In the 1820s, the Hamburg Temple constituted the only full-fledged Reform synagogue in Germany, and the preachers Salomon and Kley represented the avant-garde of the modern Jewish sermon and its family- and women-centered theology. In the following decades the Reform movement spread, and rabbis and preachers as diverse as Reform rabbi Adolf Jellinek in Vienna and the leading rabbi of modern Orthodoxy Samson Raphael Hirsch in Frankfurt began to extol the home as a site of Jewish spirituality. In fact, when religion ceased to inform every aspect of Jewish life, and Jews continued to integrate into German society and to adopt middle-class tastes, values, and habits, contemporaries increasingly located religion in the home in addition to the synagogue. Yet observers detected a decline in Jewish practice and Jewish spirit in the domestic realm. Alarmed, Jewish leaders appealed to men as fathers and heads of households to rectify the situation, emphasizing the role that the Jewish mother played in securing a future for Judaism. In fact, in the religious crisis that the leaders diagnosed, men granted a great deal of responsibility to Jewish women. On the one hand, rabbis, preachers, and educators blamed mothers and wives for the lack of Jewish religiosity; on the other hand, they exalted women as the saviors of Judaism. In either case, male Jewish leaders concluded that women needed religious education and should be exposed to the beneficial influence of well-designed synagogue worship in order to fulfill their important task.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism had become the dominant ideology of the German-Jewish population, informing much of the religious practice in Jewish communal institutions. Reform Judaism successfully accommodated the religious needs of German Jews, and it expressed contemporaries' cultural sensitivities. So did modern Orthodoxy as...
it began to constitute itself in the 1840s. Indeed, when the leaders of traditionally minded Jewry came to present their concerns about their coreligionists' repudiation of rabbinic Judaism to the public, they used contemporary literary forms and nineteenth-century modes of expression. As a well-spoken minority among German Jewry, modern Orthodox Jews strove to stem the decline of Talmud Torah and Halakhah. However, they offered no resistance to the embourgeoisement of Jewish culture. On the contrary, like their Reform counterparts, Orthodox Jews as a group were socially upwardly mobile, aspired to attain full citizenship, and embraced a middle-class life style. They adopted the language of bourgeois Judaism and considered ritual observance and faithfulness to the religion of their ancestors fully compatible with practicing an enlightened, spiritually stimulating, and morally ennobling Jewish religion in which domestic religiosity played an important role.

Like Reform Jews, modern Orthodox Jews regarded Judaism as a faith that expressed a distinctly Jewish spirit while encompassing the values of Bildung and Sittlichkeit. Beyond ideological and theological differences and regardless of their position about fulfillment of halakhically prescribed religious commandments, nineteenth-century German Jews as a whole embraced a worldview in which family life, moral self-formation, and religious practice were closely interrelated. Women, of course, were central in this family religion, and Orthodox as well as Reform German-Jewish leaders praised mothers for imbuing the young with morality and religiosity. Rabbis, preachers, and educators claimed that such mothers laid the foundations of the next generation's faithfulness to Judaism. Yet according to these male Jewish leaders, Jewish men and fathers also possessed a highly developed sense of family life and, since biblical times, had distinguished themselves from other men by a particular mildness and tenderness. Both Jellinek as a Reform rabbi and Hirsch, who was the most prominent proponent of modern Orthodoxy in Germany, lauded the Jewish religion and the Jewish people for being shaped by values and being guided by principles defined as feminine.

**RELIGIOUS CRISIS, WOMEN, AND THE FEMININE ESSENCE OF JUDAISM**

In 1833, a young rabbi from Offenbach near Frankfurt named Salomon Formstecher published a relatively early text about the Jewish home as a religious sphere. Only two years older than Abraham Geiger, Formstecher had been born in 1808 into the large family of a Jewish craftsman and as a boy had received a modern education as well as training in rabbinical literature. He then attended the university in Gießen, deepened his knowledge
of Talmudic texts, and returned to his hometown as a preacher. Later he served the community of Offenbach as a rabbi and made himself a name as an important thinker of the Reform movement. *Zwölf Predigten* (Twelve Sermons) was one of his early publications, and in this collection of sermons, the young Formstecher dwelled upon the pleasures and pitfalls of family life, on the responsibilities of husband and wife, and on the importance of domestic piety.¹ Domestic piety, Formstecher claimed, was falling into disrepute because it was considered antiquated. “Why, however,” he asked, “has one removed the spirit together with the external form?”² In the past, Jewish women had diligently read the weekly Torah portion in Yiddish. Yet German Jews, Formstecher reported, had not only discarded the outdated Yiddish translation, but also threatened to abandon any domestic religious practice.³ In order to save their children from sin and to preserve Jewish family life, Formstecher advised fathers to set an example by praying at home, and he exhorted both parents to transform the home into “a temple of piety.”⁴

The sense of a religious crisis expressed by Formstecher was pervading German-Jewish publications and sermons by the middle of the nineteenth century. Jewish leaders noted that a growing number of Jewish families neglected ritual observance and time-honored religious practices and insisted that more current forms of Jewish religiosity needed to be adopted. As David Fränkel had already done in *Sulamish*, contemporaries lamented over the perceived decline of commitment to Judaism, and showed particular concern for women's religious condition. Alternately, Jewish leaders denounced the lack of a religious culture that could comfort and guide women, held women responsible for the spiritual and moral crisis of German Jewry, and ascribed to mothers and wives the power to save Judaism.⁵ In 1842, for instance, the Frankfurt Reformfreunde (Friends of Reform), a group of reform-minded Jewish laymen, deplored the fact that many Jews had left Jewish ritual practice behind without having recourse to adequate modern forms of religion. While this situation was pernicious for the Jewish community as a whole, the Reformfreunde claimed, it presented a particular danger for youth and for the female sex. Children were growing up with religious doubts and inner conflicts, and “women who through their position in life pre-eminently rely on inner values and emotions lack any higher point of reference.”⁶ The Reformfreunde had declared Halakhah obsolete and now agitated for a religiosity that conformed to contemporary sensibilities, included women, and addressed women's specific spiritual needs.

