The Venerable Cardinal Newman once observed that the crisis of religion in the modern world is one of "authority and obedience." The authority of religion has been eclipsed and, consequently, also obedience to its precepts and teachings. The process leading to this crisis is generally understood as that of secularization, the radical political, social and cultural change which beginning with the eighteenth century is one of the salient features of modernity, at least in the West. It is as a cultural, more specifically as a cognitive process that secularization most profoundly affects and troubles religion. Philology offers us a ready insight into the nature of the process. In Medieval Latin the term *saecularisatio* was preeminently a juristic concept denoting the transference of Church property to the laity. Our contemporary use of the term, which apparently only evolved as a category of analysis in the late nineteenth century, may thus be viewed as a metaphorical extrapolation from the Medieval Latin: crucial areas of political, social and cultural life have been transferred from the domain of the "sacred" to that of the "profane." With respect to cognitive culture, authority to discern truth—moral, epistemological and ontological—has been transferred from the Church to the laity. Immanuel Kant placed the process under the rubric of autonomy: the ability and duty of the individual to use his own reason and experience to determine the *nomos* or laws governing truth, theoretical and practical.

The autonomous individual, as Kant himself tirelessly argued, is not necessarily ungodly or disrespectful of religious traditions. Indeed, the autonomous individual may have profoundly religious sentiments and concerns, but, and here is the rub, because of his autonomy or "secularity" the authority of the Church—and the tradition embodied by the Church—is for him no longer intellectually tenable. To characterize this tension between an abiding religious sensibility and a rejection or at least questioning of the Church and tradition as the
mediators of truth, I should like to introduce the admittedly infelicitious but I trust elucidating terms, "secular religiosity."³

A secular religiosity is implicit in much of our literary and philosophical discourse since the West embarked on the ambiguous adventure of modernity. A secular religiosity certainly seems to inform the dialectical reflection of Hegel, the antinomian rantings of Nietzsche, the spiritual peregrinations of Hesse, the Angst of Heidegger, the tormented world of Franz Kafka and the iconoclastic mysticism of A.D. Gordon. Modern theological discourse is also often prompted by agnostic musings of secular religiosity. For much of nineteenth and twentieth century theology, tradition—even Scripture—is no longer the source of ultimate authority guiding the religious quest. Indicatively, historical revelation is all but removed from the theologian's purview. Following Friedrich Schleiermacher, the emphasis is on the individual's religious experience and consciousness.⁴ The ambivalence to tradition is even more dramatically reflected in the so-called historical theology which by employing critical scholarship or Hegelian historiosophy sought to free religion from the encumbrances of the past by illuminating the evolutionary character of religious consciousness.⁵ To be sure, these theologians often do relate to their respective traditions, but generally in a highly idiosyncratic fashion, and again, these traditions do not provide the fundamental ground for their theological reflections and religious quest.

For any historic religious community, however, a theology unmediated by tradition is most problematic. Indeed, it is questionable whether a theology sans tradition can serve an historic community. For in purely sociological terms, tradition is the symbolic and cognitive ground of an historic community: it is the matrix of the community's shared memory, language and meaning structures. Hence, a "post-traditional" theology, grounded in a secular religiosity, entails the prospect of a cognitive disjunction—and the possible loss of a meaningful discourse—between the theologian and his historic community.

II

Yet, a post-traditional theology presumably articulates the spiritual situation and predicament of other members of the theologian's historic community. It therefore may be asked
whether the theologian could serve as a spiritual leader to those members of his historic community who like himself have gone through the "purgatory" of secularization and reject or at least doubt the authority of their tradition. Can he establish with these, his secularized, post-traditional coreligionists, a theological discourse which while remaining alert to the promptings of a secular religiosity nonetheless preserves the historic community as a context for meaningful religious reflection and quest? The dilemma of a secular individual with an abiding religious sensibility--and implicitly that of the theologian faced with the challenge to relate secular religiosity to a specific religious tradition--is incisively summarized by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz:

