



# Jews and Christians: Perspectives on Mission

## The Lambeth-Jewish Forum

Reuven Silverman, Patrick Morrow  
and Daniel Langton

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Both Christianity and Judaism have a vocation to mission. In the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, God's people are spoken of as a light to the nations. Yet mission is one of the most sensitive and divisive areas in Jewish-Christian relations.

For Christians, mission lies at the heart of their faith because they understand themselves as participating in the mission of God to the world. As the recent Anglican Communion document, *Generous Love*, puts it:

*“The boundless life and perfect love which abide forever in the heart of the Trinity are sent out into the world in a mission of renewal and restoration in which we are called to share. As members of the Church of the Triune God, we are to abide among our neighbours of different faiths as signs of God’s presence with them, and we are sent to engage with our neighbours as agents of God’s mission to them.”<sup>1</sup>*

As part of the lifeblood of Christian discipleship, mission has been understood and worked out in a wide range of ways, including teaching, healing, evangelism, political involvement and social renewal. Within this broad and rich understanding of mission, one key aspect is the relation between mission and evangelism. In particular, given the focus of the Lambeth-Jewish Forum, how does the Christian understanding of mission affects relations between Christianity and Judaism?

Christian mission and Judaism has been controversial both between Christians and Jews, and among Christians themselves. The 1988 Anglican Communion at Lambeth was the first Anglican conference since the 19th Century to reflect on the issue of Christian mission in relation to the Jewish people. It spoke of a *common mission* and called for “mutual witness to God between equal partners”. It stated that although:

*“there are a variety of attitudes towards Judaism within Christianity today... All these approaches, however, share a common concern to be sensitive to Judaism, to reject all proselytizing, that is, aggressive and manipulative attempts to convert, and of course, any hint of antisemitism. Further, Jews, Muslims and Christians have a common mission. They share a mission to the world that God’s name may be honoured”.*

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<sup>1</sup> Anglican Consultative Council, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue, An Anglican Theology of Inter Faith Relations, A Report from the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns*, London, 2008, p.1.

In 2001 the Church of England's Inter Faith Consultative Group produced the document *Sharing one hope?* which also addressed questions of Christian understandings of mission in relation to Jewish people, but without coming to specific conclusions.

In the Jewish community there have been fewer writings on mission, and there is no clear consensus. However, Jews tend to understand their mission in terms of faithfulness to Torah and the covenantal obligations. Although there is disagreement as to how these are to be worked out, Jews have not generally understood their mission as including the converting of others to Judaism.

In this context, the informal meeting of Jews with Christians from the Church of England known as the Lambeth-Jewish Forum, has sought to produce this resource: *Jews and Christians: Perspectives on Mission*, in the hope that it will help ordinary Christians and Jews – and many others – to deepen their own and each other's understandings. We hope that it will encourage and assist us all to talk together and to enjoy what we share as well as to appreciate where and why we differ.

We have in mind its use in many contexts: for the benefit of individual readers, for those engaged in theological education and, of course, for those occasions when Jews and Christians come together, that they will better be able to discuss together; for Jews to understand better diverse Christian approaches to mission and for Christians to appreciate that, for Jews, there is an ongoing Jewish mission.

This resource has been written by the Revd. Patrick Morrow, Rabbi Reuven Silverman and Prof. Daniel Langton and discussed in meetings of the Forum of which they are a part. We are particularly grateful for their contributions in bringing this work to fruition. The other Forum members are: Clare Amos, Tim Butlin, David Gifford, Toby Howarth, Ed Kessler, Reuven Leigh, Debbie Young Somers and Kate Wharton. During the production of this resource, Canon Guy Wilkinson, one of the founders of the Forum, retired and we want to express here our profound gratitude to him for all that he has contributed to the Forum's work. We also acknowledge the editing assistance of Alice Thompson.

There is no shortage of material on this subject, but this is one of the few which combines so effectively clarity with brevity and breadth with depth. This document has come out of a process of genuine and warm engagement which we have all enjoyed, and we hope that readers find something here of real value.

