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The American Jewish Response to Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions

Jonathan D. Sarna

Kenneth Scott Latourette properly characterized the nineteenth century as the "Great Century" of Christian expansion: the age when missionary activities spread to cover all corners of the world. Numerous facets of this development have been investigated.¹ We know a great deal about the origins, growth, and impact of the missionary movement. But the immediate response of the missionized, their counteractive programs and battle for cultural survival, has received surprisingly scant attention. Most scholars continue to view the "unenlightened" only as objects of history, shaped by others.²

In some cases, written native evidence concerning missionaries simply does not exist. Folklore, travel diaries, and missionary reports must be employed, resulting in inevitable distortion. In the case of Jewish missions, however, responses exist in abundance. The special nature of missions to the Jews, particularly in America, militate against glib cross-cultural generalizations. Still, the range, diversity, and surprising result of the American Jewish response invite critical comparative study.³ The basic theme, after all, is a universal one:

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¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century: A.D. 1800–A.D. 1914, Europe and the United States of America* (New York, 1941); this is volume IV of his *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (7 vols., New York, 1937–1945). See also Stuart Piggin, "Assessing Nineteenth-Century Missionary Motivation: Some Considerations of Theory and Method," in *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, Eng., 1978), 327–37; John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, 1974); James P. Ronda and James Axtell, *Indian Missions: A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington, Ind., 1978); John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875–1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province* (Cambridge, Eng., 1977).

² An important exception is Louise H. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii* (Honolulu, 1971). See also James P. Ronda, "'We Are Well as We Are': An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions," *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXXIV (Jan. 1977), 66–82.

³ The closest comparison is to missions directed at American Catholics. See Maxine S. Seller, "Protestant Evangelism and the Italian Immigrant Woman," in *The Italian Immigrant Woman in*

the struggle of a minority group to maintain its religious and cultural identity in the face of pressures to convert and conform.

Efforts to convert American Jews date far back into the colonial period. Increase Mather labored and prayed for Jewish national conversion throughout his life. His son, Cotton Mather, dedicated a conversionist tract to the Jews (1699) and—until he changed his opinions—fervently prayed “for the conversion of the Jewish Nation, and for my own having the happiness, at some time or other, to baptize a Jew, that should by my ministry, be brought home unto the Lord.” Even the mild-mannered Ezra Stiles lamented that the “sincere, pious, & candid mind” of one of his friends, Aaron Lopez of Newport, could not “have perceived the Evidences” of Christianity. He hoped that others would see the light.⁴

These, it must be emphasized, were individual and spontaneous efforts undertaken by well-meaning people eager to extend heavenly blessings to those whom they saw as good-hearted but misguided. The small number of Jews in the country, probably less than 0.1 percent of the population, made more grandiose undertakings unnecessary. Besides, the theological foundation of later missions—the notion that man by his own actions could speed redemption—had not yet found acceptance outside of limited circles. The basis for a special missionary society aimed at Jews did not exist.⁵

Organized Protestant efforts to convert American Jews began only in the nineteenth century. *Annus mirabilis* was 1816, a year that saw the establishment both of the Female Society of Boston and the Vicinity for Promoting Christianity among the Jews and of the American Society for Evangelizing the Jews. Post-Edwardsian theology, the Second Great Awakening, the growth of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, and the Peace of Ghent form the background for these developments. In addition, a man sailed into New York harbor in 1816 who had become famous for the leading role he had played in founding the London conversionist society: Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey.⁶

North America, ed. Betty Boyd Caroli, Robert F. Harney, and Lydio F. Tomasi (Toronto, 1978), 124–36; Angelo Olivieri, “Protestantism and Italian Immigration in Boston in Late Nineteenth Century: The Mission of G. Conte,” in *The Religious Experience of Italian Americans*, ed. Silvano M. Tomasi (Staten Island, 1975), 73–103; Salvatore Mondello, “Protestant Proselytism among the Italians in the USA as Reported in American Magazines,” *Social Science*, 41 (April 1966), 84–90; and Theodore Abel, *Protestant Home Missions to Catholic Immigrants* (New York, 1933).

⁴ Lee M. Friedman, *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots* (Philadelphia, 1942), 95–106; Mel Scult, *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties: A Study of the Efforts to Convert the Jews in Britain, up to the Mid Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, Neth., 1978), 47–55; Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776* (3 vols., Detroit, 1970), III, 1135–48; Arthur A. Chiel, “Ezra Stiles and the Jews: A Study in Ambivalence,” in *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Bertram Wallace Korn (New York, 1976), 63–76.

⁵ Oliver Wendell Elsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790–1815* (Williamsport, Pa., 1928); Ernest A. Payne, “Introduction,” to William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (London, 1961), iii–xx; Charles L. Chaney, *The Birth of Missions in America* (South Pasadena, Calif., 1976). For population statistics, see Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, I, 388–90.

⁶ *Religious Intelligencer*, I (Jan. 25, 1817), 555–58. On early American Jewish missions generally, see David Max Eichhorn, *Evangelizing the American Jew* (New York, 1978); Max Eisen,

Frey (1771–1850), a native of Franconia, converted in 1798 and immigrated to London in 1801. Though originally slated to work for the London Missionary Society in Africa, he soon commenced labors among his “brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh.” In 1809, he helped organize the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. Seven years later, following the publication of his best-selling autobiography and in the wake of an ugly scandal (according to one source Frey seduced a convert named Mrs. Josephson), Frey came to the United States.⁷

Frey’s arrival, and the initial attention lavished upon him in New York, brought about the first American response to missionary activities directed at Jews. European polemics and counter-polemics, including the works of David Levi in London, had appeared in New York bookstores earlier—thanks in part to Jewish printers. George Bethune English’s idiosyncratic, eccentric, and highly Judeophilic *The Grounds of Christianity Examined, by Comparing the New Testament with the Old* (1813), had also stirred up a predictable storm of controversy.⁸ But *Tobit’s Letters to Levi; or A Reply to the Narrative of Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey* (1816) was different. Personalities rather than theologies dominated its pages. It sought to puncture the halo around Frey—whose original name was Levy—and tried to prove from “common sense” that money should not be “squandered in America, in . . . the conversion of the Jews.” “Tobit” claimed both membership in a Christian church and adherence to “the doctrine of Jesus Christ as contained in the New Testa-

“Christian Missions to the Jews in North America and Great Britain,” *Jewish Social Studies*, X (Jan. 1948), 31–66; Marshall Sklare, “The Conversion of the Jews,” *Commentary*, 56 (Sept. 1973), 44–53; Lee M. Friedman, “The American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews and Joseph S.C.F. Frey,” in Lee M. Friedman, *Early American Jews* (Cambridge, 1934), 96–112; Lorman Ratner, “Conversion of the Jews and Pre-Civil War Reform,” *American Quarterly*, XIII (Spring 1961), 43–54; and Louis Meyer, “Hebrew-Christian Brotherhood Unions and Alliances of the Past and Present,” *Minutes of the First Hebrew-Christian Conference of the United States. Held at Mountain Lake, Md., July 28–30, 1903* (Pittsburgh, 1903), 16–31. On British missions to the Jews, see Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Philadelphia, 1979), 71–76, 285–86; Harvey W. Meirovich, “Ashkenazic Reactions to the Conversionists, 1800–1850,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 26 (1979), 8–25; and Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry, 1740–1875* (Manchester, Eng., 1976), 45–48, 148–50. On German missions, see David C. Smith, “The Berlin Mission to the Jews and its Ecclesiastical and Political Context, 1822–1848,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, XXX (1974), 182–90. The only general survey of the field remains A. E. Thompson, *A Century of Jewish Missions* (Chicago, 1902).

