

AUS RELIGION UND RECHT



**Leo Baeck – Philosophical and
Rabbinical Approaches**

*With an Introduction by Parliamentary
State Secretary Thomas Rachel*

Walter Homolka (ed.)

F Frank & Timme

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*For Marianne C. Dreyfus
with great affection*

The Abraham Geiger College is an heir to two centuries of modern Jewish studies in Germany and Europe. This volume is part of a series of theological, biblical and rabbinic studies which attempts to bring the best of modern scholarship together in symposia and the printed word. With this we seek to fulfill an intellectual obligation for the reborn Jewish community on the continent of Europe.

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Preface

Leo Baeck (1873–1956) can be considered to be one of the most important proponents of German Jewry. Over the course of his life, he strove constantly to combine tradition and modernity within Judaism.

Baeck educated young rabbis at Berlin's "Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums" (College for the Science of Judaism) and sought dialogue between Christianity, Islam, and other religions.

Indebted to Baeck's legacy the Abraham Geiger College dedicated its annual study conference in 2006 to this brilliant Jewish thinker – to mark the fiftieth anniversary of his death on November 2, 1956. This volume celebrates the wide spectrum of Leo Baeck's heritage.

The conference was organized in co-operation with the Leo Baeck Foundation. We are very grateful for the substantial support of the German Federal Ministry of Interior for both conference and book.

Due to Susanne Marquardt this volume comes to you perfectly edited.

November 2, 2006

Rabbi Walter Homolka
Principal of the Abraham Geiger College

Thomas Rachel

Introduction: Leo Baeck – Paving the Way for a Modern Jewish Theology*

Leo Baeck (1873–1956) was one of the most important Jewish personalities and scholars of the past century. He was the intellectual father of modern Jewish theology in the 20th century. He studied the relationship between government and church, mainly in the Prussian state. In his view, Prussia was governed by two forces which also determined the status of Jews and Judaism: Lutheranism on the one hand and Enlightenment on the other hand. Leo Baeck championed the separation of state and church and the autonomy of every individual. Long before our time, he expressed the idea of freedom, which is now a central feature of our modern understanding of church and religion.

As Federal Chairman of the Protestant Group of the Christian Democratic Party, I know that, for some time after the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany, Protestantism in Germany lagged far behind political Catholicism with regard to parliamentary, democratic participation and experience.

With the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany, the situation in Germany changed along the lines of Leo Baeck's philosophy. The freedom of the churches and other religious communities, the freedom of faith and conscience and the freedom of religious or ideological belief are constitutional rights and part of everyday life in Germany today.

The relationship between the state and the churches or religious communities in Germany is determined by the requirement of separation, by religious and ideological neutrality and the secular character of the plural constitutional state. The state must be impartial and respect the religious and ideological beliefs and decisions of the holders of civil rights. But this does not mean strict separation without any relations between state and religion. State and religion interact at their interfaces.

A central point of Leo Baeck's philosophy which is still of great importance today is its respect for different beliefs and opinions and its active interest in seeking dialogue with other religions. The aim should not be to merge different religions but to ensure that people understand and respect each other. In Leo Baeck's

* This text is a summary of the speech held at an event to commemorate Leo Baeck on November 1, 2006 at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Berlin with Rabbi Walter Homolka.

opinion, only people who have a knowledge of themselves and stand up for their own identity will be able to approach other people and enter into a dialogue with them.

Finally, Leo Baeck was very much committed to the training of young rabbis. He taught at the College for the Science of Judaism in Berlin from 1912 to 1942, when this academy was closed down. During that time, he gave new impetus to the training of rabbis. The establishment of the Abraham Geiger College in 1999 continued this tradition. The Abraham Geiger College provides training which is based on Leo Baeck's philosophy of openness, tolerance and the freedom of Jewish thinking. The first three graduates of the College were ordained as rabbis on September 14, 2006. This was the first such ordination in Germany after the holocaust. I am personally very pleased and grateful that we can now welcome a new generation of rabbis, trained in German, who distinguish themselves not only by their high standard of academic training but also by their practical and pastoral skills. The ordination in Dresden this September 2006 resumed a rich cultural and religious tradition of thinking and education which left a deep and lasting impression on intellectual life in Germany before the shoah. This ceremony shows that the Jewish tradition has its place and also a future in Germany.