In the same vein, an editorial in Germany's leading Jewish newspaper, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, diagnosed disenchantment with Judaism among German Jewry that had reached alarming dimensions within
the female population. The author—supposedly the editor of the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, Ludwig Philippson himself—suggested that atheism in his day occurred much more frequently among women than among men. Reform rabbi Ludwig Philippson in Magdeburg (son of Moses Philippson, the teacher at the Dessau Jewish Free School) had founded the Allgemeine Zeitung and for decades had remained its editor. He advocated moderate Reform and urged Jewish unity. In the editorial “The Female Sex” from 1851 when Philippson addressed the women’s issue, he claimed that for centuries Jewish tradition had failed to encourage women’s religiosity. The occasional derashah (traditional hermeneutic sermon in Yiddish) in the synagogue, for instance, had been incomprehensible to women. Thus, Philippson reported, Jewish women had recently turned to Christian literature lest they receive no religious inspiration at all. In fact, while women were destined to foster the piety and religious sentiment of their families, women’s inadequate involvement in Judaism had precipitated “the decline of religious sense” and “the decay of true religiosity” within the Jewish community, thereby threatening the survival of Judaism. As serious as the situation appeared, Philippson thought it could be remedied. Even though many women seemed to lack religious commitment, he claimed that “religious desire lies, much more, slumbers in the hearts of women only under a thin bark. A forceful, lively word,” repeated many times, could awaken female religiosity. And then, Philippson declared, true piety would return, along with noble religiosity and disinterested love. The house that was lost would be reconquered, and men, too, would return to religion. Exposing women and girls to edifying sermons, and providing them with religious training, would restore the Jewish family and save Judaism.

As leaders of German Jewry perceived Judaism to be in a crisis, they believed that a renewed emphasis on domestic religiosity and, in particular, on the issue of women’s influence in the home could preserve and revive the religious faithfulness of Jewish families. Salomon Formstecher, in the periodical Der Freitagabend (The Friday Evening), claimed that children’s formal schooling was built on foundations that were laid at home. Only within the family, Formstecher held, could a child develop his or her intellectual and spiritual capacities fully enough to become “God’s image.” In another article in Der Israelitische Volkslehrer (The Israelite Elementary School Teacher), a Dr. Rothschild argued that domestic Sabbath observance had come to constitute “the sole support, the pillar of Judaism.” Since, according to Rothschild, ritual observance and Talmud Torah had almost vanished, the Jewish character of family life had taken on increasing importance. Accordingly, he encouraged his readers to perform Sabbath ceremonies such as lighting candles and blessing bread and wine. While some of these responsibilities fell upon the male head of the household,
Rothschild contended that the “priestess at the table,” the woman, was destined to be “the founder and guardian of religious life.”

This conflation of modern Judaism and domesticity, with its focus on women’s religious role, also characterized the theology of rabbi Adolf Jellinek. Born in Moravia in the early 1820s, Jellinek had received a traditional Jewish education as well as secular training, and he had attended the University of Leipzig. In 1845, Jellinek became preacher in Leipzig and, thirteen years later, he moved to Vienna to serve as a preacher at the Vienna Reform synagogue. Jellinek endorsed organ music and modern-style decorous worship, advocated accepting uncircumcised sons of Jewish parents as members of the Jewish community, and appears to have been lax in his personal observance of ritual law. Yet he was by no means a radical Reform rabbi. Jellinek believed in progress and in the necessity of adapting Judaism to modernity, but he valued communal unity more than ideological rigor.

Like many of his contemporaries, Jellinek stressed women’s supposedly natural inclination for religion. He advocated religious instruction as well as confirmation ceremonies for girls and emphasized women’s importance in modern Judaism as mothers and wives. Devoting an entire sermon to praising the “motherly heart,” Jellinek promoted a Judaism in which the family and family-based virtues occupied a central place. He not only lauded the domestic sphere as women’s domain in Jewish culture and religion, but also claimed that home and family life played a crucial role in the lives of Jewish men. In a sermon on the regulations that organized Jewish communal life during Israel’s forty-year sojourn in the desert, Jellinek argued that a great sense of family ties, responsibility toward the family, and devotion to other family members had characterized the Jewish tribe since biblical times.

*Familieninnigkeit* (family intimacy), Jellinek claimed in another sermon, constituted the foremost value on which Moses had built Judaism and Jewish social organization. In fact, according to Jellinek, the home of a Jewish family ranked higher in Judaism than schools, synagogues, and political institutions. He stated that “the most lively and most tender family spirit (*Familieninn*) formed the deepest character trait of the Jewish people.” Jews were not only distinguished from other people by having their own customs of contracting and dissolving marriages, by unique legislation regarding the legal relationship between spouses, by their own educational traditions, by a legacy of women’s participation in Jewish society, and by particular ways of running households, but also by a highly developed family sense that shaped Jewish culture at its core. This innate family sense, Jellinek declared, inclined the hearts of Jews toward softness, mildness, and forgiveness. Biblical Israel, indeed, excelled in granting freedom
to its members, in doing justice to its own people as well as to foreigners, and in advocating loving and humane relationships. Jellinek portrayed Jews as inherently gentle and caring, and he labeled these qualities as feminine and motherly. He maintained that the Israelites, more than other people, lived in “sweet domesticity” and “indulged in the soft, female emotions of mildness and kindness.”

