

## AMERICAN CHRISTIAN OPPOSITION TO MISSIONS TO THE JEWS—1816-1900\*

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### PRECIS

Christian opposition to missions to the Jews long predates the rise of the interfaith movement. This article focuses on two groups of nineteenth-century Christian opponents of missions to the Jews: those who objected because they opposed Christian missionary activities of every sort, and those who objected to missions aimed specifically at Jews but who supported other missionary endeavors. Also discussed are hitherto-unsuspected links between Jewish and Christian anti-missionary activists, links which at least in some cases seem to have rested on a basis of social intimacy. Finally, the broader implications of this data for understanding Jewish-Christian relations in the United States are explored—both in their formative period and later as well.

“The old order changes, giving way to the new”—so begins a recent interreligious bulletin entitled “Christian Mission and Jewish Witness.” Christian opposition to missions to the Jews seems in this context to be a thoroughly new development, a product of recent advances in interfaith relations. Christian theologians who have decried attempts at evangelization—Reinhold Niebuhr, Markus Barth, A. Roy Eckardt, James Parkes, Krister Stendahl, J. Coert Rylaarsdam, and others—are all part of this “new order.” Theirs is a quest not so much for new answers as for “new and evolving questions.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Face to Face: An Interreligious Bulletin*, vol. 3-4 (Fall-Winter, 1977), pp. 1-2; cf.

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However, at least in America, Christian opposition to missions to the Jews long predates the rise of the interfaith movement. As long ago as 1816, the year when organized Christian missions to American Jews began,<sup>2</sup> Christian voices rang out against them. Opposition from various Christian quarters continued throughout the nineteenth century—and made an impact. Nineteenth-century critics of Christian missions to American Jews employed arguments quite different from those of their modern successors, and much of what they said applied specifically to the United States, where religious freedom had become enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution. Still, the attitudes expressed by these nineteenth-century figures put the contemporary reconsideration of missions to the Jews—and likewise the efforts to understand the formative period of Jewish-Christian relations in the U.S.—in a new light. As will become clear, the “old order,” at least in America, was neither as monolithic nor as antisemitic as many imagine.

## I

Missions to American Jews developed during the Second Great Awakening as part of the general outpouring of religious benevolence that followed on the heels of the War of 1812. The American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, and a broad array of other societies aimed at social betterment sprang up at about the same time as the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews—the so-called “Jews’ Society”—and all alike were founded and supported by the same sorts of people. Support, however, was by no means unanimous. Indeed, a movement developed, now known as the anti-missionary movement, that encompassed those who for various and often quite divergent reasons feared the religious implications of benevolent societies and sought to stymie their progress. The precise make-up and motivations of this anti-missionary coalition have in recent years become the subject of a small-scale scholarly debate.<sup>3</sup> Suffice it to say here that the coalition embraced minority religious

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Frank E. Talmage, *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* (New York: KTAV, 1975), p. 380.

<sup>2</sup>David Max Eichhorn, *Evangelizing the American Jew* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David, 1978); Lorman Ratner, “Conversion of the Jews and Pre-Civil War Reform,” *American Quarterly* 13 (Spring, 1961): 43-54; and Robert M. Healey, “From Conversion to Dialogue: Protestant American Mission to the Jews in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *J.E.S.* 18 (Summer, 1981): 375-387, are the most important studies. For other works see Jonathan D. Sarna, “The American Jewish Response to Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions,” *Journal of American History* 68 (June, 1981): 36, n. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Larry Douglas Smith, in “The Historiography of the Origins of Anti-Missionism Examined in Light of Kentucky Baptist History” (Ph.D., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), summarizes and evaluates all the important literature, except for the recent and largely derivative discussion in John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 43-46, 83-84.

groups—Freethinkers, Unitarians, Universalists, and the like—as well as various frontier and rural denominations of Baptists, among them the Primitive Baptists, Regular Baptists, and Separate Baptists. What allied these groups, according to Gaylord P. Albaugh, was the fear that “a single denomination or group of denominations might conceivably become so powerful as to effect a practical union of Church and State despite constitutional guarantees to the contrary.” Anti-missionists opposed *all* benevolent societies organized on a national basis, whether they carried the word “missionary” in their title or not, because they viewed them as possible vehicles for unifying church and state at the expense of religious dissenters.<sup>4</sup>

Missions to the Jews served as an obvious target for these anti-missionary forces, since the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews was precisely the kind of national association that alarmed them. That Americans, citizens or immigrants, needed to have their condition “meliorated” by missionaries just because they did not share the majority’s faith was an idea that filled them with foreboding—no matter what they thought of Jews or Judaism. They thus joined the battle against the “Jews’ Society” from self-interest: the desire to keep their own minority religious bodies free from outside meddling.

