PREFACE

Many persons who had read the original Hebrew version of my book *Teachers for an Age of Confusion: Studies in the Thought of Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook and Mordecai Menahem Kaplan* (Eked, Tel Aviv, 1993) urged me to translate it into English. I confess that I was reticent to do so. In the first place, the task was formidable. Second, when the Hebrew manuscript was published after many years of preparation, I felt that I had accomplished the purposes I had in mind when I decided to write the book. Among those purposes was my desire to give Israel's Jews a fair introduction to my teacher Mordecai M. Kaplan, as most of them have never had the opportunity to read any of his works. Then too I wanted to help clarify some of the confusion that prevails in the thinking of Israelis about the problems of the Jewish people, the State of Israel, and the future of Judaism under freedom.

My strategy of comparing and contrasting Kaplan's views with those of Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook was motivated by several considerations: (1) I place Kook and Kaplan on opposite ends of the spectrum of reasonable Judaism. That is to say, the Judaism of the future will have to emerge from interaction between these two positive, creative, and contrasting interpretations of the nature and destiny of the Jewish people and its culture. Somehow, a dialogue must be established between the two positions. (2) One of the better ways of understanding a philosophy is to see it against the background of other options. Kook certainly provides such a foil for Kaplan, and vice versa. (3) Kook is famous in Israel, and I felt that the presentation of Kaplan's philosophy in the light of Kook's vision would open doors to the Israeli public that might otherwise be closed to an outlook that originated in the Diaspora. (4) I had gained great respect for Kook's intellectual prowess, and I wanted to respond to its challenge to my own naturalistic leanings.

All of these motivations operate differently when it comes to
English-speaking Jewries. Although since his death in 1983, Kaplan has been eclipsed in many intellectual circles by other responses to the Jewish condition, he is still a force to be reckoned with. Much of his vocabulary has become legal tender in American Jewish discourse, and several of his initiatives have been endorsed in the communal and religious practices of a large section of the liberal, English-speaking Jewry. Moreover, even his opponents and those who consider his ideas to be outdated still acknowledge that Kaplan merits serious study. It is against Kaplan’s corpus that Kook, a complete stranger to most English-speaking readers, might well be given a respectful introduction.

In contrast to the emphasis on Israel in my Hebrew study, this new version relates more directly to the problems of diaspora Jewry. Simply providing a literal translation of the volume published in Hebrew was not satisfactory to me. The Kook-Kaplan confrontation presents a fruitful way to focus attention on the key issues of contemporary Judaism, for both of these men are distinguished by the broad scope of their visions. Even though Kook’s point of departure was his messianic dream of the reunification of the entire Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael and of its return there to a Torah-true Judaism, his analysis of and programs for wide areas of Jewish life have had a profound bearing on Jewish lifestyles in the Diaspora.

This same breadth of reach characterizes Kaplan. Although he spent most of his century-long life in the United States, he sought ways of ensuring the creative continuity of the Jewish people everywhere, particularly in its homeland in Eretz Yisrael. The comparison with Kook should, therefore, cast light on where each of these men might lead Judaism in the Diaspora and in Israel.

I agreed to undertake this challenge because I realized that the Kook-Kaplan dialogue deserves further elaboration on the subject of the Diaspora than was done in the Hebrew book. In this introduction, therefore, I hope not only to present the two thinkers as objectively as I can but also to indicate how their insights must be taken into consideration in any disciplined effort to solve the problems of Jewish peoplehood and Jewish civilization in our confused and confusing modern world.

The reader will find no accounts of the interesting and busy
lives of our protagonists. I limit their biographies to their similar origins and the different directions in which their fates and their temperaments took them.1 After a brief introduction to their intellectual tempers and points of departure, I go directly to some of the issues that both deemed to be central to Jewish survival and the making of a full Judaism. I believe that the agenda I cover, although incomplete, will suffice to inform the reader of the broad, coherent insight of both thinkers as to what is entailed in enabling the Jewish people to cope with the intellectual and social hazards of the modern world. They both forthrightly confront such key questions as the following: What roles should Eretz Yisrael and the Diaspora play in fostering creative Jewish continuity? How should we relate to traditions such as Israel’s election and covenant with God? What should be the status of the Halakhah (traditional Jewish law) in a democratic society?

Several chapters will be devoted to the theological concerns of both men—the idea of God, prayer, repentance, and several basic values of Judaism. I shall also delve into Kook’s and Kaplan’s views about education and the role of the esthetic dimension and the arts in Jewish life. Finally, I shall observe how their philosophies have influenced the status of women in the synagogue and public affairs.

Obviously, thinkers of the caliber of Kook and Kaplan do not grow or function in vacuums. They are stimulated and conditioned by their spiritual and intellectual antecedents. They, in turn, motivate disciples and arouse critics. After the death of inspiring thinkers, their message is often beclouded by the interpretations given to them by supporters and critics alike. Hence, to comprehend the full range and impact of the philosophies of Kook and Kaplan, we have to trace their intellectual heritage and correct the many errors made by their followers and detractors. Such a task, however, would require a different type of book from the one I wrote and which I now offer in revised form to English readers. I have chosen, as best I can, to concentrate on what Kook and Kaplan have to say and shall refer to interpretations and comments of other scholars only when such remarks and my reactions to them are likely to clarify the positions of the two thinkers. I have taken some steps to place Kook and Kaplan in their proper niches in the intellectual history of Judaism in the twentieth cen-
tury, but the territory remains largely uncharted. For now, I aim only to outline some of the agreements and disagreements of these seminal minds and to indicate how we Jews must take their philosophies into account as we confront the confusion of our age.

Finally, although I try my best to treat both men objectively and fairly, I do so as one of Kaplan’s disciples. My bias is clear, and I make no attempt to hide it; however, I hope that I have written honestly and disinterestedly about both thinkers. Let the reader decide.

I apologize to the reader for what might appear to be inconsistencies in spelling. This is especially the case in regard to quotations, which contain words whose spelling differs from that in my own text. I preferred to present these passages in their original form. The inconsistencies are endemic to English language usage. I try to resolve the problem of gender-laden language by the use of plurals and neutral terms, but here and there I revert to the traditional “man” when my meaning is humankind. In a number of instances, I follow the lead of our two thinkers who use the masculine term in this all-inclusive sense. I also wish to point to a similar difficulty in the transliteration of Hebrew terms into English. Here, too, the transliterations in quotations are those of their authors, while my text follows my preference.

I also wish to express my deepest appreciation to Fordham University Press for its many kindnesses. Special thanks to Dr. Mary Beatrice Schulte, who helped me over many hurdles; to Anthony F. Chiffolo, who was responsive to my every need; and to Barbara Malczak, a marvelous editor, who saved me from many an error and who taught me how much I still have to learn about the English language.

NOTES

1. Readers who are interested in further details about the biographies of Kook and Kaplan can refer to the sketchy articles in the Encyclopedia Judaica. Jacob Agus has a few pages on Kook’s life in his Banner of Jerusalem (New York: Bloch, 1946). Ben-Zion Bokser adds some items about Kook’s career in his Abraham Isaac Kook (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press; 1978). The best source for Kaplan’s life is the excellent

2. The literature is voluminous—too vast to list here and of sufficient proportions to merit a study in itself. Interested students should refer to the libraries of Jewish theological seminaries or of universities in which there are departments of Judaic studies. Most of the references on Kook, however, are likely to be in Hebrew.