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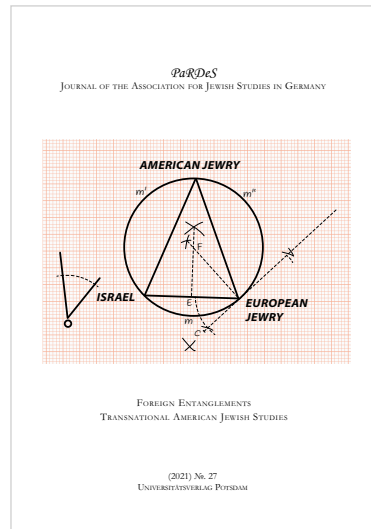
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# **A Secular Tradition: Horace Kallen on American Democracy in the United States and Israel**

*by Imanuel Clemens Schmidt*

## **Abstract**

This article focuses on the social philosopher Horace Kallen and the revisions he made to the concept of cultural pluralism that he first developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, applying it to postwar America and the young State of Israel. It shows how he opposed the assumption that the United States' social order was based on a "Judeo-Christian tradition." By constructing pluralism as a civil religion and carving out space for secular self-understandings in midcentury America, Kallen attempted to preserve the integrity of his earlier political visions, developed during World War I, of pluralist societies in the United States and Palestine within an internationalist global order. While his perspective on the State of Israel was largely shaped by his American experiences, he revised his approach to politically functionalizing religious traditions as he tested his American understanding of a secular, pluralist society against the political theology effective in the State of Israel. The trajectory of Kallen's thought points to fundamental questions about the compatibility of American and Israeli understandings of religion's function in society and its relation to political belonging, especially in light of their transnational connection through American Jewish support for the recently established state.

## **1. Introduction**

On March 1, 1945, Horace Meyer Kallen (1882–1974), social philosopher and professor at the New School for Social Research, wrote a letter to American president Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) articulating his concern about a phrase Roosevelt had used that day in an address to Congress about developments at the Yalta Conference of the previous month. Kallen singled out one sentence from Roosevelt's speech, in which he declared that, as Kallen

remembered the president's words, "There is no room in the world for German militarism *and* Christian decency." Roosevelt had thus, presumably without intending to do so, Kallen wrote, excluded a large number of non-Christians who had indeed acted morally and, on the battlefield, defended American democracy with their lives. Roosevelt instead should have invoked "human decency" rather than Christianity as the basis of morality.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly two decades later, at the age of 80, Kallen noted that his concept of democracy as cultural pluralism, developed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had finally taken hold. In support of this assessment, he pointed to the emergence of new modes of expression to characterize American society:

"Before the Second World War you never saw such a hyphenation as Judeo-Christian, and now especially our Romanist friends are using that phrase all the time. You never saw such a phrase as 'America is a pluralistic society.' Now that phrase has become very common."<sup>2</sup>

The joint and, it may seem, indiscriminate invocation of speech referring to a Judeo-Christian America, on the one hand, and a pluralist America, on the other, to equally illustrate the broad acceptance of Kallen's concept of cultural pluralism obscures the conflict that existed between two distinct visions of American democracy associated with each notion. As religious historian K. Healan Gaston has shown, the discourse on Judeo-Christian America, as well as the interdenominational alliances associated with it, were less inclusive than much of the earlier research literature had suggested. Reference to a Judeo-Christian America often implied an anti-secularist thrust.<sup>3</sup> Kallen's

<sup>1</sup> Emphasis in original. Horace M. Kallen to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 1, 1945, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (hereafter YIVO), New York, Papers of Horace Meyer Kallen (hereafter Kallen Papers), RG 317, Folder 996: Roosevelt, Franklin D., 1945. The words Roosevelt actually spoke were: "And I know that there is not room enough on earth for both German militarism and Christian decency." Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address to Congress on the Yalta Conference, March 1, 1945, The American Presidency Project, accessed October 4, 2021, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-congress-the-yalta-conference>.

<sup>2</sup> Horace M. Kallen, Address on the occasion of becoming an honorary member of Farband, New York, 1963, n.p., American Jewish Archives (hereafter AJA), Horace M. Kallen Papers, MS-1 (hereafter Kallen Papers), Box 62, Folder 7.