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# JEWISH MISSION

Reuven Silverman

## Introduction

Concepts of a Jewish Mission may be placed under the broad heading of a spiritual sense of purpose for Jews in the world. Often overshadowed by the mission concepts and activities of Christianity and Islam, the nature and importance of Jewish Mission may require some elucidation. Since explicit expressions of 'Jewish Mission', or the 'Mission of Israel' have arisen only in relatively modern times, and are not commonly heard of today, this survey will focus mainly on the 19th and 20th centuries, prefaced by an outline of its roots in earlier Jewish sources. The exponents of Jewish Mission I have selected are those who would seem to be the most influential.

The questions to be discussed here are:

- How has Jewish Mission been defined?
- What factors have given rise to it?
- What grounds are there for active Jewish missionising and what would this involve?
- How does Jewish thinking interact with Christianity over Mission concepts?

The notion of Jewish Mission emerges as an expression of covenant thinking, as well as reflecting Jewish concepts of redemption and messianism. It sometimes plays a part in issues of Jewish emancipation and nationalism, within post-Enlightenment debates on particularism vis-à-vis universalism, or in reaction to challenges from Christian, humanistic or secularist sources. In relation to all of these, the notion of a Jewish world purpose is seen to act as a stimulus for Jewish consciousness and activity.

Several relevant themes recur. The way they are treated inevitably depends upon the context and theological standpoint of those who make statements on them. In order to show historical development I am presenting this study chronologically rather than thematically. The main themes are as follows:

**Vocation or Election of Israel:** Expressions of a divine calling of the Jewish people to accomplish tasks in the world are found abundantly in the Hebrew Prophets, sometimes in an implicit messianic context. The 'Suffering Servant' concept, associated with this, raises questions about the meaning of Jewish experiences in history. Whilst such topics are of great interest in themselves, I am dealing here mainly with the way in which they are handled in post-Biblical and modern sources.

**Proselytisation:** Stemming from the Hellenistic and Rabbinic periods, some of the positions expressed, both halachic and haggadic, relate to putative biblical antecedents. Whilst the reception of newcomers to Judaism is not necessarily associated with mission, it has been taken as evidence of missionary motivation. This perception in turn reflects the historical and ideological standpoint of scholars who have researched the field, which is my primary interest.

**Proactive approaches to the Noahide Laws:** Arising from Talmud and Codes, principally the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides, the 'Seven Laws of the Sons of Noah' are a series of laws binding not just on the Jewish people but all of humankind.<sup>1</sup> Some Jewish organisations actively promote the acceptance of these laws amongst non-Jewish people. This teaching is germane to our study insofar as it reflects Jewish interest in the spirituality and behaviour of non-Jews without suggesting any desire for their conversion. It also raises issues around pluralism, the extent of Jewish responsibility towards promoting monotheism and the occasionally expressed view of Jewish values constituting an ultimate universal goal. I deal with these issues as they arise in the internal dialogue between Jewish scholars.

**Jewish Nationhood vis-à-vis Universalism:** Zionism is sometimes considered to be more than a mission for Jews towards themselves. Insofar as it is seen as a role of the Jewish people within the international community, it is treated as an aspect of world mission. It raises issues of separation and integration especially in polemics about Jewish emancipation, but also carries certain theological implications.

## Overview of pre-Modern sources

### *The Biblical Period*

Notions of a Jewish Mission derive partly from concepts of election or vocation of the Jewish people: **עם סגולה** '*am segulah*'. Chosenness, election or vocation, implies a purpose. For some, the Jewish experience of suffering at the hands of persecutors has been seen as part of a purpose, as witness to God and sometimes in association with Messianic eschatology. Numerous Biblical texts are cited in support of these doctrines.<sup>2</sup> The Abrahamic Covenant to 'do righteousness and justice' and the Mosaic injunction to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' have been seen as binding upon all subsequent generations.<sup>3</sup> This follows from statements of Israel's chosenness to emulate their ancestors' loyalty.<sup>4</sup> The universality of Israel's task is traced back to the Divine promise to Abraham that through him and his descendents all the families of the earth shall be blessed.<sup>5</sup> This leaves open, however, questions as to the nature of the blessing and how it is to be acquired or delivered.

