

Converts of Conviction

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Volume 1

Converts of Conviction

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European Jewish Society

Edited by
David B. Ruderman

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David B. Ruderman

Introduction

The study of Jewish converts to Christianity in the modern era had long been marginalized in Jewish historiography. Labeled disparagingly in the Jewish tradition as *meshumadim* [apostates], many earlier Jewish scholars treated these individuals in a negative light or generally ignored them as not properly belonging any longer to the community and its historical legacy. This situation has radically changed in recent years with an outpouring of new studies on converts in variegated times and places, especially in the modern era, culminating perhaps in the most recent synthesis by Todd Endelman in 2015.¹

Endelman's important work has already been widely discussed in recent scholarly literature and might serve as the starting point or launching pad of this book of essays.² Endelman's primary argument is that in the modern era the overwhelming majority of Jews who converted to Christianity did so for social or economic reasons—to marry non-Jewish partners, enhance their social prestige, or advance their careers and economic well-being. In other words, when modern Jews, both in western and eastern Europe, opted for conversion, they usually did so for strategic or pragmatic reasons, to overcome an inferior and segregated status in a social and political environment generally hostile to Jews:

¹ See Todd Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), and the essays in his earlier edited volume, *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1987). On the earlier disdain or indifference to the study of the modern convert in Jewish historiography, see Todd Endelman, "Welcoming Ex-Jews into the Jewish Historiographical Fold," in his *Broadening Jewish History: Towards a Social History of Ordinary Jews* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011), 82–92.

A small sampling of other recent scholarship on converts in the early modern and modern eras might include Ellie R. Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817–1906* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2016); Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany 1500–1750* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001); Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007); and David B. Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), which focuses on the life of one convert. Agnieszka Jagodzińska's recently published volume is entitled: *"Duszozbawcy"? Misje i literatura Londyńskiego Towarzystwa Krzewienia Chrześcijaństwa wśród Żydów w latach 1809–1939* (Missions and Literature of the London Society for the Propagation of Christianity among the Jews, 1809–1939) (Krakow-Budapest: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2017).

² Three thoughtful reviews of the book include that of Tobias Brinkmann in the *American Historical Review* 121.5 (2016): 1612–14; Marsha L. Rozenblit in the *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 40.1 (2016): 188–90; and Hillel Kieval in *Jewish History* 30.3 (2016): 303–06. In addition, see my discussion of Ellie Schainker's review below.

Driven by hunger or ambition, in search of fame or status, peace of mind or even a roof over their heads, they sought relief in radical assimilation, that is, they ceased to identify themselves as Jews and cut their ties to Judaism and the Jewish community. The most common form of escape was conversion to Christianity, but there were other forms of radical assimilation as well. [...] Common to all these strategies, however different from each other, was the desire to shed the stigma of Jewishness, to be free, once and for all, of a highly charged, troublesome label.³

Endelman further contends that most Jews who became Christians in the modern era were insincere and did not believe in the Christian faith or were at least indifferent to it whatever form it actually took: “For them conversion was a strategic or practical move, much like changing a name or altering a nose.”⁴ But Endelman is quick to acknowledge that there were exceptions to this general tendency. There were individuals whose conversion was a religious experience and who became pious, church-going Christians: “Some of them merged into their newly adopted communities, attracting no further attention, while others became missionaries, controversialists, theologians, and church dignitaries, and, by virtue of their Jewish background, attracted a disproportion amount of attention.”⁵

Regarding these exceptional individuals, he makes two additional points. First, much of what has been written about them is not sufficiently scholarly but primarily hagiographic or conversionist in intent: “Little of it seeks to understand the historical context that shaped their path from Judaism to Christianity.”⁶ Second, by overemphasizing the spiritual dimension of these converts’ experience, there is a danger of disconnecting them from the majority of Jews who converted for non-spiritual reasons, or in his words:

Given that most human behavior is overdetermined, it is difficult to believe that the ‘true believers’ were ignorant of the social and emotional advantages of abandoning Judaism. I do not want to argue that their conversions were inauthentic, but, rather that they were driven by a complex of motives, needs, and perceptions [...]. Moreover, even it were true that these conversions were spiritual transformations pure and simple, exceptional events removed from the common run of human experience, the language they used to describe their journey toward Christianity was rooted in the time-bound attitudes of the period. The invidious way in which they contrasted Judaism and Christianity, and the terms they used to disparage the one and exalt the other, emerged from the same negation of Jews and Judaism that motivated strategic conversion. Thus, conversions of ‘convenience’ and conversions of ‘conviction’ were not altogether dissimilar.⁷

The authors of this volume certainly concur with the gist of Endelman’s argument. Most modern converts left the Jewish fold for economic, social, or political reasons; those who chose to convert for ideological and spiritual motives were a consid-

³ Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, 5–6.

⁴ Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, 11.

⁵ Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, 11.

⁶ Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, 11.

⁷ Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, 11.

erably smaller group; and the distinction between those who converted for “convenience” and those who converted for “conviction” is never absolute. Indeed, Endelman’s claim that the so-called “converts of conviction” have not been studied adequately nor properly in their historical context appears to us as a welcome invitation for further research. Accordingly, it is the purpose of this volume to consider more fully the latter group, perhaps the most interesting from the perspective of Jewish and Christian cultural and intellectual history: those who moved from Judaism to Christianity out of a conviction that they were choosing a superior religion, and out of doubt or lack of confidence in the religious principles and practices of their former religion. Their spiritual journeys often led them to suspect and challenge their newly adopted beliefs as well, and some even returned to Judaism or adopted a hybrid faith consisting of elements of both religions. Their intellectual itineraries between Judaism and Christianity offer a unique perspective on the formation of modern Jewish identities, Jewish-Christian relations, and the history of Jewish sceptical postures.

Endelman’s cautionary words that even converts of “conviction” can be motivated by economic and social factors as well as by the cultural discourse in which they are framing their conversion narratives are well taken. But, of course, this might also allow us to consider that so-called converts of “convenience” need not always be indifferent or unaware of religious concerns and religious discourse. Their striving for social mobility and integration might have been accompanied, in some cases, by spiritual concerns as well. Given the complexity of human lives, and the still powerful hold of religious ideologies and institutions in the modern era, convenience and conviction should never be viewed as entirely inseparable. Religious ideology might indeed provide the necessary legitimation or justification of less noble social or economic aspirations. Moreover, while converts of “conviction” could easily be tainted by non-ideological factors in approaching the baptismal font or influenced by the hostile language against Judaism in the public forum, it would be unwise to reduce their spiritual and intellectual yearnings to socio-economic factors alone. Particularly when the convert leaves an impressive archival or printed record of the process of his/her transformation from Jew to Christian, it is incumbent upon the historian to take these articulations seriously, albeit with the care and scrutiny with which one should examine any ego-document.

It might be useful to refer as well to the thoughtful comments of Ellie Schinker, one of the participants in this volume, regarding Todd Endelman’s book. She calls the aforementioned approach of Endelman as structuralist, pegging all forms of abandonment as strategic and instrumental. For her, the limitation of this perspective is a loss of specificity, missing the nuanced and unique lives of actual people, communities, and living Christian cultures that pulled Jews towards them. When one examines the particulars of each and every case of conversion, where ample evidence is available, one notes considerably more ambivalence and messiness in the process; the break from Jews and Judaism was not always so radical and extreme. Endelman’s secular history of Jewish converts where conversion “is primarily reduced

to a socio-economic strategy rather than an expression of faith or communal reorientation” seems particularly unsuited to the study of converts in Russia who lived in religiously grounded societies. Schainker argues that Endelman well explains why Jews radically assimilated but not necessarily how they did so, taking into account their relationship with Christian clerics and others, how they functioned as cultural ambassadors, and how they specifically perceived and navigated the porous religious and cultural boundaries between the two religions. “Rather than studying radical assimilation as a one-way street away from Jewishness,” she concludes (and which she demonstrates in her aforementioned book on Jewish converts in Russia), “it is also a rich lens through which to study the social and cultural encounters among Jews, converts, and a variety of Christian communities.”⁸

The approach of this modest volume is in line with her general approach. Ultimately conversion is a highly idiosyncratic life choice, determined primarily by personal factors which cannot easily be reduced to an overarching explanation based solely on broad social, economic, religious, or political determinants. The book consciously avoids broad generalizations about the modern convert in favor of detailed case studies of specific converts all drawn to the Christian faith in four distinct localities: Germany, Russia, Poland, and England, and all living in the nineteenth century. In so doing, it underscores the individuality of each convert’s life experience and self-reflection and the need to examine more intensely this relatively neglected dimension of Jewish and Christian cultural and intellectual history.

Agnieszka Jagodzińska’s chapter opens the volume with the focus on two rabbinical students, Hirsch Izraeliski and Abraham Hauptmann, who were converted by missionaries of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews in Warsaw in 1837. While she lacks either a written account by the converts themselves of their entrance into evangelical Protestantism or any detailed reports of others, she is still able to locate skillfully the incident within the context of the debates over Jewish identity in Poland in the first decades of the nineteenth century. She discusses the efforts of the government to reform Jewish society through the foundation of a “Jewish committee” in 1825 and the so-called Rabbinical School based on enlightenment principles established in the following year. The Rabbinical School, as she points out, was more like a lycée than a yeshivah, offering a promising tool for reform and welcomed by governmental authorities and liberal Jews alike.

By 1815, the London Society had gained the right to operate within the confines of Congress Poland and the government passively tolerated them. Their contacts in the school, their distribution of newly printed Bibles and other materials, and their linguistic skills in English appeared attractive to certain liberal Jews who sought social and cultural integration into civil Christian society and were open to interactions with educated Europeans from the West. They sought to become part of civil

⁸ Ellie R. Schainker, Review of Todd Endelman’s *Leaving the Jewish Fold* in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 68 (2017): 214–16.

Christianity without abdicating their connections with Judaism; the missionaries mistook this receptiveness for something else.

These two students were sceptics who clearly converted out of an exposure to the Christian faith; they embraced the teaching of the missionaries out of conviction, Jagodziński contends. Their conversion was a symptom of the failed efforts of liberal Jews and the Russian government to transform Jews into civil Christians. In the end, the Jews learned that the English missionaries were not carriers of enlightenment ideals but anti-enlightenment ones.

Ellie Schainker's study of Vasily Levison offers a fascinating portrait of a German reform rabbi who converted to Russian Orthodoxy and became a professor at St. Petersburg Theological Seminary. Unlike the case of Agnieszka Jagodzińska's sources for her study, Schainker had the benefit of both an archival file and published papers to construct her convert's life and thought. Levison's conversion surely emerged from religious doubt and philosophical dissonance with his surroundings. Dissatisfied with Moses Mendelssohn's attempted fusion of universalism, rationalism, and ritualism, Levison embraced instead the warmth of the Christian faith neither in Lutheranism or Catholicism but in Russian orthodoxy, a version of Christianity, he thought, free of fanaticism and harsh polemics. In his *Jerusalem Letters*, written during a mission to Jerusalem accompanied with other clerics, he not only poured out his love for the Christian sites he saw but narrated his remarkable journey from German idealism and Jewish reform to his spiritual refuge in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Schainker's study demonstrates the inadequacy of Endelman's model of strategic conversion emerging out of the quest for socio-economic and political equality, at least in this particular case. The Jews of Imperial Russia lacked the conditions of emancipation and were not engaged in a discourse about its implementation. The dynamic interaction between Jews and Christians both prior to and after Levison's conversion in the Pale of Settlement suggest how his baptism never severed his Jewish connections as he strove to shape a new Christian religious identity. In studying Levison and other Russian Jewish converts, Schainker makes a strong case for looking beyond "a structural analysis of emancipation and its discontents." She underscores instead the role of sociability, the search for self-improvement, and the stimulus of personal relations in evaluating the conversion process. Levison's odyssey thus can neither be reduced to "convenience" nor "conviction" alone. Instead, it emerges out of highly individualized search for meaning shaped by personal and cultural encounters.

My own study focuses on the spiritual journey of the mysterious convert Stanislaus Hoga from Hasidic Judaism to evangelical Christianity to finally a blending of the two faiths. Born in Kuzmir (Kazimierz Dolny), Poland where he was highly educated in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources, Hoga met Alexander McCaul, the well-known missionary of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, who was then stationed in Warsaw. Hoga was ultimately baptized by McCaul and accompanied him back to London where he became his close collaborator in translating missionary materials into Hebrew. When McCaul published his

formidable assault on the Talmud and rabbinic Judaism, it was Hoga who translated the book into Hebrew in 1839, a work widely disseminated among his former co-religionists. My account of Hoga focuses on the period of the next ten years of his life when he gradually separates himself from the aspirations and tactics of the London society to eventually become a hostile critic of his own mentor and his severe indictment of rabbinic Judaism.

Hoga never returned to his former faith but he defended the right of Jews to observe Jewish law; indeed, he considered it the only way Jews could embrace the faith of Jesus, who like them, had been an adherent of Jewish practice all his life. In several works written in the 1840s, Hoga laid out a series of arguments in favor of a Jewish-Christianity, revealing himself as a highly serious, brooding writer, well-versed in philosophy, science, and literature. By the end of this period, Hoga disappeared from the public arena only to reappear near the end of his life as a patented inventor and scientist.

Ironically, Hoga found a receptive audience for his views among certain Christian thinkers in England who were themselves critical of the missionaries and among certain Jews who appreciated his critique of the London society even though he had formally abandoned Judaism. It was the good fortune of the apostate Hoga to see his own writings both advertised and published in the pages of the two organs of the British Jewish community, *The Voice of Jacob* and *The Jewish Chronicle*. Stanislaus Hoga's liminal place between the two religions and his reception among his contemporaries suggests a remarkable degree of tolerance and openness of dialogue between Christians, Jews, and those somewhere in-between the two faiths in mid-nineteenth century England.

Christian Wiese closes this volume with a rigorous study of two well-known German Jews, David and Paulus (Selig) Cassel. The first became a significant historian of Jewish literature and a strong advocate for the academic study of Judaism. The second, also a highly accomplished scholar of Judaism, became a convert, a Protestant theologian and missionary. Despite his apostasy, Paulus never abandoned his appreciation of the Jewish people becoming their courageous defender against the violent anti-Semitic assaults in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century.

Wiese first considers the career and intellectual output of David Cassel, his relationship to such academic luminaries as Leopold Zunz and Moritz Steinschneider, and his role as a popular historian who also addressed the relations between Jews and Christians while defending the integrity of his faith against Christian missionaries. In turning to Paulus Cassel's writings over a long span of time, Wiese comprehensively shows how he began as an historian of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) but after his conversion chose to write Christian theological history (religious *Weltgeschichte*). At the same time, Paulus left an eloquent statement on his own journey to the Christian faith while revealing his strong personal connection to Jews and Judaism.

In challenging the national and racial narratives of his generation, Paulus was unique in debunking modern racial anti-Semitism as not only an assault on Judaism

but on Christianity as well. He particularly singled out the sinister Christian amalgamation of religion and power which led to Jew hatred. He claimed that only by returning to its Jewish roots could Christianity regain its own integrity. By boldly promoting the image of Christ as a Semite, he suffered a barrage of attacks by those same anti-Semites who had vigorously tried to remove their own image of Jesus from his Jewish context.

All four of the case studies in this volume reveal commonalities regarding the rich and complex life experience of the converts, especially how their connections with Jews and Judaism were never completely severed either socially, intellectually or emotionally long after their baptism. While there are few hints about the psychological fate of the two Warsaw rabbinical students after their conversion, the cases of Levison, Hoga, and Paulus Cassel illustrate the loneliness of their lives and their challenges in finding a meaningful niche for themselves either in Christian or Jewish society. Hoga and Cassel offer especially parallel trajectories in assuming a unique role of defending the Jewish people and Judaism while believing in the faith of Jesus Christ. In both cases, ironically, they were remembered in endearing obituaries written in the Jewish press in Germany and England.

It is our hope that this modest collection of case studies of Jewish converts to Christianity in the nineteenth century provides an additional layer to the already rigorous scholarship in this field in recent years. In focusing on the individuality and particularity of the experiences of so-called converts of conviction, we hope to contribute to the history of Jewish and Christian thought as well as to the history of perceptions of the other in both faith communities.

What remains is the pleasant task of describing the origin of the book and to thank those who made its publication possible. The book emerged from a workshop sponsored by the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Hamburg on 29 March 2016. In addition to the four contributors to this volume, Professor Andreas Brämer of the Institute for the History of German Jews, Hamburg, and Dr. Mirjam Thulin of the Leibniz Institute of European History, Mainz, also participated in the program. It is my great pleasure to thank the Center's director Professor Giuseppe Veltri and its able scientific coordinator Maria Wazinski for their wonderful support in planning and carrying out this workshop as well as facilitating its publication through the Centre's publication series. Rachel Aumiller also played an important role in seeing this volume through the publication process.

June 2017

Agnieszka Jagodzińska

Reformers, Missionaries, and Converts: Interactions Between the London Society and Jews in Warsaw in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century¹

On the nineteenth of May 1837, Jewish Warsaw was shaken by the conversion of two young people. Hirsch Izraelski and Abraham Hauptmann were baptized at the Lutheran church in Warsaw, adopting new Christian names, respectively, Henry and Siegmund.² Both of them had received religious instruction from Ferdinand Becker, an ordained missionary of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews,³ an Evangelical organization established in London in 1809 and present in Warsaw since the 1820s. Every Jewish conversion to Christianity created a stir in the Jewish community of the capital but this one was especially controversial. Both Izraelski and Hauptmann had attended the Rabbinical School of Warsaw, an institution which was expected to educate a new generation of rabbis.

The decision of Izraelski and Hauptmann to change their religion was not typical for the liberal circles of the Warsaw Jews at that time; however, their situation was. These two “converts of conviction” belonged to the generation which found itself at the ideological and religious crossroads between tradition and modernity and was forced to negotiate the shape of its contemporary Jewish identity. These negotiations led some of them to Reform Judaism, some others to religious scepticism and secularism, and still others to an interest in Christianity. In this article, I will look closer into these two conversions, setting them in the context of the political, social and religious debate held between Poles and Jews in the first decades of the nineteenth century. My aim is also to investigate how the missionaries of the London Society entered the scene of the debate. By presenting the case of these two converts, I wish to raise questions about a story of their generation.

In order to understand the conversion of these two young Jewish students of the Rabbinical School in Warsaw, it seems necessary to explain first the character of the

1 The research presented in this article appeared originally in Polish as: “Warszawska Szkoła Rabinów w świetle źródeł misyjnych” [The Rabbinical School in Warsaw in the light of the missionary sources], *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów / Jewish History Quarterly* 249.1 (2014): 142–61. I wish to thank the editors of this periodical for their kind permission to publish a revised version of this text.

2 F.W. Becker, “Warsaw. Journal of the Rev. F. W. Becker,” *The Jewish Intelligence and Monthly Account of the Proceedings of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews* 11 (1837): 266. Depending on the sources, the first names of the converts were rendered respectively as Heinrich / Henry / Henryk and Sigismund / Siegmund / Zygmunt.

3 The name of this organization will be further abbreviated to LSPCJ, the London Society or the Society (always with capital letters).

School, the reasons for which it was created, and also the role it played in shaping both liberal Judaism and religious scepticism in the circles of acculturated Jews of the capital. My aim is also to determine what kind of contacts missionaries of the London Society established with the staff and students of the School and what influence they had on them.

The Rabbinical School in Warsaw

The discussion over the religious and social reform of the Polish Jews was not only a matter of internal Jewish dispute but it was also a decades-long debate between the Polish government and the Jewish community. It reached its climax in the 1820s. In 1825 the Polish government created the so-called *Komitet Starozakonnych* [Jewish Committee], a body whose role was to facilitate the social, cultural and “moral” reform of the Jews. The aim of this reform was to turn Jews into “civil Christians”⁴ (i. e. similar to Poles in every respect but religion). Despite its somewhat misleading name, the members of the Jewish Committee were Poles, while Jews served only as its consultants and advisors. The Committee soon became an axis of the Polish-Jewish debate.

In 1826 in the capital city of Warsaw, the Jewish Committee established the Rabbinical School which was thought to be a most promising tool of this reform. The name of the School is misleading, too. It had little to do with the traditional system of Jewish learning; it appeared to be more like a nineteenth-century European lycée than yeshivah. Subjects taught at the Rabbinical School combined religious studies with secular science. Religious instruction included Bible, Talmud, the Mishneh Torah of Moses Maimonides, the Shulhan Arukh of Yosef Karo, moral teaching based on the Bible and Talmud, and “holy pronunciation” (Torah cantillation). Additionally, students studied Hebrew, Polish, general history, history of Poland, geography, mathematics, and natural science. With the exception of Hebrew, all secular subjects were taught in Polish.⁵ From 1827 on also other European languages like German or French were taught at the School.⁶

This government-inspired institution was supposed to educate a new generation of rabbis who would help the Polish state to reform the Jewish community from the

4 Marcin Wodziński, “‘Civil Christians’: Debates on the Reform of the Jews in Poland, 1789–1830,” in *Culture Front: Representing Jews in Eastern Europe*, eds. Benjamin Nathans, Gabriella Safran (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 46–76.

5 “Dodatek 1: Plan ogólny zaprowadzenia Szkoły Rabinów w Warszawie” [Appendix 1: the general plan of organization of the Rabbinical School in Warsaw], in *Z dziejów gminy starozakonnych w Warszawie w XIX stuleciu* [From the history of the Jewish community in Warsaw in the 19th century], vol. 1: *Szkolnictwo* [Schools], intr. Adolf Jakób Cohn (Warszawa: Księgarnia E. Wende i s-ka, 1907), 51.

6 [Adolf Jakób Cohn], Chapter 2: “Szkoła Rabinów” [The Rabbinical School], in *Z dziejów gminy starozakonnych w Warszawie w XIX stuleciu*, 64.

inside: “The youth, raised in new schools, were expected to revive their community spiritually and morally, to destroy all these moral, cultural and linguistic differences which separated Jewish society from the Polish one.”⁷ However, the Polish reformers lacked not only any deeper understanding of what Judaism was but also basic knowledge of the role of a rabbi in the Jewish community. They quite wrongly presumed that “rabbis are the same for Jews what priests are for other denominations.”⁸

There was a part of the Warsaw Jewish community who welcomed the newly-founded School with high hopes and enthusiasm. These were liberal Jews, who called themselves “enlightened,” “progressive” or “reform,” although they had a vague connection to Haskalah and practically nothing in common with Progressive or Reform Judaism in the form in which it was known in the Western Europe. Understanding who exactly the members of this group were and what place they occupied on the ideological map of the European Jewry is part of a bigger problem of conceptualization in defining Jewish liberalism and religious reform in the Kingdom of Poland. As Marcin Wodziński points out, until recently scholars tended to believe that the lack of basic institutions of this reform (like conferences of rabbis or separated synagogues) negated the very existence of liberal Judaism in Poland. Scholars seemed to ignore the distinct nature of religious reform in Eastern Europe which avoided radical forms. More recent approaches offer better understanding of this problem:

Despite all the limitations, the religious changes taking place in the liberal Jewish community in the Polish lands can reasonably be seen as a slow but successful revolution. The reformers were afraid of change that would be too radical and could, on the one hand, arouse opposition from conservative circles and expose the reformers to a charge of usurpation, and, on the other, encourage those who had already moved away from practicing their religion to leave Judaism even more rapidly. Nevertheless, changes were gradually introduced that created obviously new forms of worship and new social relations.⁹

Wodziński also reminds us that, for Polish Jews, the Haskalah was not the only path to modernity or even the dominant one.¹⁰ So the group to which I refer in this article as “liberal Jews” should not be automatically identified as maskilim – it is more relevant to think of them as supporters of religious, social and political reform, although their views on this subject were far from being coherent and homogeneous.

⁷ Józef Bero, “Z dziejów szkolnictwa żydowskiego w Królestwie Kongresowym 1815–1830” [From the history of the Jewish schools in the Congress Kingdom, 1815–30], *Minerwa Polska* [Polish Minerva] 2 (1929): 97.

⁸ [Antoni Eisenbaum], “O Rabinach” [On rabbis], *Rozmaitości* [Varia] 10 [appendix to] *Gazeta Korrespondenta Warszawskiego i Zagranicznego* [Newspaper of the Warsaw and foreign correspondent] 50 (1822): 37. I thank Lidia Jerkiewicz for sharing this text with me.

⁹ Marcin Wodziński, “Modernity and Polish Jews: Recent Developments in Polish-Jewish History,” *Studia Judaica* 19 (2016): 82–3 (quotation 83).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

Their attitude as a group towards the Jewish tradition was also quite ambivalent: some showed more attachment to observing the halakhah, while others openly manifested their criticism and adopted a more relaxed approach towards observing Jewish law.

The Rabbinical School was crucial for the plans of Polish and Jewish reformers but the two groups intended to use the School in order to achieve their own goals. The government believed that it could help to turn Jews into “useful” Polish citizens while liberal Jews hoped to provide their children with such education that would be in compliance with the spirit of the modern world. While Poles saw in the School a tool to “correct” Judaism according to their own ideas and their understanding of what Judaism was and what it should become, Jews were interested in implementing an internal reform of their religion. The liberal Jews accepted the reformative attempts of the government as long as they corresponded with their own aim.

Despite these high hopes, the School failed to achieve its goal: not one of its graduates became a rabbi, although two of them, Izaak Kramsztyk and Izaak Cylkow, served later as preachers¹¹ who delivered sermons in Polish.¹² The alumni of the Rabbinical School formed instead what was known later as the new liberal Jewish elite who adopted Polish language, names, and dress, fought in the Polish uprisings, and sent their children to Polish schools.¹³ It is not surprising to discover that a large number of the former students of this institution grew quite sceptical of the Judaism which they knew. After all, what could be expected, if we take into consideration, for

11 Both Izaak Kramsztyk (1814?–1889) and Izaak Cylkow (1841–1908) were key religious figures in the group of the so-called Poles of the Mosaic Persuasion who advocated acculturation and social integration with the Polish majority. This group of liberal Jews believed it was possible for them to become Poles in the cultural and national sense, while still keeping their Jewish religious identity. Kramsztyk was the first preacher who introduced sermons in the Polish language—this happened in 1852 in the so-called “Polish synagogue” in Warsaw, which was a private place of worship founded by a Warsaw banker and industrialist, Zelig Natansohn, in his own house in Nalewski Street. When after the fall of the anti-Russian uprising of 1863–64 and a period of intense Russification that followed, the use of Polish language was banned in synagogues, it was Izaak Cylkow who dared to re-introduce it in Jewish worship in 1878 in the newly-opened Great Synagogue in Tłomackie Street in Warsaw. See Agnieszka Jagodzińska, *Pomiędzy: Akulturacja Żydów Warszawy w drugiej połowie XIX wieku* [In-between: The acculturation of the Warsaw Jews in the second half of the 19th century] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2008), 36, 154.

12 The information about a few of the graduates becoming rabbis offered by Adam Penkalla (“Rabbinis in the Radom Province in the nineteenth century (1815–1914),” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 76 (1997): 78–79) is incorrect. Although it was later corrected by Marcin Wodziński (*Oświecenie żydowskie wobec chasydyzmu: Dzieje pewnej idei* [Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A history of certain idea] (Warszawa: Cyklady, 2003), 140), it is still repeated—see for example: Michał Skowroński, “Szkoła Rabinów w Warszawie (1826–1863): Jaki był cel jej istnienia?” [The Rabbinical School in Warsaw (1826–63): What was its purpose?], in *Wśród ‘swoich’ i ‘obcych’: Rola edukacji w społeczeństwach wielokulturowych Europy Środkowej (XVIII–XX wiek)* [Among ‘ours’ and ‘others’: The role of education in the multicultural societies of Central Europe (18th–20th century)], ed. Stefania Walesek (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza “Impuls,” 2006), 57.

13 For more on the acculturation of the Warsaw Jews, see Jagodzińska, *Pomiędzy*.

example, that the person who taught Talmud in the Rabbinical School was none other than Abraham Buchner, the author of the (in) famous pamphlet titled *Der Talmud in seiner Nichtigkeit*, published by the London Society's missionaries in 1848?¹⁴

The Rabbinical School was one of the first Jewish educational institutions in the Kingdom of Poland that introduced secular subjects. It departed radically from the world of traditional yeshivas not only because of a different curriculum or different didactic methods but, first and foremost, because of a different vision of Judaism and what it meant to be a Jew in the nineteenth-century Kingdom of Poland. Judaism of the liberal Jews was adaptable to the standards of modern life while for traditional Jews the definition of Jewishness was not negotiable. For this reason, from the very beginning, this institution provoked heated reactions on the part of the Jewish community in Warsaw. The traditional Jews had many reasons to disapprove of the Rabbinical School, from the secular subjects taught there to more relaxed observance of the Jewish law (manifested both by the students and the staff) or even breaking it.¹⁵

The traditional Jews boycotted this institution and accused its head, Antoni Eisenbaum, a liberal, freethinker and a leader of integrationist movement,¹⁶ of various trespasses against the Halakhah from violation of Shabbat to serving non-kosher food to his full-board students. It was common knowledge in the capital that the circles of the Rabbinical School were heavily influenced by the ideas of both Jewish and European enlightenments including such trends as rationalism and religious scepticism. The failure of the Rabbinical School to produce rabbis is usually explained by the negative attitude of the traditional Jews towards this institution,¹⁷ the young age of the graduates, and the lack of their proper training or low salaries offered to rabbis that did not attract many candidates from this milieu.¹⁸ But in my opinion, there is another factor that should be taken into consideration – the graduates of the School who were influenced by secular ideas simply had no interest in becoming rabbis. Even missionaries, who were coming to the School as total outsiders, were quick

14 A[braham] Buchner, *Der Talmud in seiner Nichtigkeit dargestellt* (Warschau: Missions-Druckerie, 1848).

15 For more on this, see Jagodzińska, “Warszawska Szkoła Rabinów w świetle źródeł misyjnych,” 156–60.

16 See Marcin Wodziński, *Eisenbaum, Antoni*, YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe (2010); http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Eisenbaum_Antoni (accessed 28 January 2017).

17 The pro-Polish Jewish historians writing about the Rabbinical School usually treated the accusations raised by the traditional Jews as groundless. However, the missionary sources show that the traditional Jews did indeed have reasons to boycott the School. I elaborate this issue in: Jagodzińska, “Warszawska Szkoła Rabinów w świetle źródeł misyjnych.”

