

REVIEWS

Franz ROSENZWEIG : *Der Stern der Erlösung*, Den Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, 516 pp. (4 th edition).

1. Franz Rosenzweig is mentioned (f.i. in the widely read abstract of the "Encyclopedia Judaica" called "Jewish Values") as one of the most influential modern Jewish theologians. Any person interested in contemporary Jewish thought would be well advised to consult the excellent edition lying here before us. The writer (whose death in 1929 spared him the hardships of the Nazi period) is still a contemporary; we allow ourselves to review the book as if it appeared for the first time, asking what is the relevance in 1978 of its content, for Jewish and non Jewish philosophers and theologians alike.

Moreover, persons interested in logic and linguistics applied to religious matters will like this volume, anticipating (already in the 1920's) constructive linguistic theology.

We can not hope to analyse all Rosenzweig's topics, but it will be our aim to point out (as far as we see them) the originality of this *theology* and this *mysticism*.

Without sharing the convictions of Rosenzweig, we are impressed by his attempt to use *philosophical grammar* (1), *aesthetics* (2) *comparative religion* (3) and a strong personal *religious experience* (4) in order to construct a theology, characterised by maximal *independence and interrelation* of God and Man (5). The interdisciplinary method, the architectonic unity, and the personal involvement joined are examples to be followed even by those whose commitments lie in radically different regions.

These reasons explain our proposing of this review to this journal.

2. The "Star of Redemption" is the symbol of the content of the book. The star is built from two triangles superimposed on each other, one with the point turned upside, the other with the point turned downside. The nodes of these triangles refer to the three basic entities of the book : God, the World and Man. These three entities each occur *twice* in the system and this duality is one of the original features of the work. We shall try to explain presently. Moreover, the intricate composition of the book shows again three parts, and these three parts each contain respectively an introduction and three books. Each of the three parts gives a perspective on the three constituents of the universe from the point of view respectively of the *beginning*, the *development* and the *end* (and the three books, present in each of the three parts, yield (three times), a view on God, on World and on Man).

3. The book makes very difficult reading in its first part (entitled "Die Elemente, oder die Immerwährende Vorwelt" : "the elements, or the everlasting pre-universe"), and nevertheless the existence of this first part is one of the valuable aspects of Rosenzweig's approach. We recommend the reader to start the book by a perusal of its *second* part, and more specifically of the *second* book of this second part, dedicated to "Revelation". Nobody will resist the deep tenderness of these pages, and the violent but tranquil fire of this feeling. Having gained a personal contact with Rosenzweig there, one will be able to understand the book on "Creation" and the one on "Redemption". Then, having an overview of the spirituality of the author, one can go back to the difficult *metaphysics of the first part* and

the illuminating *liturgy of the third part*.

4. Having indicated our own journey through the book, we are now going back to its foundation. The *first original feature* of Rosenzweig's metaphysics is that he considers God, Man and the World to be ontologically independent. Certainly, there exists a hierarchy among them (we shall come back to its formulation later) but Rosenzweig stresses that the three realms have laws and developments of their own, who come into contact with each other when the internal genesis of the three has reached a certain degree of maturity. This stands very far apart from most of the metaphysical positions we are familiar with, all of them being either anthropocentric, cosmocentric or theocentric. Rosenzweig's manifest aim to the contrary is to grant to the three realms maximal autonomy and independence. This first feature reflects many trends in Jewish spirituality (let us only recall the fact that in Jewish ethics not God, but only man can forgive a sin committed against man). *The second original feature* is that all three principles of reality : God, Man and the World have an intrinsic a-temporal or pre-temporal genesis. Since Neo Platonism and Gnosticism the eternal genesis of the principles of the universe is not forgotten; but only the Kabbala has (followed by Boehme and the late Schelling) concentrated, in more recent times, on the belief in the internal development of God, so far apart from classical Christian theology. *The third original feature* of Rosenzweig is the way in which this development is described. God, World and Man are all developments of *Rejections of Nothingness*. One could say that Rosenzweig has extended to the three independent poles of the Universe, Eckeharts insertion of Nothingness in God. For God, Man and World three actions or operations are basic : the "yes" (the assertion), the "no" (the rejection), and the "And" (the combination). What is asserted (and the assertion is the foundation) is however in all three cases a double negation : God starts with the assertion of the nothingness of nothingness, yielding being, the World starts with the assertion of the nothingness of chaos, yielding structure; and man starts with the assertion of the nothingness of dispersion, yielding selfhood. The three systems develop further by means of the negation but *this* negation is the negation of something positive : everything that is different from the result of the first act. This creates in God the infinite *freedom* of his power, able to effectuate anything; in nature it creates the infinite *diversity* of particular contents (continuously destroyed and recreated) and in man it creates his internal *unity*, his "trotz" (pride or perseverance) and finally his "selfhood" that stand in complete and lonely independence, as creator and destroyer of unpersonal laws (the tragic hero). Finally the synthesis of the positive and the negative creates the living God (in whom the *freedom* comes into eternal fight and symbiosis with the *essence*). This fight in God is God's *Life*. In the universe the structure comes into internal struggle with the content and this becomes the *law of the development* of the world. In man the individuality enters into synthesis and conflict with the law and becomes the tragic society and the *tragic way of life*.

