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Jewish-Christian Hostility in the United States: Perceptions from a Jewish Point of View

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My medieval ancestors would have had no difficulty with my subject here. “Jewish-Christian hostility?” they would have exclaimed, somewhat incredulously. “Why that is due to the fact that Christians hate Jews. That is all there is to it.” This censorious attitude did not merely reflect age-old prejudice. It also seemed to comport with reality as experienced on a day-to-day basis: the abuses, the vilifications, the persecutions. With a few notable exceptions, medieval Jews quite generally viewed interreligious hatred as something inevitable, and they found rabbinic exegesis that supported their claims. Rabbinic midrash taught that “all the nations of the world hate Israel”; Rabbi Simeon bar Yokhai considered the fact that “Esau [interpreted as Christianity] hates Jacob” to be an “axiom.”¹

With the coming of the Enlightenment and the gradual theological shift toward an emphasis on love, these attitudes began to change. Jews and Christians became far better acquainted with one another; they discovered how much they held in common, and gradually a few brave souls replaced the old rhetoric of enmity with a new rhetoric of tolerance and amity. Moses Mendelssohn, the great German-Jewish philosopher of the Enlightenment, boasted that he had “the good fortune of having for a friend many an excellent man who is not of my faith. We sincerely love

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each other, though we suspect that in matters of religion we hold totally different opinions.” Mendelssohn’s Christian friends, at least in their letters to him, agreed.² Similar expressions of toleration and even philo-Semitism echoed through Holland, France, and England. Throughout Western Europe and in America too, enlightened Jews and Christians saw a new age aborning.³

A second look, however, revealed that many Christians coupled their love for Jews and support for Jewish rights with the hope that Jews would ultimately be incorporated into the Christian fold. In dispensing love, in other words, Christians concealed a hidden agenda: to persuade Jews to convert to the majority faith. Seen from a Jewish perspective, this was a cynical stratagem, a new tactic designed to further the same old purpose. Christians still hoped to make Jews see the light, only now, rather than coercing them into apostasy, they tried to love them into it instead. The verb changed, but the trouble remained the same. Where once Christians hated Jews, now they loved them too well and sought to embrace them too closely.⁴

To trace this theme fully with all of its many implications for Jewish-Christian relations in modern times would require a full volume in itself. My effort here is more modest. First of all, I want to offer several American examples of love used as a conversionist tool in order to prove that this has not just been a European Jewish problem. Second, I shall argue that conversionist philo-Semitism inevitably carries with it the insistence that Jews, beloved as they may be, remain in various ways inadequate or deficient, justifying the effort to Christianize them. Finally, to restore some semblance of balance, I shall suggest a series of factors that have mitigated interreligious hostilities between Jews and Christians in America, conversionism notwithstanding. If my first two sections seem unremittingly negative, I promise at least to conclude on a positive note.

I

The idea that Jews should be treated with love rather than tortured by persecutions has its Protestant roots in the early writings of Martin Luther, those that precede the virulently anti-Semitic phase of his life. In his *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, Luther deplored Catholic behavior toward the Jewish people, and insisted that “if we really want to help them, we must be guided by Christian love, not by popish legalism.” Luther made no attempt to hide the conversionist aims that underlay his strategy. By receiving Jews cordially and allowing them to trade and work amidst Christians, he thought that “some may be won over.” “So

long as we treat them like dogs,” he continued, “how can we expect to work any good among them?”⁵

An early echo of this idea in the United States may be found in the writings of Dr. Abiel Holmes, grandfather of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. In the biography of his father-in-law, Ezra Stiles (1798), which was subsequently quoted by Hannah Adams in her *History of the Jews* (1812), Holmes lamented that “instead of being treated with that humanity and tenderness which Christianity should inspire, they [Jews] are often persecuted and condemned as unworthy of notice or regard. Such treatment tends to prejudice them against our holy religion, and to establish them in their infidelity.” Holmes naturally held Stiles up as a counterexample for his “civility and catholicism towards the Jews.” He then proceeded to associate this benevolence with missionizing, deploring the fact that other Americans were not doing “what ought to be done towards the conversion of this devoted people.”⁶

Christian missions to American Jews, when they began in 1816, took up Holmes’s challenge and accepted the relationship between loving and converting Jews as a self-evident proposition. The numerous publications of the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, for example, regularly condemned Jewish persecutions and described the state of the Jews in heartrending terms that indicated genuine feelings of contrition. *Israel’s Advocate*, the missionary society’s first newspaper, lived up to its name—given Protestant assumptions. Jews, of course, viewed the title—and indeed the titles of many subsequent missionary publications—as pure deception. They looked with similar disdain upon most other missionary activities, for what Christians saw as charity and benevolence, manifestations of their own boundless love for God’s people, Jews scorned. “You mock us,” a Jewish opponent of missionaries sneered, “by offering to bribe us like children with toys.”⁷