18 For more information on who applied for positions of a rabbi in the area of Warsaw, see *Miasto bez rabina nie może istnieć: rabini, podrabini i kandydaci na rabinów Guberni Warszawskiej w latach 1888–1912 / A City without a Rabbi Cannot Exist: Rabbis, Assistant Rabbis and Candidates for Rabbis in the Warsaw Governorate in the Years 1888–1912*, eds. Zofia Borzymińska, Marta Rzepecka-Aleksiejuk and Rafał Żebrowski, English version—trans. Caryl Swift (Warszawa/Warsaw: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych. Departament Edukacji i Współpracy z Zagranicą, 2012).

to observe (and pity) its “infidel” character.¹⁹ According to these observations, its students were more likely to emerge freethinkers than rabbis.

Missionaries of the London Society in Warsaw

One may wonder what the missionaries of the LSPCJ, the oldest and the largest British Protestant missionary organization of its kind, did in the predominantly Catholic Kingdom of Poland, trying to evangelize its Jews. The answer lies in the special interest which the Society took in the vast Jewish population inhabiting the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth ceased to exist due to the partitions which Austria, Prussia and Russia carried out between 1772 and 1795, making the country disappear from the political map of Europe. Parts of the former Commonwealth regained their independence or semi-independence. Thanks to the support of the French Emperor Napoleon I, in 1807 the Duchy of Warsaw was created. Later, after his fall, the Duchy was replaced by the Kingdom of Poland, founded on the basis of a ruling of the Vienna Congress in 1815 (hence it was known also as the Congress Kingdom or Congress Poland).²⁰ After two failed anti-tsarist uprisings (in 1830–1831 and 1863–1864), the sovereignty of the Kingdom was subjected to further limitations and the Russian control over Polish lands grew stronger. Already after the partitions, a great number of the Commonwealth’s Jews became Austrian, Prussian and Russian subjects. In Russia, Jews were permitted to live in the western regions of the Russian Empire which constituted the Pale of Settlement and corresponded roughly with the annexed Polish lands.²¹

The London Society did not get permission to operate in the Pale; therefore it focused its missionary attention on Jews in the Congress Kingdom.²² Poland became an important destination for the Society which believed that “no country presents a more interesting field of labor for a Missionary to the Jews than this.”²³ The first

19 ‘Warsaw Journal of the Rev. F. W. Becker,’ *Jewish Intelligence* 11 (1837): 266.

20 For more on the changing political character of this state, see Marcin Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hassidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A History of Conflict*, trans. Sarah Cozens (Oxford-Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005), 34–39.

21 The basic information about the Pale of Settlement can be found in: John Klier, “Pale of Settlement,” in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Gershon Hundert (2010); http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale_of_Settlement (accessed 25 August 2016).

22 For more on the political context of the missions of the London Society in the Kingdom of Poland, see Agnieszka Jagodzińska, “The London Society and its Missions to the Polish Jews, 1821–1855: The Gospel and Politics,” in *The Politics of Nineteenth-Century Missionary Periodicals*, eds. Felicity Jensz, Hanna Acke (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 151–165.

23 “Poland,” *The Jewish Records Chiefly for the Use of Collectors and Small Subscribers to the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews* 40 (1829): 1; in *Papers of the Church’s Min-*

and the main missionary station started to function in Warsaw in the early 1820s; later some others were established in other locations in the country. Alexander McCaul, a missionary and a scholar, one of the most prominent figures of the London Society, wrote after two decades of its work in Warsaw: “Poland still continues the same rich and boundless field of labour that it ever was.”²⁴ The missionaries described their encounters with Polish Jews in reports which they regularly sent to their headquarters in London.²⁵ The LSPCJ operated in Poland until 1855 when its missionaries were expelled due to the escalation of the political conflict between Great Britain and the Russian Empire.²⁶ Despite many efforts to return to Poland, the Society managed to reopen its missions only in 1875.²⁷

The missionaries of the LSPCJ were not enthusiastically welcomed in the Kingdom of Poland neither by the Polish authorities nor by the local Protestant communities (not to mention Jews).²⁸ There was, however, a feature which they shared with the Polish government and the liberal Jews, namely interest in the situation of the Jews and the intention to change their present condition. The missionary activities of evangelization coincided thus with the Polish and Jewish efforts to implement social and ‘moral’ reforms the Jews. How did the government see the role of the missionaries in this process? The authorities believed that “because the reform of Jews is desired in our country, no possible means of implementing it should be neglected. Efforts of the English [sic!] Society deserve protection of the government.”²⁹ In reality, however, this political declaration translated simply into passive toleration

istry among the Jews (formerly the Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews) deposited at the Bodleian Library, Special Collections, Oxford: Dep. CMJ, e. 24.

24 William Th. Gidney, *At Home and Abroad. A Description of English and Continental Missions of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews* (London: Operative Jewish Converts’ Institution, 1900), 108.

25 The handwritten reports from Poland from the first half of the nineteenth century have been preserved in Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie [The main archive of the old records in Warsaw; further abbreviated to: AGAD], in the archival collection of Centralne Władze Wyznaniowe [Central Religious Authorities; further abbreviated to: CWW] file nos. 1454–58. The collection contains 107 reports written in German, 81—in Polish and four—in English. I present the information from the German reports based on the translation of Lidia Jerkiewicz and Jan Garske. These handwritten reports were later edited and published in the missionary periodicals of the Society. For more on the missionary writings of the LSPCJ, see Agnieszka Jagodzińska, “*Duszozbawcy*”? *Misje i literatura Londyńskiego towarzystwa krzewienia chrześcijaństwa wśród Żydów w latach 1809–1939* [The missions and literature of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1809–1939] (Kraków-Budapest: Austeria, 2017).

26 During the Crimean War (1853–56) Russia fought against the Ottoman Empire allied with Britain, France and Sardinia.

27 The missionary activity in this second period lasted (with intervals) until 1939 and had a different character than in the first period.

28 I discuss the reasons for that in Jagodzińska, “The London Society and its Missions to the Polish Jews,” 154, 160–63.

29 AGAD, Komisja Rządowa Spraw Wewnętrznych [The governmental commission of the internal affairs] 6630: 24 *recto*.

of the missionaries, without any efforts to incorporate them into the broader scheme of the planned reform. Despite the fact that both the Society and the Polish government wished to see Jews “improved” morally, they differed in regards to the opinion on what the final outcome of such reform should be. Nevertheless, all three groups (the government, the liberal Jews and the missionaries) did share criticism of some aspects of traditional Judaism, and especially the role and authority of the Talmud in modern Jewish life.

Alexander McCaul and Ferdinand Becker reported that first encounters of the missions in Warsaw with the reform intended by the government were not successful. They observed that the newly established Jewish Committee drew Jews away from missionaries and made them less eager to hear the Christian message than before. Jews expected that reforms planned by the Committee would bring about the improvement of their social situation and they found this option much more desirable as it did not require conversion. McCaul and Becker complained in their report:

Not long ago a violent attack was made upon us in the Jewish committee. We were, however, defended by one of the members, and the others agreed, that, although, we were mistaken in our object, our motives were laudable. The sitting of this committee has opened to some a prospect of obtaining situations, and has attached a degree of importance to others, which has induced them to withdraw almost entirely from all intercourse with us. Still we hope the operations of this committee will eventually prove advantageous to our cause.³⁰

In a way, the missionaries were right. It did not take long before the initial enthusiasm and hopes of Jews concerning the Committee faded away. Disillusionment in governmental reforms and also internal Jewish attempts to find different means to improve the situation brought some of the liberal Jews back to the missionaries. Although for the majority of Jews, the solution to the “Jewish Question” which the Society proposed was unacceptable, there were things which attracted Jews to the missionaries.

Contacts of the Missionaries with the Rabbinical School

In order to understand what brought about the conversion of the two young students of the Rabbinical School, Hirsch Izraelski and Abraham Hauptmann, it is worthwhile to determine how they—and also other students and staff of the School—came into contact with the missionaries. Missionary reports show that the agents of the London

³⁰ “Poland. Letters from Rev. A. M’Caul and Rev. W. F. Becker,” *The Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel, Containing Monthly Communications Respecting the Jews, and the Proceedings of the London Society* 5 (1827): 176. The quoted report describes the missionary activity in the end of 1826.

Society had many opportunities to approach Jews within the milieu of this institution.

The first official contact between the missionaries and the Rabbinical School in Warsaw was established already within a month of its opening, i.e. in the end of 1826. It is interesting to note that the initiative came out from the School which reached out to the missionaries, and not the other way around. The missionaries were asked to donate six copies of their Hebrew Bibles to the School. They were requested for students who could not afford to buy their own copies. Of course, the missionaries could not say no to such a request. Alexander McCaul reported:

Knowing that it would be pleasing to the Society, to see the Bibles without rabbinical comments in the hands of such persons, and considering it also desirable to excite a good feeling on the part of Jews, we sent them the Bibles in the name of the London Committee, and we have since received the [...] letter of thanks from the Jewish Committee.³¹

This gesture had a desired effect. It improved the relations with the Jewish Committee which seemed to have started off on the wrong foot. In the above mentioned letter, Ignacy Zaleski, the director of the Jewish Committee, not only thanked the Society for its gift but also promised to inform the Polish authorities of “this proof of the (London) Committee’s good-will towards the new institution” [i.e. the Rabbinical School].³²

It seems that at the end of 1826 the missionaries established also the first unofficial contacts with the Jews connected to the School.³³ However, the time when the missionaries gained special Jewish attention (both in its positive and negative aspect) was from the mid-1830s until the mid-1840s. According to missionary reports, the contacts with students and staff of the Rabbinical School and with other liberal Jews of Warsaw were particularly frequent then.³⁴

The majority of the students and staff of the School did not visit the missionaries because they were interested in conversion, although for some of them—as for Izrael-ski and Hauptmann—it was indeed an option to consider. As it turns out, the reasons

³¹ Ibid., 178.

³² Ibid., 178.

³³ Some of these private contacts even predated the opening of this institution. Such was the case of Abraham Buchner, a radical maskil and controversial teacher of the Rabbinical School. The earliest mention of him visiting the missionaries in Warsaw is dated January 1826. Buchner borrowed from the missionaries a work of Johann Arndt, a theologian considered to be a forefather of German Pietism. If the missionaries decided to lend him this book, it is quite probable they had already met Abraham Buchner earlier. They considered him to be “a truly learned and thinking man” who “studies thoroughly Christianity.” (“Poland Letter from Rev. W. F. Becker,” *Jewish Expositor* 7 (1826): 267).

³⁴ Reports from the later period do not record similar number of encounters between the missionaries and these Jews but it does not necessarily prove that contacts between them decreased. We do not know if all the reports that had been written in Warsaw, were preserved—for example, in the file of the reports dated to 1848–55 (AGAD, CWW 1458), reports on the missionary activity in the capital city are significantly fewer than in other files in the archival collection of AGAD, CWW 1454–58.

for contacts with the London Society were of a more worldly nature. One of the most popular reasons was missionary publications. The printing of Jewish books was severely diminished at the beginning of the nineteenth century especially in the Polish lands and with many publishing houses having been closed, any printed book in a Jewish language was in high demand. Missionaries made use of this “Jewish hunger” for books by selling cheaply or even distributing free copies of tracts and Bibles.

Jews gladly accepted copies of the Tanakh, or the Hebrew Bible.³⁵ They bought or received also copies of the New Testament,³⁶ *The Old Paths* by Alexander McCaul, the most famous nineteenth-century tract of the Society,³⁷ or other missionary literature.³⁸ They took interest practically in any writings relating to Judaism, although the majority of the missionary material was highly polemical towards the Jewish religion. Sometimes while visiting missionaries at their home, Jews studied these texts together with them.³⁹ News that the missionaries were teaching English might have been an additional encouragement. English classes were very rare (compared to German or French ones) in the Kingdom of Poland at that time.⁴⁰

As we know, the missionaries donated some copies of their Bibles to the library of the Rabbinical School, although individual teachers and scholars hoped to acquire these books for themselves. These publications, both in Jewish and European languages, were later used in a manner not necessarily fulfilling the expectations of the missionaries. Most of the Jews did not search for religious revelation in them but treated them rather practically as study material for learning languages. The missionaries did not seem to mind, however, as they believed that it was better for Jews to study French, for example, using copies of the French Bibles they presented to the School library rather than the “infidel works of Voltaire,” which some students used for this purpose.⁴¹ Interestingly, this was in line with the opinion of the second director of the School, Jakub Tugendhold, definitely more conservative than freethinking Antoni Eisenbaum. But Tugendhold’s campaign against Voltaire was even more radical than the missionary one. While the missionaries had nothing against the French language itself, for Tugendhold it was not enough to ban Voltaire; he even removed

35 AGAD, CWW 1456: 187; CWW 1457: 14.

36 AGAD, CWW 1456: 188; CWW 1457: 13.

37 AGAD, CWW 1457: 13; see Alexander McCaul, *The Old Paths; or, A Comparison of the Principles and Doctrines of Modern Judaism with the Religion of Moses and the Prophets* (London: [LSPCJ], 1836). This work was translated to many languages. Jews in the Kingdom of Poland read it in the Hebrew, Yiddish, German or Polish edition.

38 AGAD, CWW 1457: 13–15.

39 Reports that mention reading of the Tanakh—see for example: AGAD, CWW 1457: 11, 13, 43, 45; of New Testament, CWW 1456: 188; CWW 1457: 11, 53; of *Netiwot Olam*, CWW 1457: 13; of other missionary publications: CWW 1457: 53.

40 English classes given by the missionaries are mentioned in: AGAD, CWW 1456: 188. On reading the Bible in German, see AGAD, CWW 1456: 191. See also CWW 1457: 800.

41 “Warsaw,” *The Monthly Intelligence of the Proceedings of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews* 6 (1832): 92.

French from the curriculum,⁴² taking away the tool through which students could get acquainted with the “subversive” theories such as religious scepticism or even atheism.

Some Jews met with the missionaries simply out of curiosity. They were intrigued who these “Englishmen”⁴³ were and what they had to offer. The liberal Jews were trying to understand what Christianity is and it helped them to define who they were and what their path should be. Some of them even participated in Christian services in Hebrew which the missionaries held on Saturdays or in prayer meetings.⁴⁴ This should not be automatically interpreted as striving for conversion—at least not in the majority of cases—but rather as manifestation of the need for the social contact which the liberal Jews wished to maintain with non-Jews.

The missionaries were not only visited but also received invitations to visit the people connected to the Rabbinical School. They participated in the official events and also in less formal meetings. Missionary reports show that religious borders between Jews and Christians (including Jewish converts to Christianity) in Warsaw were less rigid than it is generally believed. For example, in 1842 Fryderyk Jan Rosenfeld, a convert and a LSPJC’s missionary, reported a visit which he paid to the local congregation of the “German” Jews where he participated in the “reformed” service.⁴⁵ He was accompanied by two people—another convert and a Jewish teacher from the Rabbinical School.⁴⁶ The missionaries, invited by Antoni Eisenbaum, frequently visited the School where they had an opportunity not only to meet the students and the staff of this institution but also to converse with his family members.⁴⁷

42 Hilary Nussbaum, *Szkice historyczne z życia Żydów w Warszawie od pierwszych śladów pobytu ich w tym mieście do chwili obecnej* [Historical sketches of the life of Jews in Warsaw: from the first traces of their stay in this city till the present moment] (Warszawa: Druk K. Kowalewskiego 1881), 157–58.

43 Although the agents of the LSPJC were popularly called “the English missionaries,” some of them were neither Englishmen, nor even Anglicans. For example, in 1834 six out of eight “English missionaries” in Poland were German Protestants—AGAD, CWW 1454: 241.

44 AGAD, CWW 1457: 9, 12, 51.

45 The “German synagogue” in Warsaw was founded in 1802 by Izaak Flatau, a rich merchant who emigrated to Warsaw from Danzig. First it served only his family and families of other German Jews who came to Warsaw in the end of the eighteenth century. But later, as the congregation grew, it moved to a new building in Daniłowiczowska Street no. 615. Although it did not strictly follow the model of the German reformed synagogues, it introduced some “reformed” elements, like some changes in the liturgy, a choir or sermons in German. Its German character faded away though, as the next generation of the Warsaw “German” Jews was getting more and more polonized. In the late 1850s the language of the sermons changed from German to Polish. See Jagodzińska, *Pomiędzy*, 36, 52–53. For more on this synagogue, see Sara Zibersztejn, “Postępowa synagoga na Daniłowiczowskiej w Warszawie (przyczynek do historii kultury Żydów polskich XIX stulecia)” [The progressive synagogue in Daniłowiczowska Street in Warsaw], *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 74 (1970): 31–57.

46 AGAD, CWW 1456: 188–9.

47 AGAD, CWW 1457: 49; CWW 1457: 52

One such conversation offers an insight into what Christianity meant for the liberal Jews. While donating another set of missionary Bibles to the library of the Rabbinical School on one winter day of 1844, Ferdinand Becker had a chance to talk to Fryderyka Eisenbaumowa, the wife of the director. During this meeting she reportedly expressed an opinion that “the real civilization of a Jew means his becoming a Christian.”⁴⁸ The missionaries were of course glad to hear and record her opinion but they totally misunderstood her. Her statement used the rhetorical codes of the Polish-Jewish debates on the “Jewish Question” and on the reform of the Jews. In my opinion, what the wife of the head of the Rabbinical School meant here was not the actual conversion of Jews to Christianity but their becoming “civil Christians.” In this context, both Poles and Jews understood Christianity not as a religious system but rather a secular construct. As Marcin Wodziński explained:

Within mainstream Enlightenment ideology [...], the concept of ‘Christianity’ had nothing at all to do with religion. Christianity was regarded as simply representing the best of all known forms of social organization and ethics, as well as the highest form of culture, and therefore the ‘civil Christian’ was the ideal being; that is, one who accepted the culture and morality of the Christian world without the unnecessary (and, in the opinion of the radicals, harmful) ballast of religious beliefs.⁴⁹

I believe that such sense of the statement made by Eisenbaumowa was clear to all the interlocutors who met on that day at the Rabbinical School—to all but the missionaries. The missionaries, lacking knowledge of the context and of the rhetoric of the Enlightenment Polish-Jewish debates, understood it in its literal, religious meaning which, after all, was the only one that interested them. The life story of Fryderyka Eisenbaumowa confirms my interpretation of this episode: she never converted and died as a Jewess. Even her children, who were brought up in a very liberal and freethinking home, remained Jews.

Naturally, the missionaries tried to convince the “progressive” (meaning, liberal) Jews to make this ultimate “progress”—as they saw it—and convert to Christianity. However, it seems that the students and the teachers of the Rabbinical School were more interested in discussions that would help them to define their modern Jewish identity. A part of these debates—like, for example, one on “the higher morality” of the New Testament, from 1844—might have reminded the liberal Jews what they already knew from the other attempts to reform “Jewish morality” undertaken by the local authorities.⁵⁰ Growing sceptical toward the traditional framework of their identity, the Jewish liberals were searching for the space in which they could test their ideas and try to define the border lines of what it meant to be a liberal

⁴⁸ In German: “die wirkliche Civilisation eines Juden blos darinnen bestehe ein Christ zu werden.” AGAD, CWW 1457: 51.

⁴⁹ Marcin Wodziński, *Hasidism and Politics: The Kingdom of Poland, 1815–1864* (Oxford–Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), 31.

⁵⁰ AGAD, CWW 1457: 42.

Jew. They expected that the missionaries with whom they shared at least a part of the criticism of traditional Jewish life, would contribute to their understanding of this problem or justify the choices which they made. A good example of this can be found in a report by Rosenfeld from 1846: “I was engaged for a few hours with two civilized Jews who have recently adopted German dress.⁵¹ They asked me if a Jew can be saved if he does not observe the Law of Moses.”⁵²

It has to be noted, however, that for some of the Jews from the milieu of the Rabbinical School, the explicit missionary propaganda was too disturbing and that they did not hesitate to express their concerns, engaging in religious polemics with the missionaries or rejecting their message in other ways.⁵³ There were not only the missionaries who attacked Judaism but also the students of the School who challenged missionaries to defend Christianity as in the case of two young Jews sent to the missionary station by “a learned Jew” with a list of questions about Christianity and objections against it.⁵⁴ For this part of the Jews, the missionaries were not partners in the debates but they rather embodied a peril lurking for Jewish souls. Taking into consideration the conversion rate in the circle of the liberal students of the Rabbinical School, these fears were quite justified.

Conversion of Izraeliski and Hauptmann

After the Rabbinical School had been established, the missionaries wrote about the Jewish youth attending this institution that “they will no doubt come from this school with views and dispositions very different from those they would have brought from a Jewish Jeshibah.”⁵⁵ And they were right. The School provided its students not only with a different type of education but also with a totally different mindset. Young liberal Jews developed a new system of values and a more relaxed attitude toward the observance of the tradition. While the missionaries naturally encouraged such a critical attitude towards Judaism, they were quite puzzled when the liberal Jews were becoming “too liberal.” They certainly had not expected that Jews, after growing critical toward Judaism, would become “infidels” and not Christians.

51 A “German dress” was a synonym for a modern, European fashion adopted by the Jews who refused to wear a traditional Jewish garb. For more on the reform of the Jewish garb in Poland, see Agnieszka Jagodzińska, “Overcoming the Signs of the ‘Other’. Visual Aspects of the Acculturation of Jews in the Kingdom of Poland in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 24: *Jews and Their Neighbours in Eastern Europe since 1750*, eds. Israel Bartal, Antony Polonsky, Scott Ury (Oxford—Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 71–94.

52 AGAD, CWW 1457: 616.

53 Some examples of confrontations between the missionaries and the students of the Rabbinical School can be found in: AGAD, CWW 1454: 411; CWW 1456: 613–14; CWW 1457: 266; CWW 1457: 312.

54 AGAD, CWW 1457: 12.

55 “Poland. Letters from Rev. A. M’Caul and Rev. W. F. Becker,” *Jewish Expositor* 5 (1827): 176.

“Infidelity” could encompass rationalism, secularism, religious scepticism or even atheism.

Such was also the case with Hirsch Izraelski and Abraham Hauptmann. According to the missionary narrative, initially “they were, like the greatest part of these scholars [i.e. the students of the Rabbinical School] at that time, in a state of utter infidelity.”⁵⁶ Both young men came into contact with missionaries in the same way in which many other students and teachers of the Rabbinical School did: seeking Bibles which the missionaries distributed.

The biographical information about Hirsch Izraelski and Abraham Hauptmann is quite sparse, in respect to both the period before and after their conversion.⁵⁷ Izraelski came to Warsaw from Sochaczew, a town located some fifty kilometers from the capital. His elderly father was a “sub-rabbi” (*dayan*) in the local community. Prior to his conversion Izraelski attended the Rabbinical School in Warsaw where for five consecutive years he received a scholarship (1833–1837).⁵⁸ The only information that we have about Hauptmann, the second student of this School, is that he was from Warsaw.

Izraelski and Hauptmann, although initially attracted to the missionaries for secular reasons, developed however a deeper interest in their message. The initial scepticism toward Judaism brought them finally to its complete rejection in favor of Christianity, which was the result of guided study of missionary publications and numerous discussions with missionaries of the London Society. It is interesting that, in order to convince them of the Christian message, the missionaries first had to restore their faith in the divine inspiration of the “Old Testament” (meaning the Hebrew Bible), as the students displayed clear disbelief in any form of revealed religion.⁵⁹ According to the reports, they became “converts of conviction,” which suggests that the motivation of their conversion was of a religious and not of social or economic nature. Not only missionaries and converts themselves chose to believe in this “conversion of conviction” but also Antoni Eisenbaum, the head of the Rabbinical School, seemed to be convinced of it. After their conversion, when the investigation was carried out on the basis of allegations which the traditional Jews raised against two young proselytes, Eisenbaum confirmed that neither Izraelski, nor Hauptmann was “led by any worldly motive to embrace Christianity.” He also complained that “they had greatly endeavoured to lead their fellow-scholars to Christianity.”⁶⁰ Their evangelizing zeal manifest among their co-students seemed to be so great that they were even labeled “the missionaries of the Rabbinical School.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ “Warsaw. Journal of the Rev. F. W. Becker,” *Jewish Intelligence* 11 (1837): 266.

⁵⁷ For more on the fate of Izraelski and Hauptmann after the conversion, see Jagodzińska, “Warszawska Szkoła Rabinów w świetle źródeł misyjnych,” 155–6.

⁵⁸ AGAD, CWW 1465: 105–6.

⁵⁹ AGAD, CWW 1455: 50.

⁶⁰ Both quotations: “Warsaw. Journal of the Rev. F. W. Becker,” *Jewish Intelligence* 11 (1837): 267.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

Izraelski and Hauptmann were not the only students or graduates of the Rabbinical School who decided to convert to Christianity. Although the exact total number is uncertain, the conversion rate was quite high. For example, during the first fifteen years of the existence of this institution as many as 20 of its 185 students changed their religion (around 11%).⁶² We cannot tell exactly how many of these conversions took place under missionary influence and which of the Christian denominations Jews chose, but the missionaries must have had their fair share in influencing these young Jews to embrace Christianity. One thing is certain: the problem of apostasy among the students or graduates of the School which, after all, was expected to educate rabbis, was at least troubling to the Warsaw Jewish community.

The conversion of Izraelski and Hauptmann turned out to be troublesome also for the Rabbinical School. The missionaries reported that two days after their baptism the superintendent of the School (i.e. Eisenbaum)⁶³ came to visit the missionary house. Apparently Eisenbaum did not know yet about the baptisms. He requested the missionaries to stop talking to the two students and even made threats about suing the missionaries. He was afraid of the negative public relations and ill fame which frequent contacts with the London Society finally brought upon the Rabbinical School. The missionaries, quite unimpressed by both his request and warning, informed him that Izraelski and Hauptmann had become Christians. They also suggested, between the lines, that the School did not need to blame missionaries for its problems⁶⁴ as they were rather caused by its own doings. They observed that “infidelity was greatly prompted by their school, which he [i.e. Eisenbaum] could not deny.”⁶⁵

When the knowledge about the conversion of Izraelski and Hauptmann became public, the scandal broke out. It involved not only the converts, their families and the missionaries but also teachers from the Rabbinical School and other local Christians. The reaction of the families was very dramatic, although the missionary narrative did not sympathize with the parents of the young converts. It is evident that the missionaries, convinced that the two young students were saved by accepting Christianity,

62 Aron Sawicki, *Szkoła Rabinów w Warszawie (1826–1862) (na podstawie źródeł archiwalnych)* [The Rabbinical School in Warsaw (1826–62) according to the archival sources] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo “Menora” 1933), 16; Raphael Mahler, *Divrei yemei Israel dorot acharonim mishilhei hameah hashe-mone-esre ad yemeynu* [History of the Jewish people in modern times], vol. 2: *Tekufat hareaktsya ve’-haberit hakedosha’ 1815–1848* [Period of the reaction and of the ‘Holy Alliance’, 1815–1848] (Merchavia: Hotsa’at kibuts artsi hashomer hatsayir, 1970), 224–5.

63 In the printed version of this report, the missionaries do not use the names of the people connected to the School. Nevertheless, some of them can be identified, see Jagodzińska, “Warszawska Szkoła Rabinów w świetle źródeł misyjnych,” 154–55.

64 The story of the conversion of Izraelski and Hauptmann sheds more light on the conflict between the liberal and the traditional Jews concerning the School. For more on the role of the missionary sources in revisiting this subject, see Jagodzińska, “Warszawska Szkoła Rabinów w świetle źródeł misyjnych,” 156–60.

65 “Warsaw Journal of the Rev. F. W. Becker,” *Jewish Intelligence* 11 (1837): 266.

could not and did not understand the tragedy of a Jewish family losing its child to another religion. It is not surprising that families of other students of the Rabbinical School forbade them visiting the missionaries.⁶⁶

One could expect that after the scandal, which was undoubtedly dangerous for the already uncertain position of the School and probably encouraged more negative reaction on the part of traditional Jews, the staff and the students would have distanced themselves from the missionaries. However, it was not the case. The contacts might have been limited immediately after the conversion of Izraelski and Hauptmann but later the missionaries were being invited to the School again and the contacts went back to normal.⁶⁷ The encounter with Fryderyka Eisenbaumowa, for example, took place already after the baptism of the two students.

A History of Misunderstanding: Conclusion

The case of Izraelski and Hauptmann can be also used as a means of diagnosing the ideological situation of the liberal Jews in Warsaw. In the first half of the nineteenth century they definitely constituted a minority within the Jewish community in the capital city but still this was a very visible minority with a high social profile and power to influence the rest. Aiming at their acculturation and integration within Polish society, members of this group found themselves in the situation in which they needed to negotiate terms of being both Polish and Jewish. It was a matter of heated debates how the role of religion in their life should be interpreted. Although the majority of this group did not convert, like Izraelski and Hauptmann, the case of these two young students defines the limits of the search for modern Jewish identity and shows where the path that led to conversion had actually started.

As I have tried to demonstrate in this article, the beginning of this path is connected to the question of the reform of the Jews and the idea of “civil Christians.” However, the Polish-Jewish debate around reform (including religious reform) ended in a fiasco. Its best example is the Rabbinical School which did not produce any rabbis and did not play the role that it was expected to play. Other projects of the Jewish Committee were not successful either. The unrealistic idea of turning Jews into “civil Christians” was never implemented.

The Jewish Committee was already a swan song of reform. Although it worked until 1837, the dynamics of the debate changed much earlier. One of the reasons was the change in the political situation. After the fall of the anti-Tsarist uprising in 1831, the Polish government was no longer interested in reforming Jews (nor any other sector of the society, for that matter) but rather in maintaining social order and the status quo. The censorship introduced by the Tsar after the fall of

⁶⁶ AGAD, CWW: 54.

⁶⁷ Jagodzińska, “Warszawska Szkoła Rabinów w świetle źródeł misyjnych,” 159.

the uprising left no room for continuation of the debate about the Jewish presence in the Polish state and society either.