The leading anti-missionary paper in America, *The Reformer* (1820-1835), published in Philadelphia by an eccentric and somewhat idiosyncratic Calvinist Baptist named Theophilus Ransom Gates, led the attack on missions to the Jews.<sup>5</sup> Beginning with its first volume, it ridiculed the “royal and splendid undertakings” of the missionaries, a phrase pregnant with unpatriotic allusions in a country so recently at war with the Crown, and proceeded to charge that conversionists betrayed “a total ignorance of the true nature of the gospel.” Gates, like most anti-missionaries, believed that nationally organized religious societies arrogated to human beings what was properly God’s. “The Lord, rest assured, will have the exclusive glory of converting that people,” he wrote. “Of this I have as full a conviction as of the truth of that declaration which God himself has made; *My glory will I not give to another.*”<sup>6</sup> In subsequent issues, *The Reformer* attacked “the two missionaries [Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons] who sailed from Boston some time since on a mission to Palestine.” It alleged that they acted merely “to be seen or to have glory of men,” though there was “no prospect” that they would ever “do much good.”<sup>7</sup> As for the American Society for Melio-

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<sup>4</sup>Gaylord P. Albaugh, “Anti-Missionary Movement in the United States,” in Vergilius T. A. Ferm, ed., *An Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945), pp. 27-28.

<sup>5</sup>The aim of *The Reformer* (“to expose the clerical schemes and pompous undertakings of the present day, under pretence of promoting religion, and to show why they are irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the Gospel”) is set forth in *The Telescope*, vol. 2 (February 11, 1826); on Gates (1787-1846), see Smith, “Historiography,” pp. 69, 73; and especially Byron C. Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Ayer Co. Publishers, 1980 [1957]), pp. iv, v, viii, 36, 153-226.

<sup>6</sup>*The Reformer*, vol. 1 (1820), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 215.

rating the Condition of the Jews, *The Reformer* charged that its plan for a colony of converts was "at variance with the providence of God," and concluded that "nearly all the conversions yet effected through the instrumentality of men, have proved only worthless."<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. C. F. Frey, the society's chief missionary to the Jews, came in for special condemnation for "draining money from the people," for lying about his past, and for the "schemes and intrigues he had adopted to carry his plans into effect."<sup>9</sup> Whenever it could find bad news about the "Jews' Society," whether newspaper attacks or reports of internal dissension in the society's ranks, *The Reformer* rushed them into print, convinced as it was that Frey and the society he represented were "perverting . . . charities and imposing upon the public."<sup>10</sup>

*The Reformer* was hardly alone in its struggle. A New York newspaper, *The Telescope*, likewise edited by an eccentric, Dr. Wooster Beach, a medical iconoclast, echoed many of its charges and frequently reprinted its columns. *The Telescope* sought both "to point out the various causes which prevent the progress of true piety, and to revive primitive Christianity."<sup>11</sup> To this end, it joined in attacks on the "Jews' Society," charging its board in general with "prejudice, bigotry, and carnality," and Joseph S. C. F. Frey in particular with being a "profligate," an allegation based on a book published in England by H. H. Norris. In addition, it reprinted attacks on the missionary society by one of its ex-employees, Erasmus Simon.<sup>12</sup> All things considered, it decided that "the Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews . . . appears to be more like a hoax than a reality."<sup>13</sup> It concluded, as *The Reformer* did, that "the Christian religion has been outraged and disgraced. . . . Unless these associations are speedily brought to an end or conducted under a different principle, and in a better manner, there will be very little true religion left remaining in the world."<sup>14</sup>

It must be emphasized that these anti-missionary writers—believers in predestination and scornful of new theological currents emphasizing "disinterested benevolence"<sup>15</sup>—displayed no special sympathy for Judaism as such, and they looked forward as eagerly as missionaries did to ultimate Jewish conversion. They refused, however, to employ human means to bring about conversion, for they believed that "all those who are sent by men, contrary to the directions given the apostles . . . will injure the cause of Zion, instead of promoting it."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., vol. 4 (1823), pp. 60-62.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., vol. 6 (1825), p. 168.

