

THE MESSIANIC IDEA IN JUDAISM AND OTHER ESSAYS ON JEWISH SPIRITUALITY, by Gershom Scholem. *Allen and Unwin*, 1971. 376 pp. £5.95.

The essays in this book are a collection of papers and lectures given at different times and if one wanted to discover a link between them, it might perhaps be the author's astounding knowledge not only of the great Messianic ideas in Judaism but also of details only to be discovered by the truly dedicated scholar whose interest reaches far beyond his particular field of Jewish mysticism.

In his Foreword he says that his book is addressed to readers with a 'passionate' interest in the relationship between Jewish mysticism and the Messianic problem. Few Christian readers will bring such a passionate interest to these questions, and for them the first essay, 'Towards an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism', is probably the most relevant. He argues that for the Christian redemption is a wholly interior event, concerning the individual and his personal salvation, while Judaism 'has always maintained a concept of redemption as an event which takes place publicly, on the stage of history' (p. 1). He repeats it even more strongly: 'It is . . . the special position of Judaism in the history of religion that it thought nothing of such a chemically pure inwardness of redemption. I do not say: thought little, but thought nothing at all. An inwardness, which does not present itself in the most external realm and is not bound up with it in every way, was regarded here as of no value' (pp. 16-17). One might dispute here the author's competence to judge of present-day understanding of Christian Messianism, for he seems certainly unfamiliar with the present trend which is much more 'Jewish' and secular.

According to all Jewish sources examined by the author, the Messianic event will either bring history to a close and inaugurate a new era for all, or radically change this world, so that it becomes a place where justice, peace and reconciliation between men and between man and God have visibly taken place. The author then discusses the various trends in Jewish Messianic expectations, some apocalyptic, some more this-worldly, but all creating a tension between the imperfect present and the hope of a complete fulfilment of all God's promises to Israel and all mankind.

His discussions of the esoteric speculations

of the kabbalists, the movements of false Messianism, such as that of Sabbatai Zwi and his disciple Jacob Frank in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are of lesser interest to the general reader. They show, however, that Jewish Messianism was, and remains, a living dynamic force in their faith.

He discusses in some detail the difference between the doctrine of the Lurian Kabbalism who believed in *tikkun*, the gathering in of the divine sparks scattered over the whole universe, and that of the Eastern European Hassidim in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who laid greater stress on *devekut*, the fervent adherence of the individual to God in prayer and in all the acts of ordinary daily life. He reproaches the neo-orthodox movement of the nineteenth century, whose representatives were Samson Raphael Hirsch and Isaac Breuer in Germany, for having neglected the Messianic and mystical elements of traditional Judaism and thereby impoverished its content, draining it of all emotional fervour.

Though the author professes a great admiration for Martin Buber he criticizes his presentation of Hassidism as too sentimental and lacking in objective scholarship. As for the Buber-Rosenzweig translation of the Bible into German, it had been meant as a gift of gratitude for what German culture had given to the Jewish community. The terrible irony is that when the translation was completed German Jewry had ceased to exist during the years of the Final Solution.

In his last charming essay Prof. Scholem describes the *Golem*, the legendary robot fashioned by the famous Rabbi Loew of Prague (ca. 1600), who would carry out all his master's orders but who, through some oversight, ran amok and became a wholly destructive power, until his master could again turn him into a lifeless mass of clay. He compares this Golem-robot with the computers in the Weizmann Institute of Technology in Rehovoth, Israel; they too can only accomplish the will of their scientific masters and lack the divine spark which alone makes man a truly human being, having received from God the faculty to think independently and—to love!

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