Franz Werfel's Great Dilemma

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FRANZ WERFEL'S GREAT DILEMMA

IN ONE of his final works Franz Werfel asserts that

Israel is chosen not only in the sense of being God's people. . . . Israel had to assume the role of antagonist so that the drama of salvation of a spurned Deity could unfold in time and reality as the sacrifice of the Agnus Dei qui tollit peccata mundi. . . . God's providence in effect condemned Israel to reject God Himself for the salvation of the world.

Even for a Jew who regards Jesus Christ as the true, historically revealed Messiah, in fact as the Son of God, baptism and conversion are not enough. . . . He belongs to an entirely different order than [the nations]. The Jew is not "curable" through baptism and faith alone. . . . Every Jew . . . as a member of supratemporal Judaism has failed to recognize Jesus Christ . . . [therefore] cannot be released from his Jewish world history.

[Hence] this enormous paradox . . . : The predestined recipient of salvation is the only one who remains profoundly barred from it until the last day but one of universal history.1

These lines from Between Heaven and Earth (1944) contain the substance of Franz Werfel's religious dilemma. At the very time he was setting them down, the Jews were going through the cruelest period of their history. His awareness of their mysterious existence and of their plight is reflected in most of his major works after 1925, the year of his first journey to Palestine, when his attention became focused upon the meaning and destiny of Israel, her relation to Christ, and his own part and place in this relationship.

1. Cf. Franz Werfel, Between Heaven and Earth, trans. Maxim Newmark (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944), pp. 195–196, 194, 195. This work is composed of three essays and reflections entitled "Theologumena." The first three were written in the Europe of the 30s, while the last section, with which I am most concerned in this essay, was composed in the United States between 1942 and 1944. Though translations of Werfel's works are my own, for the sake of the reader the references are, wherever possible, to the official English editions.
Up to that time he had concerned himself little, if at all, with these matters. Born of Jewish parents in Prague in 1890, he left his native city as a young man, never to return, except for an occasional visit. Deliberately cutting himself off from his home and his spiritual heritage, he spent most of his productive years in Vienna, the city he first came to know and to love in 1917 when he was officially summoned, after two years on the eastern front, to accept an assignment with the Austrian war propaganda office.

Denounced for his "pacificist," humanitarian writings before, during, and immediately after the war, the young poet became a marked man, often living under the threat of arrest and imprisonment. At the war's end he was drawn, by postwar revolutionary forces, into an unsuccessful attempt to establish the control of the "Red Guard" over Vienna. But he was too much of an individualist to join any political faction for long, or even any literary movement, though he did identify himself for a time with the expressionist group of writers.

The twenty or so years Werfel spent in Vienna were, for the most part, happy ones; they were fruitful, too, as attested by the range and volume of his creative achievements. Though by nature and first fame a lyric poet, his abundant energy flowed almost incessantly from one form to another: from lyric to dramatic poetry, from prose drama to the essay and the novella, from the novel to the pageant, from dramatic comedy and satire to hymnal prose and verse, from fantasy to reflection: ethical, philosophical, political, or theological.

On Friday, March 11, 1938, "Austria's black day,"1 he was fortunately on the island of Capri, far from the sorrowful sight and sound of the Nazi invasion of Austria. But on that same day his exile began. Not long afterward, he and his wife found refuge in France, only to be trapped there in 1940 when that country fell to Hitler.

In the course of their circuitous search through the south of France for an escape route they were offered shelter in Lourdes, just when hope seemed all but lost. During their five weeks' stay there, Werfel began to inquire into the life of Bernadette. During the same period he made his well-known vow to pay homage to her if saved from the Nazis. About a year later, in the safety of California, he fulfilled this vow through The First Stirring.

Franz Werfel died in the completion of his very real sense, as we say "novel but not fiction," The Song of Bernadette.

FIRST STIRRING:

No serious consideration of the religious issue in his upon the points of agreement with the Church. These issues of "no escape" for Israel and Jewish people have been.

The four ways are briefly outlined in Between Heaven and Earth. Werfel's bewilderment has given rise to a series of escape routes rejected as cheap and shameful, to self-deception and unworthy, is characterized by a return to life from the false pretender to herself and to rejection of Christ.4

Werfel's pessimism in this sense of unending struggle with despair is:


4. Cf. Werfel, Between H
Franz Werfel died in the summer of 1945, just a few days after the completion of his utopian novel, *Star of the Unborn*, which in a very real sense, as we shall see later, might well be designated as a "novel but not fiction," the words Werfel himself used to characterize *The Song of Bernadette*.

**FIRST STIRRINGS**

No serious consideration of Franz Werfel as a writer can bypass the religious issue in his works, particularly in so far as they impinge upon the points of agreement, as well as conflict, between Israel and the Church. These issues are centered in what Werfel calls four ways of "no escape" for Israel from the tragic perplexity in which the Jewish people has been "caught" during most of its unique history. The four ways are briefly identified in the "Theologumena" section of *Between Heaven and Earth*. Speaking there of his people's plight under the Nazis, Werfel anxiously inquires: "To what refined state of bewilderment has God condemned those creatures to whom He once promised everlasting favor through Abraham?" His answer comes in a series of expostulations that explore swiftly and sharply four possible escape routes for Israel. Modern liberalism is summarily rejected as cheap and shallow. Nationalism is dismissed as a road leading to self-deception and even self-annihilation. Orthodoxy, though not unworthy, is characterized as a step backward, an unthinkable withdrawal from life to fossilization. "The way to Christ," Israel's true Interpreter to herself and to the world, he finds temporally blocked, that is to say, blocked until the end of human history because of Israel's rejection of Christ.4

Werfel's pessimism regarding Israel's condition, as revealed in this sense of unending spiritual forlornness, can be transformed into...

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high and serious hope only if the total history of Israel is viewed supratemporally and in direct relation to the total significance of the Incarnation.

Werfel leaves no doubt concerning his profound conviction that the Christian way is indispensable if this world, spiritually bewildered and therefore dislocated, is to be restored. There is clear evidence of this conviction as early as 1917, the year "The Christian Mission," Werfel's earliest essay in defense of the Christian view, was published. Marysia Turrian terms it "an open letter bidding farewell to all contemporary currents and, at the same time, his first public affirmation of Christianity." Annemarie von Püttkamer, on the other hand, takes it to be "a remarkable avowal of Christian teaching without knowledge of Christ." Werfel, she believes, was at this time too much swayed by modern skepticism to have accepted the total significance of the Incarnation. It would seem that her view is closer to the facts. The attraction that the Christian way had for the younger Werfel lay more in its social and ethical values than in the truth of supernatural revelation.

STRIFE IN ISRAEL

As I have said, it was not until after his journey to Jerusalem in 1925 that Werfel began to scrutinize the supernatural character of Christianity, particularly, though not always, in its relationship to the people of Israel. His visit to the Holy Land marked a radical change within him, manifest in his subsequent works, a change that culminated in an all but final acceptance of the Church’s teaching.

His drama Paul Among the Jews, published the following year, represents the first creative result of this visit. The first, also, of a long and crowded succession of works dealing with a religious theme, it presents the climactic moment of tension and division in Israel's history. Its focus is on the conflict occasioned by Paul's return from Damascus: Filled with the convert's zeal, Paul wishes to change the heart of his people, particularly that of his illustrious teacher, the venerable Gamaliel, as himself says, Israel's "father".

At the play's climax re-examines the evidence for the Day of Atonement, the Law's "cathartic" function as immediate restoration in opposition to the will that the crucified Christ One who through divine passion and serenity leaves thunderous wrath:

PAUL: He did more than Gamaliel.
GAMALIEL: No Jew can.
PAUL: Master, an unknown one.
Now we draw His banner, stand the mystery: A mingled with His name and all creatures' heart that consumes over the world . . . unchanged . . . We do not know it.
GAMALIEL (Rising): clothed in our shroud. Nothing! Neither die.
PAUL: The tie has become like an empty wine-skin.