5. Here we want to make a first critical remark : we could interpret this pretemporal genesis of God, World and Man subjectively (starting from our ignorance about God, Man and the Universe) and leading up to a certain type of knowledge, or we could interpret it more objectively (as describing an ontological process). We must confess that we do not find Rosenzweig very clear on this point. We are certain, given the whole trend of his thought that he has considered the pretemporal development as an ontological and not as an epistemological one. Yet the arguments he uses and the terminology he refers to are

subjective. His pupils should, so we think, clarify this feature more than he did himself. A second remark is in order : Rosenzweig is here obviously very strongly influenced by Hegel and simultaneously very far away from Hegel : we have triads of triads (3 times a succession of a "yes", "no" and a "sowohl als auch" : together) but on the one hand the three moments *do not derive from each other* : they are coeternal, and on the other hand in the successive moments we have an assertion of a negation of the negative, a negation of the positive and a conjunction of this assertion and this negation. This succession is not a dialectical succession : the series is bidimensional (the acts and their objects are considered together) and the motor of development is not the necessity to solve a contradiction. Indeed, there being coeternity, we have rather a simultaneous exhibition of aspects than a going from one form to another. Moreover, Rosenzweig is never purely formal; the most abstract is brought into relation with the most concrete : the mythical gods, the plastic universe and the tragic hero of antiquity are taken as examples by Rosenzweig of this stage of "pre-world building". Here once more, Hegel would be at home. But Rosenzweig is again non Hegelian by using this illustration only to make us feel his meaning; his idea is not to describe the development of the "world spirit" and he simply rejects the unpersonal deities of the east who do not recognise the Living God. Finally, it should be said that we need a clearer explanation of the three basis operations and, before anything else, a deduction of the fact that these three operations should be introduced and that once they are introduced they should necessarily give rise to three entities of the nature of God, the Universe and Man.

6. At the end of these developments the three realms stand in no clear relations to each other, and inside themselves they can take an infinite number of different forms. The second part of the book called "The Path, or the Ever Rejuvenated world" (Die Bahn, oder Die Allzeiterneuerte Welt) will have as its purpose to bring into relation with each other the three realms.

7. *The fourth original feature* of Rosenzweig's thought consists in the method he uses to achieve this aim.

The three links between God, the World and Man will be 1) the link between the World and God : *creation*, 2) the link between God and Man : *revelation*, and 3) the link between God, Man and the Universe : *redemption*, the *final completion of the three principles*. The value of Rosenzweig's thinking in this respect lies in the fact that in all cases he directs himself to the most basic and most difficult problems.

A. *God can not create* with necessity (if not he could not be God, the self sufficient) nor could he create arbitrarily (if not he could not be reason and essence).

B. God can not *reveal* himself as he is (if not he were commensurable with man) nor as he is not (if so, he would be non-God) and moreover this revelation ought to stand in relation with creation (both conditioned by and conditioning each other) and yet they ought not to make each other necessary.

C. Finally *redemption* has to be universal and complete (the whole of mankind and of the universe must become alive and open) and yet it ought to be specific to every case and not necessary. So many topics; so many seeming contradictions.

D. These difficulties are maximalised when looking at *miracle* and *prayer*, two acts that are often examined without reference to each other (because it is thought that miracle is more scandalous than prayer) and that are yet each other's correlates. In the case of miracle God

is penetrating the universe from the outside and in the case of prayer man is penetrating out of the universe and penetrating (if this may be said) into God. The two movements are equally outrageous. All miracle is a prayer; it is in essence the realisation of a prophecy.