<sup>3</sup> K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 1–18. Cf. William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 196–215; Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

reformulation of pluralism as a religion in the late 1940s and early 1950s might at first glance be interpreted as a mere adjustment of his thought to postwar realities, a turn to religion and suspension of the category of “nationality.” As it will become clear, however, Kallen’s theological elaboration of a democratic faith should be seen as an intervention in the face of contemporary attempts to tie democracy to an exclusively Judeo-Christian religious tradition.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of transnationalism, popularized by Randolph S. Bourne (1886–1918) in his essay “Trans-National America” (1916), built on Kallen’s ideas and was closely linked to insights gained from Jewish historical experience and the diasporic condition.<sup>4</sup> During World War I, Kallen parallelly shaped the understanding of Zionism as a kind of internationalism, secular American-Jewish self-understanding as “Hebraism,” and the notion of American democracy as cultural pluralism. He charted a European and global postwar order and offered an outline of the social and economic structure for a pluralistically constituted commonwealth in Palestine.<sup>5</sup> In his 1921 work *Zionism and World Politics*, Kallen addressed how modern political projects were nourished by transvalued religious traditions and how to appeal to the biblical prophets in the establishment of a pluralist commonwealth in Palestine.<sup>6</sup> His understanding of the political potential of secularizing tradition was significantly developed in connection with his work within the American Zionist movement before and during the First World War. But while the American discourse of the 1940s and 1950s led Kallen to reject the conflation of religion and democracy, his experience of Israel in 1956 provoked a distinct realization of the necessity to draw on religious traditions in a mediated, more thoroughly secularized manner than he had previously suggested.

<sup>4</sup> Jakob Egholm Feldt, *Transnationalism and the Jews: Culture, History and Prophecy* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2016), 1–41.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Schmidt, *Horace M. Kallen: Prophet of American Zionism* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1995); Noam Pianko, “‘The True Liberalism of Zionism’: Horace Kallen, Jewish Nationalism, and the Limits of American Pluralism,” *American Jewish History* 94 (2008): 299–329; Noam Pianko, *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken: Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 26–59; Imanuel Clemens Schmidt, “Politische Gestaltung aus Quellen der Tradition: Horace Kallens Pluralismuskonzept und das Schlüsseljahr 1918,” *Denkströme: Journal der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 21 (2019): 122–136.

<sup>6</sup> Horace M. Kallen, *Zionism and World Politics: A Study in History and Social Psychology*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921), 296–299.

While Kallen's earlier transnational thought and institutional engagement has received some attention, research so far hardly engaged with Kallen's later perspectives on the State of Israel. At the same time, Kallen's reframing of cultural pluralism as a religion in the 1950s allowed him to address what he perceived as an assault on the separation of church and state. By imagining an American civil religion, Kallen sought to preserve the idea of cultural pluralism and a secular self-understanding against postwar attempts at narrowly defining American belonging in terms of religion. Kallen's advocacy of secularism with regard to the State of Israel, however, elucidates how Kallen expanded his revision of cultural pluralism beyond the American context. When he turned to Israeli society, he observed it through the lens of his decades-long fight for secularism in the United States. Applying his experience with the American debate on the relationship of religion and democracy to the specific context of the political theological discourse in Israel, Kallen revisited his references to the biblical prophets, whom earlier he had claimed for his pluralist ideas and internationalist hopes.

Kallen here illustrated fundamental tensions within American Zionism and its aim to explain the transnational relationship between American Jewry and the Jewish polity in Palestine. As an American Zionist with a deep commitment to the separation of religion and state, Kallen found the fundamental nature of a "Jewish state" problematic. In light of these tensions, variants of which have played out implicitly or explicitly in the many conflicts between American Jews and Israel, Kallen had to renegotiate the impact of his distinctly American vision on his transnational one.

