CHAPTER TEN

THE IMAGE OF GOD:
NOTES ON THE HELLENIZATION OF JUDAISM, WITH ESPECIAL
REFERENCE TO GOODENOUGH'S WORK ON JEWISH SYMBOLS

I. Hellenization in Disguise

[473] Discussions of the hellenization of ancient Judaism often take for
granted that any material for which precedent can be found in the Old
Testament is therefore independent of hellenistic influence. This
supposition neglects the fact that rabbinic literature is almost entirely
homiletic and legal. Preachers and lawyers must find proof-texts in
certain books which are authoritative for their purposes. But they do
not necessarily get their ideas from those books to which they must go
for their proof-texts. The history of Biblical and legal exegesis bristles
with examples of texts which have been made to bear meanings their
authors never thought of. Consider two rabbinic instances: Ben Azzai
uses the text, "This is the book of the generations of Adam," as an
excuse to argue that the Law is the basic principle of human society. R.
Jeremiah b. Le'azer uses the text, "Male and female he created them"
as an excuse for teaching that when God created Adam he created him
androgynous. Clearly, it would be mistaken to say that because these
rabbis found the texts in the Bible they must also have found the ideas
there.

What holds for preachers and lawyers holds also for translators.
The Hebrew text of the Bible is in a number of places obscure beyond
understanding. Therefore any understandable [474] translation of
those places must be a reading into them of ideas supplied by the
translator. Where the translator got his ideas is a question which
cannot be settled at all by the fact that he read them into the Hebrew
text. Thus when the LXX turned the obscure Hebrew, 'ehyeh 'asher
'ehyeh, which the Targums did not attempt to translate, into the clear
Platonism, "I am the one being," then, even though the resultant
Being did retain the gender of the Biblical God, there is no doubt that
we are looking at a hellenization of the Biblical religion.

1 The content of this paper was originally delivered in three lectures given in 1955 at the
Hebrew Teachers' College, Boston.
2 Gen. Rab. 8.1 (ed. Theodor, p. 55 and parallels). On the former see my note in HTR
48 (1955), 51.
3 Exod 3:14.
4 Cf. J. Freudenthal, "Are There Traces of Greek Philosophy in the LXX?" JQR, 2
(1890), 220. F. is mistaken in supposing that to on is Stoic rather than Platonic and his
explanation of an Alexandrian translation of the third century B.C. by the influence of
Therefore it is often unjustified to cite the proof-text used by a preacher, or the LXX’s remodelings of the Hebrew, as evidence that the ideas thus introduced are signs of Jewish tradition rather than hellenistic influence.

Of course, proof texts sometimes do happen to contain the ideas attributed to them. But even when they do, *the taking up and development of ideas by later writers may be evidence of outside influence.*

For example, let us consider the notion that man is made in the image of God. It appears in the Old Testament in two places in Genesis, in the second of which it is added as an explanation to a law making murder a capital offence. There is no doubt that in both these places the detail is, at very least, pre-[475]exilic. Since later Biblical tradition became much opposed to physical anthropomorphism, to anything which would suggest that a statue of any sort could be in any respect a faithful likeness of the deity, it is surprising that this material survived. It is even more surprising to find it taken up by a number of rabbis and used by them not only to justify capital punishment for murder, but also to argue the dignity of man in general and to blame those who abstain from the procreation of children because they diminish the image (sc. the number of images?) of God.

Now the purposes for which these rabbis used these proof texts are closely related to the culture of the Greco-Roman world. It was in that world that the notion of human dignity was given its classical development by the Stoics, and it was in that world that the practice of asceticism was spreading in the second and third centuries A.D. when these rabbis attack the consequent abstinence from procreation. So the motives of their statements are explicable by the influence of the Greco-Roman environment, but what of the form? Why should these

Palestinian exegesis of the third century A.D. is not plausible. Note also his final argument (p. 222), “Who would venture to ascribe to the Soferim, Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan a knowledge of systems of philosophy which could only be acquired after a long devotion to their study?” No one, surely, supposes that the translators of the Old Testament were trained philosophers. But it is supposed that Greek philosophy had a large, albeit indirect, influence on the *Weltanschauung* of most thinking men (among whom were many rabbis) in the ancient world. As evidence against this latter supposition there is no importance whatever in F.’s demonstration that the translators of the LXX neglect the technical, philosophic senses of certain words. And even concerning trained philosophers, argument from this fact would be dangerous. For instance, it would prove Philo ignorant of philosophy, since, as Wolfson has shown, he is generally indifferent in his use of philosophic terms. H. Wolfson *Philo* (Cambridge, 1947), i. 102 ff.

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5 Tosepta Yebamot, 8 end; cf. Yeb. 63b; Abot, 3. 14.
6 This is not to say, of course, that all Jewish ascetics were necessarily imitators of Greek examples. Asceticism, like mysticism, is a psychological phenomenon which can appear