Established connections between particular varieties of faith and the cluster of images and institutions which have classically nourished them are for certain people in certain circumstances coming unstuck. . . . The intriguing question for the anthropologist is, "How do men of religious sensibility react when the machinery of faith begins to wear out? What do they do when traditions falter?" . . . They do, of course, all sorts of things. They lose their sensibility. Or they channel it into ideological fervor. Or they adopt an imported creed. Or they turn worriedly in upon themselves, or they cling even more intensely to the faltering traditions. Or they try to rework these traditions into more effective forms. Or they split themselves in half, living spiritually in the past and physically in the present. Or they try to express their religiousness in secular activites. And a few simply fail to notice their world is moving or, noticing, just collapse . . . Given the increasing diversification of individual experience, the dazzling multiformity of which is the hallmark of modern consciousness, the task of . . . any religious tradition to inform faith of particular men and to be informed by it is becoming ever more difficult. A religion which would be catholic these days has an extraordinary variety of mentalities to be catholic about; and the question, can it do this and still remain a specific and persuasive force with a shape and identity of its own, has a steadily more problematic ring.

Secular religiosity then inheres the prospect of a spiritual solopsism: 7 bereft of tradition, religious sensibility shares the individuation and privacy of the modern world; faith is increasingly isolated from the matrix of community and the cognitive universe which Peter Berger calls a "plausibility structure" of established forms of meaning and symbolizations of reality and experience. The theologian who seeks to address the needs of a specific historic community is obviously charged with the awesome task of reversing this seemingly inexorable process.
The continuity with the community's religious heritage implied by this type of discourse obviously requires more than the commonplace cultivation of that heritage as merely a sort of ethnic folklore. The challenge to the theologian would then seem to be to capture anew the cognitive and spiritual significance of his community's religious tradition, and to indicate how this tradition, unfettered by heteronomous authority, could allow the individual jealous of his intellectual and spiritual autonomy to give expression and even depth to his religious sensibilities.

The role of the theologian as a spiritual guide in this specific sense may be elucidated by the Jewish experience. In classical Judaism, the preeminent type of religious teacher was the talmid chacham, the student of the Torah and Israel's revered sages. It was his "great task to pass on [the Torah] and develop its meaning for his generation." As a spiritual guide, the authority of the talmid chacham was hence not charismatic but hermeneutic. "He expounds the Word of God, but does not embody it." The Word of God is preeminent. Even God, the rabbis tell us, studies Torah.