## **2. Democracy as Religion**

Since the early 1940s, Kallen played a central role in public debates over America's self-image as a Judeo-Christian or pluralist nation. For instance, together with the philosophers John Dewey (1859–1952) and Sidney Hook (1902–1989), Kallen had opposed the Conference on Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life (CSPR), founded in 1940 and organized by Louis Finkelstein (1895–1991), chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. The conference's stated goal of uniting Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish scientists and intellectuals to defend American democracy against totalitarianism pivoted around religion as the force best suited to engage in this struggle. Many of its participants regarded traditional

religious values as the sources of democracy. The conference promoted the notion that America's social order was based on the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition, while Nazism and Soviet Communism were declared the result of secular thought.

The pragmatist philosophers Dewey, Kallen, and Hook perceived this conference as a dangerous alliance forged with neo-Thomist Catholic thinkers, and in response they founded a counter-organization in 1943. Its name, Conference on the Scientific Spirit and Democratic Faith, suggested an alternative democratic faith that was secular and based on the scientific method.<sup>7</sup>

Ten years later, largely driven by Kallen's enduring perception of a threat the Catholic Church's transnational political claims posed to American democracy, he worked out "Secularism's" theology in detail. In his 1954 book-length essay, "Secularism Is the Will of God," Kallen described Secularism as a faith invested in the federalization of diversity and its God, a ceaselessly fluctuating orchestral configuration of differences. Kallen revisited his famous image of cultural pluralism as the performance of a symphony, developed 40 years earlier, but now integrated God into this image. He again imagined the orchestra as performing a symphony spontaneously and without the guidance of a conductor. But the process and the result of the interplay of different instruments figured as the God of Secularism. For Kallen, it was recognizable not by substance but by its effect, in the free association of diversities and the establishment of relations among constantly changing beliefs.<sup>8</sup> While locating this deity's initial revelation in the American political tradition, he hoped for its transnational manifestation in ever-expanding networks of cooperation between differing groups.

<sup>7</sup> The capitalization of "Secularism" as a specific faith is Kallen's. James B. Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture: American Religion in an Age of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 84–89; Matthew J. Kaufman, *Horace Kallen Confronts America: Jewish Identity, Science, and Secularism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2019), 172. Cf. Sidney Hook, "Theological Tom-Tom and Metaphysical Bagpipe," *The Humanist* 2/3 (Autumn 1942): 96–102; Minutes of the [Planning] Committee Meeting of the Conference on the Scientific Spirit and Democratic Faith, March 24, 1943, YIVO, Kallen Papers, RG 317, Folder 99. On Finkelstein's vision for the CSPR and his specific understanding of the prophetic and rabbinic Jewish tradition as a model for a pluralist encounter of religion and science, cf. Cara Rock-Singer, "A Prophetic Guide for a Perplexed World: Louis Finkelstein and the 1940 Conference on Science, Philosophy, and Religion," *Religion and American Culture* 29 (2019): 179–215.

<sup>8</sup> Horace M. Kallen, *Secularism Is the Will of God: An Essay in the Social Philosophy of Democracy and Religion*, (New York, 1954), 15–17, 140, 184, 191; Horace M. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1924), 116.

Kallen's construction of a civil religion emerged from a functionalist understanding of religion, which he developed in his 1927 work *Why Religion*, building upon the psychological approach of his teacher William James (1842–1910). For Kallen, faith was the essential component of religion. It was at work in every area of life, on the individual and social level. Every person, religious or not, created symbolic representations of a saving power out of experiences of crisis and invested faith in what may be called God. However, Kallen believed that the attitude of faith itself – not the object of that faith – provided the decisive criterion for a religion.<sup>9</sup> From this perspective, Kallen was able to claim the status of religion for Secularism. Based on the belief in the equal liberty of groups and individuals to be different, Secularism could in fact function as a common faith among all the particular religious and secular faith communities. Rather than an existing reality, Kallen's view of Secularism represented a hope realized through the act of faith that, in his eyes, democracy represented.<sup>10</sup>

At the center of Kallen's defense of American democracy's secular foundation stood his sharp criticism of the Catholic Church. In particular, he denounced the church's opposition to public schools and its attempts to secure state support of private Catholic schools, which Kallen saw as a vicious attack by clericalism on the separation of church and state.<sup>11</sup> More generally, in Kallen's texts, the Catholic Church represents the counter principle of priestly authoritarianism to secularism, which had evolved from the Protestant multiplication of faith communities. Furthermore, by suggesting structural analogies and historical ties between the Catholic Church, Nazism, and Soviet Communism, Kallen tried to counter contemporary claims that secularization caused totalitarian regimes and that they were expressions and consequences of godlessness.<sup>12</sup> Neither on its own nor as part of a broader

<sup>9</sup> Horace M. Kallen, *Why Religion* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927), 82, 88–90, 93, 103.