Although the idea of reform was already dying out in the late 1820s and became totally extinguished by the new political reality of the early 1830s, the institutions created in its wake still functioned (for example, the Rabbinical School educated Jewish youth until 1861). It meant that the circle of liberal Jews for whom the Rabbinical School became a formative experience, and who counted on the interaction and dialogue with Christian society, suddenly lost their partner in this dialogue.

This situation coincided with the presence of the missionaries of the London Society in Warsaw. As I have mentioned earlier, the time when the contacts between the missionaries and the liberal Jews from the circle of the Rabbinical School intensified, was the mid-1830s which was exactly the period when Jews were searching for a new partner in the debate over the shape of modern Judaism. The missionaries were probably the only educated Christians in Warsaw at that time who were not only willing to engage in this debate but were also looking for contacts with Jews.

The debate between the two sides started from a seemingly common ground: a critical approach to “traditional Judaism,” especially Talmud, shared by both a part of the liberal Jews and the missionaries. Jews used debates with the missionaries to test their ideas about a compromise between tradition and modernity and about various forms of social and religious improvements. However, as it soon turned out, missionaries did not aim at making Jews “civil Christians.” The only option for them was to make Jews “actual Christians,” i.e. encouraging them to convert to Christianity.

The dramatic paradox of this situation was that both sides used a similar language and concepts but certainly did not understand each other. Although missionaries were the only available partner for the liberal Jews in Warsaw in the 1830s, they were at the same time a very unlucky partner. While the Jews were interested in debates over the conditions and the reform of the contemporary Jewish community in the spirit of the Enlightenment, the missionaries, with their anti-rational and anti-Enlightenment world views, saw no other solution than conversion. In their opinion, the only way in which a Jew could reform his “Judaism” was to embrace Christianity. The outcome of this mutual misunderstanding brought disillusionment to both sides.

Some representatives of the liberal Jews, like Hirsch Izraelski and Abraham Hauptmann, became interested in the Christian message promoted by the London Society and followed that path. Some flirted with this idea but the change was too radical for them. The majority were not inclined to change its religion. A part of this group became sceptical of religious practices altogether and although they did not officially abandon Judaism, they became effectively irreligious.

Ellie R. Schinker

Jerusalem Letters: Vasily Levison's Ruminations on Faith, Doubt, and Conversion from Judaism to Russian Orthodoxy

In 1858, Vasily Levison—a German Jewish convert to Russian Orthodoxy and professor at St. Petersburg Theological Seminary—had an opportunity to accompany Bishop Kirill on a trip to Jerusalem to visit the Russian Orthodox mission in the Holy Land. Levison was initially tapped to be a member of the mission, but his credentials were called into question due to his Jewish origins. Levison's missionary appointment was thus rescinded and he was instead issued a pilgrimage pass to visit the Holy Land.¹ Over the course of that year, Levison wrote a series of letters to his colleagues in St. Petersburg which were later published in the church periodical *Dukhovnaia beseda* in 1866 in an article titled "Jerusalem Letters."² Besides serving as a travelogue and pilgrimage story, Levison used his correspondence on Jerusalem as a means of narrating his conversion and life story to his fellow seminarians in St. Petersburg. In the first two letters, in particular, Levison narrated his conversion through the lens of Jerusalem and its changing significations as he wandered from Judaism to Russian Orthodoxy. The narrative describes how a reform-minded German Jew practically and intellectually found a path to Russian Orthodoxy. Sceptical tendencies in Reform Judaism (towards the traditionalist belief in Jewish particularity and the unchanging nature of religion) and German idealist philosophy (towards Enlightenment rationalism) helped to guide a German Jew to the top institutions of Russian Orthodoxy—a church that itself was sceptical of Jewish conversions and thus unwilling to make Levison a core member of its mission.

1 M.S. Agurskij, "Die Judenchristen in der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 23. 2/3 (September 1974): 137–76, esp. 149–51.

2 Vasilii Levison, "Ierusalimskii pis'ma," *Dukhovnaia beseda* 31 (30 July 1866), 65–78, 100–103, 112–128, 153–166, 225–232, 269–278. Letter #4 focuses on Levison's visit to Nablus on his way back from Jerusalem where he had the opportunity to see five Samaritan manuscripts of Hebrew scripture, one from as far back as Ezra (circa fifth century BCE). Levison's fascination with Samaritan culture tapped into his academic expertise in Semitic languages, in particular Samaritan script and scriptural differences between the Samaritan and Masoretic biblical texts. The contents of his fourth letter for the most part were reprinted in *Ruskaia starina* no. 5 (1914) as an essay entitled "Poezdka v Nablus" (Trip to Nablus), 392–409. Bishop Kirill, in his correspondence with Metropolitan Bulgakov, noted in an 1860 letter that Levison became convinced that the Jewish biblical text, as opposed to the Samaritan one, was a "mixture of mistakes, lies, and more or less deliberate omissions and changes (214)." See "Perepiska ep. Kirilla," *Ruskaia starina* 2 (1889), letter from Bishop Kirill to Metropolitan Makarii Bulgakov, 1857–1865. Kirill spoke highly of Levison and expressed disappointment with how Levison was treated in the Orthodox establishment.

Based on his conversion narrative, Levison was an early rabbi-doctor of the German-Jewish ilk, educated on Mendelssohn's version of religious enlightenment and yet increasingly sceptical of his Jewish heritage in the early nineteenth-century intellectual climate of philosophical idealism, romanticism, and historical criticism. His Jewish reformist or modernist outlook consisted of an appreciation of the historical nature of Judaism and a universalized messianism, and yet he was increasingly unsure of the value of Jewish difference and relevance in a reformed Judaism where there was increasingly little external (aesthetic, pedagogical, and liturgical) difference between Judaism and Christianity.

Levison and other converts from Judaism turned missionaries represent one facet of a larger phenomenon of conversions from Judaism to a variety of Christian confessions in nineteenth-century imperial Russia. The Russian state and Orthodox Church took a surprisingly restrained policy towards conversion of Jews which highlights the meaning and management of toleration and religious diversity in imperial Russia more broadly. Rather than a product of institutional mission, Jewish conversions were facilitated by everyday relationships with Christians forged prior to baptism. Local Jewish and Christian families, communities, and authorities actively responded to this extreme form of boundary crossing, and Jewish responses in particular reveal the various measures at the Jewish community's disposal to contest apostasy. Aside from a social phenomenon, conversion animated a lively set of Jewish and Russian/Christian public discourses, ranging from the grounds of religious toleration to the nature of Jews themselves. Overall, the history of Jewish conversion reveals that the Jewish encounter with imperial Russia was a genuinely religious drama with a diverse, attractive, and aggressive Christianity. Converts as boundary crossers unsettle the vision of Jews in the Pale of Settlement as a ghettoized community and highlight the spatial, social, and cultural ties between Jews and Christians. Drawing on previously untapped archival files, the mass circulation press, novels, and memoirs, I argue that baptism did not constitute a total break with Jewishness or the Jewish community and that conversion marked the start of a complicated experiment with new forms of identity and belonging.³

Levison's ambivalent reception by the Russian Orthodox Church is one indication of the contested terms of Jewish conversion in imperial Russia and Russian ambivalence about proselytizing Jews. Though religiously tolerant and indecisive about converting the Jews, the Russian state over the course of the nineteenth century was interested in modernizing its Jews, and to this end it supported certain reforms of ritual (e.g. ending outside performances of the prayer for the new moon, instituting civil divorce and ending levirate divorce), sacralizing the synagogue as a center of Jewish religious life, and modernizing the rabbinate along the lines of a centralized

³ For my broader engagement with converts from Judaism in imperial Russia, see Ellie R. Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817–1906* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016).

clerical hierarchy. That being said, missionaries were also sceptical of religious reforms as a challenge to the stability of orthodox religion which was viewed as a critical counterweight to revolution in post-Napoleonic Europe, especially in Russia. Was reforming Judaism a bridge to Christianity or a road away from it? For Levison, the answer was complicated.

Jewish Mission and Empire

Vasily Levison converted to Russian Orthodoxy in 1839 when the Russian state actively engaged in Jewish missionary work through the imperial army, specifically through underage recruits who served in cantonist training units before starting adult army service at the age of eighteen.⁴ Outside of the army, there was no official mission to Russian Jewry in the civilian realm. The state did coopt indigenous elites to strengthen religious orthodoxies and help manage a sprawling empire, and, as such, placed educated Jews in the capacity of Jewish censors, Jewish advisers to district school superintendents, crown rabbis, and “expert” Jews who advised provincial governors general.⁵ Converted Jews who wanted to proselytize the empire’s Jews had no immediate job or place on the state and Synod’s payroll; they had to sell themselves and the need to religiously assimilate the empire’s Jews. It is worth pausing on this point for a moment, because Russian-Jewish history is often narrated as a story of religious intolerance and sustained efforts to convert the empire’s Jews. Aside from the military program in the pre-reform years (1827–1856, especially the 1840s and 1850s), the Russian Orthodox church invested little time and money into missionary work, including to Jews. It was more worried about its own faithful and uprooting schismatic groups.⁶ Conversion interest towards Jews lay more in the realm of incentives inscribed into law and asylums for converts run by diocesan clergy rather than centralized missionary campaigns. Ironically, the only real consistent Jewish missionary work in imperial Russia was practiced by foreign evangelical groups.

⁴ On Jewish missionary work in the pre-reform Russian army, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted Into Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983).

⁵ Eli Lederhendler, *Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); D.A. Eliashevich, *Pravitelstvennaia politika: Evreiskaia pechat' v Rossii, 1797–1917* (St. Petersburg: Mosty kul'tury, 1999); Vasily Shchedrin, *Jewish Bureaucracy in Late Imperial Russia: The Phenomenon of Expert Jews, 1850–1917* (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2010); ChaeRan Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 2002); Azriel Shochat, *Mosad 'ha-Rabanut mi-Ta'am' be-Rusyah* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1975).

⁶ Paul W. Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33, 74–85.

In the 1830s and 1840s, Russian Orthodox Church officials responded positively when a few converts from Judaism came forward and touted their cultural and linguistic skills as former Jews to proselytize to the large population of Jews living in the Pale of Jewish Settlement, in the empire's western borderlands.⁷ Among them, Avram Hirsh Levison—soon to be Vasily Andreievich Levison—successfully introduced Jewish civilian missionary work onto the agenda of the Russian Orthodox Church and onto the ecclesiastic payroll, emphasizing the need for translation work and dissemination of missionary materials in Yiddish and Hebrew. Whereas Evangelicals invested copious amounts of time and money in translating the Gospel into native languages, the Russian-Orthodox church zealously guarded translations of the Bible and New Testament from Church Slavonic into the vernacular, even fearing a Russian translation project.⁸ As both an issue of maintaining hierarchical authority and deemphasizing bible reading in a church with a majority of illiterate peasant adherents, Russian-Orthodox authorities for much of the nineteenth century resisted translation projects and broad dissemination of the Old and New Testaments.⁹ Thus, Levison's translation work was somewhat of a novelty. In addition, he was unique in that he was an outsider to the army's missionary apparatus (Levison was not a cantonist like his contemporary missionaries), and he hailed from abroad where he cited German missionary societies and his disenchantment with Moses Mendelssohn rather than the state's own in-house mission in the military in the 1840s and 50s.

How do we know about Vasily Levison? He left both an archival and published paper trail. Nineteenth-century imperial Russia was both an *ancien régime* based on socio-economic corporations and a confessional state which used religion as a key

7 This excludes Congress Poland which was subject to different Jewish policies, including a more open reception to British missionaries like the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity Amongst the Jews (as discussed by David Ruderman and Agnieszka Jagodzińska in this volume.)

8 There were even fears of a Russian translation of the Hebrew Bible; the OPE and a Jewish school in St. Petersburg were both denied translation permission in the reform period. See *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv* (RGIA), St. Petersburg, fond (f.) 821, opis' (op.) 8, delo (d.) 270 (1866); RGIA f. 797, op. 3, d. 369 (1866). For a study of early-modern German Protestant scholarly interest in missionizing Jews in Yiddish—a language easily comprehensible and familiar—to Jews in the German lands and beyond, see Aya Elyada, “Yiddish—Language of Conversion? Linguistic Adaptation and Its Limits in Early Modern *Judenmission*,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 53.1 (2008): 3–27. On the Yiddish translations of the London Society in Congress Poland, see Agnieszka Jagodzińska, “Christian Missionaries and Jewish Spaces: British Missions in the Kingdom of Poland in the First Half of the 19th Century,” in *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective*, eds. Giuseppe Marcocci, Wietse De Boer, Aliocha Maldavsky, Ilaria Pavan (Leiden, 2015), 103–126.

9 On the politics of bible translation in the Russian Orthodox church, see Stephen K. Batalden, “The Politics of Modern Russian Biblical Translation,” in *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church: The Last 200 Years*, ed. Philip C. Stine (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 68–80; Stephen K. Batalden, “The BFBS Petersburg Agency and Russian Biblical Translation, 1856–1875,” in *Sowing the Word: The Cultural Impact of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1804–2004*, eds. Stephen Batalden, Kathleen Cann, and John Dean (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), 169–96.

marker of individual and group identity. Thus, religious conversions were well-documented by church and state officials for the corporate status change it induced. Levison's conversion file can be found in the archives of the Holy Synod, at the Russian State Historical Archives in St. Petersburg, which includes his petitions to the church for conversion, records of his conversion training, and bureaucratic correspondence regarding the sincerity of his conversion and naturalization petition as well as proof that his Orthodoxy had been purged of any Protestant foreign influences. While this file provides some clues to Levison's unlikely spiritual journey from West to East, Levison's published writings offer a more intimate glimpse at the spiritual journey of conversion, as told by a convert who had reached unprecedented stature in the Orthodox Church and yet was continuously marked as a native Jew and remained suspect for his Jewish origins. Though a conversion narrative and thus highly stylized and crafted in a missionary vein, the story of Jerusalem and his changing faith offers some clues about the role of scepticism and religious quest in his conversion journey.

Although Levison is the protagonist of this story, it is useful to juxtapose his spiritual journey to that of another convert from Judaism turned Russian Orthodox missionary at roughly the same time. Alexander Alekseev articulated a very different approach to the role that religious scepticism and a reformed Judaism could play in serving as a bridge or an obstacle to Christian conversion. He was a former cantonist who converted to Russian Orthodoxy as an underage military recruit and became a native missionary. Due to a leg injury which impaired his ability to walk, he turned to the sedentary career of writing missionary tracts and ethnographic works in Russian about Jews. For Alekseev, a sincere conversion entailed that a neophyte appreciate the many similarities between Judaism and Christianity and just change his or her idea about the timing of the messiah. Thus, Alekseev explicitly denounced reformed or progressive Judaism as dangerous to potential converts due to its critical understanding of the messiah. For Levison, a Central European Jew reared in a reformist milieu who became increasingly sceptical of his former faith and the universalizing and relativizing tendencies in early Reform Judaism, conversion was not in tension with religious doubt but actually flowed from a sceptical religious posture. While these men—Levison and Alekseev—are in some ways outliers for the substantive literary canon they left as missionaries and clerics, as opposed to the bulk of converts from Judaism in Russia who are only known for their brief appearance in the archives, their spiritual journeys and ruminations on faith, doubt, and conversion remind us that conversions cannot just be studied as dry baptisms, in socio-economic terms, divorced from the profoundly religious milieu in which they took place.

Scepticism as a Path to Religious Awakening

Avram Hirsh Levison was born in 1807. He hailed from the Grand Duchy of Saxon-Weimar-Eisenach and served as rabbi and preacher in the area. He was the son of a *Landesrabbiner* (provincial chief rabbi) in the Hesse-Kassel region. Levison re-

ceived his early education at a Jewish school in Frankfurt am Main and then attended university in Göttingen and Würzburg. In 1829, he became a rabbi.¹⁰ According to Levison's 1838 conversion petition, he became enamored with Christianity while pursuing a university degree alongside his rabbinic and preaching duties. Convinced of the truth of Christianity, Levison admitted that his "heart and conscience were in contradiction with [his] position as rabbi, and [he] steadfastly resolved to openly convert to Christianity."¹¹

But why Russian Orthodoxy for a German rabbi? Levison explained that he viewed Christianity as a vehicle to civilize Jews and make them into patriotic subjects. Because religious and civic duties were intertwined in his worldview, Levison saw the unity of Church and State in imperial Russia as ideal—intellectually and financially—for finding institutional and monetary support for his missionizing goals. In addition to an empire wedded to Eastern rite Christianity, Levison was attracted to the fact that imperial Russia housed the continent's largest Jewish population which was more "immersed in kabbalistic, talmudic, mystical, and pharisaic delusions" than its western brethren and wholly lacking in moral or civic education.¹²

Levison's theological arguments for the superiority of Orthodoxy reflected his own confessional journey. He initially wanted to convert to Catholicism and then to Lutheranism, but he could not find full spiritual satisfaction through them. In the words of his conversion mentor in Russia,

The first with its ecclesiastic predominance, intolerance and persecutions; the latter with its striving towards reform [...] and its continuous splintering into new regiments (*polk*), aroused in him distrust. Turning to the history of the Orthodox church, to his comfort, he saw that this church throughout time maintained its independence without wanting to predominate, guided by a spirit of sensible moderation, free of fanaticism and indifference, constantly following those teachings and rites which it adopted from the Apostles and Church Fathers.¹³

Levison also reflected on his own German Jewish background when explaining his turn to the Russian church. Citing the eighteenth-century German Jewish philosopher and father of the Jewish enlightenment Moses Mendelssohn, Levison claimed: "if already Mendelssohn did much to benefit Christianity through his inconsistent, so-called pure Mosaicism, such that now thousands of Jews in Germany are converting to Christianity, then how much can possibly be done through Christ's pure teachings on God, virtues and eternity [...]."¹⁴ Levison critiqued Mendelssohn's attempt to

¹⁰ Agurskij, "Die Judenchristen," 142.

¹¹ RGIA f. 796, op. 120, d. 628, listy (ll.) 3–5ob. [Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), Jerusalem, RU 586].

¹² *Ibid.*, ll. 3–5ob.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ll. 16–18ob., 32ob.–33ob.

¹⁴ RGIA f. 796, op. 120, d. 628, ll. 16–18ob. On the conversions of some of Mendelssohn's disciples, see Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749–1824* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967).

ground Judaism in universal, rational principles and yet, at the same time, maintain the particular ceremonial and ritual laws that could not be rationalized—a posture that Levison deemed “inconsistent.” In implicating Mendelssohn in a wave of Jewish apostasy (though highly exaggerating its scope among Mendelssohn’s followers), Levison argued that Mendelssohn’s attempt to translate and defend Judaism to his Christian colleagues and critics actually served as a springboard for some of his disciples to reject Judaism’s ritual laws and embrace a more universal expression of ethical truths as embodied in Christianity. In other words, Levison explicitly connected rationalism with religious scepticism and insinuated that a universal Enlightenment rationalism could lead a Jew to adopt a Christian form through conversion. Ultimately, Levison tried to make the case that if a Jewish apologist like Mendelssohn could unintentionally lead Jews to Christianity through recourse to universal Christian truths, then explicit proselytizing of true principles of faith stood to convert even more Jews.

Levison was baptized in St. Petersburg on 21 October 1839 with the Christian name Vasily Andreievich. With the Tsar’s approval, Levison was granted a position in the Orthodox Church’s spiritual administration (*dukhovnoe vedomstvo*) as missionary to the empire’s Jews, complete with salary and stipend.¹⁵ Despite this gesture, it seems that Levison’s missionary position was either short-term or never fully fulfilled. As late as the 1860s, Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow unsuccessfully encouraged the Synod to give Levison a missionary post. In 1863, Filaret wrote in exasperation, “Why has the idea of conversion of the Jews to Christianity remained so long without realization?” Following his baptism, Levison was awarded an extraordinary professorship in Hebrew language at St. Petersburg Theological Seminary. He subsequently began teaching Hebrew at the St. Petersburg Catholic Academy as well. In his academic post, Levison translated the New Testament and Orthodox liturgy into Hebrew, the former an improvement of a British translation from 1813, and the latter his own innovation.¹⁶ It was as a Semitics professor that Levison visited the Holy Land in 1858.

Jerusalem Letters

While Levison’s bureaucratic communications adhered to the process of conversion and satisfied the church’s concerns about his foreign background, Levison’s published letters offer a much more personalized and spiritual meditation on his religious journey as a church outsider who still felt marginalized. Levison began his first Jerusalem letter by relating how his father, a rabbi in Hesse-Kassel, gave him a strong

¹⁵ RGIA f. 796, op. 120, d. 628, ll. 41–44. The MVD granted Levison Russian subjecthood in December 1839 (ll. 47–48).

¹⁶ Agurskij, “Die Judenchristen,” 147.

Jewish education—especially in Jewish law—and hoped that his son would become a rabbi as well. As a child, Levison recalled standing with his father in synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and seeing his father come to tears when reciting the prayers inveighing God to restore the ancient covenant made with the biblical Patriarchs. Levison too was brought to tears, his first tears over Jerusalem, a symbol of Jewish loss and hope. He cried with his father as a companion, not understanding the prayers but emulating his father's emotions. By the age of 17, with a more mature understanding of the prayers, Levison wrote that he was defiant about the ancient Jewish loss of Jerusalem and could not understand why the Jews did not “bravely fight and defend their city?” He noted that “as a youth who felt full of strength, I was ready to declare war on the Turkish sultan and go to Jerusalem, to take her by storm; however, at this time, I already did not cry over Jerusalem.”¹⁷ In his evolving adolescent sentiments about Jerusalem, informed by his growing interest in novels and the culture of chivalry, perhaps as well by idealist philosophy critiques of an antiquated, passive Judaism whose contribution to world history had ceased, Levison presented himself as moving away from a traditional Jewish stance of passive acceptance of exile to an actively engaged historical subject whereby he believed there was a way for humans to take part in redemption.

After being ordained as a rabbi in 1829 alongside of his university degree, Levison experienced yet again a new outlook on Jerusalem and its religious significance. Levison cast himself as a Jewish-European hybrid, influenced by Talmudic thought and contemporary European literature and philosophy—running the gambit from idealism to rationalism and materialism. He expressed his universalized messianism and general universalist outlook in the following terms: “I thought that Jerusalem for a Jew could be any place where he enjoys civil rights, equal with the natives; Messiah is none other than the educated spirit of the times;—all people are equal before God, but Jews are closer to me, as a nation of one family.” Levison described how his religious ideas were grounded in a historical understanding of Judaism's evolution; Mosaic Law and even the Talmud were conceived of as ancient texts, historically significant but only partially relevant in contemporary times.

The Talmud has significance and meaning as long as it is in agreement with the spirit of the times and, in general, with the condition and circumstances of every Jewish community; since Mosaic Law, under the circumstances, is impossible to fulfill in all of its details,—Jews do not have a Temple or Palestine,—it goes without saying that it is possible to change this or that aspect of Mosaic Law according to need [...].

As an example, Levison referenced the possibility of celebrating the Jewish Sabbath on Sunday, a more radical Jewish reform position voiced in Germany at the time.¹⁸ Levison generally looked to the *Zeitgeist* as a guide for deciding the relevance and

¹⁷ Levison, “Ierusalimskia pis'ma,” 70–71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

applicability of Jewish law and culture. Thus, he embraced certain early reforms such as: prayer in the vernacular, synagogue decorum, and female Jewish education. The recurring language of the “spirit of the times” in Levison’s narrative echoes the strong Hegelian influence at many German universities of the time, including his own sojourns at university in Göttingen and Würzburg, the former being a focal point of historical studies at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Levison joined the rabbinate in the early years of religious reforms, when sermons in the vernacular and an educational emphasis on Judaism as a religion were gaining strength. With an increasingly educated Jewish lay public and an emphasis on rabbis as orators and religious teachers, German rabbis needed to be educated in the art of sermon writing and oration. It was through the need to acquire these skills from German pastors that Levison first became personally acquainted with Christianity. Also it was at this time, in an attempt to make Judaism translatable into Christian religious and ethical categories, that rabbis and educators started to promote a Jewish confirmation service and the study of Jewish catechisms.¹⁹ In this spirit, Levison included in his “Jerusalem Letters” his own translation into Russian of the medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides’ “Thirteen Principles of Faith,” to highlight just how similar Judaism and Christianity were when boiled down to core faith principles. Aside from principle twelve which posited that the messiah had not yet come, Levison opined that there was much doctrinal similarity between the faiths. Levison, however, did not believe in a physical messiah and himself preferred a different medieval articulation of core Jewish principles—that of Joseph Albo—which focused exclusively on the existence of God, Divine revelation, and reward and punishment. Levison also translated Albo’s catechism for his Russian Orthodox colleagues.²⁰ Thus, for Levison, there was little in the way of faith standing between him and the church.²¹ By this point then, at age thirty, Levison admitted that he harbored a different view of Jerusalem than traditionalist Jews. The latter believed that with the coming of the Messiah, Palestine would return to being a Jewish community ushered in with miracles as those accompanying the biblical Exodus from Egypt.

19 Michael A. Meyer, ed., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, vol. 2, *Emancipation and Acculturation, 1780–1871* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 118; Steven M. Lowenstein, “The 1840s and the Creation of the German-Jewish Religious Reform Movement,” in *Revolution and Evolution: 1848 in German-Jewish History*, ed. Werner E. Mosse, et al., 255–98, esp. 260. On the proliferation of printed catechisms and Jewish religion textbooks in this period, see Jakob J. Petuchowski, “Manuals and Catechisms of the Jewish Religion in the Early Period of Emancipation,” in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 47–64, esp. 55–57. For the first Jewish catechism, see scholarship on the early modern Italian Jew Abraham Yagel’s *Leqah tov* which was inspired by a Catholic catechism in the counter-Reformation period: Morris M. Faienstein, “Abraham Yagel’s *Leqah tov* and its History,” *JQR* 89.3–4 (January–April 1999): 319–50; David B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth Century Physician* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

20 The British missionary Alexander McCaul, like many Christian readers, also liked Albo.

21 Levison, “Ierusalimskii pis’ma,” 74, 102.

Levison, however, firmly adhered to the teachings of Jewish modernists, or, in his words, the “new Jewish school,” which saw the return to Zion in much more prosaic, disenchanted terms. He wrote, “I thought the Promised Land would be returned to Jews either by requests of European powers or through purchase with the help of Rothschild and other such bankers.”

In trying to sort out his confused intellectual and religious posture, Levison began reading Christian books, including the New Testament, and the lively polemical literature in Germany at the time between Protestantism and Catholicism. He retroactively likened his religious scepticism and the spiritual void in his heart to the empty page placed between the Old and New Testaments. In particular, he noted that whereas most Jews responded to religious doubt by latching onto family custom and the faith of their fathers, Levison as a university educated man was not able to find comfort in looking to the past. It was through reading that Levison found Christianity, a time in 1837 he referred to as his “rebirth” (*vozhrozhdenie*). He cast his spiritual conversion as finding a middle ground between philosophical scepticism (“unbelieving new philosophies”) and superstitious, ancient Jewish belief.²² At this point, Levison already saw Jerusalem through Christian eyes, convinced of the salvation of humanity through the human hands of Jesus in the Holy Land.

On Easter 1838, Levison attended a Protestant church in Weimar to hear the renowned preacher General Superintendent Johann Friedrich Röhr (1777–1848). Levison acknowledged that in any other part of the Jewish world a rabbi’s visit to a church would raise eyebrows, but in Weimar “Jews were people more or less educated and alien to fanaticism; and, hence, my visit to a Christian church was not reprehensible to them; they thought that I only went there to see the art of preaching [...]”²³ Aside from internal reform developments, the small Jewish population in the small German state of Weimar was subject to an aggressive state-sponsored reform agenda. In 1823, Saxon-Weimar-Eisenach passed a law that required Jews to conduct their public prayers in German.²⁴ Perhaps this aggressive modernization also contributed to the “normalcy” of a rabbi in a church setting.

It appears that Levison became increasingly sceptical of his rationalist, universalist Jewish posture, and like contemporary philosophical critiques, saw his rationalist reading of Judaism as superficial. Now believing in the historicity of the New Testament and the resurrection of Christ, Levison decided that he could no longer remain a rabbi and wanted to convert to Christianity. When he came to Röhr, a leading German rationalist, for baptism, the pastor declared that Levison need not convert since the ethical bases of Judaism and Christianity were the same as encased in the Prophets which both religions shared; in the pastor’s words, an honest person

²² Ibid., 112.

²³ Ibid., 114. For a further discussion of German rabbis adopting Christian models of preaching, see Alexander Altmann, “The New Style of Preaching in Nineteenth-Century German Jewry,” in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altmann, 65–116.

²⁴ Lowenstein, “The 1840s,” 258.

could be a Jew or Christian, and so baptism in his difficult predicament as a rabbi was not necessary. Levison was turned off by this arch-rationalist reading of the Old and New Testaments, and he argued that if the New Testament came to supersede the Old and morality stemmed from faith, then the Hebrew Bible was by definition the wrong set of rules for a moral life. Levison asked Röhr if he could introduce him to the Eastern Church which was devoid of Catholic-Protestant polemics and approached the New Testament as an eternal Divine text.²⁵ Levison was also turned off by the history of Jewish suffering under Catholic rule and wary of rationalist influences in contemporary Protestantism with its sceptical reading of the Hebrew Bible, such as questioning the historicity of the biblical patriarchs and interpreting the twelve tribes of ancient Israel as representing the signs of the zodiac. (Ironically, Levison in his academic career of working with the Samaritan and Masoretic biblical texts would later become convinced that the Jewish text was full of intentional errors and omissions.) In his embrace of Eastern Orthodoxy, Levison rejected the approach of universal moral religion and a rationalist approach to the common ground between Judaism and Christianity. In rejecting Reform Judaism, he also rejected a strong rationalist bent in German Protestantism and rejected Catholicism seemingly due to the negative Jewish encounter with Catholic Europe throughout history.²⁶ Despite Levison's rejection of Protestantism, the Russian Orthodox Church was concerned about his conversion training and went to great lengths to make sure than any rationalist Protestant influences were purged from his Orthodoxy. Perhaps Levison's strong anti-rationalist animus was exaggerated in part to prove his new-found orthodoxy.