Abraham Geiger, in an essay on “Nationality, Slavery, [and] Woman’s Position” in a series on Judaism and Jewish history (originally published in 1863), likewise claimed that Israel had stood out throughout the ages because of its high standards of family life and feminine virtue. Contemporaries agreed that Jews had always been more family-oriented and more gentle-hearted than other people. In line with this notion of Jews’ highly developed tender, domestic, and familial character traits, Jellinek also applauded Jewish men for embodying particularly feminine values. The Viennese rabbi advocated an ideal of Jewish masculinity that encouraged men to express emotions and to adopt behaviors understood as feminine. “Despite the male sternness which characterizes the face of Judaism, and despite the manliness which distinguishes its creed,” Jellinek declared in a speech on the fiftieth anniversary of Vienna’s Israeliite Women’s Association, Judaism “has room and sense enough for the most tender and soft . . . , the female aspects of humanity.” Therefore, Jellinek concluded, Judaism not only assigned a place of honor to women, but Jewish culture also valued femininity as a principle, and venerated “noble femaleness.”

Jewish family life and family sensibilities, according to Jellinek, have determined the national character and the social institutions of Jews since antiquity and still remain at the core of Jewish society. Jewish men’s participation in the political and public realm did not lay the foundation for Jewish identity. Rather, feminine and motherly ideals informed Jewish religion and culture. Though (in Jellinek’s vision of Judaism) women possessed a greater propensity for religion and bore special responsibilities in the domestic realm, men’s Jewish identities, too, found their source in the home and the family. According to him, Judaism has played out most importantly in the domestic realm and has represented the feminine aspect of civilization.

ORTHODOXY AND BOURGEOIS RELIGIOSITY

By the 1860s, the notion that Jewish culture stood and fell with the Jewish family, domestic life, and feminine religiosity formed an integral part of German Jewry’s worldview. The Reform movement had established itself in communities throughout Germany, and Jews had embraced a Judaism
in which edification and morality, *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit* took precedence over the fulfillment of religious commandments.  

The cultural shift, however, which lay at the heart of this transformation from a Judaism defined by Halakhah and Talmud Torah to a culture of bourgeois religiosity, did not remain restricted to Jewish Reform.

In the 1840s, an articulate, self-conscious modern Orthodox movement emerged that also defined Judaism within the parameters of nineteenth-century German culture. Modern Orthodoxy began to take shape, when rabbis throughout Europe expressed outrage about their colleagues’ unprecedented challenge to halakhic Judaism at the rabbinical conference of Brunswick in 1844. Then, Jacob Ettlinger, chief rabbi of Altona, took the lead and founded the first Orthodox periodical in the German language, *Der treue Zions-Wächter* (The True Guardian of Zion).  

Born in 1798 (he was the son Aaron Ettlinger, the rabbi of Karlsruhe), Ettlinger remained devoted to rabinic Judaism throughout his life. He founded yeshivot in Karlsruhe and Mannheim and became one of the most influential and important halakhic experts of the period. Yet Ettlinger was also one of the first Orthodox rabbis who had a university education. He served as a rabbi in Karlsruhe, in Mannheim, and in the districts of Ladenburg not far from Mannheim, and Ingoldstadt in Bavaria. In 1836, he assumed the office of chief rabbi of Altona, an area under Danish rule then, but which later became part of the city of Hamburg.

Until 1863, when Danish authorities abolished Jewish juridical autonomy in civil matters, Ettinger presided over the Jewish court in Altona in the manner of pre-modern rabbis. At the same time, however, he embraced the German culture of *Bildung*. Scholars have noted his skillful German-language sermons. Furthermore, the periodical *Der treue Zions-Wächter*, which he edited with Samuel Enoch, was a traditionalist though not a traditional publication. Enoch, sixteen years younger than Ettlinger and a Hamburg-born rabbi and educator, shared Ettlinger’s commitment to halakhic Judaism, while his collaboration in *Der treue Zions-Wächter* also attests to his endorsement of contemporary values and tastes.

*Der treue Zions-Wächter* bore all the characteristics of a modern, culturally refined, nineteenth-century publication. Written in flawless German and directed toward the educated, middle-class reader, the periodical published scholarly essays as well as German literature and poetry. The sermons that appeared on the pages of *Der treue Zions-Wächter* conformed to contemporary bourgeois sensibilities. Far from being derashot that expounded Halakah, these sermons developed theological themes and explored issues such as the significance of religion for the individual or the revelation at Mount Sinai in its historical dimension. Ettlinger also preached on current debates and issues, including on “moderation as a
principle of Judaism” and on “the Jewish concept of freedom,” aiming at developing a specifically Orthodox approach to these questions.\textsuperscript{29} Even so, \textit{Der treue Zions-Wächter} paid close attention to halakhic debates of the time addressing controversial issues such as circumcision and marriage law, and Ettlinger supplemented the German-language weekly with a Hebrew periodical. In \textit{Shomer Ziyyon ha-Né’eman}, as the journal was called in Hebrew, noted rabbinical authorities exchanged views on halakhic questions, discussed liturgical issues, formed alliances against the Reform movement, and developed strategies on how to stem the decline of ritual observance and Talmudic learning.\textsuperscript{30} Yet, though \textit{Shomer Ziyyon ha-Né’eman} played an important role in the formation of a rabbinical leadership within modern Orthodoxy, didactically and politically the Hebrew-language publication could not compete with its more vibrant German sibling \textit{Der treue Zions-Wächter}.\textsuperscript{31}