The modern spiritual leader—if we may state our thesis somewhat apodictically—must also be a talmid chacham, a student of the Torah and the sacred tradition of Israel. But there is an important difference between the spiritual leader of classical Judaism and that required by post-traditional Judaism. In his study of Torah, the talmid chacham of classical Judaism follows an apostolic hermeneutic: being grounded in an unambiguous conviction that Torah is the Word of God, his study and interpretative endeavor ultimately serve to proclaim the Word. In contrast, the post-traditional spiritual leader, given the epistemological agnosticism attendant to his secular religiosity, must perforce pursue a dialogical hermeneutic: he studies the Torah (qua Scripture and sacred traditions) with an existential commitment to listen attentively, prepared to respond to it as possibly the direct, living address of God. This approach, of course, was first articulated by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. These two renown twentieth century German Jewish philosophers, both of whom affirmed Judaism from the midst of secular European culture, agree in their fundamental dialogical approach to the study of Torah. Yet, as we shall see, they differed critically in their conception of Judaism, especially of Jewish tradition. Hence, they may be viewed as two alternative models for post-traditional Jews.
Buber would undoubtedly endorse Rosenzweig's statement that "faith based on authority is equal to unbelief" (der Autoritätsgläubige ist gleich dem Ungläubigen). Faith meant for both of them a relationship to God—a relationship which had been facilitated for Jews of the past by their sacred traditions. If these traditions are to be once again meaningful for the modern Jew then the relationship which these traditions nurtured and guarded must, Buber and Rosenzweig concurred, somehow be reestablished. Although this relationship is mutual, it is, they stressed, initiated by God: God who is utterly beyond the world enters a providential relationship with it. This founding belief and experience of theistic faith, according to Rosenzweig, explains the centrality of miracles in the respective religious traditions of the West. Phenomenologically understood, miracles are a prophetic sign of God's involvement in the world. Hence, as Goethe's Faust observed, "miracle is the favorite child of faith." But we moderns have lost our belief in miracles and the consequence of such, Rosenzweig lamented, is a loss of our faith in God's relationship to the world. Even theologians he noted, are embarrassed by the notion of miracles. No wonder the concepts of Creation, Revelation and Redemption—if they are taken seriously and not simply as edifying metaphors—have become most uncongenial to many modern theologians. Each of these concepts seeks to clarify various aspects of God's miraculous involvement in the world. The exigent task of theology, as Rosenzweig pursued it in his Star of Redemption (1921), is to affirm the phenomenological and theological content of these concepts. This is the point of departure for Rosenzweig's encounter with theistic faith. His rejection of philosophical relativism and agnosticism was prompted by a decision to adopt what he called Offenbarungsglaube; faith based on revelation, viz., that revelation is the historic moment in the founding of theistic religion. Accordingly, he defined tradition as the living, continuously renewed witness to concrete, historic miracle. Tradition is thus the context of faith. "The belief in miracle," he writes in the Star of Redemption, "and not just the belief in decorative miracles, but that in the central miracle of revelation, is to this extent a completely historical belief. Even the Lutheran reformation altered nothing in this respect. It only moved the path of personal confirmation from
the periphery of the tradition, where the present is located, directly into the center, where the tradition originated. Thereby it created a new believer, not a new belief. Belief remained historically anchored...18

Buber shared Rosenzweig's *Offenbarungsglaube* and belief that tradition is the historical witness of God's relationship to the world. They differed, however, fundamentally with respect to which facets of the Jewish tradition can still serve to quicken one's relationship to God. This difference was most clearly evidenced in their famous exchange on Jewish Law.19 Buber, as is known, assumed a metanomian position, declaiming Jewish Law, the *mitzvoth*, as a heteronomous imposition that shackles the Jew's spontaneous relationship to God. Rosenzweig concurred that the Law conceived simply as a legal construct is a heteronomous distortion of religious faith, but—Rosenzweig queried Buber—is this the Law actually lived by the Jew, caressed and sanctified by him for millenia? Existentially, in the lived moment of its fulfillment, Rosenzweig affirmed, the Law may be for the Jew of faith not *Gesetz*, a heteronomous legalism, but *Gebot*, a divine commandment which in directly addressing the individual evokes his spontaneous response. *Qua* commandment, the Law quickens the Jew's relationship to God. Buber's "reply" to Rosenzweig was terse: The God of Revelation is not a *Gesetzgeber*. He is not a Law-giver.20