A remarkable illustration of these two contradictory perceptions—the missionary view that one loved Jews by converting them, and the Jewish view that interpreted this exchange of love for Jewish souls as pure bribery—may be seen in the following citation from the twentieth report of the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews’ Board of Directors:

And here the Board would pause a moment, while they would endeavor to impress on the minds of their Christian friends and brethren, what they believe to constitute the true secret of successful effort upon the Jewish mind. It must be approached through the heart. We must make them feel that we love them, and desire to do them good. For how many years, nay centuries, has a different course been pursued by the Christian world? Ever since the days of the persecutions, when the Jews

were hunted outlaws, what have we done to make them love us? What have we done to make them think otherwise than that we were still, as of old, the enemies of their religion and their race? We have complained of the bitterness of their prejudices, the hardness of their hearts, and their unconquerable aversion to Christianity; nay some have gone so far as to express an utter want of faith in the possibility of their conversion through any human means. But, during all this time, we have done nothing for them; we have not gone among them, nor invited them among us. We have been willing at heart that they should remain as they have been, a separate people; nay, some of us have often shrunk from the idea of daily and intimate fellowship with a Jew. Let us honestly confess it—the prejudice and bigotry have been ours scarcely less than theirs, and why should we wonder at the result? But approach a Jew (as we have recently been led to do) in the spirit of kindness and Christian love, visit him in his distress, speak comfortably to him, let him see that we desire to relieve his wants, and we find that he has the heart of a man, and that it will respond to our own. . . .

Our missionary has already made himself extensively respected, and even beloved, among the Jewish population of this city. His visits, instead of being repelled with rudeness, are looked for and welcomed; the Bibles he carries with him, instead of being rejected, are gratefully received, read and treasured; the children cluster round him when he enters their humble apartment, and often welcome him with a kiss; nay, he has been saluted in this affectionate manner by aged men! What a revolution is here begun in the Jewish heart!⁸

According to this missionary perspective, the frustrating failure of earlier efforts to convert Jews stemmed from the inadequate amounts of love devoted to the enterprise. Jews had to *feel* loved before they would convert. When they did feel love, in tangible form, the results according to this report seemed most promising. Jews, needless to say, read this same account quite differently. To them it stands as startling confirmation of what Isaac Mayer Wise called missionaries' "rascality."⁹

The link between loving Jews and converting them has by no means been confined to missionaries.¹⁰ Zebulon B. Vance, North Carolina's prominent governor and then senator, was without doubt friendly toward Jews, and his frequently delivered address entitled "The Scattered Nation"—a so-called "classic of American eloquence"—was one of the more outspoken pleas on their behalf in all of late nineteenth-century America. Vance termed the Jew "the most remarkable man of this world—past or present" and viewed Jewish history as "the history of our civilization and progress in this world and our faith and hope in that which is to come." He pointed out the Jewish roots of Christianity ("Strike out all of Judaism from the Christian church and there remains nothing but an unmeaning superstition"), enumerated various "debts" Christians owed

to Jews, described Jewish “characteristics and peculiarities,” and held up to shame the persecutions and sufferings meted out against Jews “by Christian people and in the name of Him, the meek and lowly, who was called the Prince of Peace and the harbinger of good will to men.”

Yet for all the love that Vance genuinely felt toward Jews, he nevertheless believed that “the Christian is simply the successor of the Jew,” and that the Jews would ultimately abandon “their exclusion and preservation.” He looked to the day when Jews would become “as other men,” learning “that one sentence in our Lord’s prayer which is said not to be found in the Talmud and is the key-note of the differences between Jew and Gentile, ‘Forgive us our trespasses *as we* forgive them who trespass against us.’” Vance did not come right out and call upon Jews to convert, but Christians in his audience surely understood the conversionist pre-millennial tenor of his words:

So may the morning come, not to them alone but to all the children of men who, through much tribulation and with heroic manhood, have waited for its dawning, with a faith whose constant cry through all the dreary watches of the night has been, “though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!”¹¹

By the twentieth century, the “love” approach to the so-called Jewish problem had become broadly accepted, in line with the general movement from fear to love in American Protestant theology. At the two world conferences on Jewish evangelization, chaired by America’s great Protestant lay leader, John R. Mott, and held in Budapest and Warsaw in 1927, everyone professed to love Jews. The volume that emerged from these conferences, entitled *The Christian Approach to the Jew*, carried a forthright philo-Semitic declaration:

We desire to put on record our goodwill and friendly feeling toward the Jewish people; we deplore the long record of injustice and ill-usage of Jews on the part of professedly Christian people; we declare such conduct to be a violation of the teaching and spirit of Christ, and we call upon Churches and Christians everywhere to oppose injustice and ill-usage of Jews. . . .