⁷ On Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey see, in addition to works already cited, George Harvey Genzmer, “Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey,” *Dictionary of American Biography* (20 vols., New York, 1928–36), VII, 28–29; George J. Miller, “David A. Borrenstein: A Printer and Publisher at Princeton, N.J., 1824–28,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 30 (1936), 1–6; and Harry Simonhoff, *Jewish Notables in America, 1776–1865: Links of an Endless Chain* (New York, 1956), 176–80.

⁸ *Christian Disciple*, IV (Aug. 1816), 249–52; (New York) *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 (March 1854), 248; David Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestly, in Answer to Those He Addressed to the Jews; Inviting Them to an Amicable Discussion of the Evidences of Christianity* (New York, 1794); David Levi, *A Defence of the Old Testament, in a Series of Letters Addressed to Thomas Paine* (New York, 1797); George Bethune English, *The Grounds of Christianity Examined, by Comparing the New Testament with the Old* (Boston, 1813); and Edward Everett, *A Defence of Christianity, against the Work of George B. English* (Boston, 1814).

ment."⁹ Be this as it may, his work—especially in its attacks on Christian divisions and prejudices—reads like one that was Jewish-inspired. European Jews often subsidized philo-Semitic tracts. The same may well have been true in America.¹⁰

Four years after Tobit's publication, the American Society for Evangelizing the Jews received a state charter. The organization's list of officers reads like a Who Was Who of New York: Elias Boudinot, former president of the Continental Congress, stood at the helm. Below him sat many, obviously honorific, vice presidents, including John Quincy Adams, Jeremiah Day, Ashbel Green, Philip Milledoler (presidents respectively of Yale, Princeton, and Rutgers), William Phillips, and Stephen Van Rensselaer. Rounding out the list of officers was the treasurer, Peter Jay, son of diplomat John Jay. Even this formidable assembly, however, failed to convince the legislature to grant the desired charter. Disturbed by the implications of state-sanctioned evangelization, and embarrassed by the presence in Albany of Mordecai Noah, the Jewish editor of the *National Advocate*, New York City's Tammany newspaper, the legislature insisted on a new name for the evangelization society. From 1820 onward, the organization was known as the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews.¹¹

Open and direct American Jewish responses to Christian missions properly date to this 1820 incorporation. Only then did the melioration society become an active force, funded by hundreds of auxiliary organizations that poured money into its coffers and promised full support to its activities.¹² Though the society initially claimed to be interested only in "melioration," and only in those already converted abroad, American Jews understandably took fright. They feared for their survival. Being small in number (about 3,000), they could ill afford to lose adherents to the majority faith.¹³ But fear was not the whole of

⁹ *Tobit's Letters to Levi; or A Reply to the Narrative of Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey* (New York, 1816), 1,36. See also the American reprint of a Liverpool polemic, Jacob Nikelsburger, *Koul Jacob In Defence of the Jewish Religion: Containing the Arguments of the Rev. C. F. Frey* (New York, 1816).

¹⁰ Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (University, Ala., 1973), 449–61, 512; and more generally Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Philo-Semitismus im Barock: Religions- und geistesgeschichtliche untersuchungen* (Tübingen, Ger., 1952).

¹¹ American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, *Constitution of the American Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews; with an Address from the Hon. Elias Boudinot . . . And the Act of Incorporation Granted by the Legislature of the State of New York* (New York, 1820); Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey, *Judah and Israel: Or, the Restoration and Conversion of the Jews and the Ten Tribes* (New York, 1840), 81–93; Joseph L. Blau and Salo W. Baron, eds. *The Jews of the United States, 1790–1840: A Documentary History* (3 vols., New York, 1963), III, 714–73; Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York, 1981), 56–57.

¹² The early support for the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews is chronicled in its annual reports (especially 1820–1825) and in its *Israel's Advocate* (1823–1827). For details of the Philadelphia auxiliary, see Marion L. Bell, *Crusade in the City: Revivalism in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Lewisburg, Pa., 1977), 137–59.

¹³ Ira Rosenswajke, "The Jewish Population of the United States as Estimated from the Census of 1820," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LIII (Dec. 1963), 148; Bertram W. Korn, "Factors Bearing upon the Survival of Judaism in the Ante-Bellum Period," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LIII (June 1964), 341–51; and more generally, Malcolm H. Stern, "The 1820s: American Jewry Comes of Age," in *Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Korn, 539–49.

it. Historically, Christianity posed a menacing challenge to the Jewish people. By undertaking active missions, Christians forced Jews back into an age-old battle. Not only live souls were at stake; centuries of martyred souls were too. In Jewish eyes, the war against missionaries became a war of affirmation, a war to prove that eighteen hundred years of Jewish civilization had not been in vain.¹⁴

The symbolic importance of the missionary battle explains the magnitude of the Jewish response. Beginning in 1820 with a work entitled *Israel Vindicated* (allegedly authored by "An Israelite" but probably written by the non-Jewish George Houston with the help and financial assistance of Jews)¹⁵ and continuing down through the nineteenth century, the small Jewish community devoted a substantial portion of its resources to various forms of polemics. Solomon Jackson devoted his entire *The Jew* (1823–1825), the first Jewish periodical in America, to "a defence of Judaism against all adversaries."¹⁶ Later Jewish works, if less single-minded, never strayed far from "the challenge." As far as Jews were concerned, nothing was more important.