<sup>10</sup> Kallen, *Secularism Is the Will of God*, 11–12, 76, 90, 223. Cf. Horace M. Kallen, "How I Bet My Life," *The Saturday Review*, October 1, 1966, 27–30.

<sup>11</sup> Kallen, *Secularism Is the Will of God*, 5, 93, 165, 167, 171, 178, 182–183, 224–225. On the Vatican's transnational political action and support by American Catholics, cf. Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill, N.C./London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Giuliana Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade: The Vatican's Battle to Remake Christian Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Kallen, *Secularism Is the Will of God*, 6, 158, 163–165.



Judeo-Christian tradition, Kallen argued, does the Catholic Church embody the religious tradition underlying democracy. Such a tradition was conceivable only as Secularism.

Perhaps the most distinct objection to Kallen's understanding of pluralism as religion was raised by the sociologist and theologian Will Herberg (1901–1977) in his influential 1955 work *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*.<sup>13</sup> Herberg criticized the implicit secularity of contemporary American religion and attributed it to the very understanding of religion that Kallen (and others) had helped popularize. For Herberg, this secularity manifested itself in the sacralization of society and culture. Beliefs manifested in the everyday life of Americans, and their social values did not correspond to traditional religions but to the “American way of life,” which implicitly functioned as a religion. One of the central elements of this American way of life that Herberg especially criticized was his contemporaries' faith in faith, detached from a traditional focus on God.<sup>14</sup>

Kallen's outright formulation of Secularism as the religion of religions that transcends traditional faith communities marked a break, in Herberg's eyes, with the presuppositions of Judaism and Christianity and was to be regarded as “a particularly insidious kind of idolatry.” Herberg contrasted this with his own theological position in the final chapter of *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, which, more or less openly, permeates the entire work. Herberg measured American religion against a normative Judeo-Christian tradition centered around a biblical God and derived from the religion of the prophets. He presented this supposedly “authentic” tradition of the prophets as the answer to what he diagnosed as the crisis of Western civilization, and in contrast to what he saw as an affirmative American civil religion.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1955), 32–33, 35, 40, 49–53, 227. Cf. Laura Levitt, “Interrogating the Judeo-Christian Tradition: Will Herberg's Construction of American Religion, Religious Pluralism, and the Problem of Inclusion,” in *The Cambridge History of Religions in America*, vol. 3, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 283–307.

<sup>14</sup> Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 14–15, 54, 64–68, 72–77, 87–104, 193.

<sup>15</sup> Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 7, 101–102, 262, 270–272, 276–285, 288, here 102. Herberg initially formulated his critique with regard to a shorter text by Kallen, published in 1951, that already provided a sketch of Kallen's Secularism: Horace M. Kallen, “Democracy's True Religion,” *The Saturday Review of Literature*, July 28, 1951, 6–7, 29–30. However, Herberg was fully aware of Kallen's detailed exposition of a theology of democracy from 1954: Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 297.

Kallen, however, did not aim for a patriotic glorification of the status quo nor for an apotheosis of the state, as another of his critics alleged.<sup>16</sup> With Secularism Kallen argued first of all for the continuing validity of “cultural pluralism” and, for American Jews, a secular Jewish self-understanding. During World War I, Kallen had derived the separation of citizenship and nationality from an expanded understanding of the separation of church and state while arguing for a reconfiguration of Europe according to the ideal of American democracy. In the 1940s and 1950s, he saw this basic separation – and the nucleus of cultural pluralism – under threat. That Kallen’s formulation of Secularism by no means constricted his earlier concept of religious pluralism but rather expanded the spectrum of cultural groups assembled into a cooperative relationship – “be they religious, occupational, cultural, recreational, etc. etc.”<sup>17</sup> – is due to the scope of his concept of religion. Kallen’s 1954 writing and Herberg’s work published the following year represent contrasting poles within the negotiation of the relationship between religion and American belonging in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. With his reformulation of cultural pluralism as civil religion, Kallen opposed the derivation of American democracy from a Judeo-Christian tradition and implicitly objected to a notion of totalitarianism as conceived by European Catholic thinkers.<sup>18</sup> Early on he applied his American understanding of religion, shaped by Jefferson and James alike, to the analysis of societies beyond the United States and to international relations. This American notion of secularism constituted the safeguard against illiberal religion, theistic or not, and the *sine qua non* for applying American democracy on the transnational level.