In many respects the exchange between Buber and Rosenzweig on the Law was typical of the German-Jewish heirs of Kant's moral philosophy.21 At root the difference between them, however, is their contrasting conceptions of Jewish tradition. Early in his career Buber defined his task as identifying a "subterranean" Jewish tradition which modern Jews estranged from the "official" rabbinic Judaism could respond to with filial affection and devotion.22 It would be quick, however, to judge Buber's conception of Judaism as wantonly arbitrary and tendentious. As a student of Wilhelm Dilthey he read texts as a Lebensphilosoph, endeavoring to distill through a personal, empathic *Nacherleben* (re-experiencing) the life-moments that gave birth to the text. Using this method Buber sought to identify the kerygmatic core of Judaism which he understood to be the ontological possibility, first proclaimed in the Hebrew Scripture, of a dialogical encounter between man and God. In Buber's judgment, only certain texts within the literary corpus of Judaism bear witness to the founding and authenticating kerygma of Judaism. Due to its obsessive legalism, rabbinic
Judaism, which set the normative contours of Jewish tradition, Buber held, obscured the primal Jewish alertness to the Biblical kerygma. Judaism's primal spiritual sensibility, however, remained alive, leading as it were an underground existence, manifesting itself in select individuals and in movements such as early Beshtian Hasidism. Without attempting to evaluate Buber's method or the validity of his understanding of Jewish spirituality, in particular rabbinic, we may note that by his own admission his presentation of Judaism is highly selective; only certain aspects, and at times surprising aspects of Judaism, qualify as exemplifications of authentic Judaism. Hence, it may be asked whether Buber's conception of a counter-Jewish tradition, irrespective of its theological merits, has the inherent capacity to speak to all but a select number of Jews. For the community of Jews at large, even if they are ambivalent heirs to the rabbinic tradition, it is this tradition which provides their identity and self-recognition as a community.\(^{23}\) In other words, the sacrality of a tradition, as Durkheim noted, has a sociological dimension. Hence, inasmuch as a critically edited text is not the text of any historic community, except perhaps that of scholars,\(^ {24}\) so Buber's "counter-tradition" is not, indeed cannot be the tradition of the historic Jewish community. Bereft of sociological sacrality, Buber's Judaism could only speak to select Jews, or perhaps rather to select aspects within the soul and spiritual imagination of many modern Jews. It could not, however, provide the basis of a communal identity. This is indeed ironic for one such as Buber who was so passionately devoted to the renewal of Jewish community.

Rosenzweig's attitude to and ergo conception of Jewish tradition is radically different from Buber's. His view of Judaism is summarized in his statement, "nothing Jewish is alien to me."\(^ {25}\) He included within the purview of this statement, Jewish cuisine, gestures and, of course, more significantly the oral, extra-scriptual traditions which filled and permeated the whole consciousness of the traditional Jewish community. The oral traditions, which animate the life and soul of the Jewish community, are in Rosenzweig's view prior to and more fundamental than Scripture and other sacred texts. To be sure, the oral traditions attest the sacred texts of Judaism. But it is more comprehensive than these texts, for the oral traditions embrace a mass of ritual and religious usage, of customs and rules, which are at best adumbrated in the sacred texts. The
oral traditions articulate the sacred texts, rendering the written Word spoken and alive in the life of the Jew. Hence, the sacred texts of Judaism, according to Rosenzweig, must be read or rather lived from within the oral traditions of the Jewish community. To abstract them from this context is to deny them of their extensive religious significance. The first steps in this existential journey into traditional Judaism (which followed his theological clarification and affirmation of the concepts of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption, that is, after having completed the Star of Redemption) were to set-up a Jewish household—to keep a kosher kitchen and other sancta of traditional Jewish family life—but also to appropriate the religious gestures of everyday Jewish life, prayer and the fulfillment of the mitzvot. His initial focus was the traditional liturgy, wherein he discovered, as he states already in the Star of Redemption, the fulcrum of Jewish spirituality.

Not surprisingly, the extra-liturgical mitzvot were more difficult for him to comprehend and adopt, but gradually he did so. To be sure, his relationship to liturgy and the mitzvot remained dialogical; but it was a dialogue from within traditional Jewish praxis. Rosenzweig lived as a traditional Jew in order to appropriate the spiritual reality of the tradition, to know it, as he once put it, hymnically.