After meeting an Orthodox priest in Weimar, Levison sent a letter to Russian Minister of Public Enlightenment Sergei Uvarov asking for conversion and naturalization in the Russian empire. Hearing no reply for several months, Levison decided to sell his library in order to purchase a ship ticket to St. Petersburg to actively pursue his conversion dream.²⁷ It was from his position as an Orthodox pilgrim traveling through the Holy Land in 1858 that Levison articulated his fully evolved understanding of Jerusalem and its religious significance, now through the prism of Christian supersessionist doctrine. Upon seeing Jerusalem for the first time, Levison noted that he did not tear his clothes like traditional Jews, but rather cried tears of joy. One day while in the old city of Jerusalem, a rabbi approached him and looking towards the ancient Temple mount asked Levison what he thought about the holy place. Standing between the Temple mount and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Levison faced the church, crossed himself, and then answered, "Look at the Sepulcher; this is my answer to your question about Solomon's Temple. Indeed, the New Testament

²⁵ Levison, "Ierusalimskii pis'ma," 115–117.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 119. "In a word, Roman Catholicism appeared to me as too hot in its fanaticism, and Protestantism—too cold in its indifference[...]."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

served as the only answer to the Old Testament question about the coming of the Messiah.”²⁸

Conclusion

Levison’s conversion narrative is still somewhat of a mystery in that his sceptical posture towards traditionalist Judaism and then early Jewish reform and the rationalist tendencies that leveled the differences between Judaism and Christianity led him to the Russian Orthodox church—a church that eschewed rationalist tendencies and successfully staved off reformist movements for much of the nineteenth century. In some ways, Levison was a product of philosophical dissonance—an heir to Mendelssohn’s translation of Judaism into rationalist, universalist categories, and a rabbi-student sceptical of these universalizing tendencies and of the superficial rendering of religious difference into universal terms. He seems to have struggled with historical criticism of Judaism and Jewish texts, yet not prepared to accept a total symbolic, ahistorical reading of Hebrew scripture. Thus, Levison trail-blazed an unlikely religious path in imperial Russia on two accounts: he was affiliated with Reform Judaism which was not officially recognized as a form of Rabbinic Judaism in Russian until the 1870s, and he made an unlikely conversion to Russian Orthodoxy—a step which some former Jews in the Russian Orthodox church, like Alekseev, characterized as a spiritual impossibility outside of the realm of orthodox religion.

So what can Levison’s journey from scepticism to conversion teach us about converts in imperial Russia and modern Europe more broadly? Maybe he was just a careerist convert looking to get an academic position. Or, maybe he was one of the supposed few “sincere converts” of the modern era. I want to suggest an approach to conversion that reaches past motivation and returns to the religious backdrop of baptism. According to Todd Endelman, conversions from Judaism ironically increased in the modern period just as emancipation held out the promise of Jewish equality. If in pre-modern and early modern Europe, Jews converted as the only way to escape their marginal status, Jews in the modern period converted for strategic reasons, to escape the stigmatization and burdens of Jewishness that persisted even with the attainment of or hope for citizenship. While it is difficult to pinpoint convert motivation or sincerity, Endelman argues that all converts and conversions were structured and guided by attitudes of the stigma of Judaism and Jewishness long developed in Christian Europe.²⁹ If modern conversions were strategic, convenient, and intimately tied to the ambitions and hopes of Jews for full socio-economic and political equality, then it has been argued that converts in Russia—an autocratic, *ancien régime* lacking an

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁹ Todd M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 11.

emancipation discourse—resembled pre-modern converts whose baptisms were coerced or driven by despair and persecution.³⁰

While acknowledging the limitations of emancipation in both liberal and illiberal societies, my work has sought to emphasize the permeability of religious communities even in tsarist Russia where the state was invested in stabilizing and marking religious boundaries and affiliation. Conversion thus offers a window unto not just the failures of Jewish emancipation—an inadequate framework for a study of tsarist Russia, but it offers an opportunity to study religion and religious community in dynamic interaction with neighboring faiths and explore how everyday cultural entanglements were negotiated and disputed between Jews and their neighbors. Thus, Vasily Levison's conversion is both paradigmatic of sincere, spiritual conversions in the modern era and illustrative of how intellectual and social interfaith encounters must accompany conversion studies, not just structural analyses of emancipation and its discontents. Levison's world was shaped by religious encounters—through texts (philosophy, Jewish catechisms), people (Protestant pastors, his rabbinic father), and places (German university, Protestant churches, Jerusalem). It was through negotiating the people and ideas of this encounter, and the scepticism he harbored toward the religion of his ancestors and the reforms of modernists, that Levison came to conversion and a spiritual and physical journey from Central European Reform Judaism and philosophical idealism to the ecclesiastic center of Russian Orthodoxy. With a relatively short history of Jewish engagement (no Jews were legally permitted to live in Russia until the partitions of Poland-Lithuania from 1772–1795), the Russian Orthodox church was in some ways a *tabula rasa* for Jewish converts, and Levison actively tried to inscribe himself into this church through the shared religious attachment to Jerusalem yet a radically different reading of its spiritual legacy and world-historical relevance.

Aside from the cohort of sincere converts presented in this volume, I argue in my work on converts from Judaism in imperial Russia that sociability played a key role in conversion—a trend Endelman notes about popular conversions in the late twentieth century in the United States. He describes the sincerity of Jewish converts to new-age religions in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries whose convictions were less about a particular ideology and more about a sincere quest for life meaning and self-improvement. These converts were seekers in general—due to individual need and broader counter-cultural currents—for whom their chosen religion was more a function of a recruiter or personal relationship than ideology.³¹ In my research, I found much affinity between this kind of people-inspired conversion and the everyday kinds of conversions undertaken by Jews in autocratic Russia. Converts were familiar with individual Christians and Christian clerics, and this social and cultural encounter provided the framework for conversion. Thus the notion of “sincerity”

³⁰ Ibid., 90.

³¹ Ibid., 274.

in the realm of religious conversions needs to be expanded beyond just spiritual or intellectual conviction and we need to include broader trends like the search for self-improvement or convictions that stem from personal relationships. Vasily Levison's conversion from Judaism was thus exceptional in European history for his theological sincerity but also illustrative of the many everyday converts for whom conversion sincerity was predicated on personal and cultural encounters.

David Ruderman

The Intellectual and Spiritual Journey of Stanislaus Hoga: From Judaism to Christianity to Hebrew Christianity

In 1843, a small and obscure pamphlet was published in London with the fascinating title *Eldad and Medad* composed by a converted Jew who called himself Stanislaus Hoga.¹ The author staged a fictional dialogue between a converted Jew Medad and what he called a modern one Eldad, apparently a liberal non-orthodox Jew. Medad opened with a long discourse questioning the truth claims of any religion: “The more we reflect on the many contradictory opinions, which, as stamped coins are current in the world, the more our duty is increased to be circumspect in our belief, and neither to accept or reject an opinion without duly ascertaining its sound and weight.”² But he was equally suspicious of any current scientific theory:

[...] a man who in his blindness takes unmeaning words for wisdom, and is proud to find out and give names to causes, powers, and substances, of which he has no perception: as, for instance, that something which he denominates by the words attraction, gravity, electricity, galvanism, phyligion or [...] oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, etc.—the miserable, wretched, and helpless man, who is more poor than an insect, and full of wishes as an angel—a man in such condition, I saw, can do no better than read the Bible, and believe that he is a sinner, and may be pardoned.

To this his interlocutor Eldad responded that maybe it is better not to read the Bible, nor to acquire wisdom, and thus to be better off.³

It is hard to ascertain the real views of the author of this enigmatic dialogue from this pamphlet alone, but Stanislaus Hoga wrote considerably more, especially in the course of the next several years, addressed both to Christians and Jews and with a critical gaze at both. In addition to his extensive writings, considerable documentation, albeit still incomplete, exists that allows for a fuller reconstruction of his life and thought. I wish to argue in this essay that this former Jew of Eastern European and Hasidic origins was an original thinker on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, a highly educated student of philosophy, science, and literature, a master of languages, including the English language which he acquired late in life, and a figure quite deserving of the attention of those who study modern Jewish and Christian intellectual history in the modern era.

1 Stanislaus Hoga, *Eldad and Medad: A Dialogue between a Converted Jew and a Modern Jew* (London: B. Wertheim, 1843). For earlier scholarship on Hoga, see below.

2 Hoga, *Eldad and Medad*, 4.

3 Hoga, *Eldad and Medad*, 7.

While several earlier scholars had noticed and written about Hoga, especially during his early years in Poland, two fuller accounts of his life and reputation among contemporaries are worthy of special notice before presenting my own reading of his intellectual and spiritual journeys from Poland to England and from Judaism to Christianity and then finally to a kind of reconciliation of both faiths. The first is by Beth-Zion Lask Abrahams, a well-researched and comprehensive account of his life and writings with a particular focus on the English part of his life. The second is by Shnayer Z. Leiman, an elaborate account of a story circulated in the name of the chief rabbi of Palestine, Abraham Isaac ha-Cohen Kook, about a penitent apostate who sought reconciliation with his Jewish daughter and his ancestral heritage and desperately sought a rabbinic blessing on behalf of his soul in the fading moments of his life. The story mirrors in many respects the life story of Stanislaus Hoga, but, as Leiman conclusively demonstrates, does not precisely fit the details of Hoga's life, although it may have been partially inspired by it. What both accounts have in common, however, is their assumption that Hoga initially lived in England in a state of alienation from the Jewish community but, in the end, he finally broke his ties with Christianity and fully returned with sincere conviction to the Jewish fold.⁴

I wish to challenge and complicate this narrative by focusing on his writings at the end of his life and on the impression he left on Jews and Christians alike in his newly adopted country. What emerged was a unique hybridity, unlike that of several other prominent contemporary converts and Christian allies who supported his cause of Jewish-Christian co-existence. Hoga revealed a rich love and intimacy with rabbinic Judaism and especially with Jewish ritual and practice; an abiding faith in the divine messiahship of Jesus; a sceptical stance towards all orthodoxies; and finally a considerable degree of self-doubt, restlessness, and broken commitments to even his own family leading ultimately to his self-imposed isolation from both the Jewish and Christian communities. In the final years of his life, he seems to have surmounted his own crisis of identity through his involvement in scientific activities. To this, we shall return at the end of this essay.

Before focusing on his later life and thought, let us recall his origins and early career. Hoga was born in 1791 as Yehezkel in Kuzmir (Kazimierz Dolny), Poland. His father, the Maggid Aryeh Leib, was the rabbi of the town and a disciple of Rabbi Jacob Isaac Hurwitz, the Ḥozeh of Lublin. He was clearly a wunderkind, excelling in his rabbinic studies. Through the intervention of a Danzig merchant, he was introduced to Prince Adam Czartoryski and was invited to study in his personal library where he mastered several languages. Under the patronage of the prince, he became a mediator during the Napoleonic invasion between Jews, French officers, and Poles. He later came to Warsaw to assume the role of censor of Jewish publica-

⁴ Beth-Zion Lask Abrahams, "Stanislaus Hoga—Apostate and Penitent," *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 15 (1939–1945), 121–149; and Shnayer Z. Leiman, "The Baal Teshuvah and the Emden-Eibeschuetz Controversy," *Judaic Studies* 1 (1985): 3–26.

tions, working closely with the well-known Hebraists Abraham Jacob Stern and Jacob Tugenhold, whose papers mention Hoga on more than one occasion. He also became the deputy of Luigi Chiarini, the anti-Talmudic writer and president of the commission for Jewish writings and publications in Poland. During this period, he was in close contact with Berek, the son of Samuel Zbytkower, the wealthiest Jew in Poland, published several works in Polish on Jewish ceremonies, allegedly defended Hasidim against a libel in the Cracow community, and was appointed secretary of a new commission for the improvement of Jewish conditions under Alexander I for a short time.⁵

But throughout this period of time, his personal family life appeared to fall apart. After marrying at a young age and having three children, he sought to abandon his family but his father refused to allow him to divorce. He was subsequently seen in the company of a woman named Yitta with whom he had two daughters. When pressured to reveal his personal secret, he converted with Yitta and his two illegitimate children; Chaskel Meshummad as he was called in his home town became Stanislaus and he and his new family soon disappeared.

At some time during his years in Warsaw, Hoga met the evangelical missionary Alexander McCaul who had been sent by the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. McCaul was a highly educated cleric who had spent almost ten years in Warsaw studying Jewish texts and engaging with local Jewish communities throughout Poland. Apparently when McCaul returned to London, Hoga joined him to become an associate of the London Society, a valued author of missionary materials aimed at Jews, and a skilled translator of the New Testament and other Christian works made accessible to potential Jewish converts in Hebrew. When McCaul published his most famous work *The Old Paths* in 1837, a most ambitious and comprehensive attack against the Talmud and rabbinic Judaism, aimed to convince Jews to adopt the “true” Mosaic faith in the form of evangelical Christianity, Hoga was enlisted to translate the work into Hebrew. This was considered the ultimate act of betrayal by the Jewish community since they feared McCaul’s learned assault against rabbinic Judaism, especially his claims that the rabbis displayed great contempt for the non-Jew, the Jewish woman, and the Jewish poor, would have a detrimental

⁵ Much of this information comes from the aforementioned essay by Lask-Abrahams which relies heavily on Ezriel Frenk, *Mushumodim in Poyln in 19tn yorhundert* (Warsaw, 1923), 38–110. Frenk’s research has been challenged and refined by later scholars. See, for example, Marcin Wodzinski, *Hasikalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A History of Conflict* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005), Index, Hoge Ezechiel; and by the same author, *Hasidism and Politics: The Kingdom of Poland 1815–1864* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), Index, Hoge, Ezekiel; Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 109–113, 162, 216. I was able to gain a general impression of Hoga’s Polish work *Tu Chazy czyli Rozmowa o Zydach* (Warsaw, 1830) with the gracious help of Professor Agnieszka Jagodzińska who translated parts for me. What is clear is that this early work, written in dialogue form, offers striking parallels to *Eldad and Medad* and needs to be compared with it along with Hoga’s later English writings. This is a task for future scholarship.

effect on the morale of Jews everywhere, especially when distributed in Hebrew. Hoga later acknowledged his role in the translation, even claiming to have been responsible for something more than a mere translation of McCaul's words. Be that as it may, Hoga's translation, along with translations in several other languages including German, French, Italian, and Yiddish, made *Netivot Olam*, as the Hebrew version was entitled, a source of great consternation to the Jewish community and eventually evoked multiple responses from rabbis and maskilim throughout Europe and the Middle East during the second half of the nineteenth century. Hoga's association with McCaul and his anti-rabbinic crusade represented both the pinnacle of his missionary activity and his own alienation from the rabbinic tradition in which he had been raised. Chaskel Meshumad had apparently revealed his true colors as a self-hating Jew and hostile enemy of his former co-religionists.⁶

In the immediate aftermath of Hoga's entanglement in the publication of *Netivot Olam*, he seems to have disappeared again from the public arena, perhaps silently suffering the consequences of his public adversarial role against the rabbis and their vulnerable community. Yet by 1843 he appeared again with the publication of his aforementioned *Eldad and Medad* to be followed with a flurry of publications during the next four years. Rapidly producing a series of essays and letters to the editor of the major organ of the Jewish press, *The Jewish Chronicle*, which unhesitatingly published the words of a still baptized Jew, Hoga seemed to have fully regained his public voice throughout the year 1847, only to return to his private silence by the year's end. In this short period of time Hoga seems to have radically rethought his relationship to McCaul and the London Society as well as his own notion of the organic relationship between the Jewish and Christian religions. In this short period, he gradually disclosed his most profound thoughts about his mingled identity, the place of Jews in English society, and his hopes for the political and economic security of Jews in the modern world. In the remainder of this article, I attempt to carefully trace the fascinating evolution of his thinking.

As I have already indicated, Hoga's first publication in this period, the *Eldad and Medad*, was yet to betray any major departure from his anti-Talmudism of the late 1830s. Medad, the converted Jew, in addition to his sceptical postures towards all religions and scientific theories, continued to voice his opposition to the Talmud and the rabbis, viewed them as the cause of Jewish suffering, and claimed that literary sensitivity and Jewish religious orthodoxy are not compatible. Eldad, the modern Jew, offered a weak defense of the rabbis, opting instead for a commitment to the Bible alone and religious observance "that can be conveniently adapted to the present circumstances."⁷ Medad did acknowledge a practical wisdom and profound logic in the Talmud "which naturally ennoble the mind of a man who is entirely devoted to

⁶ On McCaul and Hoga's association with him, see David Ruderman, "Towards a Preliminary Portrait of an Evangelical Missionary to the Jews: The Many Faces of Alexander McCaul (1799–1863)," *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 47 (2015), 48–69.

⁷ Hoga, *Eldad and Medad*, 24.

its study,” but the Talmud is still deemed dangerous for ordinary people in perverting their natural good qualities.⁸ It is difficult to identify any clear ideological position on the part of the author of this early work other than to speculate that he was already voicing a kind of a dialectical conversation between his Jewish and Christian selves, his anti-Talmudism on the one hand and his appreciation of certain aspects of Judaism on the other, accompanied by the sceptical doubts voiced throughout. Whether this reading is an accurate reflection of his state of mind in 1843 or not, Hoga had clearly decided to present himself to English readers in a public way, albeit without any open break from his missionary stance and his relationship to the London Society. This however was soon to change.

Two years later, in 1845, Hoga published *The Controversy of Zion: A Meditation on Judaism and Christianity*, in two separate editions in London.⁹ Those familiar with his earlier publication would immediately sense his sceptical ideas about the poverty of human reason in attempting to understand anything beyond the natural world, or in Hoga’s words: “Our thoughts are as much waking dreams as our dreams are sleeping thoughts.”¹⁰ On the other hand, he strongly acknowledged that science is the proper province of human reason although the ultimate causes of gravity and light cannot ultimately be fathomed.

But unlike *Eldad and Medad*, Hoga seems to have discovered a personal voice and a boldness to declare his inner-most feelings: “There are many other authors [...] who aspire for fame, for the sake of their nation, country, language, friends, and relations; but none of these can be a stimulation and spur to me, for I am so very isolated, solitary, and alone in the world, that there is not one of these subjects of which I can properly say, it is my own.”¹¹ To overcome his lonely state, he regained his confidence in writing. He loved England and the liberty it offers individuals such as himself, and in the spirit of such openness, he sought to address the defective relationship between English Jews and Christians to create “one single community conforming to the divine will.”¹²

The primary message of *The Controversy of Zion* is clear throughout: It is possible for a Jew to believe in Jesus without abrogating his observance of Jewish law. Though excluded, as he admits, “from the pale of my nation,” Hoga intended to vindicate the honor of his ancestors by offering his most daring pronouncement about the profundity of the Jewish faith: “For I am sure that the poorest Jewish school boy in a wretched village in Poland, has a better notion of the supreme being than all the doctors in divinity of Oxford.”¹³ In dismissing rabbinic ordinances as mere ceremonial

⁸ Hoga, *Eldad and Medad*, 15.

⁹ I have seen only the second enlarged edition entitled: *The Controversy of Zion: A Meditation on Judaism and Christianity* (London, 1845).

¹⁰ *The Controversy of Zion*, viii.

¹¹ *The Controversy of Zion*, xvii.

¹² *The Controversy of Zion*, xviii.

¹³ *The Controversy of Zion*, xxv, xxx.

law, Christians have lost sight of the deep theological message of these commandments which remind Jews of their belief in the one God. He singled out the commandments of circumcision (*brit milah*), phylacteries (*tefillin*) and fringes (*zizit*) as particularly significant in publicizing the religious identity and the sincere faith of contemporary Jews. He even boldly pictured Jesus returning to the earth wearing fringes and phylacteries. In offering this provocative portrait, could Hoga have had in mind the biting critique of modern Jewish ritual practice published only two years earlier by Moses Margoliouth, his fellow convert and colleague associated with the London Society, who had himself singled out these particular rituals for ridicule?¹⁴

The critical reason why Jews are obliged to observe the law is that not only their existence as a people depends on it, but so does that of Christianity, Hoga argued. If there is no Israel and Jewish law, there can be no true messiah either. Christ is the crown and perfection of the law. But a Jew can only believe in him through his observance of the *mizvot*, his national covenant with God: “If you deprive Israel of its holy law, you deprive yourselves of your most holy Messiah,” he proclaimed.¹⁵ Even if the non-Jew desired to observe the law, and especially the Sabbath, he could not do so with the same conviction and the same intensity as that of the Jew who derives holiness and meaning from his ceremonial life. It is more incumbent on the Christian to insure that the Jews observe the commandments than to observe them on their own.

The ultimate conclusion, of course, was a severe indictment of the missionaries who violently attack Jewish practice and the rabbinic foundations of contemporary Judaism. In the mouth of a long speech of Satan constructed by Hoga, he reiterated his position that a gentile does not have to observe the law of Israel but he cannot be saved without believing in the eternity of Jewish practice and its direct link with the true messiah. Jews of course sin in rejecting Jesus but they will come to see the true light by being allowed to be their true selves in observing *halakha*. As soon as they reach this realization, they will understand the messiahship of Jesus even better than the gentiles since he is Israel’s own messiah.

Hoga’s last major work was the unfinished *Zir Ne’eman: The Faithful Missionary*, published in December, 1847 in London. It was meant to be a serial but apparently

¹⁴ I refer to Moses Margoliouth, *The Fundamental Principles of Modern Judaism Investigated: Together with a Memoir of the Author and an Introduction [...] Dedicated by Permission to the Rev. Alexander McCaul*. Preface by Rev. Henry Raikes, A.M. (London: B. Wertheim, 1843), and see below. Agnieszka Jagodzińska reminds me of the interesting parallel between Hoga and Abraham Jacob Schwartzberg (1762–1843), another famous convert associated with the London Society, who insisted on wearing his phylacteries, fringes, and beard, and generally dressing as a Jew even after he converted. Schwartzberg was also baptized by Alexander McCaul in 1828. On him, see W. T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews from 1809 to 1908* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1908), 221–22.

¹⁵ *The Controversy of Zion*, 55.

only this first issue was printed. With the apparent absence of any subsequent issues, Hoga the author seems to have suspended his publishing career.

The sub-title of the journal already revealed the author's intent: *A View to Opening the Eyes of Some Deluded Christians in England to the Doings of the So-Called London Society*. In publishing this text, Hoga was coming clean, so to speak. He fully declared his sins to the Jewish people, his contribution to the foundation of falsehood, as he called it, and his final wish to not only repudiate the London society but to replace it with a "new temple of truth." In declaring his final break from the London society, he had two goals in mind: to encourage Jews to resist the enticements of the missionaries and to uphold their practice of Jewish law, in the first place, and, and in the second, to plead for the civic emancipation of the Jews, a goal which the missionaries had resisted in their zeal to convert Jews to the "true faith."¹⁶

Hoga spelled out his grievances against the society of which he had been associated for so long in considerable detail. The society was a pious fraud, raising huge sums of money and then placing them in the hands of a few phony missionary converts who are totally ineffectual in their conversion of other Jews. They preyed only upon poor and vulnerable Jews who had no other recourse but accept their blandishments. This time he explicitly mentioned the author of *The Old Paths*, although without recalling McCaul's name. He mocked him for his ridiculous claim that Reform Judaism was a path to conversion which he had orchestrated. He pretended to convert Jews by pointing out the deficiencies of rabbinic Judaism but, in the final analysis, they did not convert. He also noted in passing that the Hebrew version of McCaul's anti-Talmudic tract, supposedly prepared by Hoga himself, was unjustly called a mere translation. One might understand this veiled reference that McCaul was not the sole author of the book, at least in its well-read Hebrew version.¹⁷

Hoga's ultimate message to McCaul and his associates was almost spelled out before the book abruptly ended, obviously unfinished. The London society, so he contended, failed to convert Jews not because their hearts were hardened but because the unsophisticated missionaries never bothered to understand the true convictions of their Jewish victims, their pristine faith, their glorious liturgy, and their high moral values. It is questionable, Hoga contended, that Christianity actually brought a higher morality to the world; instead it wrought cruelty and erroneous principles. Only in the author's own era and in the new surroundings of English society has it overcome its fanaticism and revealed its high moral mission. In the end, carefully crafted books spelling out the cardinal principles of Christianity and how they fit together can communicate the Christian faith more effectively than missionaries ever can. What was required was a plain and forthright composition written in Hebrew to address the Jewish objections to the missionaries rather than an obscure recitation of metaphysical doctrines. Hoga seems to have suggested that he would

¹⁶ *Zir Ne'eman*, 3–5.

¹⁷ *Zir Ne'eman*, 10–19.

undertake such a project properly explaining the evidence of Jesus Christ to the Jewish community. He would address the enduring truths of Christianity and show how human salvation depends on it. But alas, the proposal remained only that as Hoga's discussion abruptly came to an end.¹⁸

As I have said, *The Faithful Missionary* was Hoga's final publication, and the last articulation of his thoughts on Judaism and Christianity. However, during the same year 1847, specifically between March and November, Hoga submitted several short articles and letters to the editor of *The Jewish Chronicle* that were surprisingly published in this major periodical of Anglo-Jewry. The fact that his work was easily accepted by Jews was proof enough for Beth-Zion Lask Abrahams that Hoga had by now become a sincere and full-fledged Jew. As she wrote: "His return to Judaism must have been complete by now, for that periodical would certainly not have given space to a known apostate." There was no doubt in her mind that Hoga was now a Jew.¹⁹ Shnayer Leiman reached a similar conclusion as he wrote: "Most important he was a genuine *baal teshuvah* who lived his last years as a recluse, disowned by Jews and Christians alike."²⁰ To my mind, both of these conclusions are unwarranted. Hoga may have imposed upon himself a reclusive life in his final years, although, as we shall soon see, even that conclusion is not self-evident; but he was hardly disowned by Jews who read him and even praised him in the Jewish press, at least through 1847. Moreover, there is no evidence whatsoever that he relinquished his faith in the Christian messiah while advocating Jewish practice and excoriating the missionaries. Despite his mingled identity, I would argue, the Jewish press saw him as a scholar and as a worthy ally. Their full acceptance of his published views testify to a degree of editorial tolerance perhaps less prevalent in our own day but obviously present in mid-nineteenth-century England.

Hoga first appeared in the pages of *The Jewish Chronicle* on 19 March 1847, intervening in a heated discussion on the derivation of *Elohim*, the plural name of God in the Torah, that had previously gone on for some time between John Oxlee, a deeply learned Christian cleric sympathetic to Jews and rabbinic culture, Samuel Lee, a Jew, and another Jew, Tobias Theodores, a regular contributor to the *Voice of Jacob* and its successor *The Jewish Chronicle*. The fact that Oxlee had often written for both Jewish newspapers belies the assumption that only Jews were invited to write in the Jewish press, even on matters of great theological controversy between Jews and Christians such as the name of God. In fact, only two years later, in May 1845, the same Theodores wrote a long and most favorable review of Oxlee's impressive publication *Three More Letters* in the pages of *The Jewish Chronicle* defending the right of Jews to practice Jewish law without Christian harassment. At the beginning of the review, Theodores made the following extraordinary statement worth citing in full:

¹⁸ *Zir Ne'eman*, 34–48.

¹⁹ Lask Abrahams, "Stanislaus Hoga—Apostate and Penitent," 129.

²⁰ Leiman, "The Baal Teshuvah and the Emden-Eibeschutz Controversy," 13.

Within these few years, and in this country, the Rector of Molesworth (John Oxlee), (the well-known Christian writer and editor) Charlotte Elizabeth (Tonna), and Stanislas Hoga have labored for Jewish conversion, speaking in the same tone of kindness towards the Jewish people, of respect for the Law of Moses, and of reproof against the measures heretofore resorted to for weaning the Israelites from the religion of their fathers (an explicit reference to the activities of the London Society). Whereas formally, the vilification of the Mosaic Law and of Jewish observances were considered the most approved means wherewith to instill an attachment to Christian principles. The gentle and amiable zeal of Charlotte Elizabeth, the cutting irony of Hoga, resulting from an unfortunately correct knowledge of the world as it is; and the elaborate erudition, as well as the bold speculative energy of the tolerant Rector—all tend to establish the gross error of those who, on Christian grounds, consider it warrantable to absolve a son of Abraham, under any moral circumstances, from obeying the Mosaic commandments.²¹

Theodores' statement should erase any doubts about the Jewish establishment press's self-interest in welcoming Hoga into its credible list of contributors. Theodores not only connected Hoga with Oxlee and Tonna, two Christians who strongly defended the integrity of Jews practicing their laws but nevertheless sought their ultimate conversion to the religion of Jesus, but he openly identified him as a man who had labored for Jewish conversion, hardly a characterization of a Jew who had wholeheartedly embraced Judaism. Theodores and his editors obviously considered all three friends as allies of the Jewish community in the battle with the anti-Talmudic activities of the London Society despite their own Christian agendas.