<sup>16</sup> M. Whitcomb Hess, “Reviewed Work: Secularism is the Will of God by Horace M. Kallen,” *The Philosophical Review* 65 (January 1956): 121–124.

<sup>17</sup> Kallen, *Secularism Is the Will of God*, 58.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. James Chappel, “The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe,” *Modern Intellectual History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 561–590.

### 3. Secularism and the State of Israel

During World War I, Kallen had delineated a pluralist American self-understanding that accepted multiple cultural affiliations, encapsulated by the term “hyphenation,” and presented this as the general American experience and model for a new global order.<sup>19</sup> After the founding of the State of Israel, the transnational reach that Kallen claimed for his ideas was tested from either side, as American Jews and Israel faced questions about secularism and religion as categories of belonging. He thus again found himself called upon to counter insinuations of the dual loyalty of American Jews with an explanation of what American belonging was based on:

“Now, to be an American is not an accident of birth but an act of faith. Although nationality accrues automatically to persons born in the United States, the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship do not. They are not functions of nativity. They come alive and actual when any person, wherever born or brought up, publicly commits himself to the faith and works of a certain way of life.”<sup>20</sup>

Kallen based American belonging on the democratic faith and argued that a commitment to this faith was adequately expressed in the support of Israeli democracy. To American Jews he assigned a special moral obligation towards the “American Idea” of cultural pluralism, stemming particularly from the Jewish historical experience of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From a *longue durée* perspective, Kallen underscored the Jewish experience of persecution and discrimination based on religious difference and the social positions theologically assigned to Jews in Christian Europe. Against this background, it would be, in Kallen’s words, “a blasphemy beyond pardon” if religious difference was punished in Israel.<sup>21</sup>

Kallen expressed his severe concern about Israel’s political and social development in a lengthy article titled “Whither Israel?,” which was published in the *Menorah Journal* in 1951, a few years after the founding of the State of Israel. The spirit of equal freedom that he considered inherent in the cooperative

<sup>19</sup> Cf., most famously, Horace M. Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot: A Study of American Nationality,” *The Nation*, February 18 and 25, 1915, 190–194, 217–220.

<sup>20</sup> Horace M. Kallen, “Whither Israel?” *The Menorah Journal* 39 (Autumn 1951): 134, 109–143. On different approaches among leading American Jews to deal with the charge of dual loyalty in face of the State of Israel’s founding, cf. Zvi Ganin, *An Uneasy Relationship: American Jewish Leadership and Israel, 1948–1957* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 3–25.

<sup>21</sup> Kallen, “Whither Israel?” 138.

communities of kibbutzim and moshavim was, as he saw it, at risk of being betrayed. The pacification of religious groups, he feared, would come at the expense of upholding the pluralist principles Israel had committed itself to at its founding. What was at stake for Israel in its first decade was not merely the legitimacy conferred by the United Nations but its fundamental moral integrity. In his 1951 article, Kallen laid bare the tensions between American Zionism, as he advocated it, and the one espoused by the young state's founding ideology: a Zionism that delegitimized the diaspora and exerted psychological pressure to move to – or at least to support – Israel. The basis for American Jews voluntarily supporting the State of Israel, Kallen argued, was primarily its “scientific spirit and the democratic faith.” The bond with Israel could not be based merely on a Jewish self-understanding per se, but rather required the Zionist ideal as he understood it, “the ethics of universal human brotherhood.”<sup>22</sup> The stakes in this transnational debate about the meaning of Zionism could hardly have been higher.