The most traditional form of Jewish polemic dealt with theology—specifically, the wearisome arguments over the meaning of the Hebrew Bible and the validity of the Christian one. The points of contention scarcely changed over time.¹⁷ As a result, Jews freely borrowed from past masters. A work composed in eighteenth-century England but first printed in nineteenth century America, *A Series of Letters on the Evidences of Christianity* by Benjamin Dias Fernandes, proved spectacularly popular. Its arguments drew heavily from the classic polemical works of Isaac Troki (1533–1594) and Isaac Orobio de Castro (1620–1687).¹⁸ A later American volume, Selig Newman's *The Challenge Accepted*, was completely derivative:

The following work does not profess to be original as the subjects on which it treats, have been already fully and ably discussed by former writers, defenders of Judaism. Therefore, the learned reader will here find nothing that is new. . . . It is for the use of the less informed of our co-religionists who are almost strangers to all but the English language, that the discussions and writings of the ancient and modern defenders of our

¹⁴ On the background of the Jewish-Christian encounter in the United States, see Hans Joachim Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument: A History of Theologies in Conflict*, trans. David E. Green (New York, 1963); Oliver Shaw Rankin, *Jewish Religious Polemic of Early and Later Centuries, a Study of Documents Here Rendered in English* (Edinburgh, 1956); Kenneth R. Stow, "The Church and the Jews: From St. Paul to Paul IV," in Lawrence V. Berman, et al., *Bibliographical Essays in Medieval Jewish Studies* (New York, 1976), 109–65; and Frank Ephraim Talmage, *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* (New York, 1975), especially the bibliographic essay, 361–83.

¹⁵ Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Freethinker, the Jews and the Missionaries: George Houston and the Mystery of *Israel Vindicated*," *AJS Review*, 5 (1980), 101–14.

¹⁶ *The Jew*, I (March 1823), 1.

¹⁷ See, in addition to works cited in note 14, Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977).

¹⁸ Benjamin Dias Fernandes, *A Series of Letters on the Evidences of Christianity* (Philadelphia, [1853]), 2, 250–58. Isaac Leeser briefly traces the history of these letters in his introduction to the 1853 edition. See also *The Jew*, I (July 1823), 85. Reprints of this polemic appeared in 1858 and in 1869, and a "revised and enlarged" edition was printed serially in *Israelite*, 14–15 (1868–1869). See Isaac Mayer Wise's praise of the book as "one of the best polemical works on this topic ever published by a Hebrew in the English language." *Israelite*, 12 (1864), 149.

Faith have herein been collected and exhibited in an English dress, to enable them to stand in self-defence, when challenged respecting certain predictions of our Prophets, and perverted constructions of Scripture are sought to be forced upon them.

Like others of its genre, *The Challenge Accepted* explained crucial biblical passages, mostly in Genesis and Isaiah, and then moved on to question the authenticity of the gospel literature based on alleged inner contradictions.¹⁹

Works like these demonstrated their modern character through their emphasis on reason. No standard of truth stood higher. Following Moses Mendelssohn, the great eighteenth-century Jewish philosopher, most insisted that nothing in Judaism was "contrary to, or above, reason." Noah called Judaism "the religion of nature—the religion of reason and philosophy." Isaac Mayer Wise, the pioneer of American Reform Judaism, entitled his first theological polemic "Reason and Faith," and he later stated as a principle that "nothing which reason rejects is to be accepted." By invoking reason Jews proclaimed themselves blissfully modern. They relegated Christianity to a lower level, one reserved for religions repugnant to reason: "The credo which establishes this doctrine is so full of contradictions and inconsistencies, that I challenge any person to compose, within the same compass of words, anything equal to it, or more repugnant to reason and common sense." They implied that Judaism would win out in the end.²⁰

A variant form of theological polemic, while dependent on reason, departed from Jewish arguments and relied instead on enlightenment, deistic, and freethought ones: works by John Toland, Anthony Collins, and Paul Henry Thiry, Baron d'Holbach. *Israel Vindicated* falls into this category—not surprisingly, since its presumed author, Houston, had translated Holbach's *Ecce Homme*. English's *The Grounds of Christianity Examined* drew from similar sources. Both employed the same arguments: "Christians . . . adopt, without examination, the most contradictory facts, the most incredible actions, the most amazing prodigies, the most unconnected system, the most unintelligible doctrine, and the most revolting mysteries." Judaism, by contrast, was thoroughly reasonable. Jews promoted and printed these volumes, just as later they publicized the "heretical" findings of David Strauss and Ernest Renan. They aimed to show, as Wise admitted, that Christians and infidels had already "shorn the Christian story of the last prestige." The polemical cor-

¹⁹ Selig Newman, *The Challenge Accepted; a dialogue between a Jew and a Christian: The Former Answering a Challenge Thrown Out by the Latter, Respecting the Accomplishment of the Prophecies Predictive of the Advent of Jesus* (New York, 1850), iii. On Selig Newman, see Endelman, *Jews of Georgian England*, 244, 285. For another example of a theological polemic from this period, see the unpublished manuscript of Jacob Mordecai, Mordecai Family Papers (American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio).

²⁰ Moses Mendelssohn to Elkan Herz, July 22, 1771, quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 249; Mordecai M. Noah, *Discourse Delivered at the Consecration of the Synagogue K. K. Shearith Israel in the City of New York* (New York, 1818), 24; James G. Heller, *Isaac M. Wise: His Life, Work, and Thought* (New York, 1965), 140–41, 535; Dias Fernandes, *Series of Letters*, 149; see generally, Schoeps, *Jewish-Christian Argument*, 103–05; and Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York, 1968), 256–58.

ollary was obvious: if Christians could not even convince their own adherents, why should Jews pay them heed?²¹

By employing for polemical purposes non-Jewish, anti-Christian works, Jews courted great danger. The impious and nonbeliever held low esteem in America; irreligion and immorality were assumed to go hand in hand.²² Furthermore, many of the authors whom Jews happily quoted in attacks on the Gospels had on other occasions attacked Judaism with equal vehemence. Why would Jews want to associate with such people? The needs of the hour, however, took precedence over due caution. As had been true in the Middle Ages and in eighteenth century Germany, Jews risked temporary alliances with outcast dissenting Christians for the sake of their more urgent battle against onslaughts from mainstream missionaries. In times of religious war, polemics made strange bedfellows.²³

Jews stood on safer terrain when they employed a third kind of theological polemic, one that might be called Mendelssohnian or even antipolemical. These works invoked the spirit of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and his letter to Lavater, both of which were known in America, and they professed a "disinclination to enter into religious controversy" of any sort. Isaac Leeser, a leading Jewish minister, editor, and publicist in the antebellum period, employed this type of argument in his *The Jews and the Mosaic Law* (1834) and *The Claims of the Jews to an Equality of Rights* (1841). In both volumes he condemned Christian missionaries without specifically attacking Christianity itself. Though his later synagogue discourses were at times full of theological polemics, Leeser in these early works acknowledged and praised the kind treatment he had received at non-Jewish hands. If only Jews could disabuse their neighbors of "any unfounded suspicions they might be induced to adopt concerning us," he mused, conversionist efforts might lose public support.²⁴ Leeser did his best

²¹ An Israelite [George Houston], *Israel Vindicated; Being a Refutation of the Calumnies Propagated Respecting the Jewish Nation* (New York, 1820), 30; Sarna, "The Freethinker, the Jews and the Missionary," 105–06. Abraham De Sola republished George Bethune English's work in 1852, and readers were urged to buy it in *Occident*, 11 (Sept. 1853), 324. For Wise, see Heller, *Isaac M. Wise*, 641; and *Israelite*, 12 (1866), 396.

²² Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York, 1971), 30–42; see also John Webb Pratt, *Religion, Politics, and Diversity: The Church-State Theme in New York History* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1967), 121–57.

²³ Hertzberg, *French Enlightenment and the Jews*, 268–313; Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700–1933* (Cambridge, 1980), 23–33; S. Ettinger, "Jews and Judaism as Seen by English Deists of the Eighteenth Century" [in Hebrew], *Zion*, XXIX (no. 3–4, 1964), 182–207; Moshe Pelli, "The Impact of Deism on the Hebrew Literature of the Enlightenment in Germany," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, XXIV (Autumn 1973), 127–46; David Berger, "Christian Heresy and Jewish Polemic in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Harvard Theological Review*, 68 (July–Oct. 1975), 287–303; Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 164–65.

²⁴ Moses Mendelssohn, "Letter to Johann Casper Lavater," in *Disputation and Dialogue*, ed. Talmage, 266; Isaac Leeser, *The Claims of the Jews to an Equality of Rights* (Philadelphia, [1841]), 4, 8–13, 92–97; Isaac Leeser, *The Jews and the Mosaic Law* (Philadelphia, [1834]), 228; *Occident*, 9 (1852) supplement, iii–xx, 1–115; *Israelite*, 1(1854), 132–33; and, for a later example, *Sabbath Visitor*, 22 (1893), 324. More generally, see Bertram Wallace Korn, "German-Jewish Intellectual Influences on American Jewish Life, 1824–1972," in *Tradition and Change in Jewish Experience*,

to educate Christians, but as a strategy his proved thoroughly unsuccessful—which perhaps led him to abandon it in later years. By not challenging Christian arguments, he had unwittingly opened himself to the charge of being unable to challenge them. Missionaries claimed victory by default.²⁵

The failure of the Mendelssohnian approach points up a more general dilemma that American Jews met in their missionary encounters. If they ignored missionaries, they faced charges of cowardice or tacit acquiescence. If, on the other hand, they debated missionaries, they risked angering and offending all Christians, even those with whom they had established social relations. Civil society frowned on religious disputations. It viewed Jews who undertook them as medieval, insular, and intolerant. It made no provisions, however, for how Jews should respond when attacked. Jews did not know either.²⁶

By the end of the nineteenth century, some Jews had found a way out of this dilemma. They employed special antimissionary crusaders, like Adolph Benjamin, who defended Judaism with all necessary weapons. These crusaders scorned civility and accepted on their own heads the "medieval taint." Meanwhile, the wealthy, socially active Jews who secretly supported them—men like the banker Jacob Schiff—could proclaim themselves progressively modern and thoroughly tolerant.²⁷ The compromise may look hypocritical. In fact, it was an effort by some Jews to assimilate socially while simultaneously holding fast to their Jewish identities. The result was ambivalence: manners went one way, money the other.

Historical polemics, those that dealt with the medieval and modern worlds rather than with the biblical one, proved less risky than theological disputes. Furthermore, Jews' relative success in America made these polemics particularly effective. To view the Jewish experience, as many Christians had, as a "tedious succession of oppressions and persecutions" or as "a standing monument of the truth of the christian religion"²⁸ did not square with obvious facts of American Jewish history. "In this country," as Tobit pointed out, "a Jew is equally as proud a man as a Christian . . . [nor] is it incompetent for a

ed. A. Leland Jamison (Syracuse, N.Y., 1978), 106–40; and Maxine S. Seller, "Isaac Leeser: A Jewish-Christian Dialogue in Antebellum Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania History*, XXXV (July 1968), 231–42.

²⁵ See the bound compendium of issues from *The Jew*, S. H. Jackson, ed., *The Jew; Being a Defence of Judaism against All Adversaries, and Particularly against the Insidious Attacks of Israel's Advocate* (New York, 1824), vii. "In the present enlightened age, not to defend Judaism, would be considered a tacit acknowledgment that it was indefensible, or at least that we thought so."

²⁶ For this theme in a different context, see John Murray Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (New York, 1974), 13–14.

²⁷ Eichhorn, *Evangelizing the American Jew*, 178–80.

²⁸ Hannah Adams, *The History of the Jews from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Nineteenth Century* (2 vols., Boston, 1812), I, iii, iv. See *Christian Disciple*, IV (Aug. 1816), 250; Blau and Baron, eds., *Jews of the United States*, I, 88–89; Anita Libman Lebeson, "Hannah Adams and the Jews," *Historia Judaica*, VIII (Oct. 1946), 113–34; and C. Conrad Wright, "Hannah Adams," *Notable American Women: 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (3 vols., Cambridge, 1971), I, 9–11. Hannah Adams's view of Jewish history can be traced back to Jacques Basnage. See Hertzberg, *French Enlightenment and the Jews*, 47.

Jew to be the first magistrate, the President of these United States."²⁹ It followed that past persecutions were not divinely inspired at all, but rather the products of human intolerance. While Christians blamed Jewish intransigence and God's wrath for medieval persecutions, Jews blamed the church "whose principles, condensed into a small compass, appear to be, all who are one way are legitimized; all not are cut off."³⁰ Jews and Christians agreed on the basic facts of medieval Jewish history; only their interpretations differed.

For a while, Jews had more trouble when Christians pointed to the Jewish diaspora as proof of divine wrath, an argument easily buttressed by Jewish sources. In the late nineteenth century, however, Jews, particularly Reform Jews, provided an answer for this claim as well: "We do not look upon this dispersion as a curse; on the contrary, we regard it as a blessing—a blessing for you and all mankind." This account viewed the diaspora as God's means of spreading his message to the world. Far from being a cursed figure, the wandering Jew had been transformed into a hero: an authentic Jewish missionary.³¹

Jewish historical polemics depended on Jewish current events. The more Jews succeeded, the easier it was to claim that God still loved his people Israel and had never rejected them. In boasting of their success, however, Jews sometimes overstated their case—disastrously. Such claims as "there are upwards of seven millions of Jews, known to be in existence, throughout the world; a number greater than at any period of our history; and possessing more wealth, activity, influence and talents than any body of people of their number on earth" provided grist for the anti-Semite's mill. The same claims to power which negated an old stereotype—"the ever-persecuted Jew"—confirmed a new one—"the all-powerful Jew." Polemics had Jews caught in a double-bind.³²

As a result, some Jews reworded this argument and substituted a new phrase: "the accepted Jew." Prestige replaced power as a mark of success. The new answer to the myth of the accursed, wandering Jew was a proud, well-mannered and well-groomed Jew who "enjoy[ed] excellent social positions."³³

Historical polemics based on Christian history posed considerably less danger and shifted the argument to the enemy's turf. Consequently, Jews

²⁹ *Tobit's Letters to Levi*, 55. Christians themselves realized that "America was different," but this had little bearing on their arguments. See *Israel's Advocate*, I (Feb. 1823), 29; American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, *Interesting Documents* [New York, 1822], 11; and Aaron Bancroft, *A Discourse Delivered before the Worcester Auxiliary Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, April 28, 1824* (Worcester, Mass., 1824), 11.