9. Cf. ibid., p. 130.
10. Cf. ibid., p. 137.
of Israel is viewed with significant of the conviction that the evidence of this Mission,” Werfel’s view, was published.1 At the play’s climax, Gamaliel, moved by Paul’s relentless passion, re-examines the evidence tendered at Christ’s trial and discovers, on the Day of Atonement, that a miscarriage of justice has been committed against “a holy man of God,” whose only offense was to have illumined the Law “very hazardous and prematurely.”10 Proposing immediate restoration of justice, he offers himself as Christ’s witness in opposition to the whole Sanhedrin. But at Paul’s repeated insistence that the crucified Christ is not merely a holy and heroic man, but the One who through divine charity has fulfilled the Law, Gamaliel’s dispassion and serenity begin to give way to impatience and then to thunderous wrath:

PAUL: He did more than illumine the Law, Master.

GAMALIEL: No Jew can do more, Saul...

PAUL: Master, an unknown Being lived and drew breath in our midst. Now we draw His breath into us with every breath we take. Understand the mystery: After this intake of breath, the lives of men are mingled with His. When I was still the old Saul, there lay between me and all creatures dead, black air—loneliness. Death was another name for the world. All joy, all fragrance of the earth was but foul and mocking death. And now? Why has loneliness vanished? What is this strong, jubilant love inside me? Whence this everlastingness in my heart that consumes all fear and decay? A transformation has come over the world... not even the smallest blade of grass now grows unchanged. We live in the midst of the kingdom of God, and we do not know it.

GAMALIEL (Rising): Saul!... You are in the Temple... We are clothed in our shrouds... What has the love of your Jesus changed? Nothing! Neither did his anger. He overturned the tables of the money-changers in the Temple, and the next day they stood upright again. Neither he nor I can banish evil, only the Law can, the mysterious element we serve in order to live, the sacred tie that binds men.

PAUL: The tie has become rotten, Master. The word lies on the roadway like an empty wine-skin.
GAMALIEL (Controlling himself with great effort): This man Jesus did not say that!

PAUL: You speak of a man, Master? . . . A man? Has any man yet mastered death and corruption? Has any man yet risen bodily from the dead? The light that spoke to me before Damascus, was it a man? . . . Can a man bestow renewing grace? No, Master! He was not merely a man. He wore His humanity like a garment as you and I wear these shrouds. He was the Messiah, the Shekinah incarnate, the Son of God who was before the world was. . . .

GAMALIEL (Advancing toward Paul, breathing heavily): Saul, for your sake and mine say he was a man. . . . The Messiah has not come; he is the one eternally coming. For Israel's freedom's sake, say he was a man.

PAUL: Master, by the living God I beg you: Believe! At a moment like this, I cannot lie—not for anyone's sake.

GAMALIEL: Woe to you, then. Do you know who the Messiah is? He is annihilation. For when this arrow starts its whirring flight, the bow will be shattered. This I do not want to see.

PAUL (After a fearful self-conquest, his voice low and broken): The bow is shattered, oh Israel! And forever!

GAMALIEL: Traitor! 11

In obedience to this anguished impulse to see in Christ the great enemy, a divisive and destructive element imperiling the peace of Israel, Gamaliel revokes his decision to testify for Christ and turns his full wrath on Paul, in whom he sees the embodiment of "Israel's self-hatred." 12 With the sacrificial knife poised, but still troubled by a lurking shadow of doubt, Gamaliel directs a question to the God of Israel, who has never failed him, on the identity of Jesus. No answer comes, and the great structure of Gamaliel's faith begins to totter before his own eyes. Greatly bewildered, yet at the same time inspired by the first dim infusion of a mystical awareness, Gamaliel's hand releases the knife and comes to rest on Paul's head, upon whom he bestows the great blessing of the Lord. This is Gamaliel's last visible act, before darkness descends upon him and Israel, a darkness that is to remain unpilled until the "day of all days." 13

12. Cf. ibid., p. 142.
This man Jesus did you call a man? Has any man yet risen bodily from Damascus, was it a man? No, Master! He was not a garment as you and I are. The Shekinah incarnate, the Holy One of Israel, a darkness that is light, Saul, for your freedom’s sake, say he isn’t Messiah! For your freedom’s sake, say he isn’t Messiah! Has the Messiah come? Have we defiled your light? (Paul stands pale, rigid, with eyes closed, as if in rapture.)

GAMALIEL (Impatiently, imperiously): Answer! (A long-drawn-out trumpet blast, dying away slowly, is followed by a long and profound silence.) No answer! For the first time no answer! I am as empty as death.

PAUL (Softly, ardently): I have received an answer, Master. Here I am.

GAMALIEL (Suddenly broken): I do not know the truth anymore. Go!

(Paul takes and presses Gamaliel’s hand to his forehead.) Yes, I have seen God’s answer. I found myself on dusty roads. In harbors I saw ships rolling and tossing; the sailors sang. I stood in the swirling crowd of the vast city. And I kept moving, moving, moving. For Christ is a tireless hunter.

GAMALIEL (As if from a faraway dream): Moving, moving, moving. . . . Was this your answer?

PAUL: Now that I know it, I should like to go to sleep and be no more.

GAMALIEL (As if in a troubled awakening): Who are you, Jew? (He lets his hand rest heavily on Paul’s head.) Whoever you are, man: The Lord bless thee, the Lord keep thee, the Lord make His face to shine upon thee. . . .

PAUL: You give me strength for my journey. (Rising and moving back, his eyes fixed on Gamaliel.) Setting sun of my people! (Exit with Barnabas.)

GAMALIEL (His face slowly twisting in pain, he cries out): Destruction upon us! Destruction. . . . (He rushes out, his face covered. Gradually, his cry dies away.)

In a brief postscript to Paul Among the Jews, Werfel indicates that the purpose of his drama had been to reveal dispassionately, through direct human action, the great turning point in Israel’s sacred history. As for this claim of total detachment from his material, it has been sharply criticized by those who believe in the素材的完整性。
seems evident that he was by no means emotionally aloof from either the dramatic conflict or the two leading persons engaged in it. His inclination toward Paul's position is as clearly revealed as his personal admiration for the integrity and magnanimity of Gamaliel's whole nature. Moreover, his sympathy for Gamaliel's tragic dilemma is as obvious as his understanding, coming at the climax of the play, of Paul's view of his great teacher as a symbol of Israel's decline. Werfel does not commit himself to one side against the other; he takes both sides, for the simple but compelling reason that "the struggle goes through his own soul." 15

This struggle apparently came to an end in Werfel's lifetime, yet he arrived at no absolute decision, no unconditional spiritual resolution. Though he sought to die with Gamaliel and desired ultimately to be reborn with Paul in Christ, he still felt himself barred as a Jew from the full blessings of Christ and the life of the Church. He stands, then, as a great paradox in modern times: a Jew who believes in Christ but who is unable to take the final step to the side of the One who, he is convinced, can grant him what he desires most, spiritual wholeness.

BELIEFS AND MISGIVINGS

In the preface to Between Heaven and Earth, Franz Werfel recalls a personal experience he had in East Prussia, just prior to the Nazis' rise to power when, under reluctant police protection, he was driven from a lecture hall in Insterburg amid the bristling boos and catcalls of a student audience. Obsessed by fanatical party zeal, the students had become enraged by Werfel's claim that modern man's survival was inseparably linked to Christianity, a claim they construed as part of the "Jewish-Communist" plot to ruin Germany. The precise statement that called forth their frenetic outburst is evidently one incorporated in Werfel's essay, "Can We Live Without Faith in God?" There he declares that the so-called civilized world "can be spiritually healed only if it finds the way back to genuine Christianity." 16 He speaks these words with full awareness of his own

16. Cf. Werfel, Between Heaven and Earth, p. 120. It is worth noting that in recent times quite a few of Werfel's kinsmen, leaders in their respective realms of activity, have taken much the same position he did. There is, for instance, "the cry of

Jewish origin. As a matter of fact, such a warning became, in Werfel's case, a warning between himself, a Jew,

THE NEED OF MODERN MAN

Werfel offers a threefold return to the Christian West of what, on brief reflection, and again, namely, that has been felt by the world, both physical and moral, of all that is descended by the teaching an ever-present challenge to Western society to observe contrary to your interest,

the young Jewish thinker, and forcéd Werfel into exared him to the Jew, would certainly have been swift and terrifying. For Werfel, as

the world certainly has never been a peaceful one, with a unique "never . . . by philschismatic religions." 17

This faith in the basically unchanged by forced Werfel into exposure him to the world certain would certainly have been swift and terrifying. For Werfel, as
Jewish origin. As a matter of fact, he claims a special right to sound such a warning because of the close and enduring natural tie between himself, a Jew, and Christ.