Kallen's most extensive – and less alarmed – portrait of Israeli society, its secular faith, and the ongoing uncertainty of its realization, was published seven years later, in 1958, under the title *Utopians at Bay*. The book, first and foremost addressing American Jews, largely resulted from observations that Kallen had made in Israel two years earlier. From May to July 1956, he had traveled the country and conducted a study, sponsored by the Theodor Herzl Foundation and the American Association for Jewish Education, on the cultural and institutional factors that would shape a diverse population into a coherent Israeli society. In an analogy to the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century discourse on the Americanization of immigrants, Kallen was now writing about what he called “Israelization.” In interviews and spontaneous conversations, he surveyed the diversity of self-understandings and attitudes and the various “basic beliefs,” as Kallen put it, concerning Israel.

The most fundamental social tension he described in his 1958 study was the conflict between the principles set out in Israel's Declaration of Independence and the restriction of individual freedoms through Jewish Orthodoxy's claim to traditional authority. According to Kallen, every state that prescribed an orthodoxy was to be considered a church-state. The separation of church

<sup>22</sup> Kallen, “Whither Israel?” 129–133, 140.

and state and an understanding of religious affiliation as a voluntary act, as first implemented in the United States, Kallen reminded his readers, constituted major prerequisites of democracy. As soon as any religious community is denied the same freedom and security, or as one religion is privileged over another, the term “democracy” no longer applies. Considering the diversity of religious and cultural affiliations, Israel could not at the same time be a Jewish state and apply the democratic principle of secularism.<sup>23</sup>

Based on this distinctly American understanding of democracy, Kallen supported the work of organizations that strove for religious freedom and the separation of church and state in Israel. From 1964, he sat on the board of directors of the League for Religious Freedom in Israel, and in 1967 he was appointed president of the American Friends of Religious Freedom in Israel. In February 1967, Kallen was invited to join the Special Committee on Religious Rights in Israel, which consisted of reform rabbis and had been set up by the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the international umbrella organization of the Reform and affiliated movements. Chaired by Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath (1902–1973), president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the committee discussed how the Reform movement’s precarious position in Israel could be improved and, more generally, how the lack of equal religious rights in Israel should be addressed.<sup>24</sup> An overwhelming majority of the committee favored commissioning a white paper, to be written by Member of Knesset Zalman Abramov (1908–1997), and presented to the Israeli prime minister personally but not to be used for public criticism. Kallen, on the other hand, advocated a long-term strategy: a public campaign and the exertion of political pressure. Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman (1918–2008), chairman of the board of the United Jewish Appeal, strongly disagreed. In his view, such a strategy would be perceived as an act of aggression, damaging to the Israeli government and leading to a culture war. For Kallen, this was no different than what Americans were willing to do in the United States; it represented nothing less than the democratic process. Moreover, a culture war, in his eyes,

<sup>23</sup> Horace M. Kallen, *Utopians at Bay* (New York: Theodor Herzl Foundation, 1958), 162–166. On the newly established State of Israel’s pivotal questions concerning the character and implications of a Jewish state, cf. Michael Brenner, *In Search of Israel: The History of an Idea* (Princeton, N.J./Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 138–172.

<sup>24</sup> Rabbi Jacob K. Shankman to Horace M. Kallen, February 9, 1967, AJA, Kallen Papers, Box 43, Folder 12.

was already taking place.<sup>25</sup> Supporting Israel to him meant participating in its struggle for democracy according to the American secularist ideal.