That done, conference members settled down to discuss at length “the urgent and growing need for special evangelisation among the Jews of the world.” From the point of view of those assembled, the interrelationship of love and conversion was simply assumed.¹² The assumption continues, at least in many evangelical circles, down to the present day.¹³

II

For all that Jews may have condemned those who equate love with conversion, they have surely preferred them to enemies of old who relied on persecution to effect the same end. Christian missions to American Jews never resulted in Jewish martyrdom, and even those who converted to Christianity of their own free will were free to convert back if they so chose. In their battles for equal rights and against prejudice, and later in their Zionist efforts, Jews knew that they had allies in the evangelical camp. The 1891 Blackstone Memorial, the influential resolution entitled "Palestine for the Jews," signed by leading Americans and presented to President Benjamin Harrison, is only the best known of many such Christian endeavors on Jews' behalf.¹⁴ For their part, Jews could hardly afford to be too troubled by support from those who sought ultimately to convert them. As a beleaguered minority group, they quite understandably accepted help from anyone kind enough to extend it.

Still, despite these pro-Jewish efforts, those who sought to convert Jews could not escape casting aspersions on the religion they wanted Jews to leave. No matter how often they sang Jews' praises, they still had to insist that Jews were deficient, lacking in those advantages that accrued to all who recognized Jesus as the Messiah. By definition, a conversionist had to believe that Jews were beset by faults that only conversion could cure. This being the case, one can understand why Jews have so often classed those who profess to love them in the same category as those who openly hate them, for both alike have criticized Jews in ways that Jews find offensive.

Typical love-inspired criticisms of Jews may be found in the address delivered by the Rev. Philip Milledoler, later president of Rutgers, at the 1816 organizational meeting of the American Society for Evangelizing the Jews (the name was changed to Meliorating the Condition of the Jews in 1820, when a state charter was obtained). Milledoler, describing the state of the Jews, referred to the "strong plea of humanity" that inspired the missionary effort being undertaken. "Is not their situation," he cried, "calculated to excite our sympathy and call forth our exertions? And shall we slumber in apathy over their tremendous misery?" The misery he had in mind consisted of such things as that "with the New Testament, which is founded upon and indissolubly connected with the Old, the great body of that people are almost wholly unacquainted." That "though arraigned and condemned before the bar of God, and their own consciences, as sinners, yet by the deeds of the law they still hope to be justified before God." That "their religious exercises are scarcely con-

ducted with the form, much less with the spirit, of devotion.” And that they suffer from “laxness of morals . . . the female character among them holds a station far inferior to that which it was intended to occupy by the God of nature of providence.” In short, from Milledoler’s perspective, Jews closed their eyes to the obvious truth of Christianity, misread the Bible, were both religiously and morally decadent, and remained in need of salvation.¹⁵

Although Christian criticisms of Judaism have changed since 1816, in many cases the charges still sound obnoxiously familiar, at least to Jewish ears. *The Christian Approach to the Jew*, referred to above, reported that “the majority of educated Jews have turned to agnosticism or atheism. Religious apathy or indifference grows apace, morals have suffered . . . decadence is apparent almost everywhere.” It then proceeded to reaffirm that “the religion of the New Testament is the necessary completion of the Old Testament religion,” that “misunderstanding of the Old Testament” hindered “the acceptance of the Christian message by the Jew,” and that Christianity possessed a “higher moral standard” that acted “as a deterrent to many Jews.”¹⁶ More recently, Gregory Baum, the liberal Catholic theologian who has often criticized fellow Catholics for their negative attitudes toward Jews, pointed out the painful dilemma that makes such criticisms almost inevitable: “It is not easy to proclaim Jesus Christ without at the same time implying a negation of the Jews. As the Church, we see ourselves as the chosen people replacing the Jewish people which by its infidelity is considered to have set itself outside the divine covenant. That is what Matthew’s Gospel already clearly states.”¹⁷

Four themes emerge from this love-inspired Christian critique of Judaism that deserve special attention. When Jews talk about Jewish-Christian hostility, these are what they usually have in mind. First, there is the manifold problem of Christian triumphalism. All religions have some degree of triumphalism attached to them, just as all countries do; triumphalism is to some extent a function of self-respect. Jews, however, have always had considerable difficulty with the frequently encountered Christian view that salvation lies *only* in the church. Perhaps because Jews have been taught that the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come, they have taken offense at the notion that so long as they refuse to believe in Jesus of Nazareth their eternal prospects are, as one nineteenth-century missionary termed them, “dark and dismal even when compared with Pagan nations.”¹⁸ To Jews the idea that “if we don’t repent and convert we will nosedive directly into the waiting jaws of hell” is anathema.¹⁹