In \textit{Der treue Zions-Wächter}, Ettlinger and Enoch promoted a Judaism in which commitment to halakhic observance and Talmudic study coexisted with modern concepts of religiosity.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, Ettlinger believed that only a renewed emphasis on the emotional and spiritual dimensions of Judaism could prevent the ongoing disengagement from religious practice. As authors in \textit{Sulamith} had begun to argue four decades earlier, Ettlinger claimed that ritual and prayer that did not involve the heart and the soul of the worshipper failed their purpose. “Without belief,” he stated, “without deep inner sense that the sentences as they are written in our holy Torah are the plain truth, there will be no religion.”\textsuperscript{33} In an article in \textit{Der treue Zions-Wächter}, titled “How Does the Teacher Need to Arrange His Catechism, that the Lessons be Not Only Instructive but Also Edifying,” the author, who signed his name as “teacher Russer,” laid out the entire program of nineteenth-century religious sensitivity as it had been expressed by Schleiermacher. According to Russer, Jewish religious education aimed at inspiring the hearts of children, at making their lives “wiser and more sanctified,” and at shaping and educating (\textit{bilden}) the whole person through religion.\textsuperscript{34} Russer explained that the words that teachers direct toward students need to be “born in the heart” of the instructor in order to be true, and he promoted didactic methods through which children could absorb religious precepts and principles while being edified.\textsuperscript{35}

Prayer, Russer argued, constituted a prime means of achieving edification. As “the loftiest expression of our soul, . . . the highest language of humans and the direct rising of our inner life toward God,” prayer could set the right tone for a truly edifying religious instruction. Russer warned, however, that “mechanical treatment” could harm the educational goal.\textsuperscript{36} When the teacher led a class in prayer, Russer said, he should make the
3.2. Title page of the periodical *Der treue Zions-Wächter* (Hamburg, 1845). *Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.*
“heart string” of the students ring. While this article focused on formal religious training, other contributions in Der treue Zions-Wächter emphasized the importance of domestic education. In the first volume of the periodical, a “Dr. J.” elaborated on the influence of parents, who played a crucial role in laying the foundations for the religious sentiments of their offspring.

Like Russer and other non-Orthodox nineteenth-century pedagogues before him, Dr. J. described the goal of religious education as “awakening moral feelings in the hearts of the youth, enlivening the religious sense, and developing and ennobling both, morality and religiosity, in beneficial permeation.”

The religious education that Jewish leaders advocated in Der treue Zions-Wächter certainly differed from the traditional training in Bible and rabbinic literature that boys had received previously. Already the use of the term “catechism” by Russer indicated that Der treue Zions-Wächter had adopted Christian concepts of religious pedagogy. In the Jewish catechism literature of the nineteenth century, educators presented Judaism as a system of teachings and beliefs that could be taught in an easily accessible and well-organized manner. More importantly, however, in numerous contributions in Der treue Zions-Wächter Talmud Torah no longer represented the embodiment of religious devotion and virtue in itself. Rather, in accordance with bourgeois ideas of religiosity, the harmonious development of the soul and the intellect through Bildung led to morality and virtue. In Der treue Zions-Wächter, as earlier in Sulamith and in other publications of the Reform movement, edification and moral sentiment, Bildung and Sittlichkeit, and a sense for beauty and the tender elevation of the heart stood at the center of discussions on religion. Unlike material that appeared in Reform publications, of course, articles in Der treue Zions-Wächter lacked references to the “antiquated shell” of Judaism that supposedly obscured the spiritual kernel of the Jewish religion. Likewise, Der treue Zions-Wächter refrained from condemning “superstitions” and “pernicious additions” to the Jewish religion. Instead, the first modern Orthodox periodical defended Halakhah in its entirety, insisted on the immutability of Talmudic law, and vindicated established customs.

The different approach to Halakhah and ritual observance defined the boundary between the Reform movement and modern Orthodoxy. The broad cultural transformation, however, from pre-modern Jewish culture to bourgeois religiosity took place within Reform Judaism as well as in modern Orthodoxy. Reformers rejected, amended, historicized, or endorsed Halakhah. Orthodox Jews, opposing Reform, claimed to follow the letter of the law. Yet both movements operated within the framework of German middle-class culture adapted to contemporary sensibilities, and
embraced nineteenth-century ideas of religion as a moral institution. Accordingly, bourgeois concepts of gender characteristics formed part of the ideological premises on which modern Orthodoxy, like Reform Judaism, based its theology. And when, as an article in Der treue Zions-Wächter declared, the meaning and purpose of the whole Torah consisted in "the ennoblement of the heart," the emerging Orthodox movement could not fail to pay particular attention to the tender and moral sex that, according to the bourgeois gender model, played a crucial role as the Jewish mother.41

In an essay in Der treue Zions-Wächter, dealing with mothers' influence on the development of religious feelings of children, the author introduced his readers to the teachings of the widely known German pedagogue Heinrich Pestalozzi:

According to a new view, held above all by the noble Pestalozzi . . . , nothing can draw out and nourish the first seeds of Sittlichkeit and religion better than the love of a mother toward her child, the love of the child toward the mother; because the love between mother and child can, Pestalozzi claims, stimulate and further the elements of true religion, namely the feelings of love, gratefulness, trust and obedience.42

Yet as much as the author in Der treue Zions-Wächter commended Pestalozzi on his novel insights into early childhood education and the promotion of religiositas, most of the article discussed the shortcomings of this pedagogical theory. Not every mother, Der treue Zions-Wächter argued, was able to devote all of her time to her child. Moreover, motherly love was an instinct that even most immoral mothers possessed. Too much motherly love and lack of discipline could spoil a child rather than inspire morality. Blind love, indeed, could delay true character formation.43 Thus, while new ideas found entry into a community that insisted on strict observance and that held on to rabbinic learning, Der treue Zions-Wächter was far from embracing nineteenth-century ideology uncritically.

In the periodical, established notions on religion, women, and childrearing coexisted with modern approaches to the formation of religious and moral sensitivity. A sermon, probably given by Samuel Enoch, documents this clearly. After bemoaning increasing violations of ritual law among young people and pointing to the beneficial influence of synagogue attendance on the young in danger of moral and religious laxity, Enoch declared that religion was of singular importance for women. Yet rather than discussing the contemporary topics of female nature, the ennobling function of religion, and mothers' role as educators, Enoch first referred to the benefits of religion in the old sense. Everybody needed religion, he claimed, to further his or her 'material welfare.' Women, however, being particularly
exposed to sickness and to the hardships of pregnancy and childbirth, depended even more than men on God for comfort, help, and support. The need to care for their children placed an extraordinarily heavy burden on them. Many a “tenderly built, faithful mother,” Enoch explained, spent night after night in worry at the bedside of her sick child. And where should women turn in all these adversities, if not to “the well of religion, which teaches them that the God of righteousness not only assigned to every human on earth a measure of suffering, but that he also always assisted humanity in enduring its mishap patiently.”

