A. Introductory Remarks

The path of Reform was laid by individuals who rebelled against the rabbinic establishment in their traditional congregations and encountered the obstacle of German society. The defensiveness of the rabbinic establishment against the free, creative secular culture oppressed their personal selves, yet the defensiveness of the German society against their Jewish identity forced them to create an alternative religious institution that could enable them to conduct their struggle on two fronts. By contrast, the opposite path of Orthodoxy was laid down by leaders of the rabbinical establishment and by individuals who identified with it and developed their identities as Jews within its framework.

The task of the Orthodox ideology—we have said earlier that it, too, constituted an innovation relative to the tradition—was to confirm anew the religious authority that had been called into question and to reestablish it on its proper foundation: the given Torah (written and oral), which the believers saw as a totality of doctrines and beliefs, commandments, laws, and norms that comprised God’s word to His people through the prophets who heard it and the sages who interpreted it with methods that were also given through revelation. The belief in the factuality of the divine revelation found in this Torah given from Sinai gave legitimation not only to the religious establishment but to all the doctrines, values, and life patterns that it imparts and through which its purpose finds fulfillment. The Orthodox ideology therefore needed to confirm this fundamental belief against those who would challenge it. Thence arises the centrality of the problem of revelation—in the sense of the transmission of the word of God to human beings—in Orthodox thought.

We should, however, attend to the fact that even this ideology, which sought to protect the religious establishment, was the creation of individuals who stood at a crossroads. Like those individuals who turned to Reform, so those individuals who turned to Orthodoxy also stood at a crossroads and had to choose, and it is self-evident that it is impossible for such decisions, proceeding from a deeply personal level, to be uniform.
or to arrive at the same place. There will necessarily be many paths to Orthodoxy and different kinds of Orthodoxy, differing in their relation to the tradition and in their relation to the outside culture that challenged its authority.

Moreover, while the religious establishment required a clear, unequivocal ideology, the positions of the individuals who contributed to it were rooted from the outset in the ambivalence that lies behind every personal decision between alternatives. This ambiguity was indeed expressed, first of all in the division between fanatical and moderate responses, and afterward in the inner tension characterizing the moderate responses that favored mediation and reconciliation. It was also expressed, however, in the hidden inner struggle that characterized even the more extreme position, which was only apparently unequivocal but also expressed an inner attraction to the dangers of seduction, dangers it repressed through withdrawal and hostile rejection.

On the other hand, we should note that depending on the personal nature of the choice it was possible for an Orthodox position to take the form of a reforming idea or a journey of return in the hearts of those individuals who decided to rebel and were caught up in the definitions of the German society. The challenge to their original sense of certainty in the path that they had chosen, the confusion and gnawing doubts, roused them to thirst for the simple religious certainty that had been lost and to try to reconstruct—using the intellectual tools of modern culture that they had by now mastered and that had become a part of their own identity—the belief in the absolute truth of the Torah, whose source was in divine revelation.

On the level of organized movements, all these personal struggles were expressed in the division between the two kinds of Jewish Orthodoxy that arose side by side and clashed with each other: ultra-Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy. Ultra-Orthodoxy opted for a sweeping refusal of the Emancipation and absolute rejection of external modern culture, whereas Modern Orthodoxy considered how to fortify belief in revealed Torah in order to fashion openings to the positive messages of modern culture. These two paths were already visible in the first generation of the Jewish Enlightenment and its opponents, whereas in the second and third generations they became institutionalized during the battle against Reform.

The ideological response of ultra-Orthodoxy to Reform was based, of course, on the traditional Torah sources, and even among them there were choices to be made. The rationalist philosophy of the Middle Ages,