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<sup>1</sup> The Noahide Laws, according to the revelation of the Talmud (Sanh. 56a, Tosefta Av. Zar. 9.4), comprise of the six laws given to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and a final law given to Noah after the flood. The laws prohibit the committing of idolatry, murder, theft, sexual immorality, blasphemy, eating the flesh of a living animal, and offer a positive commandment to establish courts of justice. These moral imperatives are believed to have been given to the 'children of Noah'— that is, to all of humanity. See: Kessler, E. & Wenborn, N., A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.319.

<sup>2</sup> See: Kohler, K., 'The Mission of Israel' in Studies, Addresses & Personal Papers, New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1931, pp. 177–200, Joseph, M., Judaism as Creed and Life, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1958, pp. 287–294.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 18:19, Exodus 19:6.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 19:3; Deut.7:8; 26:17–19.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 12:3 and 18:18.

Isaiah and Micah share a vision of the 'end of days' in which all nations will flow to Zion to learn the ways of Israel's God. Similarly, Zechariah's prediction of humanity being attracted to follow the Jewish people and their God conveys the same ultimate goal.<sup>6</sup> However, all nations coming to serve the one God does not necessarily imply that Israel has a mission to bring this about, as distinct from a Messiah, or God *per se*, or that it could not occur spontaneously. Many biblical statements, however, call for an active role, such as the commonly cited 'Servant of God' prophecies in Isaiah, for Israel to be a 'light to the nations' (or 'to enlighten the nations') with the tasks 'to open blind eyes' and 'free the imprisoned'.<sup>7</sup> Isaiah's description of the 'Suffering Servant' is commonly taken as a metaphor for the people of Israel who bear the griefs and sorrows of humanity, acting as a witness to God through their endurance. In some cases this suffering is seen as being borne for the sake of vicarious redemption.<sup>8</sup>

### *Attitudes to Conversion in the Post-Biblical Period*

There is considerable evidence to show that in post-Biblical times, particularistic Judaism went hand in hand with a universalistic openness which included a readiness to receive non-Jews into Judaism. This did not necessarily entail an inclination to spread Judaism. Such openness included an acceptance of others worshipping their ancestral deities where their worship did not conflict with Judaism.

Extensive evidence exists in the Rabbinic sources of encouraging attitudes towards conversion (גִּיּוּר *giur*). There is a general welcoming of newcomers – the term 'convert' does not really fit within this context, as it is an inadequate substitution for גֵּר צַדִּיק *ger tzedek*, (proselyte, literally 'dweller' of righteousness). Whilst people would come of their own accord to embrace Judaism, the ease with which they are received has been seen by some as conducive to something of a missionary ethic, although most recent scholarship takes the opposite view. Evidence is lacking for an ethic of active promotion of Judaism before 100 CE and even after that date, in spite of greater assertiveness to be found sporadically in Rabbinical literature.<sup>9</sup>

Martin Goodman draws useful distinctions between various kinds of mission according to their motivations. Besides the desire to win converts, there are also to be found what he calls 'informative', 'educational' and 'apologetic' attitudes. These last three have as their respective goals making doctrines known for their own sake, for changing thoughts and behaviour, or for correcting misunderstandings.<sup>10</sup> They would seem to predominate on the whole over the proselytising motivation.

Biblical precedent for a background positivity towards inclusiveness is found in the interpretation of universalistic prophetic texts, in particular Jeremiah 16:19 and Isaiah (e.g. Isa. 56:1–8). It covers a spectrum from the non-Israelite settler, or גֵּר תוֹשָׁב (*ger tashav*) and the 'God-fearers' mentioned in some Psalms (later referring to non-Jewish monotheists, sometimes attached to synagogues) to the case of Ruth whose having taken 'refuge beneath the wings of the Eternal' (Ruth 2:12) became a

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 2:2–4; Micah 4:1–4; Zech. 8:23.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 41:8–9; 42:1–6; 43:10–12; 45:21–25.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 53; See: Joseph M., op.cit. pp. 161–163.

<sup>9</sup> Proponents of the missionary thesis are Bamberger, B., *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*, N.Y., Ktav, 1968 [1939], and Braude, W., *Jewish Proselytising in the First Five Centuries of the Common Era*, Providence, Brown University, 1940. Opposed to it is Goodman, M., *Mission and Conversion*, Oxford, 1994; cf. Rokeach, D., *Jews, Pagans and Christians in Conflict*, Leiden, Brill, 1982.