The committee's work resulted in a document, dated July 4, 1968, that deplored the inequality among Jewish religious communities in Israel. In March 1970, it was presented to Prime Minister Golda Meir (1898–1978) by representatives of the World Union for Progressive Judaism during a convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in Jerusalem, the professional organization of Reform rabbis. The text criticized the lack of legal equality among the Jewish religious communities in Israel because the Orthodox rabbinate not only obstructed the free practice of religion, but also practically determined who was to be considered a Jew. Government instructions, in turn, ignored the Israeli Supreme Court's ruling that this question was not to be determined exclusively halakhically. The committee's text pointed out that the authority of the state was being invoked to enforce the policies of Orthodoxy and that a *de facto* state religion delegitimized other forms of Judaism. The document therefore proposed that the State of Israel recognize as Jews all persons whose conversion to Judaism had been carried out by non-Orthodox rabbis and grant them Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return of July 1950. It also argued that non-Orthodox Jewish communities should receive equivalent financial support from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the local religious councils as Orthodox communities.<sup>26</sup>

This latter proposal in particular illustrates how Kallen's position and strategies were largely ignored. As a matter of principle, he had strongly opposed asking the government for any subsidy. Since the first meeting of the committee, Kallen had called upon the representatives of American Reform to put pressure on the State of Israel, and he had once suggested threatening Israel with the termination of financial support unless their demands were met and a broad spectrum of Jewish denominations were granted equal rights. His

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of the Special Committee on Israel, May 18, 1967, 3–5, AJA, Kallen Papers, Box 43, Folder 12; Minutes of the Special Committee on Israel, November 17, 1967, Montreal [Kallen did not participate at this session], AJA, Kallen Papers, Box 43, Folder 12; Minutes of the Special Committee on Israel, April 10, 1968, New York, AJA, Kallen Papers, Box 43, Folder 12, 5–6.

<sup>26</sup> A Statement to the Prime Minister of Israel by the World Union for Progressive Judaism and the Committee on Religious Rights in Israel on the Occasion of the Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Jerusalem, March 10, 1970, AJA, Kallen Papers, Box 43, Folder 12.

keen commitment was not due to his advocacy of Reform Judaism but was based on his general conviction that only the multiplication of diverse religious communities would ultimately achieve a complete separation of church and state, and thus the democratization of Israel.<sup>27</sup> The standard he applied was consistently the American ideal of separating religious association and political belonging, the center of his transnational civil religion of American democracy.

#### 4. Reappraising the Prophets

From his personal experience of Israel in 1956, Kallen revisited his earlier references to the biblical prophets. Instead of engendering a pluralist society with unifying ideals, he saw that the contemporary evocations of the prophets had increased antagonisms between the secular understanding of the present and religious eschatology. At first glance, Kallen's references to the biblical prophets in the 1950s seem to resemble those of his major work of 1921, *Zionism and World Politics*, which underlined the particularistic viewpoint as premise for their veritable universalism. In 1958 he again described them as rebels against a priestly establishment who condemned social injustice, including the oppression suffered by the Canaanite population in biblical times. But Kallen, notably, does not characterize the prophets as internationalist *realpolitiker* as he did earlier.<sup>28</sup> Most significantly, he now refrained from basing his understanding of pluralism on a biblical prophetic tradition. Kallen's texts on cultural pluralism from the 1950s underline consent instead of descent; that is, they emphasize the voluntary character and flexibility of an individual's association with a particular cultural group and of the relationships that cultural groups establish with one another.

In a notable passage in *Utopians at Bay*, however, Kallen now rejected the basic assumption that such notions of pluralism could be traced back to the prophets:

“One hears these sometimes referred to the pronouncements of the Hebrew prophets; indeed, such references may be read into Israel's Declaration of Independence.

<sup>27</sup> Horace M. Kallen to Jacob K. Shankman, April 29, 1970, AJA, Kallen Papers, Box 43, Folder 12; Minutes of the Special Committee on Israel, April 10, 1968, 3, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Kallen, *Zionism and World Politics*, 11–12.

But the prophets of the Old Testament although rebels, were authoritarians. The End-Time they envisioned was a time purposed by Jehovah, and mankind's acquiescence in Israel's preeminence.<sup>29</sup>

Kallen, thus, turned away from a genealogy of prophetic internationalism he had constructed 40 years earlier, which was closely connected both to his idea of cultural pluralism and his outlines of a structure for global peace. In 1918 Kallen imagined the possibility that a prophetic vision of the future – secular in character, as it had been since antiquity – could instantly be realized with the establishment of a League of Nations. In 1958 he instead invoked a “fighting faith in an End-Time” as the realization of open societies characterized by cultural pluralism. However, with this belief he did not aim at a particular future event; instead, it was conceived as an instrument for constantly re-evaluating the present.<sup>30</sup>

