NOTE FROM THE EDITORS
Barry Rubin & Judith Roumani

We are very pleased to bring you the fourth issue of Covenant, Volume 2, Number 1. This current issue has three broad focuses: studies of interfaith issues, imaginative writing in French, and writing by Jews originating from Arab lands. In view of the United Nations’ recent (belated) recognition of the existence of Jewish refugees from Arab lands in roughly equal numbers to the Palestinian refugees, it is appropriate to focus on the literary expression of those who fled from Arab countries. While most of our articles are in English, we have two in French, together with some items among the Letters and Notes.

The first group, interfaith issues, is represented by a finely written appreciation by the writer Haim Chertok, based on his recent biography of James Parkes, a clergyman in the Church of England, arguably one of the best friends that the Jewish people has ever had. He courageously used all his resources in occupied Europe to rescue many Jews from the Nazis, and both before and after published numerous studies arguing that Christianity’s persecution of Jews over the centuries has been one of history’s greatest injustices. This sensitive study does not spare its subject some sympathetic references to his weaknesses, but brings out decisively Parkes’ enormous contribution to influencing the attitudes of his own church as well as others. In this field where wheels turn with excruciating slowness, James Parkes was a revolutionary.

Of course, antisemitism must fall within the purview of interfaith issues, and a study this time from Australia, by Philip Mendes, reflects on whether antisemitism and anti-Zionism, in both their Australian and more general forms, are actually one and the same thing. On the subject of antisemitism, specifically the blood libel that has haunted Jews for many centuries, the book discussed in the Autumn 2007 issue, Ariel Toaff’s Pasque di Sangue, has apparently been revised, due to the outcry that it provoked in the Jewish and non-Jewish world, and has come out in a new edition. According to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, Toaff has moderated his views, denying any hypothesis of the blood libel’s validity.

The third interfaith article that Covenant features is by an eminent American historian, Jonathan Goldstein, on his positive experiences teaching about Israel in the Bible Belt of the American South.

Rabbi Dr. Dov Maimon, one of the most original Orthodox minds, formerly of France and now of Israel, and specialist in interfaith dialogue, contributes our fourth interfaith article: a comparative study of theological views of the role of women in Judaism and Islam. He has also interviewed Albert Memmi, a decidedly secular philosopher, sociologist and novelist, originally from the Jewish community of Tunisia. This interview in French bridges two of the themes of this issue of Covenant, imaginative writing in French and the literary expression of Jews from Arab lands. It is accompanied by a bibliography of Memmi’s more recent writing and a translated chapter from Memmi’s historical novel The Desert: Or, The Life and Adventures of Jubair Ouali El-Mammi, embodying the concerns of the ‘Arab Jew’ a phrase that Memmi defined elsewhere in his Jews and Arabs (1974; Eng. trans. 1975). Memmi’s novel portrays a world on the southern shores of the Mediterranean...
where in ancient and medieval times Jews were fully at home among the indigenous peoples. He imagines the fate of a small Jewish kingdom that may have existed in southern Morocco in medieval times until it was destroyed by Tamerlane.

Passing to the other end of the Arab world, the Jewish writer from Baghdad and now of Canada, Naim Kattan, shares some thoughts with us in French on a recent encounter of Jewish writers in Jerusalem. Naim Kattan, like Memmi, and practically all Jews who had spent their formative years in Arab countries, became a refugee from the land of his birth. While Memmi in his novel posits a kingdom in Morocco as the imaginary homeland of his nomadic protagonist, Kattan finds in Jerusalem, in Israel, and in Jewish culture a shared spiritual homeland and source of inspiration for contemporary Jewish writers, whichever language they write in. The eminent critic of Arabic literature, Sasson Somekh, has recently published his autobiography about growing up in Baghdad, developing his lifelong passion for Arabic literature, becoming a poet in Arabic, and being forced to leave the land of his birth for Israel. Our first book review is a study of Somekh’s *Baghdad, Yesterday*, on the making of an ‘Arab Jew’.

Gary Mole has contributed an original survey of French-language poetry of the Holocaust, a field that has been overlooked in the past. The expanded *Letters and Notes* section brings responses to the recent article by Tiberiu Weisz on the Jews of China. Frédéric Viey, a French scholar, responds to this recent article on the Jews of Kaifeng with an account of French nineteenth century explorers who likewise found Jews in China in the nineteenth century, and reported on this to the *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite*. Continuing the interfaith theme, under *Letters and Notes* we also present a short collection of writings by François Celier, a French Evangelical supporter of Israel. The support of Christian Evangelicals has been welcomed by the government of Israel, but is highly controversial, especially in America. Yael Soussan has compiled a short biography of Celier together with this anthology of excerpts from his writings on the Jewish people and Israel.

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The Editors

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