<sup>10</sup> Goodman, op. cit. p. 3, et passim.

byword for conversion. None of this, however, seems to have involved actively bringing people into the Israelite community, although expressions of hope for this may be found as in "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7).<sup>11</sup>

The controversial New Testament verse in Matthew 23:15, however offensive it may be in Jewish eyes, has been taken as evidence of Jewish proselytising zeal: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, you make him twofold more a child of hell than yourselves!" Goodman is of the view that the passage refers specifically to the gaining of Pharisee rather than Jewish converts. Diaspora rabbis, who were heirs of the Pharisees would seek out Jewish followers, often in competition to Christians. Goodman tries to resolve the difficulty this poses for the word 'proselyte', by maintaining that it was a rare term before the 3rd Century and there may have been a transition period in which it referred internally to the Jewish community before it became confined to conversion.<sup>12</sup>

Such sparse literary evidence would not seem to point to outgoing moves to bring about mass conversions, but only to individuals here and there setting out of their own initiative to approach potential *gerim*. Braude holds, however, that the Hadrianic decrees prohibiting circumcision of non-Jews would never have been issued had there not been considerable fervour for this, and that Yeshivot set up in non-Jewish areas may well have been motivated by a profound desire to bring all people under the wings of the *Shechinah*: that is, to accept monotheism. Goodman is of the view that there was no consistent theological approach in the 2nd Century and no indications available to explain the enthusiasm of some rabbis for proselytising 'despite the continuation of older, less missionary assumptions'.<sup>13</sup>

Views vary therefore as to whether changes may be seen towards active proselytisation from 200 C.E. onwards. Some see a theologically driven missionary zeal expressed in the 3rd Century Palestinian Amoraic pronouncements of R. Elazar ben Pedat, and R. Johanan (Pes. 87b and elsewhere), that Israel was scattered among the nations to make converts. Rabbinic sources are replete with examples of proselytising portrayed in a good light and even sometimes expressed as a religious duty. Resh Lakish (Tanhuma, Lech-lecha 6:32) asserts that the *ger* is more beloved to God than the multitudes at Sinai since he accepted the kingdom of heaven without any dramatic theophany. Here he is in conformity with the spirit of Tannaitic and Amoraic teaching in the tradition of Hillel. Pesikta Rabbati (Ch. 35) goes so far as to present God saying that Israel will 'offer their very

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<sup>11</sup> Bamberger op.cit. pp. 13–15. Among the counter-examples to the welcoming attitude are the texts in Ezra (9–10) and Nehemiah (13) opposed to intermarriage, where it is not clear whether converts are involved and also whether the issues are on national or religious grounds or both. It is common in Jewish historico-critical circles to regard the Book of Ruth as a counterbalance to Ezra and Nehemiah. Individual texts present similar problems of interpretation such as Isaiah: 56:3 "neither let the alien who has joined himself to the Eternal speak, saying: 'God will surely cut me off from His people'". Bamberger suggests that this might possibly be to defy opposition to proselytes.

<sup>12</sup> Goodman, *ibid*, pp. 69–73. Bamberger devotes a whole chapter to this verse, *op. cit.* p. 267–272. Bamberger argues that this should be seen against the background of Matthew's critique of Pharisaic legalistic and ritualistic excesses. Whilst he makes no apology for regarding it as 'biased, unfair and even libelous' he maintains that it is undeniably indicative of Pharisaic eagerness to make converts. Bamberger sees the verse against the background of the Pauline critique of Pharisaic ritual punctiliousness. He makes the interesting point that one such Pharisaic convert who was doubly punctilious in his observance than his master was Onkelos, the Aramaic translator of Scripture. His master was Gamaliel I, the teacher of Paul, so that it was 'conceivable that the author of our verse had Onkelos or someone like him in mind'. See also: Sandmel, S., *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament*, London, SPCK, 1974, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Braude, *ibid*, pp. 4, 8, 18; Goodman, *ibid*, p. 151.

lives to bring others under My wings'.<sup>14</sup> However, whilst being expressed as statements about God's purpose, they do not amount to a license to proselytise. The high value placed on converts in such texts may well be best understood in the context of encouraging monotheism rather than increasing the numbers of Jews.