<sup>11</sup>*The Telescope*, vol. 1 (1824), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 41; vol. 2 (1825), pp. 43, 57, 69-70, 73. On Beach (1794-1868), see *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 2 (1929), pp. 85-86.

<sup>13</sup>*The Telescope*, vol. 2 (1825), p. 57.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>15</sup>On this concept, Samuel Hopkin's chief contribution to missionary theology, see Charles L. Chaney, *The Birth of Missions in America* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1976), pp. 80-84.

<sup>16</sup>*The Telescope*, vol. 1 (1824), p. 65.

They favored leaving Jews alone until God saw fit to bring them to the "truth," in God's own time and way.

Anti-missionary deists and freethinkers held to a quite different view. The "strong deistical feeling . . . apparent in the opposition made to missionary societies" that Isaac Candler observed in 1824<sup>17</sup> came from people who harbored no evangelical dreams and displayed no sympathy for Calvinist teachings. Nevertheless, they joined other anti-missionaries in condemning conversionist importunities. Ties between "infidel freethinkers" and religious dissenters have been explored elsewhere;<sup>18</sup> the cause of religious liberty, it seems, made strange bedfellows. My interest here is confined to *The Correspondent* (1827-1829), a leading New York freethought journal, replete with anti-clerical and anti-Christian articles, yet akin to religious anti-missionaries in its fear of church-state union and its attitudes toward Christian benevolent societies.<sup>19</sup> *The Correspondent's* editor, George Houston, is credited with having once ghost-written a leading Jewish anti-missionary tract entitled *Israel Vindicated* (1820). The incidental attacks there on missionary societies generally ("The money raised for Bible and Missionary Societies . . . becomes a source of profit to one part of the community, and the means of gratifying the vanity of another,"<sup>20</sup>) hardly "vindicated" Israel, but they did point up the ties binding disparate elements of the anti-missionary coalition together. The coalition united Christian believers with non-believers, setting both on the side of Jews and against those who made converting them their full-time occupation.

## II

While the anti-missionary coalition fought missions to the Jews as part of a larger struggle against organized Christian benevolence, others in nineteenth-century America restricted their opposition to Jewish missions alone. Whether for religious or secular reasons, they believed that Jews should be exempt from evangelization but that efforts directed at converting other groups—Indians, Asians, and the otherwise "unchurched"—deserved wholehearted support. Cotton Mather in the eighteenth century and some German Evangelical Anti-

<sup>17</sup>Isaac Candler, *A Summary View of America* (London, 1824), pp. 163-164.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Marty, *The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961), pp. 59-70; and Smith, "Historiography," pp. 68-73; cf. William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); and Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

<sup>19</sup>Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Freethinker, the Jews, and the Missionaries: George Houston and the Mystery of *Israel Vindicated*," *AJS Review*, vol. 5 (1980), pp. 101-114; for more recent literature on freethought, see Roderick S. French, "Elihu Palmer, Radical Deist, Radical Republican: A Reconsideration of American Free Thought," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 8 (1979), pp. 87-108.

<sup>20</sup>George Houston, *Israel Vindicated* (New York, 1820), p. 90.

semites in the twentieth espoused this kind of theory of Jewish exceptionalism on the grounds that Jews were eternally damned—and beyond salvation even if they did convert,<sup>21</sup> but in nineteenth-century America the reasons offered were quite different. A typical early view, published in Nathan Whiting's prestigious interdenominational religious newspaper, the *Religious Intelligencer*, under the heading "Thoughts Respecting the Jews," argued that the "millennial state of the church" was near and that Jews would soon "be restored again to the land of promise." Since, according to the author, this could only occur while Jews "remain Jews, not Christians," it followed that missionaries had "taken hold of the business of converting the Jews at the wrong end entirely." Jews should first be restored to the Holy Land so "that the prophecies may be fulfilled." Only afterwards "might missionaries travel and preach among them with success, and God have the glory." Those who now "labour much to christianize the Jews," the article concluded, were "doing the world an unspeakable injury." This idea—that Israel would be "gathered to Palestine in unbelief," and convert only later, after the millennial reign had been established—grew in popularity through the nineteenth century, and became, as we shall see, a principal justification for Evangelical support of Zionist efforts.<sup>22</sup>