**THE NEED OF MODERN MAN**

Werfel offers a threefold reason for the need of the present age to return to the Christian way. In the first place, he is intensely aware of what, on brief reflection, seems evident, yet must be restated time and again, namely, that the depth of Christ’s teaching has as yet hardly been felt by the world. In the second place, the values, both metaphysical and moral, of all contemporary systems are immeasurably transcended by the teaching of Christ. Finally, the Christian way poses an ever-present challenge to the gross, self-seeking materialism of Western society to obey the imperative, “the sacred paradox”: “Live contrary to your interests in behalf of truth and life!” He is certain, too, that even the secular structure of modern society can be made whole “only by a universal, world-embracing frame of faith,” and “never . . . by philosophical systems, theosophical groups, sects and schismatic religions.”

This faith in the healing power of Christ’s teaching remained basically unchanged by the war, even in the midst of the chaos that forced Werfel into exile and, for a time, made him homeless and exposed him to the danger of capture by the Gestapo. His arrest would certainly have ended in death, either slow and tormenting or swift and terrifying. Even the slaughter of countless members of his own people, the young Jewish thinker, Paul Landsberg, that our world will be swallowed by chaos unless it “takes the Christian revelation for its helmman.” Two years prior to Landsberg’s death at the hands of the Nazis, the young French-Jewish writer, Simone Weil, remarked that “our obligation for the next two or three years . . . is to show the public the possibility of a truly incarnated Christianity. In all the history now known there has never been a period in which souls have been in such peril as they are today.” Edith Stein, Carmelite nun, poet, philosopher, and mystic, offered herself to Christ on Passion Sunday 1939—a few months before the outbreak of war—as a sacrificial expiation for the sake of true peace.” In August 1942, on the way to her death in a Nazi concentration camp, she wrote: “I am quite content . . . . One can only learn a Scientia Crucis if one feels the Cross in one’s own person. I was convinced of this from the very first and have said with all my heart: Ave crux, spes unica!” (John M. Oesterreicher, *Walls Are Crumbling*, New York: Devin-Adair, 1952, p. xiii; Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd, New York: Putnam, 1951, pp. 75–76; Sister Teresa de Spiritu Sancto, O.D.C., *Edith Stein*, trans. Cecily Hastings and Donald Nicholl, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1952, pp. 212, 218.)

people, even the demons, the forces of ice-cold evil turned loose or on the verge of being loosed on the world, could not alter his faith.19

Clearly, Werfel does not find Christianity as a religion wanting, that is, Christianity as a way of life informed and shaped by a unique kind of supernatural revelation. For him its essence, as embodied in the person and teaching of Christ, is what it always was: the great, in fact, the world’s only redeeming power in the spiritual, but also in the temporal order.20 Thus it is not the true Christian vision but the torch of Christendom that has grown dim because men are often ignorant, indifferent, uncharitable; because they are, in other words, too frequently opposed to their essential nature, betraying their deepest trust as human beings. Since contemporary man is “emancipated” and in many ways nihilistic, the whole structure of Christian society has been deeply shaken. And this weakening is at the heart of the modern tragedy.21

This is not to say, however, that Werfel despairs of the possibility of the world’s regeneration. He is skeptical only to the extent that he sees things realistically. Obviously not a romantic utopian who looks at the world through a rose-colored telescope, he is at the same time by no means a pessimist, taking a murky and microscopic view of things and then ponderously issuing pronouncements on man’s progressive degeneracy. To be sure, in the very midst of the war he cries out with profound concern that “the great, historical exorcism, called Christianity, seems to be retreating more and more day after day, and the demons with a shrill confusion of voices are bursting their chains.”22 But almost in the same breath he gives voice to hope, which is the more authentic and wonderful in that it sprang from the very depths of his anguish over the suffering of his people:

The naturalistic epoch, whose political creed resided everywhere in socialistic nationalism, admonished the individual: “Man, be yourself!” The next epoch, just dawning, for which no name has been found but which endeavors to unify complex patterns, is preparing to teach: “Man, be yourself and your opposite!” This is an exalted doctrine that may enthrone Christianity, so gravely weakened, once again.23

18. See ibid., p. 214.
19. See ibid., pp. 120-121.
20. See ibid., p. 120.
22. Cf. ibid., p. 226.
CHRIST AND THE CROSS

Only a brief survey of Werfel's "Theologumena" is necessary to determine his fundamental attitude toward the significance of Jesus. It is his oft-repeated and unshakable conviction that Jesus is Israel's true Messiah, the Second Person of the Trinity, God-made-man. In Werfel's words, though not those of the Church: "The Son is that essence of God who does not contemplate Himself as does the Father, but is concerned exclusively with the world as the first and uncreated and yet incarnate Word above all words." 23

In a section of the "Theologumena," entitled "Of Christ and Israel," he discusses briefly and then illustrates in some detail "The Doctrine of Correspondences," a name used to indicate the close kinship between the Old Testament and the New. In considering step by step how the Joseph story prophetically foreshadows the critical events in the life of Jesus, he unfolds the parallel between the overwhelming but joyful moment when Joseph throws off his disguise and makes himself known to his brothers and the day when, after long and anguish separation, Christ despised, rejected, and risen will utter to Israel the dramatic words: "I am Jesus, your Brother, the Messiah . . . " 24

Werfel thinks that the most fascinating part of this parallel will be revealed after the joyous reunion between Jesus and the Jewish people. Just as Joseph granted his brothers a free deed of land, so will Christ one day bring all of Israel into His Church. And as the Land of Goshen was independent of the other Egyptian provinces, so Israel will not lose her identity but be preserved to bear witness to Him.25

The same part of the "Theologumena" contains a clear and simple declaration that leaves no doubt of Werfel's stand on the question of Christ's divinity. It also reveals his belief in the reality of an unbroken Judaeo-Christian tradition; for him the living God, transcendent and immanent, makes Himself known to man by means of a unique revelation:

Jesus was not born of Greeks or Indians, but of Jews. The question here, however, and this is the heart of the matter, is not so much one of

23. Cf. ibid., p. 144.
consanguinity as of conformity and conspirituality. Our Father in heaven, of whom the "nations" speak, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who revealed Himself on Sinai, who spoke to the prophets, to Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, who became Man and died on Golgotha. In an unbroken climax, this God revealed Himself to His people with whom He carries on an unending dialogue even to this day. In Israel's soul alone, from Abraham to Jesus, was the knowledge of this God pre-formed. Because of a mysterious conformity, Israel's soul was and is the concave mirror that reflects the rays of this Deity into the camera obscura of this world. . . . Israel not only was but still continues to be the mother-of-pearl, just as Christ continues to be the pearl.26

Accepting the Incarnation as the crucial doctrine of faith, without which Christianity sinks to the level of a mere socio-ethical system, Werfel dwells with special interest and attachment on this mystery. He deals with it in various ways, as if he wished at least to touch on its many aspects, even though unable to fathom its ultimate secret.

"God assumed human form," he writes, "in order to carry it to an absurdity by raising it to glory."27 God, in other words, became man in order to suffer death in the basest manner so that man, beholding Him crucified, His immaculate human form broken and on the point of turning into dust, may himself be so humbled that he cannot but cry out at the awesome spectacle of human frailty in some such manner as did Lear at the sight of the almost naked Edgar in a madman's disguise: "Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art."28

Filled thereby with the awareness of his own frailty and unshelteredness, of his inescapable mortality,29 man may, all at once or little by little, come to condition, real at the agony of the death once and contemplating the dust and will infinitely illuminated took in the sun.30

According to Werfel incorruptibility, God Himself the death and, in the night which, in the nature, God Himself the his naked skull is put.