Continuing with this same theme, Jews have also taken offense at the triumphalistic view that Christianity is simply Judaism fulfilled. This idea

has been traced to the Book of Revelations (2:9, 3:9) and featured prominently in medieval disputations.²⁰ In America, Ralph Waldo Emerson believed that “Jews have at last flowered perfectly into Jesus,” and the *Catholic World* explained in 1878 that “Judaism . . . is related to Christianity not as the seed to the plant, but as the well-prepared soil to the harvest, as the figure to the reality, as the prophecy to its accomplishment, as the harbinger to the King whose coming he announces to the populations who are to receive him.”²¹ Jews have always disagreed and find Christian doctrines of *praeparatio* and *Verus Israel* freighted with anti-Judaism.

Finally, with regard to this first theme, Jews have had trouble with triumphalistic Christian millennial views that foresee ultimate Jewish conversion. Jews certainly prefer those who call for their *ultimate* conversion to those who work for their *immediate* conversion. Still, the link drawn in so many Christian minds between the much heralded end of days and the simultaneous end of the Jewish people is profoundly disturbing. Some assume that “the Jews in God’s own time will become Catholic Christians.” Others of a more Adventist bent believe, as William Cummins Davis described in his poem “The Millennium,” that “We’ll find the world without a Jew. The Pope, and Devil, known no more . . . / And Jew and Gentile now the same/ Rejoice to wear the Christian name.” On this one point Catholics and anti-Catholics both agree: Jews will ultimately disappear.²²

A second prominent Christian theme that has long been a source of trouble to Jews is the idea that the Bible is really a Christian book, containing a so-called Old Testament that predicts Jesus’ coming and a New Testament superseding the Old and bringing forth gospel truth to mankind. This view, of course, has long been a pervasive one. In America, William Holmes McGuffey’s *Eclectic Third Reader* (1836–7) taught a full generation that “the Scriptures are especially designed to make us wise unto salvation through Faith in Christ Jesus.” The “Old Testament,” according to the reader, was the Jews’ “own sacred volume,” and contained “the most extraordinary predictions concerning the infidelity of their nation, and the rise, progress, and extensive prevalence of Christianity.”²³ *The New York Observer*, in 1865, found it “strange” that Jews “cannot see that the Old Testament as well as the New is full of Jesus Christ.” The *Church Review* charged that “the literature of the prophetic books was misapprehended and perverted, as everything else was, by the carnally-minded Jews.”²⁴ Such quotations could easily be multiplied.

Buttressing all these claims was the fact that many Bibles published in

America, particularly in the nineteenth century, contained headings over every page and before every chapter that read Christian interpretations into the text: "The Prediction of Christ" over Psalm 110; "A Description of Christ" over Song of Songs 5; "Christ's Birth and Kingdom" over Isaiah 9. Translations, from the American Bible Society's edition of the King James Bible down to the recent Good News Bible, have also contained thoroughly Christological understandings of the original Hebrew. Such words as "saviour" and "spirit" abound, and prophecies from "Shiloh" in Genesis to the "Son of Man" in Daniel have been rendered into English with an eye toward Christian exegesis and New Testament parallels.²⁵

These theologically charged translations do not, from a Jewish perspective, capture the literal meaning of the biblical idiom. Instead, they distort the text, reduce the sanctity and significance of the Hebrew Bible, and engender interreligious hostility. To this day, the arsenals of groups such as "Jews for Jesus" are heavily stocked with arguments based on biblical prooftexts, and their missionaries, like Moishe Rosen, confidently report that "examining the clear continuities between the Old and New Testaments can be a fascinating experience for Jews," for "these prophecies clearly show that Jesus is our long-awaited Messiah."²⁶

A third area of hostility between Jews and Christians emerges from the word "decadence" which, as we have seen, both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics employed in characterizing the Jewish situation. Many Christians—not all—have always assumed that there is a straight-line relationship between Christianity, morality, and modernity, and as a consequence, they have looked upon Jews as being both amoral (if not immoral) and primitive. The very word "Christian," in popular usage, carries with it overtones of morality and civilization, as in the phrase "a Christian thing to do." In writing to Thomas Jefferson, the Jewish leader Mordecai Noah thus once used the phrase "in the civilized, or if you please in the Christian world." Quite a few American Jews, Noah among them, similarly took the phrase "you are truly a good Christian" to be a high compliment.²⁷

Referring to a few Jews as "good Christians," however, does not solve the overall problem of whether Jews *can* be moral and modern. Missionaries have usually insisted that Jews *cannot* be—a view that provoked one early critic of missions to charge the whole enterprise with aiming "to place the Jew below the level of the Christian. It presupposes the former to be in a degraded and uncultivated state, and the latter completely civilized. It recognizes the impolitic principle . . . that Christianity ought to be the predominant religion; that those who do not profess it

must necessarily be immoral persons, undeserving of the rights of citizens, and whose condition is incapable of amendment or amelioration, under the profession of any other faith."²⁸