Those less certain of when Jews would convert opposed missions to the Jews for different reasons. "Tobit," whose "Reply to the Narrative of Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey" (1816) seems to have been the first tract opposing Christian missions to the Jews written in America, thought "that if the time be ever to arrive when Jews are to be converted to this faith, that it is yet far distant." First, "Tobit" thought, Christianity had to put its own house in order. Although he did not oppose missions generally—indeed, he suggested to Frey that he would do better as a "missionary to Africans"—he was convinced that missions to the Jews, particularly when carried out by one whose character he found so ignoble, were foredoomed to fail.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>For Cotton Mather's view, adopted late in his life, that the conversion of the Jews should neither be expected nor attempted, since "circumcised infidels are not better than so many dogs" (quoted from Mather's *Tripardisus* [unpub.], XI, p. 27, on p. 50 of Mel Scult, *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties: A Study of the Effort to Convert the Jews in Britain up to the Mid-Nineteenth Century* [Leiden: Brill, 1978]), see Scult, *Millennial Expectations*, pp. 48-51. On the German Evangelicals, see Richard Gutteridge, *The German Evangelical Church and the Jews, 1879-1950* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1976).

<sup>22</sup>*Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 6 (1821), pp. 379-380; see the responses on pp. 429-430, 445-446. William E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming* (New York, Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908), p. 226, traced this view of restoration back to the Bible, Zeph. 2:1-2. For William Miller's views, see Ratner, "Conversion of the Jews," p. 48. Other nineteenth-century writings on this subject are reviewed in Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 4 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1954). See also notes 46-48, below.

<sup>23</sup>*Tobit's Letters to Levi; or, A Reply to the Narrative of Joseph Samuel C. F. Frey* (New York, 1816), pp. 36, 50. "Tobit's" identity remains a mystery. For similar later views, see John Oxlee, *Three Letters Humbly Submitted to the Consideration of . . . the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury . . . on the Inexpediency and Futility of any Attempt to Convert*

The view that missions to the Jews should be abandoned because they carried no hope for success found expression in 1831 in the learned Boston periodical, the *North American Review*. In the course of a lengthy review of H. H. Milman's *The History of the Jews*, the Unitarian writer William Bourn Oliver Peabody (not to be confused with his brother, Oliver William Bourn Peabody) went out of his way to condemn those who sought to convert Jews as if they were just the same as Godless heathens:

We must say that nothing seems so much like mockery as the attempts made to convert the Jews. This benevolent zeal assumes that they stand on the same ground as the heathen, a compliment neither deserved, nor likely to be gratefully received by such a people, and then employs as the instruments of their conversion, those who have deserted them to embrace Christianity, and who, of course, are least likely of all human beings, to gain their confidence or even attention. . . . How can the Jew be expected to embrace a faith which not only comes to him without any moral superiority in his eyes to his own, but has been the statute to which his persecutors have always appealed as their warrant for oppressing his race?<sup>24</sup>

Another Christian minister, writing under the name of "Ludwig" in the *New York Tribune*, carried Peabody's reasoning to its logical conclusion. Although he thought that "something may be done" to enlighten and convert Jews "in Mohammedan and Pagan countries," he considered all efforts aimed at evangelizing them in America to be "false—scandalously false." He called upon the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews to disband, suggesting that Christians might succeed better in converting Jews by "cultivating a good Christian literature; by applying more and more the doctrines of the Gospel to social questions; [and] by making the light of Christianity so much brighter and more cheerful than that of Judaism, that they may see it and walk in it."<sup>25</sup> Liberal and conservative Christians would use arguments similar to these down to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond.

Support for this position—favoring missions generally, opposing domestic missions to the Jews, and hoping nevertheless for Jewish conversion—emerges also from various secular nineteenth-century spokespersons, particularly those who wrote for the daily press. As a compromise position, at once pious yet tolerant, and acceptable to America's pluralistic religious tradition, while nevertheless offering Christianity a decided edge—in short, as a potential golden mean be-

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*the Jews to the Christian Faith* (London, 1842; Philadelphia, 1843), and the discussion in Abraham Gilam, *The Emancipation of the Jews in England, 1830-1860* (New York: Garland, 1982) pp. 26-28.