Aside from its aspect as an expression of the Incarnation and the way in which, in the nature, God Himself the his naked skull is put.

Werfel considers divine charity beyond necessary one on the entrance into time.

26. Cf. ibid., pp. 197–198. Werfel, in designating Israel's original mission as "the great paradox" to the Gentiles to "live counter to [their] sinful nature," concludes by asserting that "Christ is also, in addition to everything else that He is, the fulfillment of this mission of Israel." (Cf. ibid., pp. 196–197.)

27. Cf. ibid., p. 214. It may be interesting to compare Werfel's thought with Catholic teaching as expressed by Garrigou-Lagrange: "[Christ's] humanity is a conscious, free, and superior instrument, ever united to the divinity in order to communicate to us all the graces . . . merited for us on the cross. Thus every illumination of the intellect, every grace of attraction, of consolation, or of strength . . . actually comes to us from the sacred humanity." (The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Prelude of Eternal Life, trans. Sister M. Timothea Doyle, O.P., St. Louis: Herder, 1947, I, 111.) See also: "Christ's humanity . . . is the road which . . . leads souls to His divinity." (Ibid., p. 118.)


29. As Garrigou-Lagrange puts it, "in Gethsemane Christ, who was about to expiate all our sins, willed to be sorrowful even unto death to make us understand the sorrow we should have for our own sins." (Op. cit., p. 325.)

Our Father in heaven,  
the heavens and earth,  
and Jacob,  
prophets, to Elijah,  
and in Israel’s soul alone,  
this God pre-formed.  
This is and is the concave  
Immersa obscura of this  
to be the mother-of-

20 9  
A side from its aesthetic impact, this statement might well be taken  
as an expression of the traditional Christian view of the final mean-
ing of the Incarnation and the Cross. Yet the underlined phrase: “His  
very own interest” (the emphasis is Werfel’s), points to an idea or,  
at least, a wording that is not quite as traditional: God’s purity and  
incorruptibility prevent Him from sharing man’s profound experience  
of suffering and death. Hence, to put it in human terms, driven by  
an impatient love for His creatures and by a longing to share in their  
deepest experience, the Creator “violates” the law of His own nature  
in order to expose Himself to mortality.

Werfel considers the Incarnation to be not only a gracious act of  
divine charity but at the same time a supremely reasonable and ne-
cessary one on the part of God, an act, however, by no means deter-
mined by the necessity of God’s nature. On the contrary, the  

30. Robert Frost, “Sitting by a Bush in Broad Sunlight,” Complete Poems of  
31. See Werfel, Between Heaven and Earth, pp. 144-145.
32. Cf. ibid., p. 145.
33. Here Werfel thinks like a Catholic. Karl Adam writes: “When the Absolute  
expresses itself in time, when God’s eternal decrees take temporal form, it cannot but  
be that human imperfection should come into inward conflict with divine perfection.  
In this respect Schopenhauer, and before him Schelling, and later Hartmann have  
judged correctly. Those philosophers erred only in this that they attributed God’s  
entrance into time, not to be a free and loving act of the personal God, but to a neces-

by little, come to understand and then act on the knowledge that his  
condition, real and fearful though it is, is ultimately absorbed into  
the agony of the Crucified who by His suffering and victory conquered  
death once and for all. Man, Werfel seems to say, when rightly  
contemplating the Crucifixion, becomes acutely aware that he is born  
of dust and will fall back to dust, but that he is at the same time  
ininitely illumineable because a poor handful of dust once “really  
took in the sun.”

According to Werfel, God, the very essence of integrity and incor-

corruption, God the immutable and timeless, steps down into  
only to redeem the world but in His very own interest to experience  
death and, in the supernatural order, to renew and sanctify even death  
which, in the natural sense, is but the vile odor of corruption. Through  
God Himself the rattling skeleton of death is robed in purple, and on  
his naked skull is poised the golden crown.

God and untilness  
of his humanity is a  
divinity in order to com-

Thus every illumin-

et of strength . . .  
Ages of the Interior  
Boyle, O.P., St. Louis:  
the road which . . .

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32. Cf. ibid., p. 145.
33. Here Werfel thinks like a Catholic. Karl Adam writes: “When the Absolute  
expresses itself in time, when God’s eternal decrees take temporal form, it cannot but  
be that human imperfection should come into inward conflict with divine perfection.  
In this respect Schopenhauer, and before him Schelling, and later Hartmann have  
judged correctly. Those philosophers erred only in this that they attributed God’s  
entrance into time, not to be a free and loving act of the personal God, but to a neces-
Incarnation, Werfel insists, must be seen as an incomparably voluntary act, an act issuing from the source of infinite freedom. To be sure, in his explanation, he employs the term *Notwendigkeit*, "necessity," but he makes divine reason the author of this necessity. The Incarnation, then, is a free act, in harmony with "logical necessity": God loves man because God is supremely good. He therefore desires man to be ultimately happy, despite all the hostile forces deeply imbedded in life and in man himself, apparently operating against such a design. The way to happiness is knowledge of God. But this way is blocked by the very nature of God who is pure, uncreated Being and, as such, is incomprehensible to man. Hence God becomes man—"the Mysterium Magnum, which lay in God's plan of redemption from the beginning." He does so in order to reveal Himself unmistakably as God, so that man, filled with renewed confidence and hope, may begin to know Him through this divine love-sacrifice and learn to love and worship Him in return.

**ISRAEL: THE WITNESS**

In her study of Werfel, Annemarie von Puttkamer expresses the conviction that "the determining factor" in Werfel's failure to take the final step toward Christianity was his notion that Israel must remain a living witness of Christ. That his works provide strong internal evidence in favor of this argument is undeniable.

There are, to begin with, two pointed questions in the "Theologumena" section of *Between Heaven and Earth*, which despite their brevity are given the weight of a whole paragraph: "What would Israel be without the Church? And what would the Church be without Israel?" One cannot exaggerate the importance Werfel attached to Israel's role as a witness to the possibility and the truth of Christianity from the stage of history and particularly through a personal and particular encounter with the Church's love-sacrifice. Israel's role is to be a living witness to God, and the Church's role is to be a living witness to the Israel of God.

For the Messiah is the truth and Israel is the witness in the flesh of this truth. If Christ is the truth through the whole world down into a mere myth, like the grave, the Church is not a graveyard cross, changed and then restored to its physical witness of divinity, but rather an empty and impotent holy Scriptures, both the Old and New Testament, as is the case with Greece. Does the Church stand or fall at this moment of world history? We are not one. In the community of Christ is rooted the Church stands, Israel will not fall if Israel falls.

In response to the charge that the Jews do not know... what the Jews... What worship is it that they themselves baptized? Is it physical witness of divine revelation? Are the holy Scriptures, both the Old and New, an empty and impotent Holy Books? Do the Jews have a place in the Church? The Church stands, Israel will not fall if Israel falls.
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to Israel’s role as a witness in the flesh. It is no extravagance to state
that the possibility and thus the fear of Israel’s eventual disappearance
from the stage of history through persecution, through assimilation,
and particularly through a turning to Christianity, seems to have struck
him with such force that this anxious question became part of his
theological meditations.

Elsewhere in Wertfel’s work there is ample evidence of his great con-
cern with Israel’s testimonial role and of the importance of his peo-
l’s survival, if for no other purpose than to carry out this role. The
very first words in the subsection of the “Theologumena” entitled “On
Christ and Israel” deal directly with the need for Israel’s survival.

If Christ is the truth and the life, then the Jews are the indestructible
witness in the flesh of this truth. Without this living witness that moves
through the whole world, persecuted and scourged, Christ would sink
down into a mere myth, like Apollo or Dionysos.