Goodman exposes what he calls a 'paradox' leading to the rabbinic ambivalence on proselytising. On the one hand rabbis regarded conversion to Judaism 'as an advantage to the proselyte which it was desirable that Jews should help him acquire'. On the other hand some teachings suggest that this was not always necessary, such as the statement of the 3rd Century Palestinian Amora R. Yohanan (Meg.13a) that any gentile who spurns idolatry is called a Jew.<sup>15</sup>

In general, Rabbinic sources reflect an open attitude and there are virtually no hostile utterances.<sup>16</sup> Evidence is lacking however, for overt persuasion or for any explicit attempt to promote Judaism and gain converts purely on theological grounds. Contradictions of this in early Christian and other classical literature relating to the 1st Century are perhaps not as conclusive as they at first appear. Such changes as came about occasionally in later centuries may have occurred in part a response to Christian mission, not necessarily in competition but rather through changed expectations current in society.<sup>17</sup>

Whilst there was strong enthusiasm for a universal recognition of the One God, there is no evidence of a desire that Rabbinic Judaism *per se* should become the universal religion. To sanctify God's name in the world among the nations of the world was a prime duty, which was even seen as incurring divine retribution if it was ignored, but there is general agreement that gentiles can win divine approval without becoming Jewish.<sup>18</sup> There was no rabbinical mandate for spreading Judaism as the one true faith for all time.

## Medieval responses

Any openness to conversion to Judaism that might have flowed from sources was thwarted by oppressive measures against it. Emperor Constantine first outlawed conversion to Judaism in 339, either to prevent intermarriage or the conversion of women slaves. The Byzantine Emperor Arcadius (395 – 408) then banned all Jewish proselytising, a prohibition subsequently endorsed by the Third and Fourth Councils of Orleans in 538 and 548. The punishments for disregarding such rulings within Canon Law were often severe.<sup>19</sup> In spite of all this, conversions were in some places carried out privately.

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<sup>14</sup> Braude, *ibid*, p. 18–19, 24–5; Other statements on these lines are to be found in Midrash Rabbah Ruth 3, Mechilta Mishpatim 18, Tosefta Demai 2:10.

<sup>15</sup> Goodman, *ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> Bamberger only finds one, the oft-repeated statement of R. Helbo (Yeb. 47b, 109b; Kid. 70b; Nid. 13b;) that the proselyte is like 'leprosy' or a 'scab' for Israel, but finds it unclear as to its meaning. In the case of nations proscribed by the Torah, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and Egyptians, various exegetical devices were employed to overcome the disabilities, culminating in the declaration of Joshua ben Hananyah in 90CE that Sennacherib had diffused all the peoples 700 years before in his invasion. See also: Braude pp. 72–73; Bamberger pp. 198–208.

<sup>17</sup> Rokeah, *ibid*, p.65; Goodman, *ibid*, p. 152.

<sup>18</sup> Lev. R. 6:5 See: Goodman, *ibid*, pp. 130–1.

<sup>19</sup> A former deacon in Oxford was infamously burnt at the stake in 1222 for converting to Judaism and marrying a Jewish woman. See: Maitland, F. *Roman Canon Law in the Church of England*, N. J., The Law Book Exchange Ltd., 1998, pp. 158–183.

Positive statements of a Jewish *raison d'être* may be found in medieval Jewish religious literature which, whilst they do not amount to an active missionary programme, portray Judaism as central to the redemption of humanity. The poet-philosopher, Yehuda Halevi (11th – 12th Century Spain) saw Israel as 'the heart of the nations', and held that it is only through the mediation of Israel that the other nations can approach God. In his *Cuzari*, Halevi presents the legendary account of the conversion of Bulan, the 8th Century King of the Khazars as a model of Jewish missionary spirit. He compared the Torah of Moses as a seed which falls to ground, undergoes transformation in the soil, the elements of which it transforms into something like itself, ultimately producing fruit bearing the Divine Influence. "The nations merely serve to introduce and pave the way for the expected Messiah, who is the fruition, and they all become his fruit."<sup>20</sup>