³⁰ "Honestus," *A Critical Review of the Claims Presented by Christianity for Inducing Apostacy in Israel* (New York, 1852), 30.

³¹ Bernhard Felsenthal, *The Wandering Jew: A Statement to a Christian Audience, of the Jewish View of Judaism* (Chicago, 1872), 5. Cf. Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "Galut," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (16 vols., Jerusalem, 1971), VII, 275–94. See also Max Wiener, "The Conception of Mission in Traditional and Modern Judaism," *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Sciences*, II–III (1947–1948), 9–24.

³² Abraham Collins, *The Voice of Israel, Being a Review of Two Sermons Preached in the City of New York* (New York, 1823), 20. See also "Honestus," *Critical Review*, 21; and Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 122.

³³ Felsenthal, *Wandering Jew*, 4.

employed them as often as possible. A hardy perennial, deeply rooted in medieval disputations, was the proof from world events. Writers on this theme borrowed liberally from Troki's list of twenty "prophecies which are unfulfilled, and are yet to come to pass in the days of the expected Messiah." These included everything from "the ingathering of the Ten Tribes" and "the rise of Gog and Magog" to "peace and harmony" and the rebuilding of the temple. Dias Fernandes reprinted these unfulfilled prophecies in their entirety, with full attribution. Others reduced them to their barest essence: "great events are contingent on the appearance of the Messiah which have not yet been realized."³⁴ In either case, Jews forced missionaries to respond. Without explicitly saying so, they warned that missions could ultimately backfire, as Christians exposed to Jewish arguments began to question their own faith.

Similarly well rooted in the past was the argument from Christian divisions. A variety of denominations missionized simultaneously among American Jews, each claiming truth for its own views. Noah and other Jews posed the obvious question: "how are we to choose?" The question was rhetorical. Since Christians "contradict each other on vital principles and condemn each other most recklessly," Jews like Wise argued that they were better off keeping to their own firmly held convictions. Wise suggested, as others had before him, that Christianity put its own house in order before daring to venture into Jewish-held territory.³⁵

In this defensive strategy Jews did not merely refer to Christian divisions. Being thoroughly familiar with the Christian scene, they knew, in Leeser's words, of "multitudes in America who never enter a church, who never have been in Sunday School, who never had a preacher's voice reaching their ears."³⁶ Jews urged missionaries to attend to these unfortunates and to leave them alone. In some cases, though not that of Wise, they even supported Christian foreign missions and Bible societies. They did not care where the Christian army marched, so long as it kept out of Jewish domains.³⁷

Jews trumpeted two other Christian problems. In these cases, however, they aimed not to deflect Christianity, but rather to demonstrate its waning influence in order to deter potential newcomers from signing up. First, they pointed to the "rapid progress of Unitarianism." To Abraham Collins this indicated the indubitable quality of Unitarian arguments and the abiding power

³⁴ [Isaac Troki], *Faith Stengthened*, trans. Moses Mocatta (New York, 1970), 32–36; Dias Fernandes, *Series of Letters*, 250–58; *New York Sunday Times and Noah's Weekly Messenger*, April 14, 1850, p. 2. See also Collins, *Voice of Israel*, 80.

³⁵ M. M. Noah, *Discourse on the Restoration of the Jews: Delivered at the Tabernacle, Oct. 28 and Dec. 2, 1844* (New York, 1845), 27; F. C. Gilbert, *From Judaism to Christianity and Gospel Work among the Hebrews* (Concord, Mass., 1911), 85; *Israelite*, 1 (1854), 36; *ibid.*, 4 (1857), 4. See also M. M. Noah in *New York Evening Star*, June 14, 1836, p. 2; Isidor Kalisch, *A Guide for Rational Inquiries into the Biblical Writings* (Cincinnati, 1857), ix; [Houston], *Israel Vindicated*, 9; Leeser, *Claims of the Jews*, 14.

³⁶ *Occident*, 3 (May 1845), 99. See also *ibid.*, 6 (May 1848), 101; *Israelite*, 3 (1856), 172.

³⁷ Abraham Collins, "Introduction," to John Oxlee, *Three Letters Humbly Submitted . . . on the Inexpediency and Futility of Any Attempt to Convert the Jews to the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia 1843), ii; Mordecai M. Noah, *Travels in England, France, Spain, and the Barbary States, in the Years 1813–14 and 15* (New York, 1819), 56; Noah, *Discourse Delivered at the Consecration of the Synagogue*, 43; S. M. Isaacs in *London Voice of Jacob*, Aug. 4, 1853, p. 214B.

of its reason—as contrasted with that of the missionaries. To the typically more exuberant Noah, the same evidence showed broader influences at work, ones that might ultimately lead to the reunification of Christianity with Judaism—largely on Jewish terms. Both men thought that Unitarianism was on the rise and evangelical Protestantism on the decline. Neither hesitated to exploit this “fact” for its polemical possibilities. After the Civil War this argument largely died. Unitarianism became a threat to Judaism, luring away those on the fringes of the Reform movement.³⁸ But there remained another sign of weakness for Jews to exploit: Christian conversions to Judaism.

The fact that Christian conversions to Judaism took place at all in early America is remarkable. In England, through most of the nineteenth century, synagogues refused to accept proselytes because of fear of popular, clerical, and government reaction. Where converts found acceptance, as in Holland, nobody boasted about them. Jews rather took pride in their lack of evangelical zeal. They made a positive virtue of historical necessity and stressed the ethnic aspects of the faith.³⁹ Logically, however, no Jewish argument had better polemical potential than proselytism. Converts demonstrated that Judaism was a vibrant religion, one worth leaving Christianity to join. Why then, Jews asked, should anyone want to leave Judaism? By no coincidence, Christians often trumpeted Jewish conversions for the opposite reason: to stimulate backsliding Christians.

The centuries-old taboo on discussing proselytization did not break easily. Strategic considerations, however, finally won out. Jackson admitted in *The Jew* to having on file “a score or more” names of converts to Judaism. He revealed no particulars. Leiser also overcame early hesitations. By 1844 he justified reports of proselytization as an “offset to the occasional apostasy of Jews to Christianity.” Wise hardly hesitated at all. He enjoyed taunting missionaries with tales of proselytization and went so far as to inform his readers that if non-Jews mastered his *Essence of Judaism*, he would consider their “confessions.” Unfortunately, we have no record of how many confessions he heard. At least one missionary, however, sadly admitted that conversions of Gentiles to Judaism were “not uncommon.”⁴⁰

The argument from proselytization stands as one of American Jewry's most original and important contributions to counter-missionary polemics. Its significance lies primarily in its daring. By trumpeting conversions, American Jews insisted on their right to battle Christianity on equal terms—no holds barred. If Christians could convert Jews, Jews could convert Christians.