In Der treue Zions-Wächter, this traditional understanding of religion stood next to the modern approach. Thus, after having laid out a traditional framework for devotion, Enoch added contemporary reasoning. Mothers needed to “possess true Jewish religiosity,” he claimed, because children learned the first principles of morality from them. Mothers inspired their offspring with “virtue, piety, and decency” (Gottesfurcht und Sittsamkeit).

Indeed, Enoch argued, as was true of women of other nations, Jewish women have always been more pious and more religious than their husbands. Even though lack of space in synagogues prevented unmarried women from attending services, Jewish women used to pray at home diligently and devoutly. Today, however, women and girls preferred to read novels that corrupted their hearts and souls. Enoch therefore suggested expanding the women’s sections in the synagogues so that unmarried girls and women could enjoy the benefits of public worship. He declared synagogue attendance and religious devotion indispensable for unmarried women, for as soon as they married and faced the “usual storms of life,” women needed comfort and support in religion.

Contributions in Der treue Zions-Wächter discussed contemporary issues such as the emphasis on heartfelt religiosity, the need for women to attend synagogue services, notions of mothers’ influence on the moral and religious development of their children, women’s domestic vocation, and the unique female relationship to religiosity. Nevertheless, the emerging modern Orthodox movement still held on to older notions of childcare and to traditional ideas about the function of prayer and devotion. Although many articles in Der treue Zions-Wächter combined old and new elements sometimes in bizarre ways, the overall trend of acculturation manifested itself clearly. Modern Orthodoxy refused to abandon ritual observance and its commitment to the Talmud and to rabbinic learning.
ally, however, the language of nineteenth-century bourgeois religiosity and contemporary ideas of gender characteristics and gender roles began to shape Orthodoxy too. While this development found a still somewhat tentative and unsystematic expression in Der treue Zion-Wächter, it achieved completion in the writings of the man who is considered the founder of Neo-Orthodoxy in Germany: Samson Raphael Hirsch.

SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, THE JEWISH MOTHER, AND FEMININE JUDAISM

Born in Hamburg in 1808, Samson Raphael Hirsch grew up in a Jewish community that was deeply divided about the founding of the Reform Temple and educational reform. Hirsch's well-established family belonged to the opponents of the Temple, religious reform, and the secularization of Jewish school curricula. Yet at the same time, his parents as well as Hirsch's teacher, Rabbi Isaac Bernays, embraced contemporary European culture. With their approval, Hirsch attended the local Gymnasium (humanistic high school preparing for the university). Consequently, upon deciding to become a rabbi, Hirsch not only pursued traditional Jewish studies with Jacob Ettlinger in Mannheim, but also attended the University of Bonn. There he befriended his fellow student Abraham Geiger. Hirsch and Geiger founded a homiletical society for Jewish students and studied Talmud together. However, their friendship soon unraveled when in the 1830s, Hirsch began to propagate his distinct neo-Orthodox theology in the two German-language publications: The Nineteen Letters on Judaism and Horeb. In his writing, Hirsch defended halakhic Judaism while endorsing the values of bourgeois culture and catering to the tastes of modern-minded contemporaries. German Jews took notice of Hirsch's original synthesis, and eventually Hirsch gained fame as the rabbi of Germany's first modern Orthodox congregation in Frankfurt am Main.48

With Berlin and Hamburg, Frankfurt had been one of the urban centers of the Reform movement in Germany. In the 1840s, Reform seemed to become the dominant version of Judaism in the city. In 1850, however, a group of Jewish families, including a branch of the Rothschilds and other financially potent and well-respected families, declared their disenchantment with the Reform politics of the Jewish community and proceeded to establish a separate congregation.49 In the program of the newly founded Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft (Israelite Society of Religion), the traditionalists stated as follows: “The ultimate and the primary goal toward which all our efforts are directed is solely the protection and enhancement of revered Judaism, as transmitted by our fathers’ story and the awakening and
rebirth of a genuine religious temperament in the hearts of our youth.’” On the one hand, the *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft* set out to establish religious institutions that would operate within the legal framework of Jewish ritual law, as outlined by the Talmud. They wanted a synagogue service “within the bounds of the law,” a religious school “in which the ancient word of God, the true faith of our fathers, will be deeply impressed upon the hearts of our youth,” other religious institutions “established and equipped so that . . . they totally satisfy the demands of our law,” and a rabbi able to supervise communal institutions according to established *Halakhah*.\(^50\)

On the other hand, the Orthodox leaders in Frankfurt envisaged a Judaism that conformed to the cultural sensitivities of the mid-nineteenth-century German middle class. They desired “orderly and worthy” synagogue services that would satisfy “the progressive demands of the times,” during which a university-trained rabbi would “deliver religious sermons regularly in our pure, native tongue.” They also demanded that teachers at their school be versed in religious as well as secular studies, and insisted that communal institutions (staying within the time-honored parameters of Jewish law) “offer no offense to the taste and sensitivity of our present generation.” Their rabbi needed to be “a man who . . . has attained a solid, broad education with a specialty in Jewish studies and who combines an unblemished character with a genuine religious conviction.”\(^51\) In fact, though a leader who could supervise halakhically satisfactory community institutions needed to have solid rabbinic training, the *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft* did not specifically look for a distinguished Talmud scholar.