Halachic pronouncements on how Jews are to regard and behave towards the nations have produced a spectrum of positions in the pre-modern era. There are various views as to whether Jews are obligated to enforce observance of the Noahide Laws. Maimonides states: "Moses our teacher was commanded by God to compel the commandments to the Noahides. All who do not accept are killed." One who accepts Jewish law (voluntarily) is called a **גר תושב** *ger toshav* (resident alien) and one who follows the Noahide Laws is **מהסידי אומות העולם** *me'hasidey umot ha'olam*, (one of the 'righteous gentiles') provided, in the view of Maimonides, that he accepts them on the grounds that they were commanded by God through Moses and not through his own reasoning.<sup>21</sup>

It can be argued that the Maimonidean view on the Noahide laws is regarded within Halachah as essentially historical and nothing more than a statement of principles. Teaching and persuading the keeping of them does not seem to provoke disagreement. The 18th Century manual of ethics *Sefer HaChasidim* (of Rabbi Yehudah Hechaside) maintains that it is a meritorious imitating of God's conduct towards the Noahides at Nineveh in the Book of Jonah.

Amongst other scholars, the acknowledgement of monotheism has sometimes been regarded as the acceptance of Judaism as the one true religion, though it is not made explicit that Jews have a *mitzvah* to bring this about.<sup>22</sup> Most vociferous in this was Hasdai Crescas (1340–1410), a prominent rationalistic Spanish scholar and statesman (advisor to the King of Aragon), who lost his own son to persecution when he chose death at the stake rather than to embrace the Cross. Crescas was often challenged to defend his faith to Christian theologians. He wrestled with the question as to why the prophets did not go out to the nations to missionise. To this he gave various answers, such as that the gentiles of Biblical times were not ready for monotheistic teachings. His most compelling argument, which was replicated in later times, was that individual missionaries were unnecessary since the entire people fulfilled this role, scattered among the nations, proclaiming the unity of God, and the teaching of the prophets, witnessing to the service of the one God, by their very existence. "And when the truth is revealed in time, all the nations will come to serve God, shoulder to shoulder".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Halevi, Y., *Cuzari* IV: 23 (English Edition: N.Y., Schocken, 1964, pp. 226–7).

<sup>21</sup> Maimonides *Yad, Hil. Melachim* 8:10.

<sup>22</sup> Further examples of this can be found in Maimonides (*Yad Hil, Melachim* 12:4) and R. Moses ben Joseph di Trani's *Mabit* (Ch. 51). See: Jacobs, L., *A Jewish Theology*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973, p. 298.

<sup>23</sup> Crescas, H., *Or Adonai*, Book I, 3:5.

# Jewish Mission Concepts in Modern Times

## The Enlightenment

**Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786)** called by many the Father of the Jewish Enlightenment, founded his universalism on a belief in a religion of reason shared by all men. He stood on neutral ground, stopping short of affirming a concept of Jewish Mission. In 1764, Mendelssohn expressed his admiration for the moral character of Jesus. Although some rabbinic authorities had ruled that *shittuf*, the association of God with Jesus in the concept of the Trinity, was not deemed idolatry, Mendelssohn was almost the sole Jewish scholar in this period who wrote positively about Jesus.<sup>24</sup> His praise was not unqualified however. In a letter to the Swiss pastor Lavater he expressed 'philosophical respect' for Jesus predicated on the fact that Jesus had not 'proclaimed himself a divine person or a mediator between God and man'.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, on the basis of this slender concession to the Christian faith Lavater attempted to convert him, manifestly failing to respect the neutral ground on which Mendelssohn stood between the Christianity he respected and the Judaism he affirmed. In reply to Lavater, (and implicitly in reaction to other Christian polemical opponents, principally Bonnet) Mendelssohn stood his ground whilst still refusing to refute his arguments in favour of Christianity, claiming that this would be tantamount to proselytising:

"According to the principles of my faith, I must not seek to convert anyone not born a Jew. The zeal for making proselytes runs diametrically counter to the spirit of Judaism – assertions to the contrary by certain people notwithstanding... the written and oral Law that constitutes our revealed religion is binding for our people alone... All other nations... were enjoined by God to adhere to the law of nature and the religion of the patriarchs."<sup>26</sup>

Mendelssohn makes it clear that this was referring to the Noahide commandments. Thus, out of Mendelssohn's neutrality, Judaism emerges as implicitly superior to the Christianity of his counterparts on the issues of tolerance and a readiness to uphold a pluralistic approach to salvation.