³⁸ Collins, *Voice of Israel*, iv; Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 131; Benny Kraut, “Judaism Triumphant: Isaac Mayer Wise on Unitarianism and Liberal Christianity,” unpublished typescript, 1980 (American Jewish Archives), 49.

³⁹ “Proselytes,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XIII, 1182–93; Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *Conversion to Judaism: From the Biblical Period to the Present* (Cincinnati, 1978), 67–89.

⁴⁰ *The Jew*, I (Dec. 1823), 222; *ibid.*, II (April 1824), 294; *Occident*, 2 (July 1844), 216; *Israelite*, 12 (1868), 76; *Israelite Indeed*, 7 (March 1864), 213. For other examples, see *Occident*, 3 (May 1845), 42; *ibid.*, 6 (Dec. 1848), 456–67; *ibid.*, 8 (May 1850), 59; *Israelite*, 3 (1856), 52, 412; *ibid.*, 6 (1860), 210, 259; *ibid.*, 9 (1863), 220. For comparable Catholic arguments, see Aaron I. Abell, ed., *American Catholic Thought on Social Questions* (Indianapolis, 1968), xvi–xvii, 13, 14.

Religious liberty, according to this view, meant nothing less than religious anarchy. All sects had the right to fight among themselves for new members. The same "voluntary system" that permitted Protestant denominations to compete with one another, and permitted Catholics to make converts, must allow Jews to proselytize as well.⁴¹

Earlier, some Jews had propounded a different view. *Israel Vindicated* considered missions to American Jews "contrary to the true spirit and meaning of the constitution." Leeser used a similar phrase, arguing that it was "contrary to the spirit of the constitution of the country for the many to combine to do the smallest minority the injury of depriving them of their conscientious conviction by systematic efforts."⁴² According to this understanding of the First Amendment, all sects, Christian and non-Christian, had the right to exist unmolested and unmissionized. The "spirit of the constitution," however, never became enshrined into law. By the mid-1840s at the latest, most American Jews realized this. They understood that they had to fight missionaries, and they proceeded to do so with all means at their disposal.

Polemics formed only one means of countering missionaries. They covered a broad range of subjects—often borrowing arguments from both theology and history—and they aimed at a wide variety of audiences. Still, something was missing. Missions aroused the deepest of passions in American Jews: intellectual arguments, no matter how forceful, did not give them vent. Jews needed a vituperative outlet, a place where they could rage, roar, and respond with feeling. They employed for this purpose their Jewish newspapers.

Angry rebuttals consumed many pages of the Jewish press. *The Jew* specialized in point-by-point refutations of the melioration society's missionary sheet, *Israel's Advocate*. Leeser, who promised in the first issue of the *Occident* to keep "a watchful eye" on missionaries, picked his targets more selectively. He once devoted six passionate pages to a minute examination of the thirty-sixth annual report of the London Society for Promoting Christianity in order to prove that the magnitude of the society's expenses stood in stark contrast to the insignificance of its achievements. On other occasions, he found friends and relatives eager to watch missionaries for him. They furiously denied the alleged deathbed conversions of such people as Charleston's "Dr. D" (De La Motta) and Savannah's "Miss H."⁴³ Perhaps Leeser's greatest coup came in 1853 when Rabbi E. Marcussohn personally took to the *Occident's* columns to refute missionary claims of his conversion. The private record suggests that Marcussohn, a heavy drinker, may not have been nearly so innocent as he maintained. In the antimissionary battle, however, propaganda

⁴¹ The *London Voice of Jacob*, Sept. 29, 1843, p. 7B, viewed American Jews' daring with trepidation, and hoped "that forbearance will continue to characterize the English Jews." Anglo-Jewish passivity was attacked in *Israelite*, 3 (1856), 147.

⁴² [Houston], *Israel Vindicated*, v; *Occident*, 3 (May 1845), 42. See also *New York Evening Post*, March 15, 1829, p. 2.

⁴³ *The Jew*, 1 (Nov. 1823), 191; *Occident*, 7 (July 1849), 223; *ibid.*, 2 (Aug. 1844), 255–56; *ibid.*, 4 (Oct. 1846), 355–57. Cf. (New York) *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 (Nov. 1846), 142, (May 1847), 346.

needs took precedence over fine points of fact. Leeser and his readers enjoyed their victory.⁴⁴

No editor vented more rage at missionaries than Wise. He considered it a "sacred duty" to expose missionaries' "rascality" and wasted no opportunity to catch them at their "lying." Wise's passionate diatribes, however, by no means confined themselves to defensive rebuttals. By his own admission, he assumed the role of "malicious, biting, pugnacious, challenging, and mocking monster of the pen." His "peeps into the missionary efforts" conveniently summarize the major accusations made against missionaries by large numbers of Jews throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁵

Bribery and fraud held pride of place in Wise's standard litany of charges. Hypocrisy, deception, impertinence, imposition, laziness, immorality, and false piety rounded out the sordid picture. When Wise opened his columns to a non-Jew, Theodore Norman, the message did not change. Norman dutifully revealed that missionaries "deceive, cheat and impose on mankind in general."⁴⁶ A single aim underlay all of these charges: the desire to prove missionaries depraved. If Christians considered them miscreants—evil, immoral, and corrupt—then they might refuse them support. They might even succumb to fallacious logic by deciding that the quality of missionary arguments was no better than the quality of the missionaries themselves. By the same token, if Jews considered them miscreants, then they would have more reason than ever to battle against them. They could rest secure that in opposing missionaries they were patriotically working to bring about moral reform.

Mighty as American Jewish pens were in the battle against missionaries, they still could not substitute for concrete actions. Christians, after all, had foot soldiers, tracts, institutions, and funding on their side. Jews needed to respond with more than printed words alone. And they did. At the most passive level, they attempted to talk with missionaries—especially the converts among them—hoping to show them the errors of their way. Occasionally this succeeded, and converts returned.⁴⁷ Most often, however, the tactic backfired. Reports of the conversations would appear in the missionary press as evidence that Jews had begun to "see the light." When he realized this, Leeser urged his

⁴⁴ *Occident*, 10 (Oct. 1852), 352–60; E. R. McGregor to Isaac Leeser, Oct. 5, 1852, Dec. 6, 1852, microfilm 200, Isaac Leeser Papers (American Jewish Archives); C. D. Oliver to Leeser, Oct. 20, 1853, *ibid.*; S. Cellner to Leeser, Aug. 23, 1852, *ibid.*; E. Marcussohn to Leeser, Jan. 1, 1853, *ibid.*; Stephen A. Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937* (Toronto, 1979), 26–27.