The unheralded response of German Jewry (and today American and French Jewry) to Rosenzweig is an ample testimony of his role as a spiritual guide. The response to him has little to do with his Star of Redemption—few read it and fewer understand it; nor can the response be explained by the charismatic, saintly quality of his life. Rather, we surmise, it is the nature of his return, from the midst of secular European culture, to traditional Judaism which is paradigmatic to a post-traditional Jewry seeking renewed Jewish community and spirituality. Rosenzweig, however, disappoints these Jews in one very serious way. He suggests that Jewish spirituality demands that the Jews withdraw from history and that they become meta-historic guardians of the promise of an absolute future, of a future beyond the wiles of history. It has thus been rightly observed that Rosenzweig is the last great Jewish philosopher of the Diaspora—but not simply in the sense that he did not witness the Jews' return (as sovereign actors) into history through the establishment of the State of Israel. Prompted by his eagerness to accept the inner reality of the traditional Jewish community, Rosenzweig also affirmed its detachment, as it
evolved in the Diaspora, from history. This indifference to history and the fate of the rest of humanity was a posture typical of the pre-modern world; it reflected the political and social reality of a stratified, insulated Medieval world. With the rise of the modern order this reality began to change rapidly. As Rosenzweig himself recognizes in his early writings, the modern world gave birth to a new sense of Ökumene, of a shared universe and the attendant demand for a responsible and active involvement in the shaping of the evolving Ökumene. Alongside this changed perception of history and politics, traditional Judaism seemed locked to a more parochial view of history. Thus as many Jews entered the modern world and adopted its political ethos, often with a unique passion, traditional Judaism seemed ever so anachronistic. Rosenzweig, of course, was aware of this perplexity regarding the abiding particularity of traditional Judaism. Indeed he shared it; he overcame it by celebrating the a-historical posture of "the Synagogue" as a metaphysical virtue: content with its unique relationship with the God of Eternity and standing beyond history--viz., politics and war--the Synagogue exemplifies the Messianic promise and thereby prods the Church, enmeshed in history, to lead history beyond itself to the eschaton. Meanwhile, the Synagogue is to look inward in blissful seclusion from the world. There is a compelling sublimity to this perception of Israel's destiny, but it is also profoundly distressing. For it suggests that isolation from the world is an intrinsic quality of traditional Jewish spirituality. Notwithstanding his ascription of a dialectical, eschatological significance to the Synagogue's seclusion, Rosenzweig's celebration of an indifference to history is offensive to the modern Jew immersed in the urgencies of both Jewish and world history.

Buber was more alert to this aspect of the modern Jewish sensibility. As a Zionist, he appreciated the need to relieve the social and political distress of the Jews. He also understood the call of the "secular city" and accordingly sought to free religious faith from its fear of the profane and to render it relevant to the political and social challenges of the modern world. Thus his pan-sacramentalism and religious socialism with their demand that faith be extended beyond the confines of the ecclesia to our public and political activity--provinces of life hitherto all too often abandoned to instrumental aims and cynicism. The true challenge of religious
faith is to affirm God in the "broken" world of the everyday. "We can only work for the Kingdom of God," Buber writes, "through working in all spheres allotted to us. . . . One cannot say we must work here and not there, this leads to the goal and that does not. . . . There is no legitimately messianic politics, but that does not exclude politics from the sphere of the hallowing." Buber unceasingly argued that this approach to the "secular city" and politics was consistent with the traditional Jewish refusal to acknowledge any intrinsically profane sphere and the concomitant commandment to sanctify all of life.

Buber's religious socialism acquired a specifically Jewish expression in his Zionism. The return to Zion, he taught, will restore to Israel the conditions enabling her to realize, under the conditions of autonomous Jewish existence, her vocation to exemplify the ideal of hallowing everyday life and the creation of a just and genuine community. "The supernational task of the Jewish people," Buber stresses, "cannot be properly accomplished unless natural life is reconquered." By attending to their own historical and social needs the Jews as a community will be able to serve the rest of humanity. We do not want Palestine, Buber proclaimed, for the Jews alone, but rather for all of humanity!