The anxiety behind these thoughts is undiminished in the words
Rabbi Aladar Furst addresses to Ottokar Felix, a Catholic chaplain,
in Wertfel’s The True Story of the Restored Cross. It is the story of
a graveyard cross, changed by Nazi storm troopers into a swastika
and then restored to its original shape by the rabbi, who pays with
his life for his courage and act of homage. These are the rabbi’s words:

I do not know . . . why the Church places such value on converting
the Jews . . . . What would happen if all the Jews in the world had
themselves baptized? Israel would disappear. And thus the only real,
physical witness of divine revelation would vanish from the world. The
holy Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments, would sink into
an empty and impotent legend like one of the myths of ancient Egypt
and Greece. Does the Church not realize this mortal danger? Especial-
lly at this moment of world-wide dissolution? We belong together . . . but
we are not one. In the Epistle to the Romans it is written that the com-
unity of Christ is rooted in Israel. I am convinced that as long as the
Church stands, Israel will stand, but also that the Church will have to fall
if Israel falls.

In response to the chaplain’s curiosity about the source of his ideas,
Rabbi Furst says that they issue “from our suffering up to the present

40. Cf. ibid., p. 193.
41. Werfel, Die wahre Geschichte vom wiederhergestellten Kreuz, p. 10.
day. Or do you perchance believe that God would have permitted us to endure and survive for so many centuries to no purpose?" 42 For Werfel, then, Israel's destiny, particularly since the Crucifixion, is to be not only a living, but also a suffering witness. To illuminate the purpose of this suffering he chooses not the medium of words but that of action. By following the law of "the sacred paradox," Rabbi Fürst reveals the meaning of going the whole "way of sorrow," that is, of remaining true to his role of bearing witness to the Cross.

As I have mentioned, Werfel thinks of the "sacred paradox" as an imperative that can be carried out only in strenuous action, outward or inward: "Live contrary to your [selfish] interests for the truth and the life!" 43 The process by which many of his characters fulfill this law constitutes a striking pattern manifest in most of his major works. In the unfolding of this pattern, Jews frequently stand out heroically, though often tragically, as indicated in words Christ addresses to Israel in one of Werfel's poems:

And then I walked the road of sorrow to its very end
And you, you too, will walk it to its end. 44

*Between Heaven and Earth* frequently refers to Israel's testimonial role and its inseparable link to suffering. In one particular passage, Werfel speaks of Israel as "bearing a negative witness to Christ on earth through its suffering of persecution and dispersal." The starkness of this condition is softened only when viewed under the aspect of eternity. As Werfel sees it, "in the last trial beyond history" Israel will become "the chief witness in a positive sense, when the infinite Father-and-Son love of God will be ultimately revealed, for the promise made to Abraham is still valid." 45

In his final book, *Star of the Unborn*, there is another statement about Israel's testimonial role and its duration that is reminiscent of the one given by Rabbi Fürst. But unlike Fürst, Saul, the defender of Judaism, is filled with deep hostility toward the Church for having, as he believes, violated the purity of Hebraic monotheism through an illogical and incomprehensible trinitarianism. 46 Also unlike Fürst, he holds that the Church's on the Church; moreover, to the patriarchs: "The to testify for Abraham knowledge the true G

In an earlier novel, vated by Christ. Though Engländer is, in his re Engländer and Fürst They are not only aw however, goes far bey stopping only one step than Fürst in his desi Israel and Christianity toger, though Fürst is between the two. Eng that "Israel and Chris tion, he puts his be and Judaism through the failure of which cont

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42. Cf. ibid.
43. Cf. Werfel, *Between Heaven and Earth*, p. 120.
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Franz Werfel's Great Dilemma

holds that the Church's survival is dependent on Israel but not Israel's
on the Church; moreover, that it is the Church's role to bear witness
to the patriarchs: "The Church will live as long as we live, in order
to testify for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who were the first to ac-
knowledge the true God." 47

In an earlier novel, *Barbara* (1929), Werfel portrays a Jew cap-
vated by Christ. Though temperamentally somewhat like Saul, Alfred
Engländer is, in his religious outlook, much closer to Aladar Fürst.
Engländer and Fürst have a profound respect for the two religions.
They are not only aware of the common, divine origin of both, but
they also accept without question the messianic tradition. Englänner,
however, goes far beyond Fürst in approaching the Christian view,
emptying only one step short of baptism. He also goes much farther
than Fürst in his desire to see a cessation of all hostility between
Israel and Christianity. Both agree that the two religions belong to-
gether, though Fürst is careful to note that there is no actual unity
between the two. Englänner, on the other hand, states categorically
that "Israel and Christ are one." 48 Not content with a mere declara-
tion, he puts his belief into practice by attempting to unite Christianity
and Judaism through a well-intentioned but impractical scheme, the
failure of which contributes to his final madness.

It may well be that Englänner's madness and his disappearance
without trace are intended to warn both Israel and Christianity that
a "merger" would mean the disappearance of the one and the fading
into myth of the other. In contrast to this warning is Engländer's
joyous vision of the future before his reconciliation plan fails. "Can
you imagine what it means," he asks, "to fuse Israel and Christ after
nineteen hundred years of enmity? A new era would dawn upon the
earth!" 49

There is irony in the fact that Englänner's view is much more in
accord with the Church's vision than is Werfel's:

On the spiritual level, the drama of love between Israel and its God
. . . which is but one element in the universal mystery of salvation,
will be resolved only in the reconciliation of the Synagogue and the

Church. . . Nothing requires us to think that the resolution will come at the end of human history, rather than at the beginning of a new age for the Church and the world. 50

So says Maritain, strangely paralleling, in part at least, the very words of Engländer, whose mind fails when he discovers the failure of a task unachievable by man alone.

BETRAYER AND BETRAYED

In Werfel's "Theologumena," discussion of Israel's testimonial role is preceded by a passage that deals with the perilous consequences to the individual Jew who formally embraces the Christian faith. The Jew who is baptized, declares Werfel categorically, is a deserter in three ways. He is, first of all, a deserter "in a secular sense," since he forsakes a weak, defenseless, suffering people. Secondly, he turns away from "the people of God" and from its deepest origin, from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Most important of all, the Jew who goes to the baptismal font "deserts Christ Himself since he arbitrarily interrupts his historical suffering—the penance for the rejection of the Messiah. . . ." 51

In elucidating the Catholic position, Maritain holds unequivocally that the individual Jew who believes in Christ is not barred from the Church till the end of historical time. Not only is the road to the baptismal font never blocked, the call of faith is always a call here and now. A Jew who becomes a Christian is in no way a traitor; on the contrary, "for a Jew to become a Christian is a double victory: his people triumphs in him. Woe to the Jew—and to the Christian—who is pleasing to men! . . . Jews who become [spiritually] like others become worse than others. [But] when a Jew receives Christian grace, he is less than ever like others: he has found his Messiah." 52

In his belief that Jews are temporally barred from the sacrament of rebirth, Werfel also goes counter to St. Paul in whom he sees his "great teacher." 53 In Barbara, Engländer says of himself: "According to the flesh I am a Jew, according to the spirit a Christian, like the Apostle Paul whom I understand as I do myself. And this is where the problem lies." 54 I am, of course, aware that St. Paul only experienced "great sadness" his "kinsmen according to the flesh ardently desired their turn moment in the unforeseeable (see Rom 11:13-14, 25-29) is in the painful and paradoxical Paul as a betrayer of the Redeemer. 55 For Werfel maintains that the Jew as an individual is a betrayer and betrayed. 55 Ultimately, Engländer regards Paul as a betrayer of the Redeemer." 56 I support Werfel's contention that the Jew as an individual is a betrayer and betrayed. 57 In fact, all scripture support Werfel's contention that the Jew as an individual is a betrayer and betrayed. 58

ENCOUNTER BY LETTER

On October 27, 1942, an order to deport the Jews appeared in its English translation in the newspaper of the Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel. One of the Jews one the Archbishop had selected as a deportee, despite his devotion to the Church, he is less than ever like others: he has found his Messiah." 56

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that the resolution will come at the beginning of a new age.