⁴⁵ *Israelite*, 4 (1858), 237; Isaac M. Wise, *Reminiscences*, trans. David Philipson (New York, 1973), 273; Isaac Mayer Wise "The World of My Books," trans. Albert H. Friedlander, in *Critical Studies in American Jewish History: Selected Articles from American Jewish Archives*, ed. Jacob R. Marcus, (3 vols., Cincinnati, 1971), I, 173–75; Heller, *Isaac M. Wise*, 652–57. See also Samuel Sandmel, "Isaac Mayer Wise's 'Jesus Himself,'" in *Essays in American Jewish History: To Commemorate the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Jewish Archives under the Direction of Jacob Rader Marcus* (New York, 1975), 325–58.

⁴⁶ *Israelite*, 1 (1854), 36; *ibid.*, 3 (1856), 12, 268; *ibid.*, 5 (1859), 302. For the Theodore Norman exposés, see *ibid.*, 1 (1854), 39, 52, 68. Leeser employed proselyte Warder Cresson for a similar purpose. See *Occident*, 6 (Dec. 1858), 456–60.

⁴⁷ (New York) *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 (June 1847), 370; *Israelite Indeed*, 1 (July 1857), 7–8; *Israelite*, 10 (1864), 347.

readers to desist from conversations: "refrain from holding intercourse in any measure with these renegadoes." Many Jews apparently heeded his call. Missionaries increasingly reported finding Jews uncooperative and unwilling to open their doors.⁴⁸

Snubbing may have functioned as a form of Jewish passive resistance to missionaries. Still, Jews yearned for more active strategies—ones that promised to have far greater impact. Back in the 1820s, Noah intimidated the melioration society by appearing at their annual meetings. His presence, eloquent in its silence, served as indubitable public testimony of missionary failure. In 1843, Joseph Simpson attempted to invoke the president's aid against the melioration society. He asked John Tyler to censure Gen. Winfield Scott for presiding at a missionary conference while on the public payroll. Tyler, who considered the matter a private one, refused.⁴⁹ A few Jews may have found other creative or political means of frustrating the hated missionary, but the average Jew could not always control his feelings. He viewed missionaries, especially if they were converts, as traitors and provocateurs, yet found no one in government interested in protecting him. So he lashed out on his own. In most cases, situations did not develop beyond the stage of malicious language and angry threats. At that point missionaries generally left the scene. As early as 1864, however, a stone-throwing incident took place at the New York City Mission School. More serious and widespread violence and rioting came later, in the 1890s, after the immigrant population grew and missionaries opened up conversionist centers in ghetto storefronts.⁵⁰

Jewish leaders never encouraged antimissionary violence. They feared for the Jewish image and for Jews' acceptance into civil society. They also understood, however vaguely, that in the long run defensive actions—those aimed at strengthening the Jewish community internally—held far more promise of solving the missionary problem once and for all. Leading Jews preferred analysis to violence. They studied missionary successes to learn where their own society had failed. They saw how missionaries met needs that the Jewish community had ignored. Then, they imitated missionaries in order to defeat them. They created Jewish functional alternatives to missionary activities—alternatives that would keep Jews firmly within the fold.⁵¹

The most obvious weaknesses pointed up by pre-Civil War missionaries were Jewish ignorance and communal disunity. Before the rise of the meliora-

⁴⁸ *Occident*, 7 (July 1849), 223. Cf. *ibid.*, 1 (April 1843), 43–47; (New York) *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 (Dec. 1844), 142; *Israelite Indeed*, 2 (Dec. 1858), 125.

⁴⁹ Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 56–57; N. Taylor Phillips, "Items Relating to the History of the Jews of New York," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, 11 (1903), 158–59.

⁵⁰ Notices of violence include, (New York) *Jewish Chronicle* 1 (Aug. 1844), 43, (Jan. 1845), 177, (April 1845), 270, 274–75, (May 1845), 306; *ibid.*, 4 (May 1848), 336; *ibid.*, 8 (Aug. 1851), 45; *Israelite*, 2 May 24, 1868, p. 4; *Israelite Indeed*, 8 (July 1864), 10–11; Church Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, *Annual Report*, 1 (1879), 24; *New York Evening Post*, June 17, 1899, in *Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870–1925*, ed. Allon Schoener (New York, 1967), 63–65. See also Speisman, *Jews of Toronto*, 131–44; R. Gruneir, "The Hebrew-Christian Mission in Toronto," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, IX (no. 1, 1977), 18–28.

⁵¹ The contrast to the situation in Germany is striking; see Eleonore Sterling, "Jewish Reaction to Jew-Hatred in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, III (1958), 103–21.

tion society, the Jewish community had no newspaper, no certified rabbi, few textbooks, and no central leader. All of this changed once missionaries began their work. Within months of the appearance of their *Israel's Advocate*, *The Jew* rose up to answer it. Though neither lasted more than a few years, a pattern was set. In 1843, it repeated itself: the missionaries issued the *Jewish Chronicle*; Leeser responded with his *Occident*. Leeser may have been planning his newspaper for some time and for different reasons. The missionary challenge, however, transformed his ideas into action. From the very beginning the two periodicals functioned, in Leeser's words, as "two such little planets revolving around their peculiar axis, the former to malign Jews and to report all their faults and apostacies, the latter to be in a measure their *advocate* and to reprove without hesitation and reserve when errors and wrongs are discovered."⁵²

The *Occident* benefited the Jewish community in two ways: it drew disparate settlements together, and it armed Jews with the kinds of information they needed to rebut missionary claims. The periodical could not substitute, however, for the textbooks, tracts, and English-language Bibles that missionaries provided Jews for free. Jews needed educational volumes of their own, and, thanks largely to the work of Leeser, these volumes came into being. Leeser personally translated into English catechisms, readers, even the Bible, and what he did not do himself, he urged others do do. The resulting books always mirrored Christian ones in form and style. But though outwardly the same, they differed in content. In a sense, this is symbolic of all Jewish counter-missionary activities: outwardly Jews conformed, inwardly they maintained their identity.⁵³

The American Jewish Publication Society (1845–1851) expanded on Leeser's work, but kept only adult needs in mind. Rather than textbooks, the society printed popular literature—exclusively the kind, however, that challenged "the secret attacks and open assaults by specious arguments of those whose darling object is to break down the landmarks of Judaism." The society's first book, *Caleb Asher*, typifies the rest: it was an antimissionary satire.⁵⁴

Other developments in the antebellum Jewish community—the publication of new books and periodicals, the creation of Jewish schools, hospitals, and synagogues, the appointment of foreign rabbis to be American religious

⁵² *Occident*, 6 (Oct. 1848), 362. Cf. *ibid.*, 1 (April 1843), 43–44; and (New York) *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 (July 1844), 1. The *Jewish Chronicle* appeared in a newsletter format before 1844. Leeser issued a prospectus for the *Occident* in 1842. See Nathan M. Kaganoff, "Supplement III: Judaica Americana Printed before 1851," in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honor of I. Edward Kiev*, ed. Charles Berlin (New York, 1971), 193.