<sup>24</sup>*North American Review* 32 (January, 1831): 264.

<sup>25</sup>*New York Tribune*, May 12, 1848, in Lyons Scrapbook, American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, MA.

tween religious relativism and religious fanaticism—the position appears to have achieved considerable acceptance by the end of the nineteenth century.

Secular opposition to domestic missions to American Jews first found its way into various newspapers early in the nineteenth century. In the 1820's, Hezekiah Niles, himself a Quaker and editor of the influential and religiously unaffiliated *Niles' Weekly Register*, questioned the motives of converts ("about one-half of the converted return to the 'error of their ways' as soon as converting money is no longer to be had"<sup>26</sup>) and condemned the whole Jewish missionary enterprise as too expensive ("the making of a half-Christian out of a full Jew would render twenty poor and honest Christian families comfortable for a whole year"). He entertained serious doubts as to the propriety of domestic religious conversionism and seemed to believe that a hands-off policy was best: "Whether Jews convert Christians or Christians convert Jews what is it to us in this land of civil law and liberty?"<sup>27</sup> Other newspapers suggested that there were better targets than Jews. In 1848, the *New York Herald* concluded that "Christians have more need of conversion themselves than the Jews. 'Physician, heal thyself' is the best advice we can give them."<sup>28</sup> In the same year, the satirical *John Donkey* lampooned the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews for its hollow sanctimony, misuse of funds, and mistaken scale of values:

*John Donkey* . . . modestly rose up, and spoke of the distress at home, mentioned many families in his neighborhood, who were wanting the necessaries of life, remarked the advantage of ameliorating the conditions of the Five Points, and wound up with a desire that the funds be devoted for their particular brethren, whose condition, both morally and physically, demanded more attention than the Jews. Upon this an evident uproar was heard. One old lady, sternly called him "an atheist"—another indulged in some slight doubts where he might go to when he died . . . *John Donkey* walked out, determined to keep fast his sixpence.<sup>29</sup>

It was left, however, to the *New York Sunday Dispatch* to give voice, in 1848, to what we have called the "compromise position." The *Sunday Dispatch*, an independent family newspaper that espoused religious values without being sectarian, made clear that it favored missionary efforts to "heal the sick, feed the hungry, bind up the broken spirits of the earth, educate the ignorant, comfort the afflicted, pity the criminal, visit the prisoner, [and] lift up those who are

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in *The New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, July 24, 1826, in the collection of the American Jewish Historical Society.

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Isaac M. Fein, "Niles' Weekly Register on the Jews," in Abraham J. Karp, ed., *The Jewish Experience in America*, vol. 2 (Waltham, MA: American Jewish Historical Society, 1969), pp. 84-85. For similar doubts about "nominal converts" abroad, see James O. Noyes, "The Jews," *Knickerbocker*, vol. 53 (1859), pp. 46-47.

<sup>28</sup>*New York Herald*, May 14, 1848; cf. *New York American*, February 21, 1823.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in Rudolf Glanz, *The Jew in Early American Wit and Graphic Humor* (New York: KTAV, 1973), p. 81.

cast down." But it had only scorn for the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews on account of its having "accomplished next to nothing at all." It suggested that the Society was wasting its money and proposed "another direction to this benevolent organized intention, and that is to improve the condition of large numbers of persons who are already believers in the Christian faith, but who from a combination of unfavorable circumstances are no great credit to any faith or indeed to humanity." As for the Jews, they would "discover the Messiah in their own good time." When "every poor Christian brother" had become "an ornament to the faith," Jews would "begin seriously to look back to Nazareth," to find "the Messiah they have so long, so earnestly, so patiently sought."<sup>30</sup>

After the Civil War, missions to the Jews faced even more hostile press coverage. *The Nation* declared that "money given to the missions which work among a people whose ability and obstinacy are so well known . . . is money ill employed."<sup>31</sup> The *New York Sun* labelled one society for converting Jews "a useless and expensive organization."<sup>32</sup> The mass-circulation *New York Evening Journal* lectured missionaries that they had "no right to go around telling children that their parents are going to hell and trying to persuade children to give up the faith of their fathers."<sup>33</sup> Two recent comprehensive studies of late-nineteenth-century attitudes toward American Jews indicate that similar sentiments were being expressed nationwide.<sup>34</sup>

Efforts aimed at converting Jews thus met with considerable opposition at the same time that hopes that Jews would convert of their own accord found widespread support. This ambivalence reflected a broader ambivalence regarding the place of Jews in American society generally. On the one hand, most Americans gloried in the liberalism of their country's treatment of Jews, as distinguished from Europe's traditional bigotry; on the other hand, many wished this country to be thoroughly Christian in composition and character.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>[New York] *Sunday Dispatch*, May 14, 1848, in Lyons Scrapbook, American Jewish Historical Society.