As part at least, the very words he discovers the failure of a

of Israel's testimonial role with the perilous consequences embraces the Christian faith. Maritain categorically, is a deserter "in a secular sense," since among people. Secondly, he turns from its deepest origin, from essential, all the Jew who goes himself since he arbitrarily in

Maritain holds unequivocally Christ is not barred from the. Not only is the road to the of faith is always a call here Christian is in no way a traitor; Christian is a double victory: Jew—and to the Christian—who become [spiritually] like when a Jew receives Christian he has found his Messiah." He is barred from the sacrament by barred from the sacrament to St. Paul in whom he sees Länder says of himself: "According to the spirit a Christian, and as I do myself. And this is trant. Harry Lorin Binse (New

where the problem lies." 54 Engländer's problem is also Werfel's. Both are, of course, aware that St. Paul, after his own change of heart, not only experienced "great sadness and continuous sorrow" on behalf of his "kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:2–3), but that he also ardently desired their turning to Christ, as a community at a given moment in the unforeseeable future and as individuals at any moment (see Rom 11:13–14, 25–29). If not Engländer, then surely Werfel is in the painful and paradoxical position of having to condemn St. Paul as a betrayer of the One the three worship as the true Redeemer. For Werfel maintains that the "Jew who steps to the baptismal font deserts Christ Himself." 55

Ultimately, Engländer reproaches himself for not "stepping to the side of the Redeemer." 56 Indeed, there is no scriptural evidence to support Werfel's contention that, "according to the Redeemer's will," the Jew as an individual is not permitted to take this step, "here and now." 57 In fact, all scriptural evidence points in the opposite direction.

ENCOUNTER BY LETTER

On October 27, 1942, about five months after The Song of Bernadette appeared in its English translation, Werfel addressed a letter to Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel of New Orleans. Written in reply to one the Archbishop had sent him a week earlier, Werfel stated why, despite his devotion to the Church, he still remained extra muros, outside her walls. The complete letter reads:

Your Excellency:

May I express my sincere gratefulness for your kind letter of October 20 and for giving me the opportunity to clarify my position in this question of vital importance for me:

I am, as stated in the foreword of The Song of Bernadette, a Jew by origin and have never been baptized. On the other hand, I wish to profess here before you and the world that, as is evident from the major part of my work, I have been decisively influenced and molded by the spiritual forces of Christianity and the Catholic Church. I see in the Holy Catholic Church the purest power and emanation sent by God to this earth to fight the evil of materialism and atheism, and to bring revelation to the

54. Werfel, Barbara, p. 513.
poor soul of mankind. That is why, although standing *extra muros*, I have made it my purpose to support with my modest and humble abilities the struggle which the Catholic Church fights against these evils for the divine truth.

Very properly your Excellency will ask why, despite such convictions which I cherish since my early youth, I keep standing *extra muros*. To this I have to give three answers.

The first: Israel is going through the hour of its most inexorable persecution. I could not bring myself to sneak out of the ranks of the persecuted in this hour. My second answer follows from the first: Conversion brings certain advantages to the Jew. This was especially so in Europe. I did not wish to create the shadow of a doubt that I wanted to gain such advantages.

The third answer is the most important, concerning my own soul: Israel belongs, theologically, as the vessel of revelation and salvation, among the *mysteria magna*. Christians, and even the Church which calls itself the New Israel, have, in the course of history and in present times, in their practical policy, not always shown full justice to the old Israel. As long as there are anti-Semitic Christians (and even priests like Father Coughlin, preaching hatred and yet not excommunicated) the converted Jew must feel embarrassed by the impression of cutting a not altogether pleasant figure.

I have endeavored to say the whole truth and hope your Excellency will not resent my frankness. Should I have erred, I shall be glad to receive in humility your Excellency’s correction. Permit me to close with the promise that I shall not cease to write books like *The Song of Bernadette* which will strive to praise the glory of the supernatural.

With renewed thanks for your great benevolence I beg to remain your Excellency’s obedient servant in Christ.

The first of the three reasons Werfel listed in this letter for remaining outside the Church corresponds exactly to the first part of the passage I have quoted from the “Theologumena”: “A Jew who steps to the baptismal font . . . deserts, in a secular sense, from the side of the weak and reference to the climax.

But in the third place Christ Himself in the deepest sense belongs to the periphery. Of the deemer where he does not really belong.

These words repeat as 1943, a year or so before the book was published. They are of the one in which he called the Church from temporal persecution: “From Christ.” It is a way of obstacles, “secular obscurity.” By the latter he made of “wisdom,” difficult.

It would seem that with obstacles, though the first did not withdraw more and more from the periphery. Of the second he had any doubt about a difficult to realize from an encounter he touched upon a mystery of wisdom to fathom.

In spite of the further study, the final step toward the one about his own position, attitude toward Christ. 58

58. Part of this letter appeared in *Time*, in its issue of January 4, 1943, p. 68. Since the whole excerpt was taken from the first half of the letter only, the three reasons listed by Werfel as to why he chose not to enter the Church were excluded. Permission to publish the letter for the first time in its entirety was granted through the courtesy of Mrs. Alma Mahler-Werfel and Professor Adolf D. Klarmann, University of Pennsylvania, Werfel’s editor and literary executor.
Franz Werfel's Great Dilemma

Standing extra muros, I fight against these evils, despite such convictions as standing extra muros. To

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side of the weak and persecuted." 59 Conspicuously missing is any reference to the climax of his declaration in the "Theologumena":

But in the third place the Jew who steps to the baptismal font deserts Christ Himself in that he interrupts of his own will his historical suffering—the penance for rejecting the Messiah—and, in a hasty manner not foreseen in the drama of redemption, steps to the side of the Redeemer where he perhaps, according to the sacred will of the Redeemer, does not really belong, at least . . . not here and now. 60

These words represent a conviction Werfel held at least as late as 1943, a year or more after his letter to the Archbishop of New Orleans. They are echoed in another passage of the "Theologumena," the one in which he speaks of four routes of "no escape" for Israel from temporal perplexity, the last of which he calls "the way to Christ." It is a way that is blocked, he claims, by two kinds of obstacles, "secular obstacles and . . . obstacles of a deeper knowledge." By the latter he means barriers that baffle his own limited "power and wisdom," difficulties within his soul that are not easily identified. 61

It would seem that in the later years of Werfel's life the secular obstacles, though they have their own momentary urgency for him, withdraw more and more from the center of his attention toward the periphery. Of the sacred obstacles, the notion that a Jew does not really belong to the company of the Redeemer became the crucial one. This strain in Werfel's relationship to Christ does not imply that he had any doubt about the truth of the Incarnation. Something more difficult to realize was involved: a last reluctance, a holding back from an encounter for some reason unknown to himself. "I have touched upon a mystery and I fear I have neither the power nor the wisdom to fathom it rightly." 62

In spite of the reasons for his inability or persistent refusal to take the final step toward Christ, in spite of the evident or secret doubts about his own position, 63 even in spite of his occasionally quite critical attitude toward Christendom and the Church (because of "their
practical policy"), Werfel's devotion to the latter was deep and enduring: "I see in the Holy Catholic Church the purest power and emanation sent by God to this earth . . . to bring revelation to the poor soul of mankind." 64

THE FINAL SEARCH

A few years later, shortly before his death, Franz Werfel had another encounter, or rather a series of encounters, with a high dignitary of the Church, who also searched the poet's soul, only more probingly. The occasion was different, and so was the setting, for through his imagination the event is projected into the remote future, the year 101,945 A.D. It takes place against the background of a utopian world, a seductive world, from which almost all the elements that thwart the individual and the common good have been eliminated. In Star of the Unborn, Werfel, in the person of the narrator F. W., painfully submits to formal exorcism under the eyes of the "Grand Bishop." But it never occurs to the Grand Bishop to ask F. W. why, despite his strong Catholic convictions, he still stands extra muros. It may well be that there is no longer any need to pose the question since exorcism is a preparation for baptism. Following the ceremony F. W. partakes of bread and wine for which, so he says, he had "a very great longing." 65

It does not seem unlikely that Werfel alludes here to an inward longing for the Eucharist, just as F. W.'s submission to a long and arduous exorcism might well signify Werfel's own intense desire for acceptance into the Church. 66 In any event, there is little doubt that this novel is deeply personal and confessional. Star of the Unborn is, in fact, a final recapitulation of many of the major themes in Werfel's other works.