⁵³ Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in Nineteenth Century America* (Philadelphia, 1963), 34–64; Hyman B. Grinstein, "In the Course of the Nineteenth Century," in *A History of Jewish Education in America*, ed. Judah Pilch (New York, 1969), 25–50; Lloyd P. Gartner, ed., *Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History* (New York, 1969), 50–79. For a related problem, see Lloyd P. Gartner, "Temples of Liberty Unpolluted: American Jews and Public Schools, 1840–1875," in *Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Korn, 157–89.

⁵⁴ *Occident*, 2 (Jan. 1845), 511–14; *Caleb Asher* (Philadelphia, 1845). See also Davis, *Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, 51–53, 367–69; and Solomon Grayzel, "The First American Jewish Publication Society," *Jewish Book Annual*, 3 (1944–45), 42–44.

leaders, and the drafting of plans for Jewish colonies in America and Palestine—also relate to the missionary challenge.⁵⁵ In each case, other motivating factors were at work, particularly the growth of Jewish immigration. "The activity and missionary zeal of all the [Protestant] sects," however, always played a part in Jewish planning.⁵⁶ Indeed, the conversionist threat frequently proved the decisive argument—the one that convinced thrifty Jews to contribute their hard-earned money.

The only weapon that Jews refused to employ in their anticonversionist war was the missionary weapon itself. Leeser, imitating "the activity and the missionary zeal of all the sects which surround us," once called for "Israelites of every degree to become missionaries," but only to carry the good tidings to "the bosom of their own families, to their neighbors, to their friends"—not, apparently, to Christians. A decade later, he suggested the creation of a Jewish missionary organization for the same purpose.⁵⁷ Leeser also advocated a Hebrew Foreign Mission Society aimed at sending Jews to China and "other quarters of the globe" that required "the presence of enlightened Israelites" to ward off "Christian soldiers." The philanthropist Judah Touro willed this society \$5,000 in capital, and Julius Eckman, followed by the traveler I. J. Benjamin, agreed to undertake the arduous journey. In the end, however, no missionaries ever set out. Apathy, internal squabbling, charges that the society acted "contrary to Judaism," and the outbreak of Civil War brought the whole Jewish foreign missionary enterprise to a premature conclusion.⁵⁸

After the Civil War, Jewish missions never received serious consideration. "Missionizing" became something that Christians did and Jews did not do.⁵⁹ Otherwise, the antebellum dynamic remained the same. Missionaries probed

⁵⁵ *Occident*, 1 (December 1843), 411; Hyman B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654–1860* (Philadelphia, 1945), 156, 234, 386; S. Joshua Kohn, "Mordecai Manuel Noah's Ararat Project and the Missionaries," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LV (Dec. 1965), 162–96; S. Joshua Korn, "New Light on Mordecai Manuel Noah's Ararat Project," *ibid.*, LIX (Dec. 1969), 210–14; Allan Tarshish, "Jew and Christian in a New Society: Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Relationships in the United States, 1848–1881," in *Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Korn, 565–87; Allan Tarshish, "The Rise of American Judaism (A History of American Jewish Life from 1848 to 1881)" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College, 1938), 321–83.

⁵⁶ *Occident*, 2 (May 1844), 63.

⁵⁷ *Occident*, 2 (May 1844), 63; *ibid.*, 11 (Aug. 1853), 245. Cf. *Israelite*, Aug. 23, 1867, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Occident*, 10 (March 1853), 583; *ibid.*, 11 (May 1853), 83–84, (June 1853), 180–84, (Aug. 1853) 275–76, (Nov. 1853), 409–13, (Jan. 1854), 510–15, (March 1854), 597; *ibid.*, 18 (June 7, 1860), 66, (June 14, 1860), 71, (June 26, 1860), 108; *Asmonean*, 7 (Jan. 14, 1853), 149, (March 11, 1853), 245, (March 18, 1853), 257; *Israelite*, 7 (1860), 14; Leon Huhner, *The Life of Judah Touro (1775–1854)* (Philadelphia 1946), 172; H. G. Reissner, "The German-American Jews (1800–1850)," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, X (1965), 105; Davis, *Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, 78–79; I. J. Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859–1862*, trans. Charles Reznikoff (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1956), I, 318–33; Gershon Greenberg, "A German-Jewish Immigrant's Perception of America, 1853–54," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LXVII (June 1978), 338; and Michael Pollak, *Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries: The Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire* (Philadelphia, 1980), 176–86.

⁵⁹ *Israelite Indeed*, 12 (July 1868), 10–16; Jacob J. Weinstein, *Solomon Goldman: A Rabbi's Rabbi* (New York, 1973), 267; Ida Cohen Selavan, "The Founding of Columbian Council," *American Jewish Archives*, XXX (April 1978), 32–33; Joseph R. Rosenbloom, "Intermarriage and Conversion in the United States," in *Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Korn, 496.

the underside of the Jewish community and uncovered areas of Jewish need. Alarmed Jews, in turn, probed the missionaries. Having learned about Jewish needs secondhand, they then proceeded to fill them. In so doing, they subverted the missionaries by imitation. The New York example is typical. Missionaries created schools, dispensaries, and ghetto charities designed to meet immigrant needs. This led to a Jewish survey of ghetto conditions. Ultimately, Jews created free schools, dispensaries, and philanthropies of their own.⁶⁰ And then the cycle began all over again.

By the end of the nineteenth century, missionaries actually posed only a petty threat to American Jewry. They continued to ply their trade, and American Jewry continued to battle them. But outsiders knew that widespread conversions would never take place. Eight decades of struggle had sensitized Jews to their own identities and past history. They had learned the value of education, organization, and leadership. They had even discovered how to use the missionary threat as a specter—an evil portent menacing enough to frighten the community into undertaking defensive actions, self-analyses, and constructive new projects. Occasionally, missionaries did succeed in luring a few troubled souls away. In the final analysis, however, their impact was precisely the opposite of what they intended.⁶¹ Instead of converting the American Jewish community, they helped transform it into a more cohesive and more secure body than it had ever been before.

⁶⁰ Alexander M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City* (New York, 1918), 54, 468–69; *Year Book of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1890–91* (Cincinnati, 1891), 122; Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 1962), 101, 107, 199; Lloyd P. Gartner, "The Jews of New York's East Side, 1890–1893," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LIII (March 1964), 264–81.

⁶¹ For what may have been the first understanding of this impact, see Isaac M. Wise, "Had a Contrary Effect," *Israelite*, 7 (1861), 300.