Kallen relocated the biblical prophets into a theocratic past. As sources of democratic ideas, he clarified, they could only be accessed through modern mediators. He continued to emphasize the perpetuation of prophetic messages in the American Declaration of Independence and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But he referenced a fractured genealogy that highlighted secular equivalents of past religious traditions. Kallen instead invested the canon of a democratic faith with modern American literary texts that represented the prophetic tradition as a residual tradition, void of a claim to unmediated religious authority.<sup>31</sup>

During the First World War, it was an affirmative reference to the prophets that allowed Kallen to legitimize a national and secular Jewish self-understanding and to locate it within the continuum of Jewish history. In line with this construction, Kallen had insisted that to achieve a pluralist commonwealth in Palestine, the secularization of religious hopes was to be actively perpetuated and more consistently applied to the work of Zionist organizations. With the

<sup>29</sup> Kallen, *Utopians at Bay*, 245. On the narrative of conquest and David Ben-Gurion's establishment, in 1958, of a Joshua study group that met at his home, cf. Rachel Havrelock, *The Joshua Generation: Israeli Occupation and the Bible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 97–161.

<sup>30</sup> Kallen, *Utopians at Bay*, 27, 29, 245, 281–284, 288; cf. Kallen, “Whither Israel?” 118–123, 127; Horace M. Kallen, *The Structure of Lasting Peace: An Inquiry into the Motives of War and Peace* (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1918).

<sup>31</sup> Horace M. Kallen, *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea: An Essay in Social Philosophy*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1956), 88.



founding of the Jewish state and the pivotal position accorded the prophets in Israel's cultural self-understanding, he now claimed that the prophets did not provide suitable role models and that secular Israelis – "Israel's authentic Utopians" – followed a thoroughly modern pluralist faith.<sup>32</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Less than a decade after the State of Israel came into being, Kallen recognized that a sufficiently secularized reading of the prophets might not prevail within Israel's social discourse. Their reference would rather support an unmediated linkage of the state's political ideals with Jewish religion. Kallen's study *Utopians at Bay* opened with a narration of his visit to the alleged tomb of King David on Mount Zion, which reveals Kallen's perception of the religious tradition's heightened efficacy and expectations of an imminent fulfillment of biblical prophecy in such spatial proximity to the sacred.<sup>33</sup> After observing its effect in the land of Israel in 1956, he most distinctly dissociated his ideas from the visions of the prophets. Still, his almost simultaneous outspoken stance in American discussions on the role of religion in culturally pluralist democracies decisively shaped his perspective on Israel. Likewise in the United States, where he confronted influential voices that argued for a Judeo-Christian tradition as the historical and normative basis of America's political and social order, references to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible no longer adequately represented his understanding of the secular foundation of democracy. Yet, regarding the United States and its vigorous civil religious tradition, he did not feel pressed to specifically articulate the distinctions between biblical and modern democracy's prophets.

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kallen had been involved in the Americanization of America by reinterpreting its political, philosophical, and literary tradition in light of the secularist principle and pointing to its unfinished realization in cultural pluralism. Analogously, Israel's Israelization was supposed to signify a return to a firm commitment to secularism as envisioned in the Zionist thought of Kallen and Louis D. Brandeis (1856–1941), among others, during World War I. Echoing this specifically American Zionism and its convergence of the particular with the universal, Kallen imagined Israelization as

<sup>32</sup> Kallen, *Utopians at Bay*, 245.

<sup>33</sup> Kallen, *Utopians at Bay*, 5–8.

an alignment with the ideal of American democracy as cultural pluralism. He did not doubt its transnational applicability and, even less, the necessity of transferring his American concepts of Secularism as a common civil religion to Israel or, for that matter, to any other place. But as he tested them in the young Jewish state, he carefully readjusted his approach to politically functionalizing religion in a polity at greater risk of conflating religious and cultural with political belonging. However, whether in the American scene or on the transnational level, Kallen's approach to the federalization of differences encouraged the active construction and expansion of secular traditions, facilitating each and all to join a common faith in the equal right to be different.