Hoga's discussion of *Elohim*, whether calculated or not, was written in a way not to offend Jewish sensibilities. Both in his initial piece, and in two follow-up entries composed in May and June of 1847, Hoga argued that while it is natural for human beings to perceive of God as a plurality, in essence, God's true being is that of a perfect unity and is the foundation of the Mosaic religion. In distinguishing between fallible human perception of God and his actual singular reality, he impressively brought the testimonies of ancient and recent philosophers from Orpheus and Pythagoras to Kant and Newton. While eschewing any discussion of the Christian trinity, Hoga pointed out that Jews are not commanded to believe in something that contra-

²¹ Tobias Theodores, Review of John Oxlee, *Three more Letters to His Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury on the Culpability and unauthorized presumption of the Gentile Christian Church in requiring the Jew to forsake the Law of Moses*. *The Jewish Chronicle*, 16 May 16 1845, 164. On Theodores, also a founder of the reform congregation in Manchester, see Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 177; and Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1976), Index. On John Oxlee and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, see Michael R. Darby, *The Emergence of the Hebrew-Christian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 103–12. 113–18; Hillary Rubenstein, "A Pioneering Philosemite: Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna (1790–1846) and the Jews," *Jewish Historical Studies* [Published by the Jewish Historical Society of England] 35 (1996–1998): 103–118.

dicts their reason but they are obliged to observe the commandments transmitted by their forefathers.²²

By August 1847, Hoga printed a prospectus of *The Faithful Missionary* already articulating his multi-prong attack on the ideology and tactics of the London society. He included as well an unflattering reference to the *Old Paths*, a text he himself helped to create at least in its Hebrew translation, by pointing out how the missionaries have reduced it to the “rank of an advertisement of universal salvation pills.”²³ In September, he focused his attention on the vicious campaign of the London society to block Jewish emancipation. He denied the notion that Jews cannot properly serve the nation as members of Parliament as Jews, pointing to the great success of Baron Rothschild. While underscoring the deleterious political consequences of the actions of the London Society, he continued to heap insults on his former mentor Alexander McCaul and his *Old Paths*, who he called “the chariot and horseman of the London Society” and whose assault on the Talmud does not hold water. More than any other of his writings, he appears to have fully embraced his connections with the Jewish community in this essay, perhaps because its focus was on the ethnic and political identities of Jews in English society.²⁴

Finally, in November of that same year, he penned his final piece in *The Jewish Chronicle* on the potential impact of Moses on Plato, disagreeing with his friend Oxlee and siding with a Jew named Hertz Ben Pinchas who believed that Plato was indeed indebted to Mosaic law. Hoga offered the following in introducing his intervention:

Now, as I am so exceedingly delighted to see brotherly love between Jews and Christians, I am very sorry to perceive some misunderstanding between a most estimable friend of the Jews (though too learned and wise to be a doctor, and too pious and sincere to be a bishop), on the one hand, and an enlightened Israelite whose writings testify alike to his talents and his excellent feelings, on the other [...].²⁵

Oxlee wrote two rejoinders to Hoga but Hoga, despite his personal expression of good will, was not to be heard from again. Oxlee, however, did acknowledge Hoga’s disagreement with his position in the following intriguing way: “The regret so kindly felt and expressed by Mr. Hoga, respecting one of your valued contributors

²² *The Jewish Chronicle*, 19 March 1847, 98–99. Theodores briefly responded to Hoga on 26 March 1847, 111–12, followed by Hoga’s extensive responses on 28 May 1847, 144–46 [entitled: “Jewish Belief in God, and Exposition of the ‘Angel’ of Scripture, ‘The Name of the God of Jacob’” and on 11 June 1847, 155–57.

²³ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 20 August 1847, 227–28. The citation is on page 228.

²⁴ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 3 September 1847, 230–31, 238–39, entitled: “Jewish Emancipation and the Conversion Society.”

²⁵ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 12 November 1847, 309, entitled: “Moses and Plato.” Hoga was responding to what Oxlee had written on 22 October 1847, 282, denying the claim of any connection between Moses, Plato, and Pythagoras.

and myself, equally befits the scholar, the Jew, and the Christian [...].” Was Oxlee alluding respectively to the three participants in this discussion of Plato and Moses—Hoga, Hertz Ben Pinchas, and Oxlee himself? If so, he designated Hoga neither Christian nor Jew but simply scholar, perhaps suggesting both the erudite image he cut among Jews and Christians as well as his ambiguous status between both communities.²⁶

We might round out our discussion of Hoga’s image among contemporary Jews and Christians by offering some final observations on two reviews of Hoga’s *Controversy of Zion*, the first penned by a convert from Judaism and a missionary writer, and the second by a Jew. In the first case the author is R.H. Herschell, the editor of the missionary newspaper, the *Voice of Israel*, and like Hoga, a former Jew with roots in Eastern Europe. Herschell found the book painful to read especially coming from the pen of the famous translator officially employed by the London Society. While he did not wish to hurt the feelings of “our respectable and highly talented brother,” as he called him, and acknowledged errors of Christians in dealing with converts, he still believed that sincere Christians and converts had overcome prejudice as “brothers and sisters of faith in the Christian church.” He of course took exception to Hoga’s fanciful notions of Judaism, what he called “the sunny hours of childhood,” and Hoga’s absurd pronouncement about the superior knowledge of Jewish school children over Oxford divines. On the contrary, he claimed, “a well-instructed Sunday-school child knows more about God than a whole assembly of rabbis.”²⁷

In contrast, the author of the second review was Jacob Franklin, the editor of *The Voice of Jacob*, published between 1841 and 1846, and like its eventual successor *The Jewish Chronicle*, a periodical composed by Jews and promoting Jewish interests. After some reluctance, he welcomed Christian authors and readers who supported his Jewish newspaper, especially Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna who became his close friend.

Franklin had written a brief notice of *Eldad and Medad* a year earlier but he devoted a longer review to *The Controversy of Zion* as soon as the first edition appeared. Franklin was quite aware of Hoga’s background but was fascinated by the argument of the book despite the fact that Hoga had left the Jewish fold. Here is how he justified the attention he was giving the book, distinguishing between the character of the author and the quality of his argument:

Under the title, an exceedingly curious pamphlet challenges our review. It is issued at the cost of a penny only. And because we think that it ought to have an extensive circulation among Christians, we willingly give it such notoriety as our columns afford. Mr. Hoga’s learning and ingen-

²⁶ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 19 November 1847, 317–18; 3 December 1847, 336. The citation is from page 336.

²⁷ *Voice of Israel*, 1845, 167–68. On Herschell, see Darby, *The Emergence of the Hebrew-Christian Movement*, 124–33.

uity did not, as is said, find their appreciation among his brethren [the Jews], and in carrying them to another market, he forfeited the 'portion and inheritance in Israel.' It is not, therefore, with the writer that we have to deal, but with what he has written; prominently, in contrast as it stands, to that vilification of the Jews and Judaism, which another deserter from our ranks has recently given to the English public.²⁸

Franklin was referring to Hoga's contemporary the aforementioned Moses Margoliouth who had recently published *The Fundamental Principles of Modern Judaism Investigated* (1843), a devastating critique of Jewish ritual practice, derogating especially the commandments of fringes, phylacteries, and mezuzot on the doorposts of every Jewish home. I have mentioned a possibility that Hoga had responded to this book directly in *The Controversy of Zion*. Be that as it may, Franklin certainly noticed the contrast between the divergent approaches of the two converts: Hoga was vigorously defending the perpetuity of the Mosaic ordinances, defending especially the same rituals Margoliouth had dismissed, or as Franklin put it, Hoga wrote "so pertinently, and so quaintly, as to be even entertaining as well as argumentative." Franklin was especially taken by Hoga's claim that Jews understand Jesus better than Christians because he was Israel's messiah, and exclaims: "And this is the language of one who is himself a baptized Jew!" Franklin also pointed out the high price of the pretentious, "regal, Episcopal" Margoliouth book in contrast to the low cost of the sincerely modest Hoga pamphlet. To the editor of a Jewish periodical navigating the troubled waters of Jewish-Christian relations in the mid-nineteenth century, bad apostates deserved rebuke while good ones needed to be recognized and even appreciated for their defense of the Jewish cause.²⁹

After 1847, as I have noted, Stanislaus Hoga seems to have stopped publishing and he was not heard from again. This is especially surprising given the polite and pleasant demeanor he displayed in his exchanges recorded in *The Jewish Chronicle*, as well as the degree of acceptance of his views by Jews and Christians alike. But unless more of his writing might be discovered in the future, we are left to ponder his utter silence at the end of his life. Thanks however to the diligent research of Beth Zion Lask Abrahams, we know the date of his death, 21 January 1860, and the place of his death: 98 Charlotte Street, London.³⁰ What was he doing in the last thirteen years of his life?

According to Abrahams' research in the London Patent Office, and also based on evidence still accessible on line, Stanislaus was an inventor, registering three sepa-

²⁸ *Voice of Jacob*, vol. 2 (August 1843), 215 [Franklin's brief notice of *Eldad and Medad*]; vol. 3 February 1844, 95 and 103. The citation is from p. 95.

²⁹ *Voice of Jacob*, vol. 3, 95 and 103, and see note 14 above. On Margoliouth, see Darby, *The Emergence of the Hebrew-Christian Movement*, 136–42.

³⁰ Lask Abrahams, "Stanislaus Hoga—Apostate and Penitent," 146. I can now add that Hoga was buried in Highgate Cemetery, London, grave number 10092, square 50 Western Cemetery. My effort to secure a picture of the headstone on the grave were hampered by the fact that another person was later buried in the same plot and his gravestone is the only one extant.

rate patents in 1858, and five others between 1852 and 1857. His applications describe the nature of these inventions: separating gold from ore; creating an instrument for ascertaining the existence of gold in the earth; coating the surfaces of the cell of galvanic batteries and also the surfaces of crucibles; applying power in locomotion by which a given force may in its effect of overcoming resistance be increased and multiplied; inventing electric telegraphs, and more. One might dismiss this evidence as referring to another Stanislaus Hoga if not for the fact that several of his contemporaries, such as Mrs. Finn, the daughter of Alexander McCaul has mentioned his scientific interests in passing and Hoga himself often referred to science and the natural world in his own writings.³¹

Our account of the journey of Chaskel Meshummad from Kuzmir to London, from Hasidism to evangelical Protestantism, from associate of the London Society to passionate critic, and from Christian anti-Talmudist to a defender of the Halacha accompanied by a faith in the messiahship of Jesus still remains incomplete. But one thing is clear: Hoga did not necessarily die a broken, lonely, and despised man, rejected universally by Jews and by Christians. His unique brand of Jewish Christianity was recognized and even appreciated by some and he apparently found a way to bring together in his own mind and heart his Jewish and Christian selves. His final refuge, however, was science and given his remarkable intellect, he proved capable of making the unexpected transition from theologian/translator to scientific inventor. We might recall, in closing, his prescient remark in *The Controversy of Zion* of 1845: “Science is the only object in which a Jew may excel to the satisfaction of the whole world.”³² By the time of his death in 1860, Stanislaus Hoga had apparently discovered his peace of mind in the neutral non-theological space of scientific inquiry. And Hoga would eventually be followed by many other talented Jewish individuals who sought the same path, the same recognition for their intellectual accomplishments, and the same entrance into European society.

³¹ Lask Abrahams, “Stanislaus Hoga—Apostate and Penitent,” 145–46, 149. The reference by Elizabeth Finn to Hoga’s scientific attainments is in *Reminiscences of Mrs. Finn, Member of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London and Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1929), 25. Other references to Hoga as an inventor are found in the following: <https://books.google.com/books?id=VkcEAAAQAAJ> [*The Inventor’s Gazette*, 276]; <https://books.google.com/books?id=fZJGAQAAMAAJ> [*The Commissioners of Patents’ Journal*, no. 1547]; <https://books.google.com/books?id=eKwoQAAMAAJ> [*The Repertory of Patent Inventions and Other Discoveries for 1857*]; and <https://books.google.com/books?id=rOcEAAAQAAJ> [Same journal for 1852].

³² *The Controversy of Zion*, xi.

Christian Wiese

The Divergent Path of Two Brothers: The Jewish Scholar David Cassel and the Protestant Missionary Paulus Cassel¹

1

In February 1893, the London *Jewish Chronicle* published an obituary remembering two brothers who had died within a few months—two brothers whose biographies could not have been more different. One of them had acquired renown as an historian of Jewish literature, whereas the other had chosen the path of conversion and become a Protestant theologian involved in the project of missionizing the Jews. Reuniting in death the two scholars who had been separated by religious difference during their lives, the obituary declares:

The deaths of David and Paulus (formerly Selig) Cassel remove two brothers, both of whom had won a place for themselves among the honoured names of Jewish scholarship. Paulus Cassel, though a convert to Christianity, never ‘went over to the enemy’s camp,’ to use Graetz’s much-attacked but all too-just expression. Paulus was the greater man of the two, but David’s works on Jewish literature, and the part he played in communal life were not without value and importance. [...] Paulus Cassel was a scholar and writer of a higher type, and his works will live. He took a worthy part in the struggle against anti-Semitism. [...] Paulus Cassel was perhaps the first man to recognize what was really meant by writing a history of the Jews.²

Interestingly enough for an obituary in a Jewish journal, more than merely assigning the convert a place within the history of Jewish scholarship, emphasizing both his innovative contribution as a historian to the understanding of Judaism and his role in defending Jews and Judaism against the accusations of modern anti-Semitism, it even suggests that he was, in comparison to his brother who remained faithful to his tradition, the greater mind and more original scholar. Who then was Paulus Cassel, the historian who turned against his ancestral faith to become a Protestant theologian and missionary? What can be said about the motivation of both his conversion and his role as a defender of the Jews? What was his understanding of Jewish history and how did it change after his conversion? How were his conversion, his missionary activities and his defense of Judaism perceived by Christians and Jews,

¹ This essay has been written within the context of the Hessian Ministry for Science and Arts funded interdisciplinary research LOEWE hub “Religious Positioning: Modalities and Constellations in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Contexts” at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main and the Justus-Liebig University Gießen. All translations of originally German sources are those of the author of this essay.

² *The Jewish Chronicle* 27 February 1893, 11.

including his brother David? A similar set of questions need to be asked with regard to David Cassel's divergent spiritual and intellectual path. How did he, as a historian of Jewish literature, respond to the political and intellectual challenges to which Jewish scholarship was exposed during the nineteenth century? How did he interpret Judaism's role in the history of humankind and its contribution to contemporary European culture? What was his perception of Judaism's relationship to Christianity and his attitude toward Jewish conversions to the dominating religion?

The story of David and Paulus Cassel is, indeed, a fascinating one, not only because of the dramatic personal dimension involved, but also with regard to the very different paths Jewish scholars in nineteenth century Germany were able to choose when confronting the challenges the Jewish minority had to face in view of the protracted process of emancipation, the continuing pressure of Christian supersessionism, and the emergence of political and racial anti-Semitism. Within that context, Selig (Paulus Stephanus) Cassel turns out to be a rather unique figure, a serious and learned intellectual, neglected by historiography and rarely discussed among scholars of Jewish intellectual history (as well as in scholarship on contemporary Protestantism). In 1933, he appears all of a sudden in Arnold Zweig's *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit* (1933), in a chapter dedicated to Silesian Jewish intellectuals in which he is mentioned as one of those converts who should continue to be counted as Jews, "as if they had not left us" [*als wären sie nicht von uns weggegangen*]. There are, among the converts, Zweig argues, characters such as Cassel, "who make their baptism a turning point in their life and, continuously fighting for their former fellow believers, develop a Christian element in themselves that would carry them until the end of their lives."³ Historian Ernest Hamburger devoted a passage to Cassel in his book, *Juden im öffentlichen Leben Deutschlands*, in which he described the latter's shortlived episode as a conservative Prussian parliamentarian in 1866 and 1867, but mainly honored him as a scholar who wrote a "much-noticed history of the Jews" and, based on his profound knowledge of Judaism and Christianity, composed the most courageous and pugnacious attack against late nineteenth century political anti-Semitism.⁴ Alan T. Levenson, who wrote the only existing scholarly article about Cassel, aptly portrays him—alongside Edith Stein (1891–1942)—as a "philosemitic apostate," in contrast to the many examples of Jewish converts who turned into enemies of Jews and Judaism, and as a "devout Christian and proud Jew."⁵ And finally, Todd M. Endelman, in his study, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, lists Paulus Cassel among the rare cases in Central Europe in which conversion was not an expression of radical assimilation on the part of those who were unable or unwilling to endure

³ Arnold Zweig, *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit. Ein Versuch* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1991), 110.

⁴ Ernest Hamburger, *Juden im öffentlichen Leben Deutschlands. Regierungsmitglieder, Beamte und Parlamentarier in der monarchischen Zeit 1848–1918* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), 219.

⁵ Alan T. Levenson, "The Apostate as Philosemite," in Levenson, *Between Philosemitism and Antisemitism: Defenses of Jews and Judaism in Germany, 1871–1932* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 132–141, here 141.

the burden of being Jewish and who desired to be liberated from the marks of Jewish particularism for the sake of social acceptance and equal rights.⁶ Cassel's main achievement, according to Endelman, was that, in contrast to most of his Protestant contemporaries, he became aware of the fact that the modern race-based anti-Semitism in Germany was "an assault on the doctrinal foundations of Christianity," and fought with courage and dignity against both the denigration of Jews and Judaism and the undermining of the Christian faith.⁷ Cassel thus falls into the category of what Endelman terms "conversions of conviction," which he defines as follows:

Among the many Jews who became Christians in the modern period were a few who were, by their own testimony and the testimony of others, sincere converts. Unlike the majority, who changed their religion to escape the disabilities of Jewishness, these converts viewed their change of religion as the outcome of spiritual illumination, philosophical reflection, scriptural study, or some combination thereof. Unlike the majority, these converts took their new faith seriously. They believed that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah; that his death atoned for the sins of humankind; that the Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible was correct and the Jewish reading willfully incorrect; and that God's covenant with the Jewish people was void, having been reassigned to the New Israel, that is, Christendom. They worshiped regularly and often testified publicly to the truth of their new faith. For them, Christianity was more than a new cloak in which they enveloped themselves for worldly advantage.⁸

The following analysis of Paulus Cassel's biographical path and writings will demonstrate that Endelman's category of "conversion by conviction" as well his insistence that even such conversions may include elements of a "conversion by convenience" does, indeed, help to do justice to his individual case. It seems, however, that conviction did play a crucial role in Cassel's decision. He was, as we will see, not merely a convert who engaged in active missionary work and, at the same time, defended contemporary Jews against the attacks of religious and racial anti-Semitism. He was also a scholar, once a representative of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and later a historian who embarked on rewriting and refining the theological narrative adopted as part of his conversion, particularly when he felt compelled to refute alternative, nationalist and racist narratives because they threatened both the Jewish minority and the balance he himself had found between a critical appreciation of Jewish tradition and his new Christian identity. By contrasting Selig (Paulus Stephanus) Cassel's intellectual and spiritual journey with his brother David's interpretation of Judaism, this article also endeavors to elaborate on the distinct historical and theological concepts underlying the convert's conviction and the alternative attitude provided by Jewish scholarship in nineteenth century Germany—the alternative Paulus Cassel uncompromisingly left behind when embracing Christianity.

⁶ Todd M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 4–5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

2 *Wissenschaft* as an Antidote to Conversion: The Political Dimensions of David Cassel's Jewish Scholarship

Jewish Studies is the historical knowledge of Judaism, the science of its religious ideas, their revelations in the great individuals of the Jewish people, its literature, its religious and moral life. It is also the science of religious ideas and institutions as they appear to fit into our world view, proving their worth in us and to us as living moral forces. It is the great evidence of Judaism's achievements in the past, of its right in the present and future, and it is our protection against prejudices disseminated over millenia, against all intellectual weapons concocted against us and our teachings. It protects the great facts of the past, it collects the rays emanating from the documents of Judaism that light the present and the future. Without it, we would be a body without a soul, a ship without a captain. [...] It has become part of the legacy of the wonderful past of the Jewish people, and thus the difficult task still lies ahead, to awaken all good minds of our race with strong words against the destruction that has been caused by shortsightedness, ignorance, and indifference, to put an end to the listlessness, with which the teaching of Judaism has been passed down to the young generation. Its task is to raise everyone's awareness of the mission Judaism has fulfilled, under the pressure of unprecedented struggles and suffering, by preserving the religion of the Prophets and the Torah from everything that might obscure it, and it will also have the duty to take a stand against the attempt to transform our religion into a syncretistic construction by accepting foreign institutions.⁹

This definition of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, taken from an essay published in 1898 by the historian and Orientalist Martin Schreiner (1863–1926) reflects the self-conception the young discipline had developed during the nineteenth century. As a child of the modern age, its origins were in the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment, and in the encounter with the historical understanding of German Idealism and Romanticism, which revolutionized the Jewish awareness of history. The innovation of this new discipline of academic Jewish Studies consisted in the development of a modern scholarly ethos. Although it had deep roots in the traditional Jewish scholarly tradition, its early representatives made it their task to approach the study of Jewish religion, history and literature using the methods of contemporary historiography, i.e. “to emancipate from the theologians” and to cleanse itself from the prejudices, motives and passions of religion.¹⁰ Within the context of the emancipation of the Jewish minority such a vision of academic objectivity promised to bring an end to the isolation from non-Jewish academia, while furthering social and cultural integration. However, from its very inception, the young discipline went beyond the purely academic, fulfilling the important function of reformulating Jewish identity amidst a

⁹ Martin Schreiner, “Was ist uns die Wissenschaft des Judentums?,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 62 (1898): 150–152, 164–166, and 175–177, here 177.

¹⁰ Leopold Zunz, *Über jüdische Literatur* (1845), reprinted in Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Gerschel, 1875), 41–59, here 57; cf. Ismar Schorsch, “The Ethos of Modern Jewish Scholarship,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 35 (1990): 55–71.

Christian and, especially in Prussia, predominantly Protestant society and culture. In 1933, philosopher Max Wiener (1882–1950) described it as having been chosen “to exalt the heritage of the Jewish past, cleansed of its dross, in order to give non-Jews a new respect for their [the Jews’] race and to imbue the Jewish community with confidence and self-respect.”¹¹ In the wake of the Haskalah, one of the central goals of the Jewish scholars was thus what Shulamit Volkov has called “inventing a tradition”: an ethical and philosophical interpretation of Judaism that aspired to prove the legitimacy of the continued existence of Jewry and Jewishness within modernity and to demonstrate its contribution to the contemporary social, intellectual and moral problems.¹² A crucial inner-Jewish implication of this endeavor was the desire to engender a modernizing renewal of Judaism and to immunize the Jewish minority against the threat of a possible self-dissolution as a consequence of religious-cultural indifference or conversion.

The Hebraist and historian David Cassel was a typical representative of this new scholarly movement. Born on 7 March 1818 in the Silesian-Prussian town of Groß-Glogau as one of two sons of a Jewish sculptor, he visited the local Klosterschule, a Christian grammar school, then enrolled at the University of Breslau and eventually studied philosophy and classical philology in Berlin, where he attended the lectures, among others, of the Orientalist Julius Heinrich Petermann (1801–1876), the philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Trendelenburg (1802–1872), and the philologist Philipp August Boeck (1785–1867). Apart from that, he devoted himself to Talmudic studies and literary studies under the supervision of one of the founders and towering figures of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), and maintained friendly relations with Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907), later also with Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), Zacharias Frankel (1801–1875) as well as with scholars such as Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) and Michael Sachs (1808–1864). It was, however, mainly Zunz and Steinschneider who exerted the strongest influence on the emerging historian of Jewish literature. Cassel received his doctoral degree with a thesis on “Die Psalmenüberschriften in kritisch-historischer und archäologischer Hinsicht” in 1842 and his rabbinical diploma in 1843 from Frankel, but never accepted a rabbinical position. In 1846, he became principal of an educational institute called the “Dina-Nauen-Stift” in Berlin, a position he held until 1879. He also served as a teacher of religion in Berlin at the congregational school for Jewish girls in 1850/51, from 1852 to 1867 at the Jewish school for boys, and from 1858 onwards as a lecturer at the Jewish community’s teacher seminary. From 1862 to 1873 he was also a teacher at the Jewish Normal School. In 1872, when the *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* was established in Berlin, Cassel was eventually hired as a lecturer in Biblical exegesis as well as Jewish history and literature. In religious terms,

¹¹ Max Wiener, *Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation* (Berlin: Philo, 1933), 16.

¹² Shulamit Volkov, “Die Erfindung einer Tradition. Zur Entstehung des modernen Judentums in Deutschland,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 253 (1991): 603–628.

he seems, at least initially, to have been closer to the positive-historical school than to the Reform movement, as is demonstrated by his 1856 vigorous defense of Rabbi Michael Sachs within the context of conflicts about the religious services in the Berlin Jewish community.¹³ Not an ardent reformer but a devoted historian, he usually refrained from getting involved in inner-Jewish controversies, emphasizing the impartial objectivity of religious history and the constructive role of *Wissenschaft* in providing the basis for an adequate moral and aesthetic renewal of the synagogue service. In 1857 he became a member of the *Gesellschaft der Freunde*, originally an association of young intellectuals inspired by the Haskalah, but later a cultural home for Berlin Jewish intellectuals of different backgrounds.¹⁴

In terms of his scholarship, Cassel belonged to a group of the most creative Hebraists of the nineteenth century, and famously contributed to the concept of a Diasporic world literature—an intercultural archive that records the traces of the Jews' migrations in history. His most important work was his unfinished two-volume history of Jewish literature,¹⁵ but he is also known for his translation and edition of Jewish texts, for instance Judah Ha-Levi's *Sefer Kuzari*¹⁶ or Azariah dei Rossi's *Me'or Einayim*.¹⁷ His historiographical approach and main aspects of his representation of Jewish history can be seen in the short compendium of Jewish history and literature he published in 1868 for educational purposes, which he expanded to a more than five hundred page textbook in 1879.¹⁸ Following an introductory part on the biblical period and a first chapter on the history of the Jews between the Babylonian exile and the destruction of the Jewish state by the Romans, the main body of both books is devoted to Judaism's Diasporic history. After the loss of Jerusalem and the Second Temple, "the most important caesura in the history of the Jewish people," as Cassel maintained, the political side of Jewish history had become negligible. The most interesting object for research was, therefore, the creative tension between Judaism's efforts to preserve its own identity and the adoption of the characteristic cul-

13 See David Cassel, *Die Cultusfrage in der jüdischen Gemeinde von Berlin* (Berlin: Adolf, 1856).

14 See Sebastian Panwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Freunde 1792–1935: Berliner Juden zwischen Aufklärung und Hochfinanz* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2007).

15 David Cassel, *Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur*, vol I: *Die biblische Literatur*, part 1: *Die poetische Literatur*; part 2: *Die prophetische Literatur* (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1872–1873).

16 *Sefer ha-Kuzari = Das Buch Kusari des Jehuda ha-Levi: nach dem hebräischen Texte des Jehuda Ibn-Tibbon herausgegeben, übersetzt und mit einem Commentar, so wie mit einer allgemeinen Einleitung versehen von David Cassel* (Leipzig: Voigt, 1869).

17 *Sefer Me'or Enayim. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von David Cassel*, 3 vols. (Vilnius: Romm, 1864–1866; repr. Jerusalem: Makor, 1970).

18 David Cassel, *Leitfaden für den Unterricht in der jüdischen Geschichte und Literatur. Nebst einer kurzen Darstellung der biblischen Geschichte und einer Uebersicht der Geographie Palästinas* (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1868); David Cassel, *Lehrbuch der jüdischen Geschichte und Literatur* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1879); both works follow exactly the same structure, but the latter is much more comprehensive and detailed.

tural features of the nations amongst whom Jews lived from antiquity to the modern period:

They devote an astonishing intellectual energy to cultivating and developing the inherited religious teachings, producing a vast literature of their own, but they also take part with no less keenness and success in the scholarship, art, commerce and industry of those nations. The focus of the historical representation, therefore, has to be on this literary and cultural history.¹⁹

And, indeed, the bulk of Cassel's erudite work, which is based on the most recent scholarly work of Leopold Zunz, Michael Sachs, and Abraham Geiger, can be characterized as a comprehensive description of Jewish literature and scholarship from the Talmud, which he interprets as the main root of the continuing vitality of the Jewish spirit,²⁰ through the medieval traditions of religious philosophy and Kabbalah, with a particular attention to the culture of Spanish Jewry, to the Jewish cultures in Western and Eastern Europe as well as the Ottoman Empire, including Palestine, until the period of the Enlightenment. When he addresses the Jewish minority's political experience, he presents a lachrymose history, dominated by discrimination and persecution, and even if, at least implicitly, the Jewish cultural interaction with the non-Jewish world is given substantial weight. The image of the Jewish-Christian as well as Jewish-Muslim relations is one of constant struggle for survival. While Christianity had become "an irreconcilable enemy of the religion from whose womb it had emerged and whose right to exist it denies since its birth," Islam later became an equally dangerous and bitter foe. Judaism's most important spiritual and cultural achievement was, according to Cassel, that despite those two powerful hostile religions, it had successfully fought for its religious distinctiveness, losing only its "weaker and less noble members" to the temptation of conversion.²¹ Less than a decade before the eruption of modern anti-Semitism in Germany, Cassel's perception of the modern period since the French Revolution, the Enlightenment and the process of Jewish acculturation is generally positive. The historian praises Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) as a model for the combination of cultural participation and loyalty to one's own tradition that he himself envisions as Judaism's future in Europe at a time when the still existing obstacles for Jewish equality, continuing outbreaks of anti-Jewish hatred and increasing religious indifference and ignorance might seduce contemporary Jews to turn to the religion of the dominant majority.²²

The hidden warning in Cassel's otherwise hopeful remarks on the modern Jewish experience leads to his struggle against the loss of Jewish religious identity. Most rel-

¹⁹ Cassel, *Lehrbuch*, 163–164.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 199–200 for Cassel's description of the ignorance and hatred with which non-Jewish scholars had treated the Talmud over the centuries and for his optimism regarding a new scholarly appreciation in the age of emancipation.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

²² *Ibid.*, 514–515.

evant for a comparison of his religious convictions to those of his brother Selig, later turned Paulus, and for an interpretation of his perception of Christianity as well as his attitude toward conversion, however, are three different writings from the fields of Jewish scholarship, religious education, and political apologetics. The first one is his plan, drafted in 1844 together with Moritz Steinschneider, but never implemented, of an encyclopedia of Judaism—the *Real-Encyclopädie des Judentums*.²³ In his final version of the document, Cassel strongly emphasized the need of such a project which would serve to strengthen the scholarly character of the young discipline of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and to foster the social and intellectual progress within the Jewish communities. The state of Jewish scholarship, he maintained, excluded as it was from the German universities, reflected the situation of the Jewish minority in general, particularly the denigration it suffered due to Christian society's lack of knowledge about Judaism and its propensity to "declare it dead."²⁴ Given Judaism's mission to counter Christian particularism by embodying general human values and fighting for "the eternal freedom of the mind, against darkness, parochialism and self-interest," and in view of the fact that Jewish scholarship was constantly discriminated against on the part of Christian scholars as well as the state, the planned encyclopedia was, according to Cassel, both an academic and a political project: "The more intrinsic the links between Jewish scholarship and Judaism's external circumstances, and the more intimate the amalgamation of life and *Wissenschaft*, the more the scholarly endeavor should take the situation of the external world into account."²⁵ Judaism's history and tradition should be explored by Jewish scholars only (since non-Jewish scholars continued to be motivated by prejudice) in an academic manner, independent of the differing religious trends, in dialogue with the achievements of general scholarship, and in an accessible style. Unfortunately, Cassel argued, since only very few Jewish scholars enjoyed the privilege of being able to fully devote themselves to scholarship, a systematic and coherent representation of Jewish theology and Jewish history had to be postponed to a better future. Instead of waiting for the "messianic period of Jewish scholarship,"²⁶ however, what had to be provided was a collaborative foundational work, a basis for future research and a source of knowledge for educated readers, irrespective of their religious affiliation.