<sup>31</sup>*Nation* 8 (May 6, 1869): 355.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in *American Israelite*, October 16, 1868.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted in Louis A. Mayo, "The Ambivalent Image: The Perception of the Jew in Nineteenth Century America" (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1977), p. 36.

<sup>34</sup>Mayo, "Ambivalent Image," pp. 34-37; Irving Weingarten, "The Image of the Jew in the American Periodical Press, 1881-1921" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1979), pp. 140-144.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Sidney Mead, "The Theology of the Republic and the Orthodox Mind," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (March, 1976): 105-113; and Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

## III

The existence of significant Christian opposition to missions to the Jews raises the question of mutual influence: to what extent did Jewish and Christian opponents of missions borrow from one another? I have already suggested in discussing *Israel Vindicated* (1820)—allegedly written by “an Israelite,” but attributed to freethinker George Houston, whose ideas are certainly reflected in the work—that Jewish and Christian religious dissenters of various sorts did interact and even joined together in an informal anti-missionary coalition. The evidence, however, extends much further. Missionary opponents, notwithstanding their varying and diverse religious beliefs, all adduced a variety of similar arguments, ranging from attacks on the character and sincerity of missionaries to charges of corruption to suggestions that Christians put their own house in order before going out to convert Jews.<sup>36</sup> Even more revealing is the charge in Solomon Jackson’s anti-missionary newspaper, *The Jew*, that conversionism was “a mere pretence” and that the “real object” of the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews was to establish Presbyterianism as the law of the land—an allegation not elsewhere found in Jewish sources and clearly borrowed whole from anti-missionary Baptists.<sup>37</sup> Nor was this the only Christian influence on Jewish polemics. Abraham Collins’s *Voice of Israel* (1823), for example, quoted, among others, George Bethune English’s *The Grounds of Christianity Examined By Comparing the New Testament with the Old* (1813), *Ecce Homo* by George Houston, and *Christianity Unveiled* by “Boulanger”—the latter two being in reality adaptations of works by the anti-Christian French Encyclopedist, Paul Henri Thiry baron d’Holbach.<sup>38</sup> Collins (or perhaps his son) also later reprinted the Rev. John Oxlee’s *Three Letters . . . On the Inexpediency and Futility of Any Attempt to Convert the Jews to the Christian Faith* (1843), an important English anti-missionary work composed by a philosemitic Anglican cleric.<sup>39</sup> A thorough study would no doubt reveal many additional examples of such borrowing.

For their part, various anti-missionary Christians seem also—though not to the same extent—to have come under the influence of Jews. The *Reformer* took

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<sup>36</sup>See Sarna, “The American Jewish Response.”

<sup>37</sup>*The Jew*, vol. 1 (1823), pp. 191-194; George L. Berlin, “Solomon Jackson’s *The Jew*: An Early American Jewish Response to the Missionaries,” *American Jewish History* 71 (September, 1981): 21, discusses this charge, but misses the context. Berlin is wrong in suggesting that the article was actually written by Jackson. For the Baptist view, see Lambert, *Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, pp. 23-43.

<sup>38</sup>Abraham Collins, *The Voice of Israel, Being a Review of Two Sermons Preached in the City of New York . . . Also, An Examination of the Principles and Effects of the Christian Religion* (New York, 1823), pp. 11, 70-74.

