The Liberal Arts are immersed in a mutually exclusive Greek world-view, which excludes the Hebraic world-view as a worthy contemporary. Allan Bloom claimed that 'Only in the Western nations, i.e., those influenced by Greek philosophy, is there some willingness to doubt the identification of the good with one's own way.'<sup>22</sup> Martha Nussbaum challenged Bloom's claim, objecting to its 'startling ignorance of the critical and rationalist tradition' evident in a variety of world-views, although she also failed to mention the Jewish tradition.<sup>23</sup> Thus, if and when the Bible is read, it sits between ancient Greek texts and Augustine, and they create the lens through which it is interpreted. Typical of the Church Fathers, Augustine exegeted Scripture with a background in Manichaean gnosticism and neoplatonic philosophy, and Aquinas followed with his Aristotelian predilection. The patristic doctrine of supersessionism consciously strove to expunge all Jewish traces from the Christian faith and sever Christianity from its Hebraic origins.<sup>24</sup> However, an authentic reading of the Bible needs a Jewish lens, with assistance from the Talmuds and Midrashim.

The Bible is a Hebrew text, but it has been mediated through a Greek world-view. Worse still, it is repeatedly strip-searched at the door by the 'security' of higher criticism before it is allowed to

enter the 'Great Conversation'.<sup>25</sup> We dissect a butterfly into its constituent parts, labelling the wings, thorax, head, legs, etc. As it lies in pieces on glass plates for microscopic scrutiny, the beautiful colouring has all but rubbed off on clumsy fingertips and scalpel blades. It no longer flies. And so it is that after we have dissected the sacred beauty of Scripture, we see the constituent parts – sources, redactions, pericopes, *Sitz im Leben* – but it no longer flies. Other ancient texts enter in with VIP status, whilst the Bible is frisked with suspicion. Now it stands in danger of being ushered out of the Conversation altogether. Peter Hawkins warns us that

... the Bible is on the endangered species list. This is most obviously a cause for alarm among those who venerate the sacred text “as a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119.105). But it must also trouble the more secular minded who see the Good Book as the cornerstone of The Great Books.<sup>26</sup>

What then is the way forward? We begin with two cities – Jerusalem and Athens – held as opposites ever since Tertullian asked, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?'<sup>27</sup> Leo Strauss wrote, 'Western man became what he is, and is what he is, through the coming together of biblical faith and Greek thought. In order to understand ourselves and to illuminate our trackless way into the future, we must understand Jerusalem and Athens.'<sup>28</sup> The highest synthesis of these representations for Strauss is found in the word, 'wisdom'. Both cities make claims to 'true' wisdom: the beginning of Greek philosophical wisdom is wonder, whereas the beginning of biblical wisdom is the fear of the Lord. According to Strauss, 'We are thus compelled from the very beginning to make a choice, to take a stand.' However, he believes that even if we say we are open to both, we will side with Athens by default, because we wish to hear before we act.<sup>29</sup>

Responding to Strauss, Ariella Atzmon argues that 'all attempts to reconcile the Jewish imperative of “first act and then listen” with the Greek urge for understanding above all else, are doomed to failure'. Atzmon believes 'the disparity between Athens and Jerusalem is ingrained in the primordial split between the tiller of the soil and the wandering shepherd. It is the biblical rivalry

between Cain the dweller, signified by the craving for rootedness, and Abel the wanderer'.<sup>30</sup> Of course, Cain put Abel to death, and the Bible's first murder victim is also the first shepherd. As the story of the Hebrew Bible unfolds we meet more shepherds: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons, Moses and David. Moreover, God is made known to us as a shepherd in the Twenty-Third Psalm. Yet, from early on in Scripture the position of the shepherd is lowly and despised. When Joseph is reunited with his father and his brothers in Egypt, he informs them that 'every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians' (Genesis 46:34). Interestingly, a similar bias is found in the earliest Greek accounts of the Exodus, dating back to around 300 years before the Christian era. They exhibit strong anti-Jewish tendencies and refer to the Jews as 'Shepherds'.<sup>31</sup> Contempt for the shepherd is long-standing.