Lawlike behavior *can be*, and nearly always is a miracle, because it has been anticipated in the secrecy of the precreation, in order to obtain from man the impossible and premature realisation of redemption and prayer is always a miracle because instead of remaining true to its simple essence (the prayer to be able to pray) it is also a violent effort to make the transcendent present in the immanent and so again to anticipate *now* the *final* redemption of the Universe. Typical for Jewish spirituality is the complete rejection of external miracles (*the real miracle is the prophetically announced regular occurrence*) and the eschatological and cosmological anticipation of the redemption in every miracle-prayer (the struggle of Jacob with the angel is the symbol of all prayer).

We see then how enormous the difficulties are (and we also see that in Rosenzweig's thought the problems of creation, revelation and redemption are not hidden but maximalised. The objections of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, as exposed in Fichte's "Kritik aller Offenbarung", become the very central themes leading to the explanation of creation, revelation and redemption.

8. We believe that the reader will do best, if he wishes to follow here Rosenzweig's thought to start with "grammar of Eros" (pp. 193-206).

A methodological remark should be made. The nature of religious thought is always revealed in Rosenzweig by the nature of religious language. In fact every part of the book claims to be founded on logic and on grammar. We did neglect the logic because it is a rather confused subject-predicate logic; present-day scholars of Rosenzweig will find it a rewarding task to start with modern logic and to read from the basic properties of modern logic the basic properties of God, Man and World (as he tried to do with classical subject-predicate features). But we should not neglect the grammar. Rosenzweig considers this grammar to be a major vehicle of theological thought because *the religious life is a dialogical life* (p. 134-195) from the very creation of man on. The history of this dialogue is the history of creation. This dialogue has to exist because it is the way following which *in man* the assertion of the non-non different is combined with the rejection of the non identical, and following which the assertion of the non non identical is combined with the assertion of the non identical. The encounter of the self with the other is the very essence of the existence of the self (if Rosenzweig's triad is applied) and so the other encountered will again be, as object, neither identical nor different. This encounter has to be the encounter of Man with God (The prototype of all dialogue). Revelation is thus a necessity on the basis of the principles of this system. But if it is at all to be a revelation it must occur in a contingent manner, having contingent content and contingent places and times. This is the philosophical solution to one of our problems when confronted with the dialogical, and yet logical, metaphysical and grammatical theology of Rosenzweig.

9. One should follow the primordial dialogue. Man is called "Where are You?" and in silence he answers "Here I am", the *lonely* self opening himself to an *unknown* voice. This voice then gives one *command* "Love me". This command is not the weak, ascetic, virtuous command of the traditional school religion; it is a violent, jealous *desire to be loved*. And for this reason, man knows "*He loves me*". God is the being that can command to be loved and that can only reveal itself and its own love by the command to be loved (pp. 196-197). The

answer of the soul to this command is not the confession that it reciprocates, but the deep shame not to be able to answer adequately, and, as the result of the showing of this shame, the awareness of one's radical *indifference* towards one's own guilt confronted with the evidence of the love of the other, and thus the *certainty* of loving also, being loved forever. Guilt disappears as the reference to the self disappears and as the whole consciousness is filled by the only possible faith (p. 202) "*All confession of faith has only one content : him, whom I did recognise in my experience of being loved, as the one who loves me, exists*". By means of this recognition, God gains being and man gains his manhood" (pp. 202-203). We leave reluctantly this supremely beautiful and moving part of the book (one of the summits of mystical literature), and we try to explain how the unity of Creation, Revelation and Redemption realises also the unity of God, Man and World (and so the full actualisation of the three principles themselves, not only in their hidden depths, but for each other and for everything).

10. The solution lies in the fact that the dialogue leads to an "I am Yours" said by Man the beloved, to God the lover, and to the answer "You are mine" said by God to the Soul. In this tense and violent but silent and tender give and take, the two participants must be at infinite distances in order to give and take enough of each other to and from each other. *Revelation* so described *presupposes distance-creating creation* and finally the "I am yours" can only end by a prayer without words that wants to make the beloved lover present in everything, answered by the desire of the beloved lover. Both Man and God desire the realisation of the redemption in which the YOU shall be the I and in which the *It*, vehicle of the dialogue, shall itself be the I and the YOU. To summarize : *revelation shows the existence of creation, anticipates total redemption, consecrates the final difference between I, You and It (that will never be annihilated) but also the incompleteness of I, You and It. They can only become complete by being filled with each other.* God will become completely God, the World completely the World and Man completely Man when the internal development that constituted them in themselves will be repeated by and in each other. This all can, however, not be achieved with necessity (both emanatism and islamic monotheism commit the error to make these processes necessary while their very essence compels them to be irregular, contingent in their form and yet unavoidable). God, Man and the Universe can exist without each other but they can only be achieved through their mutual interpenetration (our formula is paradoxical and we know it, but the asymmetry of the three poles is sufficiently respected, to our minds, by the fact that while God is *redeemed* (end of the second part !) and is *unified* (end of the book, with reference to the Schechina), the other two participants in the universal drama : Man and the World are deified (God becomes all in all - an end that can be achieved at the end of the development of the universe and that most types of theologies have already postulated at its beginning).