The program of the *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft* indicates that nineteenth-century ideological and cultural premises had come to shape the worldview of German Orthodox Jews, too. The traditionalists opposed the trends of their times by, in principle, strictly upholding the formal requirements of ritual observance, commitment to *Halakhah*, and rabbinic learning. Nevertheless, notions of bourgeois religiosity had achieved prominence in their program. The founders of the *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft* emphasized the reawakening of “genuine religious temperament”; they insisted on an aesthetic that matched their “taste and sensitivity”; they repeatedly stressed the importance of religious forms that reached the hearts of young people; and they referred to Judaism as a “faith.”\(^52\) The Neo-Orthodox movement took religious sentiment and morality, *Sittlichkeit* and *Bildung*, edification and dignified devotion, no less seriously than its Reform counterpart. The Orthodox Jews of Frankfurt and successively of other communities were highly acculturated Germans who expressed their loyalty to halakhic Judaism in contemporary ways.
As the rabbi of the Frankfurt traditionalists, Samson Raphael Hirsch was thoroughly devoted to the German culture of Bildung and to bourgeois respectability. He developed a philosophy and theology that integrated Jewish tradition and nineteenth-century ideas of universal humanism. Understanding Jewish ritual law as embodying the values of Bildung, Hirsch saw a specifically Jewish spirit at the core of Judaism: a distinctly Jewish spiritual substance, constituting "one internal life principle," according to Hirsch, drove Jewish "life and doctrine" as a unit. As important a role as Halakhah and the male practices of learning and prayer played for Hirsch, in his theology "the true God is Spirit [Geist]," and "the first source for the knowledge of God is and remains our own heart."

In this interpretation of religion, women were destined to figure prominently. In fact, in a series on women in his periodical Jeschurun (poetic name for Israel), Hirsch described women as preeminently representing the Jewish virtue of renunciation or self-abnegation. Renunciation, Hirsch claimed, characterized "the spiritual and moral activity of man as such." Since the expulsion from Eden, which was lost through the pursuit of pleasure, Jewish men and women faced the task of withstanding sensual allurements and had to devote their lives to the performance of duty and to the quest for holiness. Women, however, who lived entirely for husband and children, personified renunciation and virtue. Self-sacrifice had become a woman's pleasure.

According to Hirsch, women lived on a morally and religiously higher plane than men: "The true woman is the noblest embodiment of man formed in the image of God." Already "the concept 'woman,'" Hirsch expounded in his Bible commentary, "includes the notion of 'the good.'" Hirsch then argued consistently in his writings that the exemption of women from active, time-bound mitzvot did not stem from contempt of the female sex or religious inferiority of women. Halakhic Judaism rather avoided requiring women to perform certain commandments due to women's more fully developed religious temperament. Exposed to stimulations and temptations in the professional and public realm, men required constant concrete reminders of their covenant with the Eternal. These reminders included circumcision and regulated times and fixed formulae for prayers. Conversely, women, according to Hirsch, possessed a greater innate sense of the spiritual, a stronger tendency to spontaneous fervor and faithfulness, and more direct, enthusiastic religious devotion. Women consequently needed fewer external markers in the form of mitzvot to draw them toward God.

While in his theology Hirsch insisted on the immutability of Halakhah and on the full observance of divinely revealed law, he also placed a high value on a religiosity that was not contained in the performance of ritual.
This religious spirit of rabbinic Judaism Hirsch tended to gender as feminine. The sublime, pure, unspoiled essence of Judaism, according to Hirsch, represented the female principle of the Jewish religion and of Jewish history. In a sermon on the significance of fast days in the Jewish calendar, Hirsch even declared: “The whole history of the Jews since the fall of Jerusalem is nothing but a triumph of the ‘female’ over the ‘male.’”\(^{59}\) In this text, he equated maleness with the civil realm, the state, and political power, whereas the female embodied the “purely human,” the spiritual, and the domestic.\(^{60}\) And since Israel had lost all claim to statehood, worldly power, and access to the rights of citizens with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., rabbinic Judaism rested on foundations that Hirsch conceived of as feminine. The ethical primacy of the human over the citizen and the house over the state found expression in Jewish history, as the Israelites were deprived of manliness in the Roman or Western sense, which associated male virtue with “sword and scepter.”\(^{61}\) Without a state, Hirsch argued, Jewish life in the diaspora centered on the spiritually more uplifted domestic sphere, “where the wife stands by her husband on equal terms and where the female spirit (des Weibes Geist) celebrates its victories.”\(^{62}\) In Judaism, salvation emanated from within rather than from external political institutions and practices.

In Hirsch’s theology, the Jewish home and the Jewish family constituted the source, the cradle, and the mainstay of the Jewish national and religious existence.\(^{63}\) Accordingly, Hirsch not only invested women with spiritual superiority, but also understood postbiblical Judaism as based on feminine principles: the sublime and the lofty rather than the material and the political. As was the case with Jellinek, Hirsch understood Judaism as embodying essentially female values, and he extolled Jewish men for embracing a Jewishness not built on Western notions of manliness but on expressing pure spirituality, devotion, and renunciation. Hirsch promoted a feminine Judaism in which spirituality took precedence over politics and in which the domestic realm defined Jewish identity for both men and women.

