

*Jack Bemporad*  
LET US MAKE MAN

I feel so indebted to Andrea for all that he has done for my better understanding of not just Hermann Cohen and Martin Buber, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and so much else, but also for his personal friendship. He is a true and cherished friend and has been so kind to me over many, many years.

Andrea has written brilliantly and lovingly. For example, his few pages on the confrontation of Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger, in his book on the Second Volume of Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, his penetrating and I believe accurate understanding of Buber, as well as his doctoral dissertation on Buber, especially, his discussion of Buber's Hasidism, which in 1986 anticipated what can be found in the last chapter of his *Cadenze*<sup>1</sup>. He states there, that the passage in *Leviticus* 19:2, "You must become Holy before me", is interpreted by Hasidism, "You must become Holy by being human".

His touching words about Edmund Husserl in the last chapter of the *Cadenze*, all this I think testify to his love of Judaism, but most importantly, his magnificent contribution to our understanding of the works of Cohen. All this I think points to his being a Catholic of a Jewish persuasion.

I want to affirm with a brief treatment of Jewish texts on his original *midrash* on "Let us make man" as being the joint work of God and man in producing man. In *Genesis* 1, when it comes to the creation of Adam, that is, humanity, there is, as it were, a hesitation. It is as if God is self-consciously evaluating whether he

<sup>1</sup> Andrea Poma, *Cadenze. Note filosofiche per la postmodernità*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2014; Engl. transl. by Sarah De Sanctis, *Cadenzas. Philosophical Notes for Postmodernism*, Springer, Cham 2017.

should be creating man at all. It was not so certain or so clear that this was such a safe thing to do. It is a kind of an irreversible step that he was taking and as my teacher Hans Jonas interpreted it, he said man was not just made IN God's image FOR God's image.

The very being which God created, as it were through self-consciousness, is himself self-conscious, so that man should be aware of himself and the world. While it is true that God names himself, as we discover in *Exodus* 3:14 and 34:6-7, and while God creates a cosmos, it is up to man as co-creator with God to create a human cosmos. And after God has created everything, the environment of the world, he brings them before man to see what he will call them, "and whatever Adam called every living creature, that was the name, thereof" (Gen 2:19).

I would like to simply quote a number of Midrashic statements that testify to this significance and responsibility given to man. A beautiful passage to *Midrash Rabbah* says, in the name of Rabbi Simon: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, 'Let him be created', whilst others urged, 'Let him not be created'. Thus it is written, Love and Truth fought together, Righteousness and Peace combated each other (Ps 85:11). Love said, 'Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of love'; Truth said, 'Let him not be created, because he is compounded of falsehood'; Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, because he will perform righteous deeds'; Peace said, 'Let him not be created, because he is full of strife'. What did the Lord do? He took Truth and cast it to the ground. Said the ministering angels before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Why dost Thou despise Thy seal? Let Truth arise from the earth!'. Hence it is written, *Let truth spring up from the earth* (Ps 85:12)".

We find in the Babylonian Talmud, *Tractate Yoma* 69b, not only that God's seal is Truth, but that God only wants truth spoken about Him. The prayer of Moses claimed that God is mighty and awesome, but in time of catastrophe when strangers destroyed his Temple, Jeremiah asks, "Where is his awesomeness?". When strangers are enslaving his children, Daniel asks, "Where is his power?". Why didn't they recite Moses' prayer, on the principle that Moses had already established it? The response to this

question is, as Rabbi Eleazar said, “*Because Jeremiah and Daniel knew that God insists on truth. They would not ascribe false things to him*”.

What is most remarkable, as highlighted by Cohen, on judgment day, individuals are going to be asked whether they had been able to think logically. “In that hour, in which man is led to judgment, it is said to him: ‘[...] Did you make inferences on the basis of one sentence to another?’” (*Shabbat* 31a:11). “Rashi gives an explanation of the question: ‘The inference of one sentence of another, that is knowledge’”<sup>2</sup>.

In the one place where miracles are adduced in defense of an argument, they are categorically rejected, including the rejecting of the heavenly voice, maintaining that the Torah is not in heaven and the sages have to follow majority rule (cf. *Buba Metzia* 59b:5). All these instances point to the power that God has given man to determine his destiny.

Finally, in the question that Turnus Rufus, the Roman Governor of Palestine in the first century, asks Rabbi Akiba: “Which is the greater? The work of God or the work of human beings? To his surprise, Rabbi Akiba answered: The work of human beings is greater. Why? Because God creates wheat but it is the farmer who plows the field, sows the seed, and reaps the harvest and it is the baker who makes the flour into a dough and bakes the bread for men to enjoy”<sup>3</sup>. We say the blessing on the bread, not on the wheat, just as we say the blessing over the wine, and not on the grapes. It is man who must complete God’s unfinished business. “So to speak, [man’s work] is actually greater since it is the fulfillment of the divine purpose”<sup>4</sup>.

Louis Jacobs, in quoting this passage of the Maharah of Prague, introduces it with a very important statement. He states “God is not the creator of the Torah. On the contrary, it is God who makes Himself known through the human process of redaction. How this

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, nach dem Manuskript des Verfassers neu durchgearbeitet und mit einem Nachwort versehen von Bruno Strauß, J. Kauffmann, Frankfurt a. M. 21929; Nachdruck Fourier, Wiesbaden 1978, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Jacobs, *God, Torah, Israel. Traditionalism Without Fundamentalism*, Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati 1990, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

can be is a tremendous mystery, but then, so is how God can be in control of His universe and yet leave room for human freedom and human creativity. To quote the *Maharal* again, just as God created an unfinished universe for humans to bring to perfection, He created an incomplete Torah for humans to bring to completion"<sup>5</sup>.

Man must even affirm the nature of how God is to be conceived. It is in proclaiming the nature of the God that 'ought to be' as opposed to 'the God that is' as affirmed by the surrounding peoples. So Abraham, in *Genesis* 18, says: "Even though I am but dust and ashes" (v. 27), from the point of view of being, from the point of view of morality, he can ask: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do justice" (v. 25). Moses, in *Numbers* 14, claims that God must be a God who keeps his promises, and that God himself has taught man that real power is in forgiveness not in destruction. Job is convinced that God has to be the kind of God that will vindicate his (Job's) innocence.

Finally, in *Genesis* 1 it is clear that the first thing that Adam and Eve know, really know, profoundly, is that they are naked, vulnerable, finite, and therefore make themselves clothes with whatever is available. When they were told that they should not eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil for they would die, what do they know about death or good and evil – all just vague general terms. But having eaten the fruit, they know they are naked. The clothes that they create are not sufficient, so that God makes them clothing, which can be interpreted as the virtues. The reality is that man is an unfinished being and must complete himself. In fact, making himself is man's greatest work of art. With God's help, we are all creators of ourselves.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.