23 David Cassel, *Plan der Real-Encyclopädie des Judentums: Zunächst für die Mitarbeiter* (Krotoschin: B. L. Monasch & Sohn, 1844); for the history of this project, see Ismar Schorsch, "The Emergence of Historical Consciousness," in Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH and London: Brandeis University Press, published by University Press of New England, 1994), 177–204, esp. 194–195; Arndt Engelhardt, *Arsenale jüdischen Wissens: Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der "Encyclopaedia Judaica"* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 132–152. The ambitious project that was supposed to follow the model of the *Universal-Lexikon der Gegenwart und Vergangenheit*, edited by Heinrich August Pierer (1794–1850), had to be given up in 1846 due to financial problems on the part of the publisher.

24 Cassel, *Plan der Real-Encyclopädie des Judentums*, 4–5.

25 *Ibid.*, 8.

26 *Ibid.*, 18.

The encyclopedia was supposed to achieve this by educating its readership about the manifold areas of Jewish knowledge—dogmatic theology (Jewish thought, Kabbalah, relation to other religions), practical theology (ceremonies, religious service, law), history (from the Bible to the present, including geography), cultural history (biblical and talmudic culture, Jewish contributions to scholarship, art, and economy), literary history (Bible, Talmud and Midrash, rabbinical literature, poetry), and linguistics—and thus to convey an impartial, dispassionate image of Judaism. One goal was explicitly to lessen prejudice among non-Jewish intellectuals: the imagined reader was the “unprejudiced Christian, or at least the Christian who desired rich guidance,” who, until the present, had no more sources of knowledge than “old, dusty writings, produced by blind fanaticism, born out of raging hatred against the Jews, nourished by disgraceful ignorance and mindless confusion.”²⁷ Jewish scholars, therefore, were compelled to take the initiative to defend their denigrated faith by what, despite the apologetic element involved, he claimed to be the means of pure scholarship. More importantly, they had to take responsibility in order to strengthen those Jews who were alienated from their own tradition and thus vulnerable to the constant pressure to convert to Christianity:

Finally, it is equally necessary for many Jews to be taught about their Judaism as it is for the Christians, since they themselves often live in deplorable confusion regarding their hereditary faith, and fraudulent merchants of salvation are doing their part in increasing the confusion, in order to cast their nets in the muddy waters. Or should we wait until the last spark of interest the Jew takes in his history and literature has been extinguished? Isn't it, rather, the obligation of anybody who has kept a warm heart for his faith to use his entire strength to preserve, exalt and promote it? We, therefore, state (and every true Jew will agree with us) that it can only be desirable from a Jewish point of view that Judaism be thoroughly understood with regard to any of its aspects; the semi-darkness hovering over so many aspects increases prejudice rather than dissipating it.²⁸

As this passage demonstrates, David Cassel was, as many contemporary representatives of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, strongly concerned about conversion as a serious threat to the Jewish minority—a threat that resulted from what he perceived as a volatile mix of religious alienation, disillusionment in view of the unfinished process of emancipation, and internalization of non-Jewish prejudices regarding Jewish history and culture.²⁹ It is probably not too far-fetched to speculate on the impact his brother's conversion must have had on his increasing awareness of this threat and his determination to

²⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁸ Ibid., 23.

²⁹ For the struggle of the representatives of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* against conversion during the later period, see Christian Wiese, “Übertritt als Integrationsleistung? Leitkultur- und Konversionsdebatten im Deutschen Kaiserreich,” in *Konversion in Räumen jüdischer Geschichte*, ed. Martin Przybalski and Carsten Schapkow (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2014), 81–122.

counter the potential inclination of young Jews to choose an easy way out of the enduring dilemma in which they found themselves when attempting to secure their place in German society.

The second source that reveals how strong Cassel's concern about conversion was is his book *Sabbath-Stunden zur Belehrung und Erbauung* (1868), a collection of fifty-two homilies on the Torah, originally delivered as Sabbath lectures at a school for boys. The goal of these—pastoral and moralizing—homilies was to foster the pupils' bourgeois sense of *Sittlichkeit*, to convey them an appropriate knowledge and appreciation of Jewish values, and to strengthen their religious self-confidence and fortitude. One of the dominating leitmotifs of Cassel's sermons is the encouragement not to despair in view of the many experiences of discrimination these boys would face in their social and professional lives and when becoming aware of the long history of suffering and persecution endured by Jews throughout their history. Instead, they should be proud of and remain loyal to their tradition while integrating into German society. Incessantly Cassel reminded his audience of the courage and steadfastness the Jewish minority had evinced even during the worst periods of discrimination and murderous persecution, thus appealing to the pride of the present generation:

And we who are lucky enough to live in better times, we who have been awarded the right to live our religion in a free and unrestricted manner, should we be less steadfast than them? Could we reconcile it with our sense of honor to be ashamed of the name of Israel because we, as individuals, are confronted with a large majority of members of a different faith?³⁰

The Jewish youth, Cassel emphasized, should be aware that they would continue to be exposed to prejudice and discrimination, but they should all the more rely on God and, while embracing the majority culture, cherish the faith of the Jewish community. Rather than allowing themselves to feel ashamed of “belonging to this oldest of religions, the mother of other religions,” they should be proud of their twofold identity: “Never forget that, in the first place, you belong to the large brotherhood of humankind; never regret that you belong to the community of faith called Israel.”³¹

Again and again, Cassel bemoaned the indifference characterizing many in the Jewish community and their lack of knowledge about “their own religion, their own history, Judaism's role in the history of humankind.” He insisted that what was needed in order to live up to the responsibility toward Judaism's future was the will, from early youth on, to acquire the intellectual and spiritual means to defend the Jewish tradition: “How would you feel if, at some point in the future, you would, during a social event, hear people talk about the Jewish faith, and you, being Jews yourself, felt unable to contribute, or if your religion was attacked and

³⁰ David Cassel, *Sabbat-Stunden zur Belehrung und Erbauung der israelitischen Jugend* (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1868), 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 82–83.

you were incapable of defending it?” It was, therefore, the holiest of duties for a young Jew to immerse himself into Jewish learning and to feel the joy of being permeated by Jewishness and a sense of Jewish belonging.³² It was a distinguishing mark of modern *Bildung*, Cassel argued, that members of different religions respect each other, whereas prejudice, denigration, and hatred were the expression of a lack of education that young Jews should learn to despise rather than succumbing to the pressure exerted by the experience of such attitudes. At the same time, Jews should be careful to respect the religious identity of non-Jews and avoid any sense of superiority, derision, and hostility, since it was Judaism—as a non-missionizing religion—that taught humankind the notion of legitimate religious difference.³³

In contrast to this Jewish notion of religious plurality, Cassel argued, the still widespread strategy of alienating Jews from their religion by withholding from them essential civic and cultural rights as well as social and economic opportunities, thus rewarding those “who recklessly abandon their inherited faith and equally frivolously affirm a new conviction,” had to be considered a shame for modern society. All religions should refrain from coercion when it came to questions of faith and follow Judaism’s example in actively rejecting conversion should it be pursued out of sheer opportunism or as a consequence of external pressure: “The holiest of human values, religious conviction, should not be brought to the market-place like a commodity one gives away for money or which one buys again if suggested by the opportunities involved.”³⁴

While David Cassel’s remarks in his plan for a Jewish encyclopedia as well as his homilies primarily served to immunize his fellow-Jews against both cultural discrimination and the temptation to subject to the attraction by the dominant culture, a third intriguing document, an open letter, published in 1869, to the famous anatomist, pathologist and liberal politician Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902), is one of the very few political statements published by the Jewish historian that is written also with a non-Jewish audience in mind. What prompted him to vigorously attack Virchow, whom he otherwise admired as an advocate of emancipation,³⁵ was that the latter had, in an essay on the history of civil and military hospitals, claimed that neither in antiquity nor in their Diasporic history had Jews developed an adequate medical system, whereas it was Christianity’s achievement to have introduced a humanitarian

³² *Ibid.*, 238; see 193–194.

³³ *Ibid.*, 233–234.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 171–172.

³⁵ David Cassel, *Offener Brief eines Juden an Herrn Professor Dr. Virchow* (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1869), 1. He emphasized that he had never felt the desire to engage in politics and was only forced to respond to Virchow’s view because the latter had displayed a sad example of ignorance that was damaging to the Jewish minority; he, Cassel, wrote his open letter because he hoped that Virchow, as a man of character, “possessed the moral energy to resolutely dissociating himself from prejudices and errors,” if they were satisfactorily shown to him (5–6).

concept of neighbourly love also to the realm of care for the sick and wounded.³⁶ Cassel perceived this statement as a disgraceful denigration of Jewish ethics that he feared was likely to foster prejudice among the uneducated. Apart from his attempt to refute the erroneous historical assumptions underlying Virchow's views, Cassel accused him of "unfriendly sentiments toward Judaism" rooted in an obvious lack of insight when it came to defining "Christianity's and Judaism's relationship to humankind and especially to modern society."³⁷ What is more relevant here than Cassel's protest against a variety of implications of Virchow's historical judgment, including the latter's remarks on Judaism's alleged intolerance and exclusivity, at least in antiquity, is the way the Jewish historian defined his relationship to Christianity. He did this both by defending his own loyalty to Judaism and by embracing historical arguments that are strongly reminiscent of similar views expressed by his more famous contemporary Abraham Geiger:

It is obvious that I don't accept the specific Christian dogma; otherwise I would have converted to Christianity. [...] As far as Christian ethics is concerned, I am far away from underestimating it. What a bliss it would be if all our political, civil and social circumstances would express the ethical teachings of Christianity. However, I am convinced as a scholar that Christianity has produced no ethical truth that has not yet been taught by Judaism and that has not yet been included in the latter's foundational source, the Old Testament. Nonetheless, I don't deny Christianity's historical significance, its merits for humankind. Judaism, with its irreconcilable opposition against paganism, and with its strict monotheism [...] would, despite the eternal truth inherent in its notion of God, have had difficulties to spread it, including its ethical truths, quickly amongst the pagan world. Christianity took over this task; it came to a compromise with paganism, it complied, to a certain extent, with the latter's views, it allowed it to keep its images, gave it saints instead of Gods, also used violence when conviction was not sufficient, and prided its priests a degree of power that has served humankind pretty well as a force against the crude morality of the nations and the harshness of the princely power. [...] Four hundred years ago, a faint idea of the evanescence of this amalgamation of Jewish and pagan elements flashed through the Christian world; this faint idea found its expression during the period of the Reformation, which did, however, remain incomplete. The present desires a complete break with the opaque dogma and contents itself with the purely ethical part of Christianity.³⁸

This passage is a full-fledged expression of modern—particularly liberal—Judaism's interpretation of the Jewish religion as an embodiment of pure ethical monotheism, of Christianity's historical role in spreading Jewish ideas and values throughout the pagan world, and of the price the Christian religion had paid for such an historical triumph, to the extent that it became tarnished, in its Christological tradition, by the very paganism of the world it succeeded to permeate with its message. Christianity and Islam, according to this view, should recognize Judaism's originality and acknowledge its historical role and universal future. Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889) had

³⁶ Rudolf Virchow, *Ueber Hospitaler und Lazarette: Vortrag, gehalten im December 1866 im Saale des Berliner Handwerker-Vereins* (Berlin: Luderitz, 1869).

³⁷ Cassel, *Offener Brief*, 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

provided a philosophical version of this powerful polemical interpretation in the 1840s in his *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*.³⁹ Whereas Abraham Geiger had further accentuated it in his book, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte [Judaism and its History, 1863/64 and 1871]*, which most likely influenced David Cassel's argument in his letter to Virchow. Far from being original, he rejected conversion and defended Judaism's right to exist, embracing what Susannah Heschel has characterized as a counterhistory that was meant to refute the contemporary Protestant anti-Jewish constructions of Jewish history and to foster Jewish self-respect.⁴⁰ By emphasizing the Jewish elements of Christianity and insisting on Judaism's continuing significance for the future of religion, he challenged what he saw as an illegitimate identification of Christianity and the modern human conscience, an identification that unjustly denied Judaism's preeminent historical role in bringing about that very sense of humanity. Apart from Virchow's ignorance, he criticized the inclination of liberal Christian theologians to compensate the loss of plausibility of their dogmatic tradition by making Judaism the dark foil for Christian identity. Virchow, by rethinking his judgments on the role of Jewish ethics in human history, he hoped, could contribute to a pluralistic culture in which Jews would not be denied their part in humankind's cultural achievements: "My most vigorous wish," Cassel concluded, "is to make sure that you might perceive in my words, even the sharper ones, the eager effort to help the acknowledgment of truth and to extirpate deeply rooted prejudices."⁴¹

3 Paulus Stephanus Cassel: A Convert's, Missionary's, and Philosemite's Changing Historical Interpretations of Judaism and Christianity

It would be fascinating to know how Selig Cassel, after having embraced Christianity and after having become the Protestant missionary Paulus Stephanus Cassel in 1855, thought of his brother David's representations of Jewish history, his reflections on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity as well as of his vigorous rejection of

³⁹ Samuel Hirsch, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden oder das Prinzip der jüdischen Religionsanschauung und sein Verhältnis zum Heidentum, Christentum oder zur absoluten Philosophie* (Leipzig: Hunger, 1843); for Hirsch's philosophy, see Christian Wiese, "Von Dessau nach Philadelphia: Samuel Hirsch als Philosoph, Apologet und radikaler Reformier," in *Jüdische Bildung und Kultur in Sachsen-Anhalt von der Aufklärung bis zum Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Christian Wiese (Berlin: Metropol, 2009), 363–410.

⁴⁰ Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 14; for the concept of counterhistory, cf. Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 36–37.

⁴¹ Cassel, *Offener Brief*, 38.

conversion. Unfortunately, no sources seem to be available that would shed light on this question, let alone on personal conversations or controversies between the two brothers concerning theological and historical issues. The same is true for David Cassel's judgment on his brother's decisions: it would be most interesting to catch at least a glimpse of the Jewish historian's judgment on the twists and turns of his brother's historical and theological views on Jews and Judaism that will be analysed in the following interpretation. However, no private letters or public statements reveal the personal dimension of what must have been a story of alienation, conflict, and separation. Given David Cassel's firm theological and moral rejection of conversion, his brother's choice will most likely have been absolutely unacceptable to him. As will be shown, this is confirmed by a few indications which suggest that, even though both brothers lived in Berlin for decades, they never spoke to each other again after what, for David, must have appeared as an act of apostasy that destroyed the very foundations of any further personal relationship.

Embracing the Supersessionist Narrative: The Path to Conservative Protestantism

In terms of his biographical and intellectual development, Selig Cassel took a completely different path than his brother, despite similar beginnings. Three years younger than David, born in 1821 (also in Glogau), he was educated at the Gymnasias of Glogau and Schweidnitz and subsequently studied history and philosophy at the University of Berlin, where he was strongly influenced by Leopold von Ranke (1759–1886). Apparently, he was also educated in rabbinical studies, and it seems that his early Jewish learning (as well as his brother David's) was influenced by Jacob Joseph Oettinger (1780–1860), a native of Glogau, who acted as chief rabbi of Berlin between 1825 and 1860.⁴² While links to representatives of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* were apparently much less significant for him than for his brother, he often expressed his strong appreciation for Zunz, Steinschneider, and Isaak Markus Jost (1793–1860), even long time after his conversion. In the 1840s, he wrote for the conservative "Constitutionelle Zeitung" for a while, before moving to Erfurt, where he served as the editor of the "Erfurter Zeitung" from 1850 to 1856. Among his writings before the conversion were a number of articles devoted to Jewish history and a rather idiosyncratic book entitled *Sabbatliche Erinnerungen* (1853), a book that was entirely different from his brother's Sabbath sermons in that it contained only general religious-philosophical reflections based on verses from the Hebrew Bible, but with no single reference to either the word Jew or Judaism, or—a few years before his con-

⁴² See Paulus Cassel, *Ueber die Rabbinerversammlung des Jahres 1650. Eine historische Abhandlung: Festschrift Sr. Ehrwürden Herrn J. J. Oettinger, Rabbiner in Berlin, zu seinem 25jährigen Amtsjubiläum in Ehrfurcht geweiht* (Berlin: Buchhandlung des Berliner Lesecabinet, 1845).

version—of the name of Christ or any reference to Christianity.⁴³ It seems quite likely to interpret them, as contemporaries have done, as the expression of an intermediate period of non-confessionalism before leaving Judaism and embracing Christianity.⁴⁴

Selig Cassel was baptized as a member of the Protestant Church in Prussia on 28 May 1855, receiving the name “Paulus Stephanus.” The only, albeit fascinating source we can rely on when looking for details about his baptism in a church in Büßleben near Erfurt is the sermon delivered on that occasion by J. A. K. Rothmaler, director of the local Royal Seminary. While we cannot, in the absence of more comprehensive autobiographical material, be exactly sure about Cassel’s religious motivation, this sermon at least demonstrates how his conversion was interpreted by the preacher, how the latter depicted the religion Paulus left behind when giving up his Jewish name, and what the view of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity was to which the convert consented by the very act of being baptized.

The preacher emphasized that Cassel’s parents were no longer alive and that both would not have felt any desire to see their son deciding for Christian salvation, but comforted him by assuring that the Church and the Savior himself would from now on offer him motherly and fatherly love. He was careful to describe Cassel’s relationship to his ancestral Jewish religion with dignified words, acknowledging that he had been blessed by God and planted “into the chosen people of the old covenant,” and that he had been educated and prepared by the Law for the holy truth of the Kingdom of God, before being liberated from it. Cassel had been a model in following the fatherly law, but his strong Jewish spirituality had been “only the shadow of a future glory.”⁴⁵ Although clearly avoiding to aggressively denigrate the religious tradition the convert was about to leave behind, the tone of the sermon is that of classical supersessionism; its focus on the process in which the Trinitarian God himself had led him to the freedom of the Gospel and the development with which Selig, on a personal as well as on a scholarly level, had gradually recognized the Christian truth as the fulfilment of the rich, albeit utterly flawed tradition into which he had been born and which he had embraced with enthusiasm and sincerity:

Behold, under Christ’s leadership and by Christ, in the Gospel and by the Gospel alone, not by the splendour of outer glory, not by the abundance of meaningful customs, not by the power of centuries and their tradition, not by the weight of the number, the wealth and the honor, but by the gentle attraction of the original strength of God’s word and the scholarship devoted to it you have learned to call Jesus Christ your Lord. He enticed you at an early stage, and you couldn’t

⁴³ See Paulus Cassel, *Sabbatliche Erinnerungen* (Erfurt: Keyser’sche Buchhandlung, 1853); as Cassel emphasizes in his preface, these were reflections that were supposed to address an audience beyond confessional separations and contribute to uniting the readers in the spirit of God (*ibid.*, III–IV).

⁴⁴ See, e. g., Wilhelm Johann Albert von Tettau, *Gedenkrede auf Prof. Dr. theol. Paulus Cassel, gehalten in der Königl. Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt* (Erfurt: J. G. Cramer, 1893).

⁴⁵ *Rede bei der Proselyten-Taufe des Herrn Paul Stephan Cassel in Erfurt am zweiten Pfingsttage, 28. Mai 1855 in Büßleben, bei Erfurt, gehalten und zum Andenken für ihn und seine zahlreichen Freunde herausgegeben von J. A. K. Rothmaler* (Erfurt: Keyser’sche Buchhandlung, 1855), 4–5.

avoid Him, you had to move toward Him, even though, at first, you saw in Him merely the sage from Nazareth and explored his sayings like the sayings of wisdom in your people. But soon you felt how nobody with a simple, faithful spirit could come close to this saint of God without being attracted by Him with an irresistible power; soon you felt how the entire contemporary scholarship was rooted in and supported by Him, how power and glory were all winning their foundation and significance in Him, how all true human struggling and aspiration was oriented toward Him and glorifying Him. And when you then heard His mild word, according to which you can still continue to love your Law in Him since He had not come to dissolve, but to fulfil, and according to which it [the Law] was supposed to be a taskmaster preparing you for Christ, that wonderful yearning overwhelmed you, the yearning for standing in His grace and for winning His peace for time and eternity.⁴⁶

With these thoughts, the sermon may shed light not only on the perspective of the Church that converted Cassel but also on his own self-understanding of the religious meaning of his conversion. In all the later theological texts in which Paulus Cassel reflected upon his decision, it is exactly this narrative that he adopted: his Judaism, including his Jewish scholarship, had gradually prepared him to acknowledge Christ as the fulfilment of the Law and allowed him to embrace the full truth, without rejecting essential elements of his former conviction, but completing it and giving it a new orientation in light of the Gospel. The preacher, too, stressed the element of continuity rather than rupture when telling Paulus Stephanus Cassel that “you are and will remain Selig, as your pious parents have called you in anticipating love on the occasion of your circumcision!” The element of discontinuity, however, is accentuated when he admonishes the convert to give up any form of boasting of his own religious achievements—“since the children of your people—as humans attached to the Law—are inclined to such boasting.” The sermon then ends on a triumphalist note, with a prayer that praises Jesus Christ for having “saved this son of your chosen people that has, however, gone astray and lost in the deserts, from his error.”⁴⁷

After his conversion Paulus Cassel became librarian of the Royal Library in Erfurt and secretary of the Academy in Erfurt in the following year. He remained in Erfurt until 1859, and King Frederick William IV bestowed the title of professor on him in recognition of his political loyalty. Later, the University of Erlangen conferred on him the degree of “Licentiatu Theologiae,” and he obtained the title of “Doctor Theologiae” in Vienna. In 1860 he moved back to Berlin, where he temporarily served as a teacher at a gymnasium, devoting himself to literary work. His public lectures, which drew increasingly large audiences, both Jews and non-Jews, made him known throughout Berlin and beyond. In 1866 and 1867, Cassel was a Conservative member of the Prussian House of Representatives, becoming a prominent member of the Conservative Party. In 1867 he abdicated his political career in order to follow his true vocation. He was appointed missionary by the *London Society for Promoting*

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 10–11.

Christianity Amongst the Jews, a position which he retained until March 1891. At the same time Cassel was assigned to the pastorate of the Christ-Church [*Christuskirche*] in Berlin, with over a thousand seats, erected from 1863 to 1864 by the Society on Königgrätzer Straße. He remained in service there for twenty-four years, and according to several sources, baptized two hundred and sixty-two Jews in his Church during that period.⁴⁸ A prolific writer, he continued to publish many books, pamphlets and articles devoted to a variety of religious, cultural, historical and political topics,⁴⁹ among them most interesting attacks against historical-critical interpretations of Jesus in contemporary Christian thinkers such as David Friedrich Strauß (1808–1874) and particularly Ernest Renan (1823–1892).⁵⁰

The crucial question, what exactly had led Selig Cassel to the baptismal font in 1855, at age thirty-four, remains difficult to answer, since there are only passing explicit remarks in his many writings. Alan T. Levenson tends to assume that the failure of the Prussian State to provide full emancipation, taken together with the fact that Cassel served in the Royal Library in Erfurt and in the Prussian House of Deputies after converting, and the social and professional advancement this meant, at least partly suggests a certain degree of pragmatic or opportunistic motivations. But he is equally convinced that Cassel converted for religious and ideological reasons connected to the kind of conservative Protestantism embraced by Christian friends associated with the *Neue Preußische Zeitung* or *Kreuzzeitung*.⁵¹ Further clarifying Cassel's motivations would require a detailed analysis of his political commitment to this milieu as well as his attitude toward the latter's dominant views on Jews and Judaism. While it is beyond the scope of this article to explore this context in detail,⁵² what should be indicated is the affinity that, according to several sources, seem to have existed between Paulus Cassel and Hermann Wagener (1815–1889), an influential Prussian journalist and politician, author of an anti-Jewish pamphlet entitled *Das*

⁴⁸ See Reverend W. T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, from 1809–1908* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1908).

⁴⁹ For a bibliography of Paulus Cassel, see Louis Grossman, "Cassel, Paulus Stephanus (Selig)," in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1902), 604–605; from 1875 to 1889 Cassel edited the journal *Sunem, ein Berliner Wochenblatt für Christliches Leben und Wissen* (16 vols.).

⁵⁰ See Paulus Cassel, "Die Erfüllung: Ein Wort für christliche Wahrheit," in Cassel, *Vom Wege nach Damaskus: Apologetische Abhandlungen* (Gotha: Gustav Schloßmann, 1872), 26–72; "Ueber Renan's Leben Jesu," in *ibid.*, 75–153; his harsh critique of Renan's scholarship also includes that of the French scholar's flawed reception of and verdicts on Talmudic sources (*ibid.*, 110–115; 127–135).

⁵¹ Levenson, "The Apostate as Philosemite," 133.

⁵² For the political character of Prussian conservatism after the failed revolution of 1848, see Doron Avraham, *In der Krise der Moderne: Der preußische Konservatismus im Zeitalter gesellschaftlicher Veränderungen 1848–1876* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008); for the dominant notion of the "Christian State" associated with Friedrich Julius Stahl (1802–1861) or Ernst Ludwig von Gerlach (1795–1877), see *ibid.*, 294–318; for conservative attitudes toward the Jewish minority, see *ibid.*, 323–358.

Judenthum und der Staat (1857).⁵³ Cassel's relationship to Wagener remains enigmatic and unclear. Several scholars, including Jacob Katz in his book, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, have speculated about some sort of input Cassel may have given to Wagener's pamphlet,⁵⁴ referring to the author himself, who claimed in his unpaginated preface that it had been composed "in cooperation with a friend, an expert." There is, however, no other proof for the suggestion that this friend could have been Cassel other than a reference to Rabbi Samuel Holdheim (1806–1860), who, according to Immanuel Heinrich Ritter (1825–1890), identified the convert Cassel as a co-author or advisor.⁵⁵ Other scholars have questioned this identification, assuming that this "friend" could well have been the philosopher and anti-Semitic thinker Bruno Bauer (1809–1882).⁵⁶ At this point it seems difficult to draw any conclusions from the potential link between Cassel and Wagener. However, should what seems to be pure speculation turn out to be true this would shed some light on Cassel's political attitude toward Jewish emancipation and modernity in the 1850s. After all, Wagener's pamphlet was not merely extremely critical with regard to the Jewish Reform movement (a criticism Cassel apparently shared) but also strongly opposed full equal rights for Jews in the Christian State—a discrimination that could only be overcome by conversion. Should Cassel have agreed with that opinion, as many members of the London Society did as well, it must, however, have been temporarily, because, as we will see, he later advocated emancipation without making it dependent on baptism.

More relevant for Cassel's experience and self-understanding as a convert is an article he published in the late 1860s, in which he defended himself against the liberal Protestant Church historian Friedrich W. F. Nippold (1838–1918). Nippold, who was extremely critical toward conversion in general had lamented that Jewish converts to Christianity, including the Prussian conservative Friedrich Julius Stahl and Cassel himself, because of their Jewish background, tended to turn into proponents of "the harshest attitude of Orthodoxy" and attacked what he called the "proselytizing zeal" (*Proselyteneifer*) particularly of former Jews. Cassel was outraged about several aspects of Nippold's criticism which he interpreted as an expression of an underlying anti-Jewish resentment. First of all, he complained that, rather than being accepted as Christians, Jewish converts were constantly reminded of their Jewish de-

⁵³ Hermann Wagener, *Das Judenthum und der Staat: Eine politisch-historische Skizze zur Orientierung über die Judenfrage* (Berlin: F. Heinicke, 1857); as a detailed interpretation of Wagener's contribution to the amalgamation of nationalism, antiliberalism, and anti-Semitism in Prussian conservatism during that era, see Henning Albrecht, *Antiliberalismus und Antisemitismus: Hermann Wagener und die preußischen Sozialkonservativen 1855–1873* (Paderborn et al: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010); for an interpretation of Wagener's pamphlet, see *ibid.*, 176–183.

⁵⁴ Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Antisemitism, 1700–1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 211 and 356 n. 4.

⁵⁵ Immanuel Heinrich Ritter, *Beleuchtung der Wagener'schen Schrift "Das Judenthum und der Staat"* (Berlin: Hasselberg, 1857), 8.