At the beginning of his unexpected exorcism, he complies with the request of the father exorcist to make the sign of the cross. This he does obediently and precisely, as if it were habitual with him. The sign of the cross, he is undoubtedly aware, represents "the most important of the sacramentals," an outward means of stirring inward devotion. The act: but nonetheless pro-

64. From the letter to Archbishop Rummel, loc. cit.
65. Cf. Werfel, Star of the Unborn, p. 236; see also p. 640.
Franz Werfel's Great Dilemma

devotion. The act and the words accompanying it constitute a swift but nonetheless profound condensation of the Church's belief in the triune God and in the redemption of man through the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ. Werfel must have understood the full significance of this religious act as a public profession of faith. Thus by having F. W. solemnly make the sign of the cross he manifests his inner conviction about the most central and sacred doctrines of Christianity.

DEATH: PURSUER AND WOOER

Star of the Unborn is in a very literal sense the final confession of a man aware that, for him, time is swiftly running out. What one commentator says of Werfel's Embezzled Heaven (1939) is also true, but in a much more intimate sense, of this last novel: "The protagonist of this book is death." This literary testament was completed on August 17, 1945, nine days before Werfel died. Since 1939 he had been aware that he was marked for an early end; in 1943 when he began work on Star of the Unborn, death had become his relentless pursuer. It was quite natural, then, that this novel should be preoccupied with the problem of mortality, as conceived and worked out in a utopian world and in its relation to the Christian faith.

In Star of the Unborn, the man of the future, possessing highly developed scientific techniques, conquers death through the painless "process" of retrogenesis; thus the human body is directed backward, step by step, to the embryonic state, to its first (or rather its last) heartbeat. Retrogenesis conquers death by avoiding it. The goal is a kind of vegetal felicity: Man becomes a fragrant, blooming daisy instead of a stinking carcass. This is advanced humanity's greatest accomplishment for man. It is even more amazing than a supernatural miracle, for it is scientific and tantalizingly "human," so much so that Werfel, in the person of F. W., doomed to die shortly, is mo-

68. Annemarie von Puttkamer speaks of Werfel as an "untiring reader" of both the Old Testament and the New, whose knowledge of them was sound and whose information on theological matters "astonishingly deep and comprehensive" (op. cit., pp. 151, 104).
69. Ibid., pp. 104–105.
70. See ibid., pp. 104, 116; also Alma Mahler Werfel, op. cit., pp. 245, 282.
mentarily tempted, as it were, by his own fictional invention to seek this easy way out.\textsuperscript{71}

His long and bitter struggle to escape this seductive but dehumanizing avoidance of death in the subterranean Wintergarden is sustained by the memory that for him death is "the sacred ordinance of God which man must not tamper with."

I have no desire to choose and control my death by my own free will, even though this control may be a sign of incalculable progress, as many believe. It is, of course, quite pretty to end as a daisy, white and pure. But the way to that goal is too risky for me, when I think of the "Catabolites" [the monstrous specimens of failure in the retrogenetic process]. Death stands \textit{behind} me! I am not afraid of him, because I have already made his acquaintance. But I do not want him to stand \textit{before} me.\textsuperscript{72}

These words, spoken by the central character, are no doubt Werfel's, expressing his reconciliation to the idea of a natural death and the near approach of his own. F. W. speaks the words after he has escaped the dangers of the lake of Light Water, the purpose of which is to lethalize man's memory, simply by evacuating its images, actual and potential, so that the human soul may sink into happy forgetfulness—a process Werfel calls "the epitome of all the sins man could possibly commit."\textsuperscript{73}

The ordinance of death is not only divinely decreed, he believes, but also divinely exemplified through Christ who for all time showed man a different way to conquer death—indeed, a way vastly different from the utopian process. Not by any blasphemous attempt to escape death forever but by voluntarily accepting and suffering it at the destined moment can man transcend it. To become a daisy or a geranium may be an aesthetic notion but only in facing death can man, according to Werfel, imitate "divine integrity and incorruptibility." Only in this way can he hope to remain or to become truly human.\textsuperscript{74}

Werfel's attitude toward death is clearly meant to be taken in a Christian sense, as disclosed by the way Io-Runt, the intrepid young

\textsuperscript{71} See Werfel, \textit{Star of the Unborn}, pp. 493-495.
\textsuperscript{72} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, p. 579.
\textsuperscript{73} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, pp. 573, 574.
\textsuperscript{74} See Werfel, \textit{Between Heaven and Earth}, p. 144; also \textit{Star of the Unborn}, pp. 559-560.
Franz Werfel's Great Dilemma

star rover, sacrifices his life for the benefit of man. Voluntarily he accepts true suffering and death in preference to the spurious "death of death" in the Wintergarden and thus ushers in a new era of hope for the world, the hope that man will henceforth begin to follow his example, and so kill "poor death" and "wake eternally." 75

Toward the end of F. W.'s visit to the utopian world, as he is sitting in the Grand Bishop's library discussing ways and means of returning to his own century, news arrives of the death of the gravely injured star dancer. In announcing the sad event the messenger uses Christ's final words on the cross: "It is consummated" (Jn 19:30). 76

Thus Werfel's last novel repeats the heroic pattern that is one of the dominant elements in his works. In obedience to the law of the "sacred paradox," the young star dancer, careless of himself, salvages from the wreckage of civilization mankind's most precious possession: the so-called Isochronion, containing "the future of the human spirit . . . the price of his sacrifice." 77

Io-Runt exercises so quickening an influence on F. W.'s imagination that for a fleeting moment he identifies him with the Isochronion itself. Symbolically, it represents the heavenly man who, in spite of his omniscience, his allness, descends upon earth and briefly dwells in time, revealing his capacity for redemptive suffering. 78

To make the analogy complete, the death of Io-Runt is miraculously followed by a renascence that fills F. W. with a radiant kind of joy. The happiness he experiences is twofold: first, a being to whom he is deeply devoted, is not dead; second, he is to be conducted safely back home by the requickenened star dancer, a "genius in orientation" for whom even "the heavens are not big enough to get lost in." 80

77. Cf. ibid., p. 621. The so-called Isochronion is described as a small metal capsule with straps on either side, looking like a Jewish phylactery. F. W. speculates that it contains a complicated formula, a drop of essence, or a grain of drug. In any case, its contact with a human forehead had such an effect that "the earthly, tiny dissimultaneity . . . could flow into the great simultaneity of the cosmos." It seems to be an instrument, in Werfel's utopian world, whereby the earthman's consciousness can be attuned to the "universal consciousness of the celestial man" (cf. ibid., pp. 618-620).
78. See ibid., pp. 619-620.
79. See ibid., p. 645.
80. Cf. ibid., p. 631.
SWIFT RESCUERS

But before he can be rescued, F. W. makes a confession to the Grand Bishop, the only one who at that moment can help him. His admission of being lost marks the climax of his deliverance: He goes to the Church for spiritual aid, and the Church, in turn, leads him to his deliverer.

The first step in this process of restoration, however, had been taken some time earlier by F. W. himself, on the first day of his three-day visit to the utopian world. His profession of faith in the Incarnation through the sign of the cross, freely made in the Catholic cathedral of the utopian world, had placed him under the protection of that cross. The sign of the cross the Grand Bishop draws over his head, as he dismisses him immediately before his departure for home, commits him finally into the hands of the deliverer. Thus F. W. enters and leaves this strange world ringed round by Christ's mercy. On two significant occasions, F. W. discovers that sacred mercy "plays . . . about man's beating heart" so as to "baffle death," 81 twice rescuing him from mortal danger: once from foundering during his fabulous experience on the planet Jupiter; and then from suffering a flowery but everlasting death in the Wintergarden.

The experience on Jupiter marks the second, or intermediate, step in this redintegrative series. Thrown off balance by the enormous gravitational pull of the planet, F. W. is at the same time caught in a roaring tempest on a vast mountainous sea of molten metal. When human knowledge and skill give him no support, he turns his attention upward in panic. "At the very last moment," he says of this experience, "I thought of the sacred power that had saved my life more than once, and for the first time since the creation of the world human lips spoke on this vast, unstable planet the Latin words: Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum." 82 At this point angels suddenly come and save him.