Various nineteenth-century descriptions of Judaism agreed with missionaries about Judaism's primitive character. A popular volume entitled *The Jew At Home and Abroad*, revised from a British edition by the American Sunday School Union (1845), reported on "the absurd and superstitious practices which are so numerous and diversified in the private and public exercises of the Jews."²⁹ A later work professed to detail Jews' "religious prejudices, superstitions, and fables, their sacred reverences for trifling traditions and useless ceremonies and customs." Other works, particularly the autobiographies of converts, continued to characterize Judaism in this fashion down through the twentieth century.³⁰

Given this view of Judaism—and as readers of Lyman Beecher's *A Plea for the West* (1835) know, Catholics were not treated in any more friendly a light—it followed that America for its own good had to be Protestant. Daniel Webster spoke for many when he insisted that "the Christian religion"—to him synonymous with the Protestant religion—"must ever be regarded among us as the foundation of civil society." If that meant that a Jewish school for the poor "would not be regarded as a charity" since it taught "doctrines . . . contrary to the Christian religion," so be it. Similar pronouncements, as Robert Handy has shown, echoed down through the nineteenth century and beyond.³¹ To be full Americans according to this view, to be seen, in other words, as moral, modern, and thoroughly civilized, Jews had to convert. Needless to say, Jews have vigorously demurred.

The last in this sad litany of Christian hostility as seen from a Jewish point of view is the problem of the "mythical Jew" and the "Jew next door," the clash between received wisdom about ancient Jews and perceived wisdom about modern ones. Many Christians have always experienced difficulty distinguishing Jews they read about in the Bible from those they meet on the street, and they ascribe to the latter characteristics, if not indeed guilt, attributed to the former. The editor of the *Richmond Whig* in 1829 may have been somewhat carried away when he wrote that:

When we see one of this people, and remember that we have been told by good authority, that he is an exact copy of the Jew who worshiped in the Second Temple two thousand years ago—that his physiognomy and religious opinions—that the usages and customes of his tribe are still the same, we feel that profound respect which antiquity inspires.³²

Still the sentiments he expressed have found many echoes.

Had “profound respect” been the universal response to this anachronistic view of Jews, it seems safe to assume that Jews would happily have overlooked the problem. Unfortunately, however, that was not to be. Instead, many Jews have found themselves pilloried not only for their own sins, but for the reputed sins of their ancestors. Thus the abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison once attacked Mordecai Noah as “that lineal descendant of the monsters who nailed Jesus to the cross between two thieves,” and concluded that “Shylock will have his ‘pound of flesh’ at whatever cost.”³³ Oliver Wendell Holmes admitted that he grew up with the view that Jews formed “a race lying under a curse for their obstinacy in refusing the gospel.” Others remember being chased with cries of “Christ-killer” and “sinner.”³⁴

Problems connected with Christian efforts to reconcile the increasingly apparent differences between the “mythical Jew” and the “Jew next door” cannot be considered here.³⁵ Suffice it to say that Jews have found it particularly galling to discover that even when they have gone to great lengths to “modernize” themselves by conforming to Western norms they continue to be viewed as if nothing had changed for them since Pharaic days. Missionaries, indeed, have quite generally viewed all deviations from strict Orthodox Judaism to be anathema;³⁶ to their mind, as we have seen, modernization cannot take place without Christianization. According to this way of thinking, Jewish history ceased to develop independently soon after the year 1, for “with the appearance of Christ, the account of the Jewish branch of the church properly ends.” Jews from then on could only be acted upon; they could not act themselves. Jews alive today are consequently fossils. Modern Jews are a contradiction in terms.³⁷

III

I have so far portrayed Jewish-Christian relations in the United States in rather dismal tones. I have argued that many Christians love Jews by trying to convert them, and that they express their love of Judaism by insisting on the superiority and ultimate triumph of Christianity. In making these claims, I have wandered with seeming abandon across the full spectrum of American Christianity, ignoring critical theological differences, and I have leaped back and forth across two centuries in time, ignoring obvious historical changes. I have done this deliberately to suggest the existence of an ongoing Christian tradition, deeply troubling to Jews, cen-

tered neither in any one Christian denomination nor in any single historical period, and available for use as part of the cultural baggage that American Christianity carries on its back.