When Hirsch emphasized the crucial role that the religious Jewish home played in Jewish communal life, he addressed men as well as women. Like the leaders of the Reform movement, he called upon fathers as well as mothers to instill faithfulness toward the Jewish tradition into their children by fully observing the Sabbath within the family.\(^{64}\) Occasionally Hirsch also turned specifically to men, urging them not to leave religious instruction entirely to the school. Fathers needed to introduce their children themselves to biblical texts.\(^{65}\) Without a father’s “word and example,” Hirsch stated, what the young learned at school remained void of sanctity and seriousness and lacked fulfillment.\(^{66}\) Both parents bore the responsibil-
ity of actively caring for the formation of their offspring’s souls and hearts (Geistes- und Herzensbildung). Yet at the beginning of a series on pedagogy that Hirsch published in Jeschurun, the modern Orthodox leader asked whether fathers or mothers played the main role in domestic education. Hirsch answered that the father was “the captain of the family boat,” who determined the course and gave directions and whose consent was required in every respect. However, the influence of the mother formed the decisive factor for the development of the intellectual capacities and religious sensitivities of the children under her care. In accordance with the principles of nineteenth-century pedagogy, Hirsch condemned uneducated and crude wet nurses and caretakers, insisting that only mothers could provide the love, kindness, Sittlichkeit, and “sensible prudence” that laid “the solid ground for eternity” in the hearts of the young. Thus, Hirsch continuously stressed the centrality of women’s contributions to early childhood education and mothers’ indispensable function in securing the next generation’s faithfulness to Judaism.

As Reform rabbis and preachers such as Gotthold Salomon and Adolf Jellinek did, Hirsch developed a theology in which the family and women’s function in the domestic realm played a pivotal role. In his sermons and writings, he devoted more space and attention to Bible exegesis and rabbinic interpretations than most of his Reform colleagues. Nevertheless, he offered interpretations that were perfectly in line with contemporary ideas of women’s and men’s natural characteristics and of the home as a family’s and in particular women’s hallowed space. In a short essay on Psalm 128, Hirsch confirmed that the house was the “kingdom and paradise” of the Jewish woman, and in his women’s series in Jeschurun, Hirsch praised the biblical Sarah, who modestly stayed in the tent when her husband Abraham welcomed guests. In Abraham’s tent as in contemporary Jewish homes, Hirsch claimed, “the presence of God and the blessing, the hospitality and the cheerful light of the house were closely bound up with the virtuous rule of an angelic woman.” Moreover, Hirsch repeatedly referred to a rabbinic tradition according to which God commanded Moses to turn first to the women of Israel when he brought down the Torah from Mount Sinai. According to the Talmud, Hirsch explained, God foremost counted on “the upholsters and keepers of the Jewish home,” because women “are more diligent than the men in performing [their] religious duties,” and because they were destined to “lead their children to the Torah.” In fact, Hirsch declared that since ancient times, the “moral and social welfare [of the Jewish people] depended on the moral and spiritual elevation of the women,” and the Talmud credited the righteousness of women for the liberation of the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery. And today, Hirsch added, “our mothers have to save Judaism as in biblical times.”
In his education series in *Jesburun*, Hirsch emphatically urged women to fulfill this holy task. "Women of the House of Jacob! Mothers of the Jewish people!" he exclaimed, "our continued survival and freedom depend solely on our willingness and ability to fulfill the vow... ‘To hearken to the voice of God and to keep His covenant.’ This is what your child, O Jewish mother, should first learn from you.” And after bemoaning the ridicule and hostility with which Reform Judaism treated Orthodoxy, Hirsch continued: “Take up the challenge, O Jewish mother, which the perversity of our era has thrown at the moral nobility of your children!... rescue your children!... Save your child for humanity and Judaism and raise him to be obedient to God!” The female sex, Hirsch claimed, was particularly well equipped for guiding the young generation toward an observant, moral, and culturally refined lifestyle. “Who would be more suitable than the Jewish woman to train our children thus to sanctify their entire beings, [and] to banish all that is false and impure from their hearts and minds?” Hirsch asked. “The mothers of the Jewish people” not only excelled in virtue and modesty, but they also reached the highest standards of moral purity by being responsible for the observance of the laws of sexual purity and the dietary laws in the house.

Hirsch affirmed,

as long as the woman in the Jewish home remains a truly Jewish woman, everything vulgar and evil, everything with even a breath of indecency, of immorality and licentiousness, of filth and impurity will retreat from her presence; not even a vulgar look or gesture will be seen near her. Then the bodies, minds and hearts of her sons and daughters, too, will develop in moral purity.

In Hirsch’s theology and pedagogy, ritual purity and the observance of Halakah thus interrelated closely with bourgeois ideas of women’s noble and sublime mission in the house. Mothers stood at the center of a Judaism that valued the Jewish family and the Jewish home highly. No less emphatically than Salomon and Reform rabbis, Hirsch entreated women to fulfill their mission as saviors of Judaism in modern society. Yet, in contrast to the Reformers, Hirsch expected mothers not only to inspire their children with morality, religiosity, and love for the Jewish faith, but also to lead their offspring toward a life of ritual observance within an Orthodox framework. The woman, according to Hirsch, was destined not only to save Judaism as such, but also to rescue Orthodox Judaism in particular. Reformers criticized Orthodoxy for following antiquated religious practices. However, like their Reform counterparts, modern Orthodox Jews adopted notions of feminine religiosity, a home-based Judaism, and the paramount impor-
tance of the motherly influence in the religious realm. These ideas were used in the Orthodox struggle against Reform.

To prepare women for the task of defending Orthodoxy, to lead highly cultured Orthodox German-Jewish households, and to imbue their children with Bildung, Sittlichkeit, religious sentiment, and loyalty to halakhic Judaism, Samson Raphael Hirsch and other modern Orthodox leaders put great weight on a modern education for girls. In fact, in the school that the Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft in Frankfurt founded, boys and girls received instruction in mixed classes until the community was able to establish separate institutions. Even though such an arrangement violated tradition as well as contemporary notions of gender-specific education, Hirsch and the Orthodox Jews of Frankfurt opted for coeducation rather than neglecting appropriate schooling for girls. Orthodox education for girls in Germany, indeed, included intensive instruction in Bible. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the rabbi of Berlin’s modern Orthodox congregation, Esriel Hildesheimer, lectured before girls and women and promoted Talmud learning for the female sex. By then, modern Orthodox education for both sexes had come a long way from the traditional Talmud Torah to which women had not had access.

