



The Meaning of Jewish Existence: Theological Essays, 1930-1939 (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry)

Alexander Altmann

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A leading thinker's early essays on the theological and intellectual foundations of Jewish existence and values are now available in English. Hitler's early campaign against German Jews was not only a matter of political and economic boycott, but also one of excluding them from a culture they had long embraced. In response, the Jewish community mounted a spiritual resistance by organizing an elaborate network of educational and cultural activities that affirmed the intellectual and religious heritage of Judaism. A young Orthodox rabbi and scholar in Berlin, Alexander Altmann played a central role in this effort by articulating anew for his generation the inner spiritual world of traditional Judaism as grounded in the Jewish law or halakhah, which he held to be the wellspring and fundamental matrix of authentic Jewish spirituality. In essays published in German newspapers and journals in the 1930s, he initiated a renewal of Jewish religious thought that addressed modern Jews from the depths of Israel's ancient traditions and deepened their understanding of Jewish existence and its values. Altmann, now considered one of the intellectual giants of Jewish scholarship, selected fifteen of these essays for translation into English before his death in 1987. These pieces, plus an epilogue entitled Exile and Return in Contemporary Jewish Perspective written in 1977, are of value as primary documents from a dark period preceding the Second World War and also for their intrinsic worth as important early scholarship by a great thinker.

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