⁵⁶ Nathan Rotenstreich, "For and against Emancipation: The Bruno Bauer Controversy," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 6 (1959): 3–36, here 28.

scent; more importantly, he rejected the view that the Mission to the Jews was about aggressive proselytism, emphasizing that he was engaged in winning Jews by the means of spiritual and scholarly conviction. If this was “proselytizing zeal,” what about the love of the apostles who wished to spread the Gospel amongst Jews and pagans? And was it that astonishing that converts who had “embraced the truth of the Gospel out of true conviction” were among those who worshipped the vibrant faith in Christ as taught by the Scriptures rather than amongst the liberals? What Nippold called “the harshest attitude of Orthodoxy” of the missionaries of Jewish descent was nothing else than the fulfilment of their duty “to annunciate to the Jews Jesus Christ, the end of the Law” in the new covenant.⁵⁷

Within the context of Cassel’s defense of his conservative Christian views and the legitimacy of the Mission to the Jews we find a passage that appears to come very close to his own self-understanding as a convert of conviction and that very much sounds like an autobiographic justification of his own religious choices:

The Jew who turns to Christ, has nothing to deny when it comes to the teaching of the Old Covenant, since Jesus did not come to dissolve but to fulfil. He does not lose anything, he just progresses; he does not leave Israel, since he wins it in an even fuller sense. He does not destroy the Law, he just opens it with the key of the Spirit. There are no errors he has to execrate, just half-truths he finds fulfilled in Christ. He does not allow himself to be bound by the rabbinical interpretation of the Law, because he has been liberated.⁵⁸

Interestingly enough, in these passages, Cassel also reflects on the wins and losses of the Jewish convert, particularly the element of painful personal sacrifice involved that nobody would take on himself without sincere conviction, as well as on their sometimes disillusioning experience of encountering either suspicion or religious indifference in their new community:

When talking about conversions and converts, the following aspects need to be considered. It is not the same when, in our time, members of a confession convert to other confessions or when a Jew converts to Christianity. No doubt, in the first case, too, this is often a step that involves melancholy and tears, but the convert joins a new community which becomes a source of relief, support and consolation for him. The profound depths of the sacrifice, when it comes to the feelings of the natural human being, which the path toward the Church usually means for the Jew, can hardly be described with words. Because he proceeds, he leaves behind. It has been dissolved what had been bound, including bonds which love and habit have tied, close to the innermost part of the heart. He says farewell to the house of his father and mother. A profound alienation, never to be bridged, is placed between him and his siblings, comrades and friends, a sense of otherness that even tolerance, *Bildung* or faithfulness will not remove. The cross he takes on himself, disrupts even the most tender emotions. As when Abraham heard the word: Leave your land, your home, the house of your father, what is announced is that his new confessional life will be a permanent departure and farewell. This is what the Jewish proselyte experiences

⁵⁷ Paulus Cassel, “Von Baden nach Preußen: Ein kritisches Sendschreiben,” in Cassel, *Vom Wege nach Damaskus*, 157–212, here 201 and 204.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

most of the time. All the fights which include the abandonment of the family, of siblings, of comrades of youth, of university friends, [...], of a political group, of social networks, of a religious community, all of this has to be overcome by the Jewish proselyte who embraces Christ in his heart. He literally experiences what is written: Whoever wants to follow me, should deny himself, take his cross upon himself everyday and follow me (Luke 9:23). And even more: enthusiastically he embraces his fulfilment, since his strength would be lost without being sure of victory. But now he joins circles, where often not much is fulfilled. He hears the ideal of his soul in the words of his master, in his church's bell—but not the entire community he joins, will express it. [...] The temptations he experiences within Christianity are no less than the pain of leaving he had to overcome. The sentiments to which he is exposed in the Christian environments are undescrivable. He has to endure much ungentle love, impudent mistrust, faithless confidentiality, derogatory suspicion.⁵⁹

Finally, what is conspicuous in Cassel's debate with Nippold is that in defending his involvement in the Mission to the Jews he felt compelled to reject a twofold suspicion he apparently often encountered on the part of both Christians and Jews: while Christians were always wondering "whether it was possible for a Jew to truly convert," Jews doubted that the conversion was honest, attacking the converts as opportunists. His answer to the Christians consists in reminding them that the Gospels were "written by converted Jews" and that the apostles, the Jewish emissaries of the truth of Christ, have been "the greatest missionaries and converts." As to the accusation of insincerity, Cassel cited Moses Mendelssohn's famous response to Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801) in 1769: "If I was convinced in my heart by the truth of another religion, it would be the most unrighteous perfidy to refuse to confess the truth despite my inner conviction." Even though Mendelssohn himself chose to reject Christianity, Cassel argues, this statement made him a witness of the legitimacy of Jewish conversion, provided it was motivated by sincere conviction—as in his own case.⁶⁰

From Wissenschaft des Judentums to Religious Weltgeschichte

Rather than further speculating about the question which weight exactly should be attributed to the different elements that eventually led to Cassel's conversion—disillusionment with the protracted process of Jewish emancipation, personal opportunism, political affinities to Prussian conservatism, religious doubts concerning the Jewish faith, and serious attraction to Christianity—it may be worthwhile following a trace he himself offered in his 1886 essay "Wie ich über Judenmission denke" ["How I think about Mission to the Jews"]. In these retrospective reflections, he emphasized that he had been brought to Christianity first and foremost by his own intensive reading of history, and that it was the historical narrative and interpretation he had discovered this way that shaped his own missionary activity:

⁵⁹ Ibid., 198–199.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 191.

It was the love of Christ, which I had found by myself, not by a missionary's word, but by the study of world history, indeed, the history of the Jews themselves, which had cost me several years—that I wanted to implant into the hearts of my brethren according to the flesh, by the same noble means, by that same love [...] I had to preach the Gospel. There was no alternative.⁶¹

Taking Cassel's own hint seriously requires a detailed comparative reading of his representations of Jewish history prior to and after his conversion, of which this essay can only give an initial taste. The starting point for this attempt is, firstly, the two hundred and thirty-eight pages article on "Juden—Geschichte," which Selig Cassel wrote in 1847 for the multi-volume *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, edited by Johann Samuel Ersch (1766–1828) and Johann Gottfried Gruber (1774–1851).⁶² This article, originally planned for his brother's project, the *Real-Encyclopädie*, and now included in this prestigious encyclopedia, stands alongside the article on "Judentum," written by the Protestant Biblical scholar Eduard Reuss (1804–1891), which focused mainly on the history of the Hebrew Bible and ended with an extremely negative depiction of postbiblical Judaism,⁶³ as well as Moritz Steinschneider's entry on "Jüdische Literatur."⁶⁴ Isaak Markus Jost, the foremost historian of Judaism during the first half of the nineteenth century, characterized Cassel's article rather derogatively as a "one-sided" work, which "merely gives episodes out of the life of Jews in various countries. It is collated in a fragmentary manner, though rich in erudite notes."⁶⁵ Later judgments are more positive, describing the article as a pioneering approach due to its emphasis on political-social history and its innovative use of non-Jewish sources.

The overall narrative characterizing Cassel's representation of the history of the Jews is that of an exceptional world-historical drama, shaped by profound passions, incomparable struggles and suffering; an admirable expression of steadfastness and loyalty to Judaism's national law; an extraordinary enthusiasm for faith; and a religious-cultural tradition that enabled Jews to be an integral part of the highest intellectual activities throughout their Diasporic experience. The history of unspeakable prejudice, hatred and fanaticism the Jewish people encountered was, as Cassel emphasized in his introductory passages, as terrible as it was undeserved, since Judaism has, throughout the millenia of its historical path, been "a source of human love

61 Paulus Cassel, *Wie ich über Judenmission denke: Ein kurzes Sendschreiben an Englische Freunde* (Berlin: Sunem, 1886), 24–25.

62 Selig Cassel, "Juden—Geschichte," in *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, in alphabetischer Folge von genannten Schriftstellern bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Johann Samuel Ersch and Johann Gottfried Gruber, 2. Section, Theil 27 (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1850), 1–238.

63 Eduard Reuss, "Judentum," in *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, 2. Section, Theil 27, 324–347.

64 Moritz Steinschneider, "Jüdische Literatur," in *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, 2. Section, Theil 27, 357–471.

65 Isaak Markus Jost, *Geschichte des Judenthums und seiner Secten*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Dörrfling & Franke, 1859), 365.

and humane *Bildung*.” However, due to peculiar circumstances, the Jewish people was treated without such love and benevolence until the very present.⁶⁶

In contrast to Cassel’s historical works after his conversion, this encyclopedia article does not provide any theological interpretation of the Jewish role in world history, nor does it attempt to lend it a religious meaning. Rather, it can be characterized as an extremely detailed and learned summary of post-biblical Jewish history in the Middle East and all of the European Diaspora, with a focus on its political, social and cultural dimensions, with an abundance of footnotes offering references to contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish literature, and with a vast number of quotations from relevant source material, including the Talmud, in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. While it would lead too far to examine Cassel’s historical judgments in detail, the following passages will focus on a few crucial elements that might help identify the major changes his interpretation underwent later, after he embraced Christianity as well as Christian views regarding Judaism’s history.

First of all, it is most interesting to observe that, even though Cassel described the destruction of the Second Temple as an important, albeit “not an epoch-making” event within Jewish history,⁶⁷ his depiction of the political and social situation of the Jews in the Roman Empire, even after Constantine, is very differentiated, emphasizing the contradictory aspects of mounting hostility against Judaism, social and economic restrictions, and a general protection of Jewish rights and equality. Based on Jewish and Christian sources as well as on the scholarship of his times, he underscored the complexity of the developments within Judaism, of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and of the conflicts and interactions with the Roman authorities before and after Christianity became the dominant religion. The Roman attitude toward Judaism was oscillating between tolerance and the hostility triggered by the Jewish resistance against the Roman Empire. The Jewish attitude toward Rome was motivated by the pain of having lost national sovereignty as well as by a powerless yearning for its restoration. Jewish writings expressed hostility toward the emerging Christian religion which they perceived as a pagan-inspired distortion of Judaism, but their attacks were never as disgraceful as those launched against the Jewish religion by the Church Fathers. The overall image, however, is not that of a relentless exclusion and persecution of the Jewish minority, but that of an interaction shaped by mutual antagonism and polemics on the one hand, and a strong degree of religious and cultural interaction on the other.⁶⁸

Even more important for the sake of comparison is Cassel’s account of the inner-Jewish life during the Roman period. At the center of his representation is the emphasis on the enormous significance of the Law for Jewish tradition, which, as he emphasized in contrast to the majority of Christian scholarship, was entirely compatible

⁶⁶ Cassel, “Juden—Geschichte,” 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5–34.

with serious learning, tolerance toward the non-Jew, ethical strength based on the idea of free will, and religious originality. Despite a few critical remarks regarding the nature of rabbinical literature, the overall conclusion is that the halakhah, as a result of the need to preserve the Jewish Law after the loss of the Jewish state, played a creative role throughout Jewish history, and that it would be an utter misunderstanding to interpret it in terms of the traditional Protestant verdict on Jewish legalism and particularism. The rabbinical tradition, Cassel states, very much in contrast to his own later verdicts, “has not always been understood according to its value and its continuous creativity.”⁶⁹ It is the scholarship of Leopold Zunz, Zacharias Frankel, and Michael Sachs, particularly their works on literary history, that helped the young historian to celebrate the creative and universal elements of rabbinic Judaism as well as the significance history and remembrance had for the Jewish people, helping the Jews to develop a universalistic perspective with regard to the meaning of Providence for all the nations of the world. As much as the rabbinical literature was a distinctive, time-bound literary expression of Judaism within the context of antiquity’s Oriental-Roman culture, it should be viewed with admiration rather than with religious contempt. Against historical judgments based either on Christian religious fanaticism and ignorance or on Jewish “pseudo-objective neutrality,” as he characterizes Isaak M. Jost’s approach, Cassel praises rabbinic literature as the guardian of the Jewish idea of God and Judaism’s spiritual and national values, as an effective means of warding off syncretism and loss of identity. Modern standards cannot do justice, he maintains, to its true nature as the product of “a vigorous, tenacious, original mind, an indefatigable, unbending and unblemished character.”⁷⁰ Throughout the article, therefore, the emphasis is on Judaism’s vital and creative contribution to and interaction with the other cultures in the Diaspora, despite the mounting pressure of discrimination and violence since the medieval period.

The largest part of Selig Cassel’s article is devoted to the history of the Jewish struggle for survival in the different parts of the Diaspora from the Middle Ages to the modern period, a recurring theme being the Jewish minority’s social circumstances under Muslim and Christian rule. Interestingly, and very much in contrast to his later views, the author argues that the Jews in Muslim lands were in a clearly more favorable situation than those in Christian Europe. Based on contemporary work such as Abraham Geiger’s *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen*,⁷¹ Cassel interprets the Jewish existence under Muslim rule as an ambivalent one, marked, in the beginnings of Islam, by Jewish influence on Muhammad’s thought

⁶⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁷¹ Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen* (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1832); see Susannah Heschel, “Abraham Geigers historische Philologie und die Anfänge der Islamwissenschaft in Deutschland,” in *Jüdische Existenz in der Moderne. Abraham Geiger und die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, ed. Christian Wiese, Walter Homolka and Thomas Brechenmacher (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 321–340.

and eventually by a process of Arab appropriation of central Jewish values: “As Christianity carried the Jewish idea into the world by joining the wisdom of the people and giving up the isolation of the Law, Muhammad arabized Judaism for his fellow countrymen.”⁷² This early stage of cultural interaction was, in the wake of Islam’s emergence as a world power, followed by a situation in which the Jewish minority suffered legal and social discrimination but continued to flourish in religious and cultural terms, enjoying, particularly in the Ottoman Empire, an unprecedented lack of persecution in comparison to most other parts of Christian Europe: “There is no trace of the systematic, furious, relentless obsession with persecution ruling among the Christian nations.”⁷³

This narrative further accentuates what is a dominating element of Cassel’s article, a detailed analysis of the Christian tradition of anti-Jewish prejudice, hatred and its legal as well as socio-political consequences that overshadowed Jewish life well into the age of emancipation. The ever-more violent expressions of Christianity’s enmity toward the Jews since the early Middle Ages, with the crusades as a turning point and the Spanish Inquisition and expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula as another culmination, triggered an admirable response of martyrdom and religious-cultural creativity. The few elements of change, such as the temporary Jewish-Christian rapprochement within the context of Humanism and the early Reformation period, ended in disappointment: “Luther’s statements against the Jews have, rather, created a new canon of intolerance for centuries to come,” with Protestantism embracing the conversion of the Jews as its true and most important task.⁷⁴ Hatred and stigmatization, based on religious—not on national—antagonism remained a crucial part of the collective mind. In contrast to his brother’s representation of Jewish history, Selig Cassel did not devote too much attention to modern developments associated with the Enlightenment and the period of emancipation, nor did he express much hope that a new era may have begun in Europe in the nineteenth century. Rather than harboring enthusiasm with regard to a real shift of the political, social and cultural circumstances of the Jewish minority, the article ends with an equally brief and sober hint to the New World beyond the Atlantic, a land of freedom and independence “which is being granted to those who step on its soil,” including the Jews.⁷⁵

Considering Cassel’s harsh critique of Christian hatred of Jews and Judaism as well as his positive judgment on Jewish religion and culture, particularly on Jewish resilience and creativity in response to external pressure, whoever reads his article would certainly not guess that its author was to convert to Protestantism less than a decade later. The same is true for another article Cassel published in 1847, even

72 Cassel, “Juden—Geschichte,” 169.

73 Ibid., 192.

74 Ibid., 78. In this regard, Paulus Cassel had a view that was very similar to the one his brother David held, see Cassel, *Lehrbuch*, 475.

75 Cassel, “Juden—Geschichte,” 237.

though it seems permeated with a sense of disillusionment regarding the prospects of full emancipation. Under the title “Die preußischen Bürger des jüdischen Glaubensbekenntnisses,” Cassel deplored the persistence of the concept of the Christian State and the often implicit conviction that the Jews, as a nation within the nation, should not be granted civic equality. Citizenship, he insisted, is not constituted by religious unity, and the Jews, whether or not they were still to be considered a nation, i. e. an ethnic entity, should be acknowledged as belonging to the state, with equal duties and rights: “With regard to the state, they are citizens; in terms of their relationship to the Christians they are confessors of Judaism.”⁷⁶ By depriving the Jews of their rights, however, Prussia would lose its status as a constitutional state, in which he, Cassel, believed. Every citizen, therefore, had to protest against a form of discrimination “that only disappears if one converts.”⁷⁷ What follows, a defense of Judaism’s creative role in the realm of German *Bildung*, *Sittlichkeit*, and *Wissenschaft*, does not indicate, at least at first glance, any inclination to give in to the social pressure for conversion. In a remarkable passage, the author rejects the notion that the Jews were characterized by a number of national weaknesses and vices that would only be washed away by baptism, qualifying the proselytes for all the privileges of the Christian state. Instead, he strongly affirms his ancestral faith, defending it against anti-Jewish accusations. As a member of those “who desire to live and die in the Jewish confession [and] are profoundly convinced of the flawless integrity of our religious law,” he felt compelled to forcefully reject the false judgments on the Jewish religion and national character: “It is humiliating,” he wrote, “to be forced to defend yourself against the accusations of anti-Jewish writings. [...] It is a merit, a consolation, to suffer for the holy legacy of the fathers, to endure violence, but the stigmatization of moral ineptitude we have to reject.”⁷⁸

What exactly happened after 1847 (and the failed revolution of 1848), whether the pressure and disillusionment became too overwhelming, or what else led to Cassel’s radical reorientation in the 1850s, including his dramatic revision of his own narrative of Jewish history, seems to remain shrouded in mystery. In 1860, five years after his conversion, Cassel presented his views in a book entitled *Die Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes seit der Zerstörung Jerusalems*, published by the Berlin Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, thus clearly indicating the missionary context. The structure of the work is very similar to the article of 1847, but the essential narrative, the tone and the scholarly approach are radically

⁷⁶ Cassel, *Die preußischen Bürger des jüdischen Glaubensbekenntnisses* (Leipzig: 1847), 4. The Jews, he argued, continued to be a nation, unified by ethnic bonds, but had been torn from their national soil since millenia; “dispersed over the Earth, they found and loved new fatherlands and adopted new languages and customs,” and their religious difference from their environment was, therefore, no reason whatsoever for exclusion (*ibid.*, 3).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9. The same was true for ignorant denigrations of the Talmud which were beneath the dignity of academic work (*ibid.*, 13).

different. Footnotes have almost disappeared. Academic historical writing has been replaced by what Cassel calls a “book written from the bottom of the heart” [*ein Herzensbuch*], a call for “love toward and prayer for Israel, whose redemption we are awaiting from one morning watch to the other.” The drama of Jewish history has now become the greatest testimony “for Christian truth and Divine judgment,”⁷⁹ rather than for Judaism’s loyalty toward the Law, the Jewish people’s undeserved suffering, and its creative cultural role throughout history. That same year, Cassel also published a number of collected essays—based on speeches he had delivered in Berlin in 1859—under the title “Weltgeschichtliche Vorträge.”

The preface to these essays clearly reveals his altered historiographical approach: “Our task was to present world-historical images, illuminated by the Gospel of our God and Savior. No historical work should know of a different task.”⁸⁰ In fact, they can be read as a comprehensive commentary to the theological assumptions underlying his new representation of Jewish history. Judaism itself, Cassel argues, is an embodiment of world history, not so much because of the dispersion of the Jews into every corner of the world or because of the impression Israel has made on world culture and continues to make due to its adaptation to different languages and cultures. It is because of the way “it teaches, embodies and bears witness to a God who is not the God of a nation but the God of the world,” and because whoever reads this history gets an insight into God’s universal will for humankind in general.⁸¹ Israel in world history is, as he points out in *Israel in der Weltgeschichte*, “the prophet of light and judgment, of consolation and banishment, of burning love as well as wrath.”⁸² However, Israel’s world-historical prophetic role reaches beyond this and culminates in “Christian Israel,” in fact in Christ himself, who is the true expression of world history: “World history is a product of the Christian truth” in that the latter has revealed the love of Christ to all nations and taught them the true meaning of God’s history with humankind.⁸³ Cassel’s previous emphasis on the political and social history of the Jews has now turned into a traditional Christian history of salvation, or *Heilsgeschichte*, or rather into a triumphalist history of Jewish perdition, or *Unheilsgeschichte*, which interprets the destruction of the Second Temple and the history of exile as an immediate result of the curse the Jewish people brought upon itself by its sins, particularly by its legalism and blindness toward the liberation from the

79 Paulus Cassel, *Die Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes seit der Zerstörung Jerusalems*, ed. by the Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christenthums unter den Juden (Berlin: Magazin des Hauptvereins für christliche Erbauungsschriften in den preußischen Staaten, 1860), 1–2; a further variant of his interpretation was published under the title *Israel in der Weltgeschichte* (Berlin: Eduard Beck, 1866).

80 Paulus Cassel, *Weltgeschichtliche Vorträge: Erste Abtheilung* (Berlin: Martin Berendt, 1860), preface.

81 *Ibid.*, 7.

82 Cassel, *Israel in der Weltgeschichte*, 7.

83 Cassel, *Weltgeschichtliche Vorträge*, 8.

Law offered by its Messiah Jesus Christ.⁸⁴ Jewish history in antiquity, from the Pharisees to the period of the Talmud, appears as the most glaring proof that the Jews had cut themselves off from salvation. With their rejection of Jesus, with the Jewish role in his crucifixion by the Romans, and with their hostility against early Christianity, the Jews brought punishment and subjugation upon themselves, without, however, realizing and acknowledging that they had been “ashamed by the victory of the Christian truth.”⁸⁵

The image drawn by Cassel of Judaism’s religious and cultural development in the wake of its dismissal of the Christian Messiah is now quite similar to the pejorative depiction in Eduard Reuss’s aforementioned entry on “Judaism” in the *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*. The Pharisaic honest, albeit mistaken legalism prevented the Jews from understanding the true meaning of the Torah. This failure rendered the rabbinical tradition superficial and particularistic, stuck in the hopeless hope for regaining political freedom rather than embracing the freedom of spiritual universalism. Judaism had reduced the rich potential of the Jewish spirit to a useless, artificial web of an “illusionary legalistic system.” It had thus become a “land made of paper in which the Jews led an imagined national existence and in which the entire distinctly Jewish intellectual activity is immured.”⁸⁶ The distinctive mark of Jewish history and culture is, therefore, a profound lack of freedom, even servitude, that would only be overcome by the Jews’ future liberation through Christ. Jewish theology, culture, philosophy throughout the ages—all this is an illusion that prevented the Jews from recognizing the Divine reality in Christ, even their ritual and ceremony, which helped them to flee into a fictitious freedom. Cassel continued to acknowledge what he had previously praised, the Jews’ vibrant spiritual and literary activity—from the Talmud and the Gaonim to Rashi, the medieval commentaries and the Shulkan Arukh—even under conditions of pressure and persecution. He argued, however, that this vitality had become utterly ill-directed:

God, who had not forsaken them even in their exile, did not take their searching mind from them. However, their strength had taken the wrong direction. They evaded the real truth, which was fictitiously replaced by an oblique dialectic. Thus their theology became an unproductive shadow-boxing, and their entire participation in the work of the nations among which they lived took on a wrong and unhealthy character. There is only one truth, and whoever deviates from it, will necessarily be misdirected.⁸⁷

Jewish culture, according to Cassel’s verdict, had been dominated by the lack of everything that constituted the strength of religion, including a creative exegesis, a talent for historiography and a philosophical depth. From time to time, the mystical yearning of the Kabbalah for liberation from the barren world of Talmudism turned

⁸⁴ Cassel, *Die Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes*, 9–10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 and 68.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

out to be an “asylum of freedom” in the midst of halakhic bondage, but the mystical thoughts about creation, sin and redemption, despite coming close to Christian truths, were ultimately opposed to the Christian and biblical truth and thus soon “reverted into the darkest superstition.”⁸⁸ The Jews’ eschatological and political hopes—from antiquity to the present—were equally misguided: since they had “killed the true redeemer,” their souls were burning from a thirst for freedom, which made them vulnerable to fall for pseudo-messianic impostors such as Bar Kokhba and Shabbtai Zvi. They were living under a curse that prevented them from finding anything else than further slavery, even in the days of European emancipation, “where they fantasize about being free.”⁸⁹

What is most striking in Cassel’s historical account, apart from the negative depiction of Jewish culture,⁹⁰ is the theology of history that had crept into his interpretation since his conversion. Israel’s history of suffering, which he had previously described as a consequence of undeserved and condemnable Christian hatred, particularly since the Middle Ages, is now a natural consequence of their abuse of Christ and Christianity. Cassel’s historical representation of the Christian-European policy of discrimination and persecution (from the anti-Jewish policies of the Roman Empire through the Crusades to the Inquisition and the expulsion of Spanish Jewry) is almost unchanged. This includes the moral rejection of the obsessive medieval Christian hatred, which lacked both wisdom and love, reflecting the powerlessness of the Christian Church when it came to “overcoming Israel by means of the Christian message.” Only this, “the strengthening of Christian life and the purity of the teaching of the Gospel,” rather than violence, would have been capable of winning the Jews’ trust and prevailing over their “deluded spirit,” instead of further hardening their hearts against Christianity.⁹¹ However, despite these more conciliatory overtones that are typical of the rhetorical insistence on “love for Israel” on the part of many theologians involved in the Mission to the Jews since the early modern period, Cassel’s text is interspersed with remarks such as “what a terrible consequence of Divine judgment.”⁹² Even severe criticism launched against anti-Jewish prejudice and malevolence is limited by the constant emphasis on God’s justified condemnation of his chosen people. It would also be interesting to comment in more detail on Cassel’s altered image of Jewish existence under Muslim rule, but suffice it to indicate here that, rather than providing a differentiated analysis of the ambivalent legal and cultural conditions in different parts of the Muslim world, including Spain and the Ottoman Empire, Cassel now resorted to a very different theological interpretation. According to this view, Jews had been unable to escape

⁸⁸ Ibid., 43–44.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 74–75.

⁹⁰ See, however, the slightly contradictory emphasis on the Jews’ continuing cultural creativity in Cassel, *Israel in der Weltgeschichte*, 17–21.

⁹¹ Cassel, *Die Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes*, 53–55.

⁹² Ibid., 47.

the divine wrath even when leaving the Christian world. Not only did he now depict Muhammad as a false prophet who, under Jewish influence, created a new religion of demonic violence, before turning against the Jews; he also interpreted the emergence of Islam in anti-Jewish theological terms:

Islam was a verdict pertaining to the sins of many nations. To the Jews it revealed the power of Divine truth. Those who refused to be liberated by the gracious voice of the Divine Son of Man, have now been enslaved by the nations of the false prophet; they were suffering under the Christians because they opposed the Divine truth, but under the Moslems they suffered because they were witnesses of the Divine truth. Until it has been liberated by Christ, Israel will remain unfree. Unfree even in their own inner and spiritual life.⁹³

Finally, Cassel's interpretation of the Jewish presence in the modern period, still rather hopeful in 1847, had become very negative in 1860. Christian Hebraism, once a vibrant force that entailed hopes for winning the Jewish minority over to Christianity, had been replaced by rationalism and indifferent tolerance, depriving the Jews of a model for a true Christian conviction. Although Moses Mendelssohn still managed to escape the Talmudic system without giving up the Jewish Law, the next generation of maskilic and post-maskilic Jewish intellectuals was inclined to convert, but only because liberal Christians saw Jesus Christ simply as an ethical model rather than as the Divine redeemer. The emancipation, finally, had a more than ambivalent effect, leading mainly to the dissolution of all historically inherited commitments and to the abandonment of Jewish ethnicity as well as covenantal hopes, with Orthodox Jews deceiving themselves and Reform Jews leaving true Judaism behind and becoming "unbaptized non-Christians." Reform Judaism in particular was, as Cassel wrote in his conclusion, a natural target for the Christian mission's task to approach "the old nation which denies its name and no longer perceives the light in the dark with the words and the power of the apostle." He adds that, in the present, thousands of Jews had been unable to resist the power of the Gospel and that the time had come particularly for missionaries of Jewish descent like himself to preach "the blessed word of the cross" and to profess "that the love of Christ means the end of the Law."⁹⁴

Had this missionary tractate in the guise of a history of the Jewish people remained Cassel's last word, it would make it easy to characterize him as yet another apostate who turned against his religious tradition and the Jewish minority in order to legitimize his conversion. It would be most plausible to see him as a Jewish sceptic, who converted because he had started to doubt his own religion and, indeed, his own understanding of Jewish history, and who was finally rewriting the latter in the

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79–80. Already at this time, however, Cassel was aware that the shift from a fanatic Christian antagonism against Judaism to a nationalistic hatred of the Jews would strongly affect converted Jews, "since, even though nationalism doesn't like the Jews it also perceives the proselytes, in particular the believers, as an offense"; see Cassel, *Israel in der Weltgeschichte*, 23.

light of his new religious conviction. However, the story is further complicated by the many indications that his spiritual journey had not yet been finished. Rather, his experience of the contemporary German discourse on Jews and Judaism led him to yet another, alternative reading both of Jewish history and of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Rethinking his theology of history in view of the massive tide of modern anti-Semitism since the 1880s made him, as we will see, in many respects a rather unique voice within the chorus of Protestant missionaries, even though he neither returned to his ancestral faith nor gave up his conviction regarding Christianity's superiority. In 1880, Paulus Cassel published an essay under the title "Die Juden in der Weltgeschichte." It reveals another turn his attitude took in confrontation with the explosion of anti-Semitic literature after the social crises following the establishment of the German Empire in 1871. Not everything changed in Cassel's perception of Jewish history, but what is conspicuously absent now is the theology of history dominating the historical views expressed after 1855 and the denigration of Jewish culture they entailed.⁹⁵ Only thirty pages long, this essay emphasizes something rather different, namely the strong extent to which European and particularly the Germanic culture owed its religious, cultural and moral strength to "Jerusalem," the embodiment of absolute freedom and morality, in contrast to "Athens," the origin of art, and "Rome," the symbol of power which came to dominate Christianity's self-understanding, to its own detriment.⁹⁶ The valuable forces of modernity are rooted, according to Cassel, in the Hebrew Bible—Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms—and the natural continuation this tradition found in the New Testament, in the Jewish apostles St. Peter and St. Paul.⁹⁷ The reason for the Jews' rejection of Christ, he argues, are to be found in the resistance of their national peoplehood against the teaching of universal humankind. The conflict between Isra-

⁹⁵ Paulus Cassel, *Die Juden in der Weltgeschichte* (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1880). It needs to be said, however, that while this essay, apparently addressing primarily a non-Jewish audience and trying to convince it to abstain from anti-Semitic views, points to a substantial revision of Cassel's value judgments on Judaism, another book, published that same year, reveals the continuity of essential themes of his earlier theology of history, namely the claim that the catastrophe of the Jews' rejection and crucifixion of Jesus was the origin of their suffering in exile; see Paulus Cassel, *Die Juden: Ein weltgeschichtliches Zeugnis der heiligen Schrift* (Berlin: Selbstverlag, 1880), 5–14. But Cassel also criticizes the "Pharisaic zeal" with which the other nations looked down at the Jews instead of following the Paulinic theology of God's enduring love for Israel (*ibid.*, 15). He bemoans that even the Lutheran Reformation, despite its insight into the pure nature of the Gospel, remained under the spell of traditional prejudice (*ibid.*, 25) and that Protestantism since then (with the possible exception of Pietism) one-sidedly focused on the principle of *sola gratia* rather than on Christian love: "This is why it saw the Jews as enemies of faith and spoke to them with Luther's words of raging anger rather than with Christ's words of love" (*ibid.*, 42). However, despite the fact that Christians had become their persecutors, Jews have no reason to turn away from Christ, because it is in him that they will eventually find consolation and salvation: "The Jewish question is the question of Christ. Only the true Christ who died at the cross is the true solution" (*ibid.*, 40).