Are the world-views of Athens and Jerusalem irreconcilable or can a way to live within the tension be found? Here, I turn to Thorleif Boman, who differentiates between dynamic (Hebrew) and static (Greek) thinking.<sup>32</sup> Greek thought is rest, harmony, composure and self-control; whereas Hebrew thought is movement, life, deep emotion and power: 'The Greek most acutely experiences the world and existence while he stands and reflects but the Israelite reaches his zenith in ceaseless movement.'<sup>33</sup> In the Hebraic world-view, 'everything is in eternal movement: God and man, nature and the world'. Despite the contrast, Boman sees Greek and Hebrew thinking as complimentary: 'the Greeks describe reality as *being*, the Hebrews as *movement*. Reality is, however, both at the same time; this is logically impossible, and yet it is correct.'<sup>34</sup> A different world-view invites us to view from a different position with a different angle, placing us somewhere else as the viewer and changing our relationship and position to the object or person or text in view. Thus, introducing Jewish voices which come from a distinctly different place will give us an alternative viewpoint in the Great Conversation. Sometimes the differences may compliment, sometimes they may challenge. It is not just what Jewish voices say of themselves, but what they tell us about the other. Having another viewpoint can help us to minimise our blind spots.

Jonah Cohen has proposed a curriculum for Jewish day schools, drawing on Jewish and non-Jewish texts. He argues that

... an ideal integrated Jewish education starts with universal human concerns ... with those bedrock problems that all thinking men and women must grapple. What is the good life? How do we define human nature? What is man's relationship to the earth? How should we organize society? Can we trust deduction and induction to give us certainty? What is the meaning of logic, of science, of God? ... around these kinds of elemental questions ... we can obviously bring into conversation a large variety of great thinkers and artists from both the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds ... What do Plato, Einstein and Levinas have to say about scientific methods? In what ways is scientific thinking similar to Talmudic exegesis and reasoning? ... We can approach these thinkers, rabbis and artists as fellow journeymen sharing a common pursuit of truth, and, like Talmudic scholars, we can compare, discuss and analyze their various perspectives on humanity's fundamental concerns.<sup>35</sup>

Cohen's curriculum is distinctive in that a dialogue is created between great Jewish thinkers and great non-Jewish thinkers who are both wrestling with the same problems and concerns. This would 'restore to Jewish consciousness a number of ignored but influential ancient and medieval authors ... who were translated into European languages, plagiarized, appropriated, and their names sometimes erased from the western canon, all because they were Jewish and presumably fair game.' But why should these Jewish authors be restored *only* to Jewish consciousness? 'Those who contend that western civilization rests on the struggle between Athens and Jerusalem,' Cohen argues, 'ignore how vigorously the sons and daughters of Jerusalem have embraced and contributed to the rational, empirical and artistic traditions of Athens'. Regrettably, the same cannot yet be said for Athens' sons and daughters.

Thankfully, Cohen is not alone. The Shalem Center in Jerusalem is set to soon open Israel's first Liberal Arts College.<sup>36</sup> Their 'Core Curriculum', embraces classic texts from the Jewish, Western



and Islamic traditions. This approach

... weaves the Hebrew Bible and classical rabbinic texts into the main curriculum alongside Western sources in philosophy, political theory, science and literature. The Jewish intellectual and political contributions to Western civilization and the Islamic world form an integral part of the "story" of mankind.<sup>37</sup>

The idea of weaving world-views together suggests a close relationship between the traditions in approaching science, philosophy, art and other subjects. Hopefully, Shalem will succeed and create an intertextual dialogue, a truly Great Conversation rather than a monologue.

Jewish schools and colleges are looking to their futures, but what of western colleges and universities? At the University of Winchester, we are introducing a module to the BA in Modern Liberal Arts entitled: 'Athens With Jerusalem', in which we hope to begin to redress the balance. The important word in the title of the module is 'with' ... not Athens and Jerusalem, not Athens or Jerusalem, but Athens with Jerusalem – we do not need to perpetuate the mutual exclusivity of one view over the other. Both cities, both wisdoms and both voices can stand side by side. The rooted tiller with the wandering shepherd. In the Book of Proverbs we read: 'If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth' (Proverbs 30:32, ESV). Perhaps it is time for those in the Great Conversation to cover their mouths ... to pause and listen to the Jewish voices.

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<sup>1</sup> Marijk van der Wende, 'The Emergence of Liberal Arts and Sciences Education in Europe: A Comparative Perspective', *Higher Education Policy*, 24 (2011), 233-253.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas J. Tomcho, John C. Norcross and Christopher J. Correia, 'Great Books Curricula: What is Being Read?', *The Journal of General Education*, 43.2 (1994), 90-101; and Gerald Grant and David Riesman, 'St. John's and the Great Books', *Change*, 6.4 (1974), 28-34, 36, 62-63.

<sup>3</sup> Tomcho, Norcross and Correia, pp. 90-91.

<sup>4</sup> Tomcho, Norcross and Correia, pp. 92-93.