11. We think that we have expressed in this way the basic original features of Rosenzweig's theology. As we saw it, it is completely founded on the collaboration between the philosophical thought of the first part (the internal growth of God, Man and the Universe) and the intimate relation described in the second part between the Soul and God, existentially lived through. We have however to ask ourselves how Rosenzweig conceives of the proof of his statements. He is certainly not unaware of the problem and he offers, so we think, *four proofs in favor of his theology*

12.1. He compares every stage of creation, revelation and redemption to the development of a work of art in general and of different types of works of art in particular. The unification of the mythical, the tragical and the plastical that is the unification of God, Man and Universe as he has conveyed them is the very formula of a complete work of art and this complete work of art simultaneously symbolises the redemption. If the work of art is the analogon of the universe, and if the creation analysis he presents is exact, then the universe should be developed by means of the internal and external growth of the three principles he considers.

12.2. Considering the relation between philosophy and theology, he (obviously very much influenced by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) notices that radical philosophy can only start with the subjective and existential problem of the individual; but that in order to become a collective undertaking this existential problematic must become a collective existential undertaking. According to him this can only occur if philosophy becomes theology. On the other hand historical theology is not enough and purely experiential theology is not sufficient either; theology must become philosophy to complete historical and emotive dimensions. This leads him to think the universe in such a way that the personal life of the thinker might reveal the center and foundation of this same universe. His claim is implicitly that only if his philosophy is true, this collaboration of theology and philosophy can be realised (and indeed we might say that the independence in interrelation, leading to radical eschatology might be conditions of possibility of this collaboration of the two disciplines).

12.3. He considers grammar and logic as revealing essential truths about the relation between man and the universe and from the study of grammar and logic that recurs repeatedly throughout the book, he draws conclusions about the nature of reality. In his "Grammar of Logic", the language of knowledge (p. 138-148), he gives a philosophical grammar leading to a theory of categories that claims to show that the universe being a set of things (that *should* be a thing but *is not*) refers with necessity to some other completing factor of an external nature (God).

12.3. Finally he uses the results of his analysis to explain the relations between various religions that have existed, that still do exist and whose features are then confirmations of the hypotheses he puts forward.

Rosenzweig does not systematically examine the problem of proof. But we think that the reader who assembles systematically the four types of materials mentioned and who studies systematically the reciprocal dependence of the first and the second part of this book will have the necessary material at his disposal to evaluate the claims of Rosenzweig's work. We do not consider it to be our task here to give a final evaluation of it. We simply want to point out ways and means to do so. It is obvious that recent results in esthetics, logic and linguistics should be brought in to Rosenzweig's field.

13. We finally come to the third part ("The Configuration, or the eternal Superuniverse").

Man having found that he is loved by God becomes, fortified by this love, himself the lover of those who are "near" to him, those that resemble enough what God loves in him in order to make it necessary for him to love them also. A new duality is introduced in man, the lonely self : the beloved becomes lover (as God the creator becomes redeemer and as the

universe streaming away from the origin is drawn towards the end). This makes it necessary for man to enlighten his love for the "nearest one" ("love acts as if there were no God and no Universe", p. 298), by replacing the concrete loved one in the texture of the whole. Prayer makes this possible and *the organisation of the time that remains for us to be lived, while waiting for the completion of the incompleted universe, by symbolising and anticipating in time the redemption to come (this a spatial and collective organisation of prayer), is the ritual and cultural life.*

Rosenzweig has already rejected the impersonality of the oriental religions and the literal necessitarianism of the Islam : his religion is a religion of *free* and *contingent symbolic* and personal love between *independent beings*. This leads him to an original position with respect to the relation between Christianity and Judaism. These two religions seem to him both needed, but also with necessity opposed.