It would, however, be a gross distortion to imply that this tradition forms the sum and substance of Jewish-Christian relations in the United States, for precisely the opposite is true. Jewish-Christian hostility in the United States has always been balanced by genuine manifestations of amity. Jews who interact socially with Christians know that not every Christian seeks to convert Jews, nor does every Christian wish that Judaism would disappear. To underscore this point—forgotten with surprising frequency by those who write on this subject—I shall now switch directions and briefly outline five factors that promote Jewish-Christian harmony in the United States, mitigating problems that do exist. I do not claim that these are the only factors involved, nor that they have invariably succeeded in thwarting the kinds of love-inspired anti-Jewish sallies that I have enumerated. I do maintain, however, that any discussion of Jewish-Christian hostility would be incomplete without devoting at least some attention to these countervailing tendencies.

1. *Freedom of Religion.* The first amendment's guarantee—"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the exercise thereof"—reiterated by American presidents, duplicated in state constitutions, and enshrined in American tradition, generally taints as "un-American" anything that smacks of religious intolerance. Conversionism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Mormonism, and other expressions of religious zealotry and narrow-mindedness have, to be sure, sometimes elicited support from leading Americans; religious liberty in this country has always meant different things at different times to different people. But constitutional guarantees have at least put those who seem illiberal on the defensive. Those, by contrast, who speak out on behalf of boundless religious tolerance generally win far more widespread approval.

2. *Religious Pluralism.* Even before the Revolution, American social and religious diversity mandated the reality of pluralism among some Protestants. A denominationalist conception of the church arose which, within limits, accepted each Protestant communion as acceptably Christian, differences notwithstanding. Full religious pluralism followed logically, many coming to accept the view that *all* who love and fear God may claim legitimacy. This widely embracing idea—preserved in such phrases as "one nation under God"—permitted Jews an equal place in the panoply of American religion. As early as 1789, when Philadelphians celebrated their state's ratification of the Constitution, onlookers witnessed a parade of "the clergy of the different Christian denominations,

with the rabbi of the Jews, walking arm in arm.³⁸ In 1860, a Jew was for the first time invited to deliver the prayer opening a session of Congress.³⁹ Later, Jews and various Christian denominations formed temporary informal coalitions based on shared common interests. While, as we have seen, pluralism continued to have its opponents, and religious triumphalism never did die, the fact that America's religious tradition made a place for Jews has again meant that those who deny Jews independent religious legitimacy must answer to the bar of public opinion. Most Americans seem to prefer one or another pluralistic model of religion, assuming as they do that real religion, whatever the brand, must be all right.

3. *Voluntaryism.* All religious groups in America depend for survival on voluntary support from a committed laity. This results in competition among different faiths and would at first glance seem to exacerbate rather than inhibit hostility such as that between Jews and Christians. In fact, however, competition has in the long run acted as a moderating force in American religion. Most religious groups have learned that unfair or dishonorable competitive practices are responded to in kind, to the ultimate detriment of religion generally. Faiths have gained far more by promoting their own virtues than by badmouthing opponents, for competitors in America are still expected to display respect for one another. America's competitive religious situation does, of course, continue to promote discord; competition always does. But at least in the case of Jews, interfaith rivalry has also had a beneficial effect. Challenges, even if they weakened Judaism at first, have ultimately led to changes that made for a stronger and more viable Judaism than existed before.⁴⁰

4. *Coalitionism.* As American religious groups began to worry about their declining influence, issues that divided them tended to loom less large than the need to display unity in the face of formidable adversaries. Secularism, the advent of new religions, and menacing political developments all posed challenges that cut across denominational lines. Religious coalitions took shape in response. The new stress on common areas of agreement did not close off areas of disagreement. Still, the knowledge that Jews could serve as valuable allies has resulted in new sensitivity toward Jewish concerns, and in some cases—Reinhold Niebuhr's for example—important theological reevaluations.

5. *Interfaith and Community-Relations Organizations.* Organizations designed to further "better understanding" between Jews and Christians, all of them products of the twentieth century, have played an increasingly important role in building a spirit of amity between Jews and Christians.⁴¹ Their financial resources, prestige, political savvy, and high-level connections have enabled them both to mold opinions, particularly those

reflected in the media and in textbooks, and on occasion to shape policy. While it is easy to exaggerate the contribution of these groups—often their contributions have been more show than substance—they have by their existence and message served to counter the idea that Christians seek merely to convert Jews, if not one way then another. The National Conference of Christians and Jews, for example, goes out of its way to emphasize to Christians that “dialogue is *not* a soft-sell approach to conversion.” It quotes “an evangelical layman” who considers it “illegitimate” to utilize dialogue to make converts, and stresses that “the purpose of dialogue is not to convert but to create mutual understanding and respect.”⁴²

Of course, five factors⁴³ do not harmonious relations make. There is instead an ongoing tension among various Christian approaches to the Jew, some reflecting hostility, some amity. The tangled web of conflicting Jewish, Christian, and American traditions, the simultaneous attraction of contending religious and political ideologies, and the contradictory demands of competing authority figures of different persuasions together ensure a level of complexity in Jewish-Christian relations that defies attempts at glib generalization. Feelings of love and hate, tolerance and intolerance, triumphalism and pluralism all coexist uneasily not only within different religious groups, but often within individuals themselves. At any given moment in American history there has been reason for despair and reason for hope. American Jews have experienced trouble from Christians, but they have enjoyed manifold blessings from them too.