<sup>5</sup> St. John's College is introducing Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* in its 2012 Sophomore Year, but continues to group biblical texts in Roman to Renaissance periods: <<http://www.stjohnscollege.edu/academic/readlist.shtml>> [accessed 22 June 2012].

<sup>6</sup> Gavin I. Langmuir, 'Majority History and Post-Biblical Jews', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27.3 (1966), 343-364 (pp. 347-348).

<sup>7</sup> James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue; a Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (London: The Soncino press, 1934); and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Waynesboro, GA:

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- Authentic Media, 2004).
- <sup>9</sup> Steven Bowman, 'Jewish Responses to Byzantine Polemics from the Ninth through the Eleventh Centuries', *Shofar*, 28.3 (2010), 103-115 (p. 113).
- <sup>10</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, 'Talmud trials' in Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (eds.), *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 417-418.
- <sup>11</sup> Margaret Brearley, 'Dominicans' in Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (eds.), *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 130-131.
- <sup>12</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 47: Christian in Society IV*, ed. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia :Fortress Press, 1971), p. 269.
- <sup>13</sup> Charles Murray, 'Jewish Genius', *Commentary* (April 2007), 29-35 (p. 29).
- <sup>14</sup> Murray, pp. 29-30.
- <sup>15</sup> Murray, p. 35.
- <sup>16</sup> See Walter J. Ong, 'Educationists and the Tradition of Learning', *The Journal of Higher Education*, 29.2 (1958), 59-69, 115 (p. 61).
- <sup>17</sup> Steven A. Epstein, *Wage Labour and Guilds in Medieval Europe* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 169.
- <sup>18</sup> Alfred Jospe, 'Universities', *Jewish Virtual Library* (2008)  
<[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0020\\_0\\_20217.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0020_0_20217.html)> [accessed 22 June 2012].
- <sup>19</sup> Anne H. Stevens, 'The Philosophy of General Education and its Contradictions: The Influence of Hutchins', *The Journal of General Education*, 50..3 (2001), 165-191 (pp. 174-175).
- <sup>20</sup> See Harold S. Wechsler and Paul Ritterband, 'Jewish Learning in American Universities: The Literature of a Field', *Modern Judaism*, 3.3 (1983), 253-289.
- <sup>21</sup> Daniel Goffman, 'Teaching Jewish History to the "Other"', *The History Teacher*, 24.2 (1991), 157-174 (p. 158).
- <sup>22</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 36.
- <sup>23</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Undemocratic Vistas', *The New York Review of Books*, 34.17 (1987), 20-26 (p. 22).
- <sup>24</sup> See Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'The Adversus Judaeos Tradition in the Church Fathers: The Exegesis of Christian Anti-Judaism' in Jeremy Cohen (ed.), *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict from Late Antiquity to the Reformation* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), pp.174-189.
- <sup>25</sup> Bloom, pp. 374-375.
- <sup>26</sup> Peter S. Hawkins, 'Lost and Found: The Bible and Its Literary Afterlife', *Religion & Literature*, 36.1 (2004), 1-14 (p. 1).
- <sup>27</sup> Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum (On the prescription of heretics)*, 7.9  
<<http://www.tertullian.org/quotes.htm>> [accessed 22 June 2012].
- <sup>28</sup> Leo Strauss, 'Jerusalem and Athens: Some Introductory Reflections', *Commentary*, 43 (1967), 45-57 (p. 45).
- <sup>29</sup> Strauss, p. 46.
- <sup>30</sup> Ariella Atzman, *Athens or Jerusalem: Or the story of Cain and Abel Revisited* (2007)  
<<http://arielaatoz.blogspot.com>> [accessed 22 June 2012].
- <sup>31</sup> Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes towards the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 15-21.
- <sup>32</sup> Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: Norton, 1970).
- <sup>33</sup> Boman, p. 205
- <sup>34</sup> Boman, p. 208.
- <sup>35</sup> Jonah Cohen, 'Integrating Education in Jewish Day Schools: Toward a Jewish Great Books Program', *Covenant*, 1.3 (2007)  
<<http://www.covenant.idc.ac.il/en/voll/issue3/Integrating-Education-in-Jewish-Day-Schools.html>> [accessed 22 June 2012].
- <sup>36</sup> *The Case for Shalem College* <<http://www.shalem.org.il/Educational-Philosophy/The-Case-for-Shalem-College.html>> [accessed 22 June 2012].
- <sup>37</sup> *Shalem College Curriculum* <<http://www.shalem.org.il/Educational-Philosophy/Shalem-College-Educational-Philosophy.html>> [accessed 22 June 2012].