The Judaic ritual life is radically biologically founded, carried by a nation, without land, without state and without language. For Rosenzweig, this nation has only a ritual existence; but according to Rosenzweig no Jew becomes a Jew; he is born into Judaism. This "holy people", mythically related to the "holy land", it can not and may not ever possess (the possession of the land makes the nation part of temporal development and liable to destruction) is however leading a life, all of the actions of which (familial or communal) are sacred and constitute symbols of creation, revelation and redemption. The Jew holds himself aloof from time and sees the development of mankind as *an approximation to the silent pole he represents*. The Christian cultural life is to the contrary not the life of reconfirmation of an existing covenant or the expectation of a future redemption, but a life of active world conquest, not tied to any biological limit, in the service of the sanctification of the society and of mankind. The *star* and the *cross* are two necessary features of time organisation as preparation of the future eschatological period.

Within Christianity itself there coexist three churches a) the Church of Petrus, b) the Church of Paulus and c) the Church of Johannes. The Church of Petrus is an organised visible group having as purpose to unify the whole of mankind in Christ; this visible group can not reach success because it can not keep the purity of its inspiration. The Paulinian church pursues the same aim as the church of Petrus but only through transformation of the inner life not through external actions. Once more a too strong accent on one part of man (the internal life) leads to failure, c) a third church (p. 314 : Christianity of the Future) is the Church of hope (no longer the Church of *love* of Petrus nor the Church of *faith* of Paulus but the Church of man who only wishes to offer himself in the service of his work, *hoping*).

Rosenzweig is not clear, so it seems to us, about the nature of the Church of hope, this Christianity of the future, a) Is it Judaism ? Then the strong opposition between Jew and Christian he described before was too radical, b) Is it Orthodoxy ? Yet he characterizes the Russian Church only as a renewal of love and faith, c) It is Freemasonry ? There the pure hope, by eliminating love and faith, eliminates itself according to him (pp. 317-318).

Finally he comes to the conclusion that the only adequate prayer is the prayer that realises the final solution in the present, that makes eternity actual everywhere and in every moment. To do this we need the two ways : *the way of action* (of body, soul, and of human totality : the three christian churches united) and *the way of contemplation* (the judaic life). Both are according to him, necessary.

14. Before ending this review we have to formulate a few questions on this last topic :

14.1. Is his characterisation of the Petrus Church, the Paulus Church and the Johannes Church really correct ? We could characterise catholicism by the authority vested in the pope and his hierarchy, protestantism by the authority vested in Christ through his book and in the individual conscience, and orthodoxy by authority vested in the encounter of the community with Christ. Or, thinking about the orthodox Easter we could see orthodoxy rather close to judaism as the church of the redemption, protestantism close to the cross, as the church of revelation; and catholicism close to nativity as the church of cration.

14.2. Given this christian multiplicity should we not also realise the internal multiplicity of Judaism (Kabbala and Talmud, for instance) ?

14.3. Given the necessity to consider various churches as necessary should we not also consider as necessary a) the existence of the pure Goethean heathen who lives only in the service of his work, b) the existence of multiple revelations of the one God, an idea that is neither Judaic nor Christian but Islamic ? Is not the characterisation given by Rosenzweig of Islam seriously incomplete ?

14.4. Given the necessity to countenance a multiplicity of ways of cultural life should we not attribute to the unitarian freemasonry the function of organising the equality and relation of the many cultural life styles (and refuse to consider it as only the expression of Johannitean Christianity ?)

14.5. Rosenzweig has not given a clear deduction of the necessity of the separate and opposite Christianity and Judaism dimension. His followers should come back to this problem.

14.6. Given the existence (in 1978) of the state of Israel should one derive from the "Star of Redemption" either a rejection of this state, or (more probably) a defense of the state of Israel as a secular state, added to a defense of the necessary existence of a judaic diaspora ?

14.7. Moreover, should not a writer who identifies so strongly the history of mankind with the history of religion say more about the status of secular revolutions (for or against justice) and their religious function in the anticipation of the holy epoch ?

15. We can now end this very incomplete analysis. We think that many themes (the independence, internal growth, and mutual completion of World, Man and God; their revelation in and by language and logic; the theory of dialogue and of the work of art as symbol of the development of the universe) of this book should be studied further and have not yet received outside of Jewish circles the attention they deserve. Rosenzweig's book, if one applies modern linguistic analysis to the parts of the Bible he uses (the 115th psalm, the Song of Songs, Genesis) shows that linguistic theology can be fruitfully used as a tool for fundamental theology and for historical research. Moreover the influence of the Kabbala on this modern work, and the affinities between Ernst Bloch and Franz Rosenzweig make this work worthy of further comment.