⁹⁶ Cassel, *Die Juden in der Weltgeschichte*, 5–7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

el and Christ was the first expression of the “world historical antagonism between nationality and cosmopolitanism.” The Jews rebelled against their universal prophetic mission and the Roman Empire alike, the paradoxical outcome being that, after having been defeated, they became “a world historical nation” that was sent amidst the nations with a renewed mission.⁹⁸ To be sure, the Christian missionary does not refrain from emphasizing the liberation engendered by Christianity, the path the latter shows from a particularistic understanding of nationality toward universalism. But Christianity, too, according to his view, suffered from a paradoxical development, the amalgamation of religion and power as well as the obsessive hatred, rooted in Pharisaic self-righteousness, that led to the murderous persecution of the Jews during and since the Crusades.⁹⁹

How did the Jewish minority respond to the “truly world-historical power of prejudice”?¹⁰⁰ In answering this question, Cassel, interestingly enough, draws back on elements of his article from 1847, expressing honest admiration for Judaism’s intellectual and cultural achievements despite exile and persecution, and pointing to the wealth of Jewish literary creativity for which the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* had given ample evidence: “The venerable Zunz is still alive, to whom the modern Jews owe the awareness of having an enormously broad literature to which they can recur.”¹⁰¹ Cassel also explicitly admitted that he had been mistaken in 1860 and needed to revise his verdict on emancipation. The fact that a persecuted minority managed to liberate itself from the ghetto, fighting for equal rights and cultural participation, making it amongst the best of European society, should be acknowledged and admired:

A humane people such as the German nation should feel an explicit joy, when those who have felt the scourge of prejudice for such a long time, are still capable of rising to their potential. [...] It is a joy to see how human beings manage to develop their strength and capabilities. [...] If you remember that this nation, in order not to dissolve in world history, was fighting for its life, then being dispersed to live a life in the Diaspora, where it was tortured as a nation, and now, due to its new freedom, starts to adapt to the life of the nations, who would not consider this to be a world-historical miracle in the history of divine providence amongst the nations! Therefore, instead of launching attacks against their freedom, it is the task of human kindness to cultivate it; [...] the more the Jews enter the realm of the State, the more the goal of humane and Christian *Bildung* will be fulfilled. The hand that built the ghettos must tear them down, and those who caused disgrace, need to restore honor.¹⁰²

Rather than making the Jews responsible for their own disgrace and overemphasizing the consequences the long history of humiliation may have had on their character, what was needed, Cassel emphasized, was a self-critical analysis of the disgrace

98 Ibid., 12.

99 Ibid., 13–19.

100 Ibid., 22.

101 Ibid., 23–24.

102 Ibid., 26.

inherent in the obsessive hatred against those who embody the valuable roots of the Christian tradition. The Christian Church had to return to Jerusalem, to the tradition of the Holy Scripture, in order to overcome what he characterizes as the victory of Rome over Christian love.¹⁰³ The true Christian attitude toward the “Jewish question” was to refute the modern literary expressions of anti-Semitism, these “written crusades,” rooted as they were in envy, nationalism and racism, and to follow the spirit of Christ rather than that of Roman Emperor Titus.¹⁰⁴ His own motivation to fight against anti-Jewish hatred, Cassel concluded, was not only the willingness to defend the Jews—“an obligation toward the graves which I ought not to forget”—but even more, to defend the Gospel he had embraced.¹⁰⁵

Herald of a “Semitic Gospel”: The Fight against Anti-Semitism

What needs to be addressed in order to contextualize Cassel’s rewriting of his interpretation of the Jews’ role in world history, are the circumstances that made the missionary a “philosemitic apostate,” as Alan T. Levenson calls him. Cassel was acknowledged as a fighter against anti-Semitism even by those who disapproved of his conversion, while many of his Christian colleagues, including other representatives of the Mission to the Jews, started to criticize him for his solidarity with the Jewish minority in Germany. Cassel earned his credentials as a defender of the Jews during the first great anti-Semitic debates since 1879, especially in 1880 and 1881, in which conservative Protestant theologians such as Adolf Stoecker (1835–1909), national-liberal historians such as Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896), and proponents of racial hatred such as Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904), Eugen Dühring (1833–1921) and others laid the basis for a version of modern anti-Semitism that permeated particularly the German middle class, but also the academic elites, undermining political liberalism’s support for Jewish emancipation in Germany. Be it Treitschke’s accusation of the Jews’ lack of integration and adaptation to “Germanness,”¹⁰⁶ Stoecker’s accusation that Jewish capitalism, socialism, and anti-Christian hatred had

103 Ibid., 27–29; cf. Cassel, *Die Juden: Ein weltgeschichtliches Zeugnis*, 29: “The historical behavior of Christianity toward the Jews did not follow the example of the crucified Christ but that of Emperor Constantine, the ruler.”

104 Cassel, *Die Juden in der Weltgeschichte*, 20 and 29.

105 Ibid., 30.

106 See Michael A. Meyer, “Great Debate on Antisemitism. Jewish Reaction to New Hostility in Germany 1879–1881,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 11 (1966): 137–170; for a documentation of the controversy on anti-Semitism in Berlin 1880/81, see *Der “Berliner Antisemitismusstreit” 1879–1881: Eine Kontroverse um die Zugehörigkeit der deutschen Juden zur Nation*, ed. Karsten Krieger, 2 vols. (Munich: Saur, 2003).

joined forces in order to destroy German Christian society,¹⁰⁷ or the new racial and volkish voices, they all made Jews into the symbols and scapegoats of the diverse crises of modernity that were plaguing contemporary German society. With their attack on the “foreignness” of the Jews and the “Jewish mind,” they played a central role in determining the national self-conception of many Germans during the German Kaiserreich.

What was most challenging for many Jewish intellectuals, including Paulus Cassel, was the ideological transformation anti-Semitism underwent during those years. A pessimistic cultural critique of modernity depicted Jews as the embodiment of capitalistic mass society, intellectualism, liberalism, and pluralism. Under the influence of social Darwinism and racist theories, anti-Semitic thinking became merged with the “Aryan myth,” including its negative counter-myth of the Semitic/Jewish race. The defining characteristics of the new ideology, which went far beyond narrow nationalistic circles, were the assertions of the biologically inferior and destructive nature of the Jews as well as a dualistic world view that explained the decline of Western history, and ultimately the contemporary social, political, and intellectual conflicts, with the alleged Germanic-Jewish racial antagonism. Notions characteristic for German nationalists, according to which conversion, mixed marriage, and the renouncement of Jewish culture might dissolve the stigma of alienation, increasingly lost their plausibility. Instead, some of the racial ideologues also objected to the Christian religion and its Jewish origins and made the goal of abolishing the Christian influence on Western culture, viewed as the intrusion of the “Semitic spirit,” an integral component of what they termed the necessary “de-Judaization” of German society.¹⁰⁸ Others, who sought to integrate biblical traditions, especially the person of Jesus, as positive components in their ideology, suggested a programmatic “Aryanization” and “de-Judaization” of Christianity. It is that tendency that challenged Cassel most since it put everything in question that he believed in, including his self-understanding as a missionary to the Jews and his interpretation of Jewish *Weltgeschichte*.

During the peak of the political debates of the early 1880s, Paulus Cassel published around a dozen pamphlets in which he opposed the different expressions of anti-Semitism, warning German society not to succumb to the temptations of national and racial chauvinism and particularly his own Protestant Church not to underestimate the threat the modern version of hatred against Jews and Judaism posed to the very foundations of Christianity itself. Much detail could be provided on Cassel’s vigorous attack against the leaders of the anti-Semitic movement, on his de-

107 For Stoecker, see Martin Greschat, “Protestantischer Antisemitismus in Wilhelminischer Zeit: Das Beispiel des Hofpredigers Adolf Stoecker,” in *Antisemitismus*, ed. Günter Brakelmann and Martin Rosowski (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 27–51.

108 For the phenomenon of “anti-Christian anti-Semitism,” see Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany Religion, Politics and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 223–289.

fense of Jews and Judaism, and on contemporary Jewish as well as non-Jewish responses to him. However, the following remarks will be limited to identifying the main themes he addressed in writings such as *Wider Heinrich von Treitschke: Für die Juden* (1880); *Die Antisemiten und die evangelische Kirche: Sendschreiben an einen evangelischen Geistlichen* (1881); *Der Judengott und Richard Wagner* (1881); and *Ahasver: Die Sage vom Ewigen Juden. Eine wissenschaftliche Abhandlung. Mit einem kritischen Protest wider Eduard von Hartmann und Adolf Stöcker* (1885). Emphasis will be particularly on those elements of his political and religious argumentation which shed light on important shifts in his views on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity during those years.

In political terms, Cassel's willingness to acknowledge the Jews' accomplishments and to criticize the un-Christian sentiments of their accusers is most evident in his writing against Heinrich von Treitschke. Defying the Berlin historian's infamous slogan "The Jews are our misfortune" [*Die Juden sind unser Unglück*], Cassel contended that the Gospel's phrase "salvation comes from the Jews" (John 4: 22) ought to be the guiding principle of the Prussian state's attitude toward the Jews. The historian, he averred, should know that the true misfortune for Germany was an un-Christian "world history without humility and self-reflexion" as well as the fateful exaggeration of national sentiment and racial thinking which threatened to undermine "Christianity's cosmopolitanism."¹⁰⁹ Cassel had no sympathy for Treitschke's xenophobia, terming "pseudonational chauvinism the direst enemy of the Gospel."¹¹⁰ The German people needed to be reminded that emancipation had been a *fait accompli* for decades and that reversing it would threaten political culture, sparking off a destructive wave of fanaticism that could easily turn against the Church and the State as well.¹¹¹ Treitschke's terrifying hatred against Eastern European-Jewish immigrants, who had escaped persecution in their home countries and become useful German citizens, lacked "true evangelical benevolence." It demonstrated that the so-called "Jewish question," a consequence of the history of discrimination of the Jews, had now become a "Christian question" [*Christenfrage*], i. e. the question whether modern society was capable of cleansing its collective mentality from traditional hatred and accepting the Jews as equal citizens, rather than scapegoating them for the materialism that had overcome Germany since the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹² Finally, Cassel also rejected Treitschke's accusation with re-

¹⁰⁹ Paulus Cassel, *Wider Heinrich von Treitschke. Für die Juden* (Berlin: Friedrich Stahn, 1880), 6–7 and 8.

¹¹⁰ Paulus Cassel, *Die Antisemiten und die evangelische Kirche: Sendschreiben an einen evangelischen Geistlichen* (Berlin: J. A. Wohlgemuth's Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1881), 44.

¹¹¹ Cassel, *Wider Heinrich von Treitschke*, 18.

¹¹² Paulus Cassel, *Ahasverus. Die Sage vom Ewigen Juden: Eine wissenschaftliche Abhandlung. Mit einem kritischen Protest wider Ed. v. Hartmann und Adolf Stöcker* (Berlin: Internationale Buchhandlung, 1885), 20. In this book Cassel also rejects the anti-Semitic theories of philosopher Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), whose justification of political and cultural discrimination against

gard to Judaism's and contemporary Jewish scholarship's alleged hatred against Christianity—an accusation aiming at Heinrich Graetz's critical representation of Christianity's attitude toward the Jews in the latter's *History of the Jews*.¹¹³ He conceded that Graetz's views were, indeed, tactless, but defended them as an understandable, albeit exaggerated response to the injustice done to Judaism by Christian scholars. As an alternative perspective he pointed to the much more appropriate judgments in Isaak M. Jost's work as well as in his own article from 1847 (thus aligning himself to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*): "Don't we find there an appreciation of the Christian spirit?"¹¹⁴

In religious terms, the most interesting element in Cassel's critique of contemporary anti-Semitism is his lucid awareness of the threat posed to Christianity itself by volkish attacks against the Hebrew Bible and by racially motivated concepts of a de-judaized version of Christianity. He referred, among others, to Richard Wagner's 1850 pamphlet *Das Judentum in der Musik* that had been republished during the early 1880s in the *Bayreuther Blätter*. As is well-known, Wagner's voice was quoted again and again by those within the anti-Semitic movement who wished to destroy the notion of the identity of the old Jewish God, the *Judengott*, with the Christian God of love and to remove the influence of the Jewish Bible, as a means of liberating the creative impulses of German culture. Wagner's ideas went to the very heart of Cassel's faith. The missionary was especially infuriated by the composer's claim that Jesus the Galilean was a non-Jew—the basis for the myth of the "Aryan Jesus" that rose to prominence during those years and later became part of volkish theologies within the Protestant Church.¹¹⁵ Wagner, Cassel argued, distorted Christianity, ignoring the profound biblical—and, in fact, ethnic—link between Jesus and Judaism as well as the theological truth that Jesus Christ had not come to destroy, but to fulfil the covenant begun with Abraham and legislated with Moses.¹¹⁶ The "bestial hatred against the Old Testament" which he perceived in Wagner's, Dühring's and other volkish writings, was a horrible, pagan-inspired attack which threatened to destroy—with the dignity of the Holy Bible—the Protestant confession and, indeed, Christianity itself. He was utterly shocked that the Protestant Church did not protest more vigorously against such attitudes and predicted quite lucidly: "We will soon be at the

Jews relied on the claim that traditions shaped by religious law had necessarily undergone a process of "ossification," making them incapable of progress, reform, and modernization; See Eduard von Hartmann, *Das Judentum in Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Leipzig: Friedrich, 1885); for Hartmann's attitude toward Judaism, see Hugo Bergman, "Eduard von Hartmann und die Judenfrage in Deutschland," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 5 (1960): 177–198.

113 See Michael A. Meyer, "Heinrich Graetz and Heinrich von Treitschke: A Comparison of their Historical Images of the Modern Jew," *Modern Judaism* 6 (1986): 1–11.

114 Cassel, *Wider Heinrich von Treitschke*, 13.

115 See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

116 Paulus Cassel, *Der Judengott und Richard Wagner: Eine Antwort an die Bayreuther Blätter* (Berlin: J. A. Wohlgemuth, 1881), 10.

threshold of a hatred which will throw away the Jewish theories of the New Testament and end up with a pseudo-Germanic nihil.”¹¹⁷

Not hatred but love was the answer to the “Jewish question.” Addressing Treitschke, he reminded his readers that at Christmas “we should approach the crib of the Semitic child, whose Semitic parents shepherded him while the angels sung Semitic songs.”¹¹⁸ The notion of the Jewish roots—even the Jewish and Semitic—nature of Christianity, the volkish antisemites’ worst nightmare, did not worry Cassel. On the contrary, he relentlessly insisted that Christianity merely fulfilled Judaism, or more precisely, that it was the culmination of the prophetic potential inherent in the Old Testament that the anti-Semites within the Church sought to eliminate from the Christian canon. It is actually here, within the context of his fight against anti-Semitism, that he, for the first time, characterized Christianity as an essentially Jewish, even Semitic religion, as he told his fellow Christians in a rather drastic manner:

Christ is a Semite. The teaching of the justification of the sinner and of sanctification is a Semitic teaching. What Luther put back on the table in the Reformation is the teaching of the Semitic apostle. The great Gospel of love, which has inspired all of modern literature is, indeed, to be found in the Bible, a Semitic book. There can be no doubt, the Germanic people has been educated in the Christian truth, but this truth came from a Semitic heart. The Prophets were Semites. That our people should not be deprived of the Biblical spirit—this is what our modern fight will be centered around.¹¹⁹

The Jews, according to this interpretation, were “Semites without the Gospel, but with the Old Testament. They do not recognize Jesus, but they are, indeed, waiting for a Messiah.” Even though he agreed that many Jews had, as many Christians, abandoned their religion and embraced materialism, he thought that this was clearly not their own fault. “The Jews,” he argued, “have lost their believing Semitic spirit amongst German paganism.” While emancipation may have liberated the Jews in legal terms, they had then been abandoned spiritually, deprived of the true piety embodied by the—Semitic—Gospel.¹²⁰ Whereas anti-Semites such as Stoecker rejected emancipation because it had allegedly unleashed the “Jewish spirit” in Germany, Cassel’s diagnosis was different: it had been modernity with its pagan materialism that had undermined all religious piety, Jewish as well as Christian. As Alan T. Levenson has convincingly argued, this analysis of the deleterious effects of modernity on the Jews themselves was quite unique, at least from a Christian perspective, and it seems that Cassel’s millenarian desire to convert Jews was, in contrast to that of anti-

¹¹⁷ Cassel, *Die Antisemiten und die evangelische Kirche*, 8 and 43.

¹¹⁸ Cassel, *Wider Heinrich von Treitschke*, 27.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

Semites who wanted Judaism to disappear from German culture, driven by the fear of universal secularism rather than by fears of Judaization.¹²¹

Contemporary anti-Semitism, Cassel was convinced, has had a terrible effect on the Jews, on Christianity, and on German society. Not only did it produce a society permeated with prejudice, hatred and fear; it necessarily alienated the Jews and made it impossible to demonstrate to them the glory of the Gospel: “Should they listen to the missionary’s preaching while surrounded by the shouting of the anti-Semitic chorus?”¹²² The hatred to which they were exposed necessarily made them hate Christianity and become allies of those whom they had long left behind. But more importantly, anti-Semitism was undermining Christianity itself, with the Church not even becoming aware of what would have to disappear from Christianity if Judaism should be eliminated from it. In this regard, particularly Stöcker, the Protestant theologian and politician, was “the greatest enemy of the Gospel in this century.”¹²³

According to the personal remarks to be found in these sources, the response to Cassel’s passionate attack against anti-Semitism was apparently devastating and strongly affected him in his self-understanding as a Christian of Jewish descent and as a missionary to his fellow Jews. Those who criticized his writings of this period, particularly for having called Jesus the “child of a Semite” [*Semitenkind*], tended to insinuate either that he had only defended the Jews because he belonged to Israel itself, or that, given his missionary goals, his defense was not sincere.¹²⁴ A number of pamphlets composed by Christian theologians affiliated with the anti-Semitic movement, all of them marginal figures, opposed his insistence on the Jewish roots of the Gospel,¹²⁵ attacking him for inciting hatred against Christianity, and insinuating that he had never truly embraced the Christianity faith. A particularly spiteful response was that by a certain Ludwig Berthold whose pamphlet was entitled “Cassel! Predige deinen Juden und dir selbst!” [“Cassel! Preach to your Jews and yourself!”]. The author, who constantly calls Cassel “Herr Judenmissionar,” re-

121 Levenson, “The Apostate as Philosemite,” 135.

122 Cassel, *Die Antisemiten und die evangelische Kirche*, 37.

123 Cassel, *Ahasverus*, 8. See the harsh criticism of Stoecker in Cassel, *Die Antisemiten und die evangelische Kirche*, 25–27.

124 See Cassel, *Ahasverus*, 31.

125 See Hugo Delff, *Judentum und Christentum: In Veranlassung der Schrift des Herrn Professor Dr. Paulus Cassel “Wider Heinrich von Treitschke”* (Husum: C. F. Delff, 1880). From the perspective of a “Germanic Christian,” who is constantly forced to acknowledge the chosen people’s rulership, he describes Jesus’ Jewish descent as irrelevant: even if he should have corresponded to the “type of the Oriental and Semite” in his outer appearance, he had overcome all external national characteristics and embodied “a universal cosmopolitan nature” (4). While “Mosaism” with its “Jewish God” was a barbaric principle, the Prophets were the forerunners of Jesus; not a single trace of their spirit can be found in Judaism (15). Jesus, he claims, was misunderstood by his Galilean disciples—it is their Semitic nature that influenced Christianity, very much to its detriment, and is responsible for all the cruelties in Christian history; only a return to Jesus’ “religion of the Spirit” could redeem Christianity (21).

fers particularly to the latter's book, *Die Juden in der Weltgeschichte*, deploring the priority it gives to Jerusalem over Athens and Rome and asking the question many of his opponents seem to have raised at that time: "Why didn't Dr. Paulus Cassel become a Jew rather than becoming a Christian, even a missionary to the Jews in Berlin?"¹²⁶ If Cassel knew that Jesus was, indeed, an Israelite, but an Israelite rejected and crucified by his own people, his message to the Jews would need to be that they should overcome their blindness. And rather than preaching in a church in an area of Berlin inhabited mostly by Christians, he should go where the Jews were assembling: "Rent a hall close to the stock market, Judenmissionar, and preach there in front of those you are supposed to address!"¹²⁷

While Cassel pretended that he did not mind that Jewish readers might not acknowledge the sincerity of his motivation,¹²⁸ he confessed that, given the lack of support and understanding for his work, he felt strongly alienated from his fellow Christians:

I had no allies: Those whom I defended, had—so far—been my adversaries; those, against whom I protected the Jews, seemed, until then, to be my allies, after all I had spent strength and life in Christian and patriotic activities. [...] But I would have been ashamed to deny the Gospel of love and to step on and cowardly defile the graves of the patriarchs with their feet, just for the sake of the frail brotherhood with half-friends.¹²⁹

The Convert of Conviction's Loneliness

Shmuel J. Agnon, in a Hebrew collection of stories, included a brief vignette entitled *achim*—"The brothers"—which referred to the tale of two brothers told in this article, apparently because it intrigued him as a tragic episode worth telling. The text runs as follows:

Rabbi David Cassel and Selig Cassel were brothers. Both hoed the field of Jewish scholarship [*chokhmat jisrael*]. Rabbi David was faithful to his religion and people, he kept the Torah and was punctilious about the commandments. Selig, in contrast to him, left God and converted to Christianity, and his name was no longer Selig but Paulus. Dr. Rubens, one of Rabbi David's students, told me that from the day Selig converted to Christianity, Rabbi David gave up on him and did not want to see him. Once, both of them met accidentally at a wagon of one of Berlin's

126 Ludwig Berthold, *Cassel! Predige deinen Juden und dir selbst! Ein Mahnwort an den Herrn Judenmissionar Professor Dr. Paulus Cassel und dessen Stammesgenossen* (Berlin: Friedrick Luckhardt, 1881), 8.

127 *Ibid.*, 28.

128 See Cassel, *Wider Heinrich von Treitschke*, 4: "The Jews know that I have not enjoyed their affection; I do, therefore, not even consider whether or not they are fine with me appearing as their defender while I am protecting their world historical right."

129 Cassel, *Ahasverus*, 4–5.

local trains, and they cried on each other's shoulders. As the train reached the station, Rabbi David jumped out of the wagon and did not see his brother again until the day he died.¹³⁰

This moving little story captures the pain caused to both brothers by the different choices they made and the price they had to pay for the steadfastness with which the two of them held on to the religious convictions that separated them until their death. It also allows us to imagine the loneliness resulting for Paulus Cassel from his “conversion of conviction.” All the sources interpreted above, autobiographical notes as well as historical and theological writings, indicate that the Jewish historian, after turning to Christianity, even though having found a firm religious and political identity, was never accepted as what he had chosen to become—a Christian missionary to the Jews preaching the Gospel of the “Semite” Jesus Christ who had liberated humankind from the bondage of the Law, a defender of the Jewish minority's equal rights as well as Judaism's historical and cultural role in world history, and a guardian of the Hebrew Bible's relevance for Christianity at a time when Protestant theology was strongly tempted to completely sever the ties between Judaism and Christianity. Having become sort of a celebrity as the pastor of the Christuskirche in Berlin, who is even mentioned in Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest*,¹³¹ he seems to have attracted many listeners, Christians, Jews, and those unaffiliated with any religion, as Cassel tells in his aforementioned essay *Wie ich über Judenmission denke*.¹³² But despite his considerable success as a preacher, lecturer and writer, a formative experience of Cassel's life, in different contexts, seems to have been rejection and suspicion: It was not merely his brother who refrained from having further contact with him. The vast majority of the scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* ignored him completely, even his writings against anti-Semitism.

Many other Jews doubted the sincerity of Cassel's conviction or strongly opposed his missionary activity which they felt was a threat to Judaism's very existence as an equal part of German society and culture. A telling episode with regard to the perception of his post-conversion identity was a public skirmish with the philosopher, writer, and literary critic Fritz Mauthner (1849–1923). Cassel had responded to a devastating review of his book on *Ahasver* by Mauthner (in the *Berliner Tageblatt*) in a polemical article. There he called the Jewish freethinker a “master of the feuilleton of chuzpe,” accusing him of ignorance regarding Judaism and Christianity and of reckless attacks against Christ which threatened to increase anti-Semitic resent-

130 Shmuel J. Agnon, *Taharikh shel Sipurim [A Compilation of Stories]* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1984), 163. I would like to thank my colleague Yaakov Ariel (Chapel Hill) for pointing me to this story.

131 The passage in *Effi Briest*, chapter 32 is, however, not overly favorable: after a service in the Christuskirche, Effi says about the pastor: “He does preach quite well and is a very intelligent man. [...] But in the end it is just the same as if I read a book; and when he then speaks that loud and waves his hands about and shakes his black locks, my sense of reverence is gone.”

132 Cassel, *Wie ich über Judenmission denke*, 8.

ment.¹³³ Mauthner, in turn, attacked Cassel with spiteful sarcasm, denying him any literary talent and, even more hurtful, depicting him as “a conspicuously poorly baptized Jew” [*ein auffallend schlecht getaufter Jude*] and a “dead bug between Judaism and Christianity” [*eine tote Wanze zwischen Judentum und Christentum*], thus insinuating the same kind of repugnant hybridity of which he was accused by anti-Semites.¹³⁴

However, apart from such polemics, the most disappointing experience for Cassel was the lack of interest in the project of the Mission to the Jews, already before the eruption of anti-Semitism. The Protestants in Germany, he complained, did not love the Jews, on the contrary: they transferred their aversion on the proselytes, and not even the noblest among them were spared the experience of being referred to as former Jews.¹³⁵ With the exception of scholars such as the Leipzig Protestant theologian Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890), whom Cassel praised for his solidarity with the Jews and with him as a missionary,¹³⁶ even the representatives of the Mission to the Jews, including the *London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews* turned against him, making him an outsider, with severe consequences for his work. His career as a missionary came to an ignoble end in 1890 when the Berlin Police informed him that the Christuskirche must install an emergency exit. When Cassel reported this to the London office of the Society, the latter wired back a telegram instructing him to immediately close the church for financial reasons. Cassel, however, in a bitter letter published shortly before his death, took the closure as a sign of the fact that the Mission to the Jews simply failed to be of interest to Christians any longer.¹³⁷ More than that, they also had no knowledge about the Jews, their social circumstances, or their literature, and they utterly underestimated the significance the missionary work amongst the Jews had for Christianity itself—as a touchstone for the vitality of Christian love.¹³⁸

133 Paulus Cassel, “Zur Naturgeschichte der Chuzpe,” in Cassel, *Aus dem Lande des Sonnenaufgangs: Japanische Sagen aus originalen Mittheilungen niedergeschrieben und gedeutet* (Berlin: Wilhelm Issleib, 1885), 89–100, here 90.

134 Cited in Carolin Kosuch, *Missratene Söhne: Anarchismus und Sprachkritik im Fin de Siecle* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 120. Mauthner, who was in favor of an intensified process of Jewish assimilation, was sceptical with regard to conversion as a means of integration and generally rejected it as an expression of opportunism; see his statement in *Judentaufen*, ed. Werner Sombart (Munich: Georg Müller Verlag, 1912), 74–77.

135 Cassel, *Wie ich über Judenmission denke*, 7.

136 *Ibid.*, 31. For Delitzsch’s fight against antisemitism, see Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2005), 109–158, and Alan T. Levenson, “Missionary Protestants and the Defense of Judaism,” in Levenson, *Between Philosemitism and Antisemitism*, 64–90.

137 Paulus Cassel, *Sendschreiben an Freunde in Deutschland und England über die Christuskirche in Berlin und ihr Martyrium durch die London Society* (Berlin: Ginzel, 1891).

138 Paulus Cassel, *Mene tekel. Eine wissenschaftliche Entdeckung. Zweiter Brief an Freunde in Deutschland und England über die Leiden der Christus-Kirche* (Berlin: Verlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1891), 15–16 and 20–21.

Whatever the exact circumstances of the closure of his church, Cassel himself assumed that he had challenged particularly German missionaries with his pro-Jewish attitudes. And, indeed, there were such voices, for instance when Johannes F. A. de Le Roi (1802–1874), the historian of nineteenth-century *Judenmission*, claimed that Cassel’s writings were “carried out absolutely on the Jews’ behalf and dictated entirely by a party spirit.”¹³⁹ While Cassel never publicly argued that his vigorous polemics against anti-Semitism contributed to his dismissal, it seems quite likely that, as Alan T. Levenson phrased it, “Germany’s most successful missionary lost his position for being a Semitic philosemite.”¹⁴⁰ When Cassel died, just a month before his brother David, it was a Jewish journal, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, that devoted an obituary to him which tried to do him justice, praising his early scholarly works as well as his later literary achievements, without being silent about the pain his conversion meant for the Jewish community, but finally publicly acknowledging him as a convert of conviction:

When the anti-Semites began to show themselves, Cassel remembered his origin, and opposed the leaders [...] with great decision and manliness. It was this manly action that gives us some satisfaction for his desertion of the parental religion. We have to judge this apostasy very differently from that of many others in former and present times, as he did not forsake his old creed for any worldly reason, or to get honors and position, but rather because he followed a mystical line of thought. God alone can judge the veracity and purity of his life; we dare not. ‘Peace be to his ashes!’¹⁴¹

139 Johann F. L. de Le Roi, *Geschichte der evangelischen Judenmission seit Entstehung des neueren Judenthums*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Hinrich’sche Buchhandlung, 1899), 189–191, here 191; the author emphasizes the “strongly distinct Jewish peculiarity of his entire character” (ibid.).

140 Levenson, “The Apostate as Philosemite,” 134.

141 *Der Gemeindebote: Beilage zur “Allgemeinen Zeitung des Judenthums”* 56.53 (1892), 1. The obituary refers rather ironically to Cassel’s missionary activities, when pointing out that, after his conversion, he “sought satisfaction in leading numerous Polish Jewish youth [*polnische Judenknaben*] to Christianity” (ibid.). Cf. the obituary devoted to David Cassel in the same journal (*Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 57.4 (1893), 37). Apart from Cassel’s erudition, his enthusiasm for scholarship and his kind and tolerant character, the author emphasizes his loyalty to his tradition: “What was more important to him than anything else was his Judaism, which he loved, for which he lived and which he sought to preserve” (ibid.).

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