<sup>39</sup>On Oxlee, see note 23, above. In 1852, Rabbi Abraham de Sola reprinted George B. English’s *The Grounds of Christianity Examined by Comparing the New Testament with the Old* (Montreal, 1852); see Sarna, “American Jewish Response,” p. 41, n. 21.

notice of Jackson's *The Jew*, and at least on one occasion it quoted anti-missionary attacks by another "learned Jew."<sup>40</sup> *The Telescope* quoted Jewish opponents of missions, particularly the best known Jew then living in America, the journalist-politician Mordecai M. Noah.<sup>41</sup> "Tobit," who clearly knew Jews even more intimately, went further. "I have been acquainted with many [Jewish] families . . .," he told Joseph S. C. F. Frey, "and I have very frequently seen the Old and New Testament bound together [in their homes], as may any Christian who visits Jewish families in this city"—this a response to Frey's charge that few Jews knew "anything" of most of the sacred Scriptures. Based on personal observation, Tobit also denied Frey's charge that Jews lacked translated prayerbooks.<sup>42</sup>

In later years, of course, Jews and liberal Christians, particularly Unitarian opponents of missions to the Jews, often stood in intimate contact with one another, each side privately hoping that it would ultimately prevail, but meanwhile happy to cooperate with fellow liberals.<sup>43</sup> Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, for example, had several Christian acquaintances who joined in his attacks on conversionists.<sup>44</sup> The American Unitarian Association, for its part, gave wide distribution to Robert Laird Collier's sermon entitled "The Folly of Converting the Jews" (the sermon still hoped that Jews would come to "the true knowledge of Jesus Christ").<sup>45</sup> A Unitarian minister in 1893 actually invited Rabbi Gustav Gottheil of New York's prestigious Temple Emanu El to come and speak out against missionaries from the pulpit of his own church. "Bear your and our protest," he pleaded, doubtless aware of Gottheil's oratorical skill, "against the miserable business of Christian proselyting among the Jews."<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, then, Jewish and Christian opponents of missions did not press their arguments against missionizing in splendid isolation. Increasingly, throughout the nineteenth century they cooperated: joining forces occasionally, more often influencing one another, and usually mindful of the fact that, whatever their differences and their different motivations, they shared anti-missionary goals in common.

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<sup>40</sup>*The Reformer*, vol. 4 (1823), pp. 240, 256. One of the quotes is actually from the early pages of *Israel Vindicated*.

<sup>41</sup>*The Telescope*, vol. 1 (1824), p. 94; vol. 2 (1825), p. 70. On Noah, also see n. 47, below.

<sup>42</sup>*Tobit's Letters to Levi*, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup>Benny Kraut, "Judaism Triumphant: Isaac Mayer Wise on Unitarianism and Liberal Christianity," *AJS Review*, vols. 7-8 (1982-83), pp. 179-230, esp. p. 229.

<sup>44</sup>Isaac M. Wise, *Reminiscences* (New York: Arno Press, 1973, © 1908), p. 66; *Israelite*, vol. 1 (1854), pp. 39, 52, 68; cf. Sarna "American Jewish Response," p. 47.

<sup>45</sup>Robert Laird Collier, "The Folly of Converting the Jews," in his *Every-Day Subjects in Sunday Sermons*, 2nd ed. (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1872), p. 107.

<sup>46</sup>"Brother Stephen" to Gustav Gottheil (April 18, 1893), Gottheil Papers, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York.

## IV

What, then, are the implications of all of this for Jewish-Christian relations in general in nineteenth-century America? Given the current state of research, any answer must remain tentative. Still, it seems to me that four important consequences can be suggested:

1. Christian anti-missionary activities helped Jews to appreciate the special character of American religion—quite unlike what they had known in Europe. Jews in Europe certainly knew of intra-Christian squabbles; sometimes, indeed, they were caught up in the midst of them. But they still largely viewed Christianity as a monolith and associated it with the state. The anti-missionary movement, like other causes that brought Jews and Christians into contact, showed Jews that no denomination in America was singled out for recognition by the state, that Christianity was far more deeply divided than in Europe, and that these divisions could work to Jews' advantage. Gradually, Jews came to realize that they needed to fashion for themselves a more complex model of Jewish-Christian interactions, one that took account of the fact that, in America, Christians of different sorts viewed Jews in different ways.

2. Anti-missionary activities helped teach Jews about American religious politics. Given the plethora of denominations and sects all struggling to survive in America's voluntaristic religious environment, coalitions became inevitable. Groups that had little in common, such as anti-missionary Baptists and Jews, and even those who profoundly disagreed over religious fundamentals, nevertheless found it in their interest, if only to preserve the rights of all minority religious groups, to form temporary alliances in order to further common ends. The fact that Jews and those who prayed for their conversion could unite against those who hired missionaries to bring about Jews' conversion seems no more strange in this context than do twentieth-century political alliances between Catholics and anti-Catholic Fundamentalists. The missionary challenge simply made Jews realize earlier than they might otherwise have done that their self-interest, if not indeed their survival, required them to forge coalitions in order to strengthen their political base.