Reform Judaism and the modern Orthodox movement in Germany adopted contrary approaches to ritual observance, Halakhah, and the nature of rabbinic law. Despite opposite views in many areas, however, both factions of German Jewry embraced the same religious culture, shaped by nineteenth-century values and ideas. Reform and Orthodox Jews adopted the notion that Judaism distinguished itself from other religions by a particular Jewish spirit.

This spirit, they believed, expressed itself in Jewish ritual and in Jewish family life. Positive-historical Judaism, the third branch of German Judaism, which the rabbi Zacharias Frankel began to develop in the 1840s, likewise put great emphasis on the spiritual essence of Judaism. According to Frankel, Judaism was defined by an eternal faith that could not entirely be grasped by rational and critical means. This faith occupied a realm “inward, [and was] to be apprehended with warmth.” It equaled if not surpassed the observance of ritual commandments in importance. Ultimately, in fact, faith rather than Halakhah established truth for Frankel. Thus, German-Jewish leaders and thinkers across the religious spectrum agreed on the primacy of a Jewish spirit or faith. Based on these premises, rabbis and preachers such as Gotthold Salomon, Adolf Jellinek, and Samson Raphael Hirsch devised a novel-style Jewish religious life. According to them, the Jewish spirit needed to be cultivated in edifying religious practices that were emotionally meaningful.
In the religious culture that these leaders created, women played a new and highly valued role. Educators, preachers, and rabbis agitated for modern devotional manuals for women and began to write such a literature; they advocated and instituted religious education for girls and women; and encouraged women’s synagogue attendance. In their sermons, they pleaded with women to exert their beneficial female influence within their families; and Hirsch extolled women as defenders of Orthodoxy. At the same time, however, German Jewry did not revise the halakhic categories that determined the legal position of females. Attempts of the Reform movement to emancipate women within Talmudic law failed at the three rabbinical conferences in the 1840s. Modern Orthodoxy evidently never considered changing Halakhah. And when positive-historical Judaism established itself with the founding of the Jüdisch-theologisches Seminar in Breslau in 1854, the discussion on the status of women in Jewish law, which had never provoked a broader, passionate debate in Germany, simply no longer took place. Without being emancipated, women had moved to a more central position in a transformed Judaism. In the second half of the nineteenth century, contemporaries’ understanding of what constituted the Jewish religion and what a man’s and a woman’s defining characteristics and duties were, had changed in ways that had altered the gender organization of Jewish culture along with Jewish culture itself.

Technically and legally, the religious practices that had defined Judaism as a primarily male culture unremittingly constituted male privileges. Equality before the law remained beyond the reach of females in Jewish society, as it did in German society, where full citizenship and formal participation in politics formed men’s prerogatives and defined manhood. However, Jewish leaders such as Jellinek and Hirsch located Judaism not in the political but in the domestic realm. They argued that the family had always stood at the heart of Jewish society, and claimed that participation in the political and public arena did not stand at the core of Jewish identity. Rather, throughout Jewish history, Judaism had represented the female aspects of civilization including gentleness, mildness, and forgiveness, and the home rather than the state had formed the center of Jewish culture and spirituality. In this reading, Judaism did not constitute an alliance and brotherhood among individual men in a polity, but a religion shaped and framed by the family in which men as well as women embodied feminine virtues.

Sermons, biblical commentaries, and essays of German-Jewish rabbis and preachers referred to Jewish men as family members, as fathers, brothers, and sons who shared domestic responsibilities with their wives, sisters, and mothers. In these texts, Jewish leaders praised Judaism for its inherent feminine values. While men held authority and possessed rights that women
did not have, authority and rights did not form the parameters of the religion that Jewish leaders propagated.81 Rather, rabbis and preachers stressed "tender influence," feminine compassion, emotional sensitivity, and the gentle infusion of a proper religious spirit. According to them, women exerted the decisive influence on a family's domestic life and on the spiritual and moral character of a home.

The interpretation according to which feminine values have shaped Judaism and have formed the core principle of Jewish civilizations since antiquity was not entirely a product of the nineteenth-century culture of bourgeois sensitivity. In fact, the texts of rabbinic Judaism express great esteem for virtues and qualities that they conceive of as feminine. Talmudic literature programmatically valorizes femininity, feminine weakness, passivity, humility, submissiveness, and even self-abnegation and masochistic behavior. These texts exhort men to practice feminine virtues, to identify with women, and to behave like women. Nevertheless, as pervasive as the feminization of the Jewish male may have been in rabbinic culture, the religious economy of halakhic Judaism also systematically privileged Jewish men. Jewish women may have enjoyed much respect, and femininity appears to have been valued to an extraordinary degree in Jewish culture. But Jewish men's superior position in Jewish society solidly rested on men's privileged relationship toward ritual commandments and on women's exclusion from the communal practices of Hebrew prayer and Talmud Torah. Men derived power and status from their ability to study and to interpret religious texts.82

In nineteenth-century Germany, religious learning in the traditional sense and the performance of ritual commandments lost much of their prestige. Many Jews abandoned the practices that had formed the bedrock of men's superiority in Jewish culture for centuries. In fact, even for modern Orthodox men, Talmud Torah and Hebrew prayer no longer stood at the center of their identity as men. Other cultural practices marked masculinity in German society. Thus, the idealization of feminine values, feminine characteristics, and feminine modes of behavior, which possesses a long history in Jewish culture, gained new weight and new meaning. It was no longer an aspect of a Jewish life world that was shaped by rabbinic and halakhic Judaism and that privileged men. But the exaltation of women and of the feminine now went hand in hand with a bourgeois cult of domesticity, and it formed part of a modern culture of Jewish religiosity with a novel gender order. In the nineteenth century, women had access to and indeed were often believed to possess a natural affinity for contemporary modes of religiosity, and men and women engaged in many of the highly prized religious practices of bourgeois Judaism together.