Secular religiosity, as previously suggested, is a phenomenon inherent in the individuation of society and culture characteristic of modernity. As Peter Berger observes in his most recent book, The Heretical Imperative, the modern world beckons us all, including the religious individual, to "heresy"—choice (the Greek verb hairein means to choose), choice before the richness of universal human experience. Open to a multiplicity of experiences and cultural options, the modern individual can no longer delimit his experience and culture to that of his primordial community. The heretical imperative, as Berger acknowledges, is thus hardly conducive to community, certainly not a community based on the considerations of historic continuity and tradition. With respect to religious experience and culture, the heretical imperative sunders, liberates, Berger would say, faith from the bonds of community. In the Jewish context, the implications of this tension between faith and community are already manifest with Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), "the first modern Jew." In his attempt to demonstrate the compatibility of Judaism with Deism—that is, the conviction that the intellect is in the
universal, natural domain—Mendelssohn in effect rendered Judaism a confessional religion, solely bound by a unique body of ceremonial laws; the Jews, he insisted, have no special claim on truth and, by implication, on the shaping of history according to God's truth. The Jew was now free to be a European, to accept the culture and history, that is, secular destiny of Europe. Although he would be loath to admit it, Mendelssohn's confessional God was no longer the God of Israel who had entered into a covenant with the Jewish People governing not only their mode of worship, but also their destiny—and through them ultimately the destiny of humanity—in history. The Covenant, as the authenticating ground of Jewish community, entails more than confessional ritual and belief, but a sustained responsibility to creation and history. However, to Mendelssohn and his heirs—as to all modern Jews to an extent—Jewish community had become theologically problematic.

The problem implicit in the separation of Jewish faith from the historical destiny of the Jewish people—a relationship traditionally provided by the concept of the Covenant—may be summarized in the question: is Jewish community, bereft of its convenental dimension, simply the source of the Jew's mode of worship and primary social identity? As a description of a social fact, this is undoubtedly an adequate characterization of the function of Jewish community. But if the issue is the spiritual and religious significance or purpose of Jewish community, then the above characterization is not adequate. And should it be argued, as Mendelssohn would have, that the Jewish community is the social basis of the Jewish religion, one may legitimately query: Why be Jewish? As citizens of the modern world, jealous of our autonomy and intellectual integrity, the modern Jew would have difficulty accepting the answer ultimately implied by Mendelssohn: because God commanded us! A Judaism compelled by obligation, even when accompanied by an appeal to filial and ethnic loyalty, has not worn well with the modern sensibility.

Surely the question of the modern individual's commitment to Judaism qua a community of faith has to be pursued existentially, that is, the individual has to discover within Jewish religious community a spiritual meaning relevant to his own existence. For the individual Jew who stands critically before his ancestral tradition, the spiritual and existential significance of Judaism must first be illuminated. Notwithstanding their limitations, Buber and Rosenzweig serve
these individuals as spiritual guides, for both recognized that the spiritual significance of Judaism as a personal faith is grounded in the communal experience of the convenantal relationship (although each understands the Covenant and the nature of Jewish destiny rather differently). Both return to the Biblical teaching, often obscured in modern Jewish thought, that the Jewish people was born of and with the Covenant, that Judaism is not simply the religion of the Jewish people, but rather it is the religious dimension of the Jewish people.37

The Covenant, as viewed and lived by Buber and Rosenzweig, is the supreme dialogical moment in which God addressed the House of Israel and pari passu the individual Jew. Thus, existentially, the individual Jew discovers the spiritual meaning of his own existence in the spiritual purpose and vocation of the Jewish people. By conceiving the Covenant as primarily a dialogue, Buber and Rosenzweig helped illuminate the delicate spiritual fabric underlining the heteronomous structure of classical Judaism. They thus encouraged the renewal of a convenantal consciousness among modern Jews who otherwise feared that Jewish religious existence involved a forfeiture of their autonomy and secular dignity.

Buber and Rosenzweig profoundly appreciated the predicament of the modern Jew caught between the imperatives of secular religiosity and a primordial urging to ground his spirituality in the religious community of his forefathers. Buber and Rosenzweig knew this predicament; each sought to resolve it with integrity, with full respect for the scruples and passions of the modern sensibility and to the nuanced meaning of Judaism. Neither Buber nor Rosenzweig was dogmatic; they humbly invited us to listen in on their dialogue with God. For this invitation we are ever grateful.