3. The anti-missionary movement paved the way for Jewish-Christian cooperation in efforts aimed at restoring Jews to the Holy Land. As we have seen, some Protestants opposed missions to the Jews on the theory that "God's people" had to be ingathered in "unbelief" and converted only later, after seeing Divine prophecies fulfilled. This opened the door to joint efforts on behalf of Restoration and Zionism, based on the pragmatic theory that disagreements over what might happen at the "end of days" should hardly deter cooperation in the here-and-now. The Jewish leader Mordecai Noah made this point quite explicitly in his famous *Discourse on the Restoration of the Jews* (1845), when he called on Christians and Jews to "unite in efforts to promote the restoration of Jews in their *unconverted* state, relying on the fulfillment of the prophecies and the will of God for attaining the objects they have in view after the great advent shall

have arrived."<sup>47</sup> The same theory underlay joint Jewish-Christian support for William Blackstone's well-publicized memorial, presented to President Benjamin Harrison, entitled *Palestine for the Jews* (1891).<sup>48</sup> In both cases—as also in twentieth-century Evangelical support for Zionism—the fact that the Christians involved looked askance at active missionary efforts aimed at converting Jews made this otherwise somewhat unlikely coalition possible.<sup>49</sup>

4. Most important of all, the anti-missionary movement offered what we have seen was an acceptable resolution to believing Christians who at one and the same time wanted Jews to convert but considered it illiberal, if not downright unAmerican, to send people out to actually convert them. By adopting alternative nonmissionary means to bring about conversion—supporting Jewish restoration, living a model Christian life, or laboring to improve society generally—the faithful could feel pious without feeling intolerant, and they could still carry on normal social relations with Jewish acquaintances. While there is no evidence that opponents of missions to the Jews consciously fashioned their arguments with this aim in mind, or that those who embraced the arguments did so just for this reason, the fact that anti-missionary theology functioned in this way surely explains at least some of its appeal.

What this means, viewed from a broad perspective, is that nineteenth-century opponents of missions to the Jews—persons hardly reckoned among the great figures of their day, and today overlooked almost completely—actually played an important role in fashioning what was a comparatively tolerant live-and-let-live religious atmosphere in the United States. Much as American Christians may have harbored hopes that Jews would one day see the light and convert, surprisingly few, considering what might have been, actually made any serious, sustained efforts to convert them *en masse*. Jewish opposition to missionary activities and the dismal failure of most previous conversionist approaches aimed at Jews certainly explain this to a very large extent. Still, more than generally recognized, it was non-Jewish opposition, both religious and secular, that also

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<sup>47</sup>Mordecai M. Noah, *Discourse on the Restoration of the Jews* (New York, 1845), p. 25; Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981), pp. 152-154.

<sup>48</sup>William E. Blackstone, "Palestine for the Jews" (1891), reprinted in Moshe Davis, ed., *Christian Protagonists for Jewish Restoration: An Original Anthology* (New York: Ayer Co., 1977); idem, *Jesus Is Coming*, pp. 226, 234-241; on Blackstone, see Isidore S. Meyer, ed., *Early History of Zionism in America* (New York: Arno Press, 1977, © 1958), pp. 164-170; Carl F. Ehle, *Prolegomena to Christian Zionism in America: The Views of Increase Mather and William E. Blackstone concerning the Doctrine of the Restoration of Israel* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1978); and works cited in the following note.

<sup>49</sup>On Evangelical Zionism, see David Rausch, *Zionism within Early American Fundamentalism, 1878-1918: A Convergence of Two Traditions* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1979); Yona Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 1978); B. Eugene Griessman, "Philo-Semitism and Protestant Fundamentalism: The Unlikely Zionists," *Phylon* 37 (Fall, 1976): 197-211.

limited missionaries to the Jews from having more of an impact than they did. Given competition between a broad array of Christian causes seeking support, most Americans, influenced by what they read or heard from those around them, put evangelizing the Jews low, indeed, on their list of religious priorities.