Notes

1. Genesis Rabbah 63:7 and Sifre 69; cf. Rashi on Genesis 33:4. Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962); Shmuel Almog, ed., *Antisemitism through the Ages* (Hebrew, Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1980); and Gerson Cohen, “Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) 19–48, especially p. 26, explore aspects of this medieval view.

2. Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1973) 220; cf. pp. 50, 592.

3. David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Alan Edelstein, *An Unacknowledged Harmony: Philo-Semitism and the Survival of European Jewry* (Westport,

CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968) 248–313.

4. In addition to works cited in note 3, see Abraham Gilam, *The Emancipation of the Jews in England* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982) 26–32; and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 7–46.

5. Gordon Rupp, "Martin Luther in the Context of His Life and Times," *Face to Face: An Interreligious Bulletin* 10 (Spring 1983) 6; Armas K. E. Holmio, *The Lutheran Reformation and the Jews* (Hancock, MI: Finnish Lutheran Book Concern, 1949).

6. Joseph L. Blau and Salo W. Baron, *The Jews of the United States 1790–1840: A Documentary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) 1:91.

7. *Ibid.*, III:769.

8. *The Twentieth Report of the Board of Directors of the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews* (New York, 1843) 12–13.

9. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The American Jewish Response to Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions," *The Journal of American History* 68 (June 1981) 45.

10. John Adams concluded a pro-Jewish letter with the hope that "once restored to an independent government and no longer persecuted they would . . . possibly in time become liberal Unitarian Christians": Adams to Mordecai M. Noah, 15 March 1819, reprinted in M. Davis, *With Eyes toward Zion* (New York: Ayer, 1977) 19.

11. Zebulon B. Vance, *The Scattered Nation* (New York: J. J. Little & Co., 1904), especially pp. 10, 14, 25, 40, 42; see also Selig Adler, "Zebulon B. Vance and the Scattered Nation," *The Journal of Southern History* 7 (August 1941) 357–77; and for Vance's views on "the elevating and refining influence of the Christian religion," Clement Dowd, *Life of Zebulon B. Vance* (Charlotte, NC: Observer Printing and Publishing House, 1897) 121–22; cf. p. 287.

12. *The Christian Approach to the Jew* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1927), quotes from pp. 36, 18; see also pp. 178, 189. For other views on Mott and the Jews, see C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865–1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979); and C. Howard Hopkins and John W. Long, "American Jews and the Root Mission to Russia in 1917: Some New Evidence," *American Jewish History* 69 (March 1980) 342–54.

13. Arnold Seth Stiebel, "The Marketing of Jesus: An Analysis of Propaganda Techniques Utilized by Christian Missionaries in Their Attempt to Proselytize the American Jew" (Ord. thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1982).

14. William E. Blackstone, "Palestine for the Jews" (1891), reprinted in *Christian Protagonists for Jewish Restoration* (New York: Arno Press, 1977). On Blackstone, see I. S. Meyer, ed., *Early History of Zionism in America* (New York, 1958) 164–70; Yona Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978) 136–42; and Carl Ehle, "Prolegomena to Christian Zionism in America: The Views of Increase Mather and William E. Black-

stone Concerning the Doctrine of the Restoration of Israel" (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1978). For other examples, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "From Necessity to Virtue: The Hebrew-Christianity of Gideon R. Leder," *Illif Review* 37 (Winter 1980) 31; B. Eugene Griessman, "Philo-Semitism and Protestant Fundamentalism: The Unlikely Zionists," *Phylon* 37 (Fall 1976) 197–211; and David Rausch, *Zionism within Early American Fundamentalism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979).

15. *Religious Intelligencer* 1 (1817) 555–57; for later echoes of these charges, see Bernhard E. Olson, *Faith and Prejudice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); and Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), especially pp. 60–80.

16. *The Christian Approach to the Jew*, pp. 95, 98–99; cf. Frank E. Talmage, "Christianity and the Jewish People," in Talmage, ed., *Disputation and Dialogue* (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1975) 240–53; and B. Z. Sobel, *Hebrew Christianity: The Thirteenth Tribe* (New York: Wiley, 1974) 76–92.

17. Gregory Baum, "Foreword," in Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) xi.

18. Elnathan Gridley, "The Character of the Jews," *Memoirs of American Missionaries Formerly Connected with . . . Andover Theological Seminary* (Boston: Peirce and Parker, 1833) 295.

19. Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials* (New York: Atheneum, 1973) 126.

20. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1948); David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979) 287–89.

21. Alfred R. Ferguson and Ralph H. Orth, eds., *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977) 13:120; F. Doncat, "Relations of Judaism to Christianity," *Catholic World* 27 (June 1878) 352.

22. P. Girard, "The Present State of Judaism in America," *Catholic World* 25 (June 1877) 375; William C. Davis, "The Millennium" (1811), quoted in Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954) 4:222. For the medieval background, see Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, p. 268.

23. John H. Westerhoff, *McGuffey and His Readers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978) 138–39.

24. *New York Observer*, 24 August 1865, p. 268; *Church Review* 24 (April 1872) 271.

25. Nahum M. Sarna and Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jewish Bible Scholarship and Translations in the United States," in Ernest S. Frerichs, ed., *The Bible and Bibles in America* (forthcoming).

26. Moishe Rosen with William Proctor, *Jews for Jesus* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1974) 47–48.

27. Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981) 133; idem, "The 'Mythical Jew' and the 'Jew Next Door' in Nineteenth Century America," in David Gerber, ed., *Anti-Semitism in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) 65, 76.

28. *Israel Vindicated* (New York: Abraham Collins, 1820) vi; on this work see Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Freethinker, the Jews, and the Missionaries: George Houston and the Mystery of *Israel Vindicated*," *AJS Review* 5 (1980) 101–14.

29. *The Jew at Home and Abroad* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1845) 111.

30. Charles Freshman, *The Autobiography of the Reverend Charles Freshman* (Toronto: S. Rose, 1868) vii; cf. Stuart A. Federow, "Convert Autobiographies As a Genre of Literature" (Ord. thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1982), especially pp. 66–68, 98. See also George Sweazy, *Effective Evangelism* (New York: Harper, 1953) 58: "It is normal to be a Christian; it is abnormal to be away from Christ."

31. Daniel Webster, "The Christian Ministry and the Religious Instruction of the Young," in *The Works of Daniel Webster* (Boston: C. C. Little and J. Brown, 1851) 6:166–67; Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). See also Ferene M. Szasz, "Protestantism and the Search for Stability: Liberal and Conservative Quests for Christian America, 1875–1925," in Jerry Israel, ed., *Building the Organizational Society* (New York: Free Press, 1972) 88–102; and for the European background, Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) 195–202.

32. *The Richmond Constitutional Whig*, 9 January 1829, in Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond*, (Richmond, VA: H. T. Ezekiel, 1917) 56.

33. Louis Ruchames, "The Abolitionists and the Jews," in Bertram W. Korn, ed., *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus* (Waltham: American Jewish Historical Society, 1976) 508.

34. Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Over the Teacups* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1891) 194; cf. Louis Harap, *The Image of the Jew in American Literature from Early Republic to Mass Immigration* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974) 87–90.

35. See my article cited in note 27 above.

36. *The Jew at Home and Abroad*, pp. 152–53, thus condemns Moses Mendelssohn; for an analysis of this theme in more recent missionary writings see Norman S. Lipson, "An Enquiry into Hebrew Christianity" (Ord. thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1972) 45–49.

37. W. H. Ryder, "Church of the Jews," *Universalist Quarterly Review* 15 (July 1858) 319. For Jewish responses to the fossil theme in general and particularly to Arnold Toynbee who gave the theme currency, see Maurice Samuel, *The Professor and the Fossil* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956); and Oscar Rabinowicz, *Arnold Toynbee on Judaism and Zionism: A Critique* (London: W. H. Allen, 1974).

38. Edwin Wolf II and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956) 150.

39. Bertram W. Korn, "The First Jewish Prayer in Congress," *Eventful Years and Experiences* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1954) 98–124.

40. On this theme, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Impact of Nineteenth Century

Christian Missions on American Jews," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (forthcoming).

41. See Lance J. Sussman, "'Toward Better Understanding': The Rise of the Interfaith Movement in America and the Role of Rabbi Isaac Landman," *American Jewish Archives* 34 (April 1982) 35–51. David Berger, "Jewish-Christian Relations: A Jewish Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20 (Winter 1983) 5–32, came to hand after this essay was substantially complete. Berger offers important insights into the impact of dialogue, as well as on the problem of triumphalism dealt with above.

42. Dean M. Kelly and Bernhard E. Olson, *The Meaning and Conduct of Dialogue* (New York: National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1970) 11–12.

43. For related discussions, see Winthrop Hudson, *The Great Tradition of the American Churches* (New York: Harper, 1953); Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); and Jonathan D. Sarna, "Anti-Semitism and American History," *Commentary* 71:3 (March 1981) 42–47.