As his rescuers take leave of him, he discovers that they are on their way to the Rosarium Virginis where he imagines them in attendance upon "the earth-woman his suffering and death. F. W.'s experience is not.
In fact, it seems to go.
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DEATH: AN OPEN

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83. Cf. ibid., p. 320.
84. Cf. ibid., p. 472.
85. Cf. Werfel, Between.
86. Cf. ibid., p. 214.
87. "The Existentialist place empty except for
p. xi; see also Werfel's
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Profession to the Grand help him. His admittance: He goes to, in turn, leads him however, had been taken first day of his three- faith in the Incarnation he draws over his head, protection of that fortune for home, comthus F. W. enters and his mercy. On two of mercy “plays . . . th,” twice rescuing during his fabulous suffering a flowery or intermediate, step by the enormous same time caught in molten metal. When he turns his attention he says of this ex saved my life more words: Ave Maria, ngels suddenly come that they are on their them in attendance ed to the Air We Oxford University Press, upon “the earth-woman from whom had issued the spirit who through his suffering and death had freed God in man and man in God.” 83 F. W.’s experience is more than a mere product of the imagination. In fact, it seems to go beyond the realm of personal belief to that of actual knowledge. When asked, some time later, whether or not he believes in Mary, his reply is unequivocal. “Believe is the wrong word . . . in my case for I know that she has helped me wherever she may dwell.” 84

This confession is hardly startling, coming as it does from one who is so convinced of the Incarnation that he, a Jew, simply accepts Christ as God and man, miraculously born of a Jewish maiden of Nazareth. He has no doubt that Christ is the fulfillment of Israel’s original mission and that the “Father in heaven, of whom the ‘nations’ speak, is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who revealed Himself on Sinai, who spoke to the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, who became man and died on Golgotha.” 85

DEATH: AN OPENING

Although Werfel’s attention in Star of the Unborn is continually engaged by the theme of death, he does not stop there. For he can say—and he does so frequently and variously—that “God assumed human form in order to carry it to absurdity by raising it to glory.” 86 Death, he knows, is nothingness, but not in the modern nihilistic sense of emptiness. 87 On the contrary, death is for Werfel an opening, a gateway to something, as he suggests not long before his own death: “How could we die if we were not immortal?” 88

Thus in his last two works a long-held conviction is deepened and strengthened, the conviction that “the God of Abraham . . . who became man and died on Golgotha” has annihilated the emptiness and

83. Cf. ibid., p. 320.
84. Cf. ibid., p. 472.
85. Cf. Werfel, Between Heaven and Earth, p. 197.
86. Cf. ibid., p. 214.
87. “The Existentialists take the road to Calvary. But arriving there they find the place empty except for two thieves dying on their crosses.” (Helmut Kuhn, Encounter with Nothingness: An Essay on Existentialism, Chicago: Regnery, 1949, p. xi; see also Werfel’s assertion that naturalistic nihilism is the “all-pervading modern state of consciousness,” Between Heaven and Earth, p. 88.)
meaninglessness of death. This conviction gives him courage for his own encounter with death. It could well be—who can say?—that this conviction also served in giving reality to his hope, long before the time he reckoned, of "contemplating God," which he calls "the highest possible act of identification, a supernatural mode of being entirely I and entirely you," an identification "from which issues boundless felicity." 89

Between Heaven and Earth, from which these words are taken, is a direct, contemplative preparation for Star of the Unborn. Both reveal an acceptance of death as well as of life, each a "perfect gift . . . from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration" (Jas 1:17).

EDITOR'S NOTE

Scholar that he is, Mr. Ellert faithfully records and interprets Franz Werfel's religious position, but gentle respect keeps him from investigating the causes of Werfel's "dilemma." There is, indeed, something sacred and untouchable about every man, and it is rarely given us to penetrate the mystery of his inner life. Nor is it our task to judge him; happily, final judgment is reserved to the Lord alone. Though judgment is not ours, we are not released from making judgments, now and then. Hence I feel I should add a few observations to Mr. Ellert's diligent exposition.

First, I find Werfel's references to his Jewish birth as a special source for the understanding of Jesus painful. No doubt, Jesus is David's Son in every word He speaks, but before Him who offers no consolation, no victory, but that of the Cross, even a mild form of racism is absurd. Again, the notion of an Israel condemned to remain aloof from Christ till the end of days; the thought of a divinely decreed penance that now, and for all historic time, bars Jews from becoming Christians because of the Synagogue's failure to recognize Him, is as fanciful a construction as is the legend of the wandering Jew. To exclude Jews from the realm of God is entirely unchristian.

One is almost compelled to attempt to "rationalize" his position. There are those who say, "we are content to be what we are," that is, creaturely delights, he unwillingly accepts as a given, and existence might have imposed upon him to one of his own creating Hyacinthe de Lafite, who is "no mystery and move onward to Schweißstuch der Veronika." There are, "not with a clear and definite intention." Commenting on this, Werfel once wrote: "It is individual to acknowledge, I do not want to remain remaining a craven weakness in the business of religion."

They also allude to these words. It is something to know that one's own existence is meaningful, but it is something else again to know that one's own existence is meaningful—what created subjectivity is bound to be subjectivity and, trembling as it were, seek the business of religion. Religion is essentially that which gives from person to person with all the delight, and the torment that is the Existent, Image Books, Dec.

To sum up, for Werfel in his speculation, seem to have had
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 exclude Jews from the realm of Christ, as Werfel does, is a fatalism entirely unchristian.

One is almost compelled to see in this arbitrary banishment Werfel's attempt to "rationalize" his own indecision. But whence this indecision? There are those who say that, loving company, esteem, and other creaturely delights, he unwittingly feared the loneliness a full Christian existence might have imposed on him. There are others who compare him to one of his own creations, the poet in The Song of Bernadette, Hyacinthe de la Fite, who is unable to abandon speech about the mystery and move onward to its unconditional acceptance. They find Werfel not unlike one of the characters in Gertrude von le Fort's Schweistuch der Veronika. "I denied myself to God," she confesses, "not with a clear and definite No, but with an indefinite Yes. I never fully surrendered to Him."

Werfel once wrote: "It is high time for the spiritually awake individual to acknowledge, 'I dare not shirk the ultimate question without remaining a craven weakling on earth, having no firm foundation.'" Commenting on this appeal, Cornelia and Irving Süssman remark:

It was not in the question which he pursued as a writer, but in the answer which pursued him as a man, that one penetrates the subtle pathos of that mysterious split-ness which polarizes a literary man, so that while his word may be true north, his existence may be south, or paralyzed between the two poles. (The Critic, Dec. 1959-Jan. 1960, p. 13.)

They also allude to these words of Jacques Maritain:

It is something to know that God is a transcendent and sovereign Self; but it is something else again to enter oneself and with all one's baggage—one's own existence and flesh and blood—into the vital relationship in which created subjectivity is brought face to face with this transcendent subjectivity and, trembling and loving, looks to it for salvation. This is the business of religion.

Religion is essentially that which no philosophy can be: a relation of person to person with all the risk, the mystery, the dread, the confidence, the delight, and the torment that lie in such a relationship. (Existence and the Existent, Image Books, Doubleday, p. 80.)

To sum up, for Werfel image and thought, poetry and theological speculation, seem to have had primacy over faith and commitment.
If this sounds like a bold or presumptuous statement, I can only plead that it is far less severe than Werfel's own examination of conscience. In "Stammering at the Eleventh Hour," a poem contained in a privately printed collection, *Gedichte aus den Jahren 1908–1945*, he drops all defense:

I must beat my breast,
Be my own accuser!
Oh God, hear my stammer:
Into every trap I fell.
Not for so much as a single day
Could I free myself from evil...

When my heart, a universe of bliss, undeserved,
Was drowned in the chant of "Holy, Holy,"
I was yours.
While I still dreamt I believed,
I had long been lying in the dust.
These lightning flashes are all I own.
They are the last guilders
My vices have not stolen.
Thus I can pay my debt to you
With nothing but my own debts.

But where there is sorrow there is hope. Anyone who so vividly knows that his frailties and his faults cry for mercy, cannot be far from the kingdom.