## The Nineteenth Century

In modern times ideas of Jewish Mission were voiced by traditionalists and reformers alike, although it is believed to have taken on special meaning for Reformers as a universalized form of the Messianic hope, and a radical reinterpretation of the Chosen People doctrine.<sup>27</sup> It may be seen as a product of the Enlightenment and as such, was not restricted to Judaism. As Michael Meyer observes, "the Germans too believed they possessed a civilizing mission, often, as in the case of Schleiermacher, closely linked to that of Christianity."<sup>28</sup> From an internal theological point of view it emphasised the global human role in the pursuit of Utopia and de-emphasised the personal Messiah. From the socio-political standpoint of emancipation it affirmed the brotherhood of Jews and Christians in pursuit of common aims.

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<sup>24</sup> Another was Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697–1776).

<sup>25</sup> Altmann, A., *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1973, pp. 204–205.

<sup>26</sup> Jospe, E., ed. and tr., *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from His Writings*, N.Y., Viking Press, 1975, p. 134.

<sup>27</sup> Meyer, M. *Response to Modernity, A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, Detroit, Wayne State Univ., 1988, pp. 137–8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, ad loc.

**Abraham Geiger (1810–1874)** a founding father of Classical Reform Judaism, believed that Judaism was destined to be a universal religion with a prophetic task to bring salvation to the world. His whole purpose was to lead Judaism towards humanity in general and 'to have Judaism permeated with humanity's concepts'.<sup>29</sup> Much of his reforming zeal was directed to this end: "Judaism must give up all outworn forms and, devoid of all its nationalist elements from the past... come forth in its eternal truth, in its lofty teachings and its appeal to mankind to hallow all of life."<sup>30</sup> Devotion to the historical religion of Judaism, its ceremonies, language and laws were vital means to that end: the 'cosmopolitanism' for which he strove could only be achieved through particular loyalties.

In line with the thinking of the Jewish Enlightenment from Mendelssohn onwards, Geiger's outlook was in reaction to Christian challenges to Judaism. In one of his lectures he rejects the notion of Judaism as a preparation for Christianity. He proudly asserts its resistance to the doctrine of Original Sin, and its conviction that 'God has given to man the power of self-determination and self-refinement', and 'has not taken the development of all mankind to a higher goal to mean a denial of itself'.<sup>31</sup>

The Reform of Judaism for Geiger was directed towards the preparation of a purified Judaism to replace Christianity as a world religion. He viewed the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation as tending towards the worship of man as God, hence idolatry. It hindered the progress of humanity towards perfection. His scholarship, in particular his description of Jesus as a Pharisee met with opposition from Jew and Christian alike. Susannah Heschel contends that it was 'not an effort to Christianise Judaism but to Judaise Christianity'.<sup>32</sup>

His critique of Judaism was equally strong. Nationalism and the attachment to a land was what prevented Judaism from becoming the universal faith. In his reform of the liturgy, Geiger abolished all references to a return to Zion, the rebuilding of the Temple, and references to a personal Messiah who it was hoped would bring these goals to fruition.

This process of universalisation of Judaism would be made both possible and necessary by the acceptance of Jews into German civic society. Geiger wrote and spoke against a background in which there was still much room for progress in this regard: although 'tolerated' the community remained without official state recognition.<sup>33</sup>

**Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888)** Geiger's great opponent, advanced a mission theology as a founder of Modern Orthodox Judaism. He seems studiously to avoid the word 'mission', but his word vocation (*Beruf* in German means 'calling') may be taken to correspond with this. Maybaum suggests he avoids using 'mission' to distance himself from both Geiger and Christianity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Geiger, A., 'To J.N. Dernburg', 1833. In Weiner, M., *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1962, p.84.

<sup>30</sup> Geiger, A. 'To the Board of Directors of the Breslau Community', 1846. In Weiner, M., *ibid*, p.117.

<sup>31</sup> Geiger, A., *Thirty Four Lectures*, Breslau, 1865, Vol. I, pp. 145ff

<sup>32</sup> Heschel, S., *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Geiger, A., *Sermon on the anniversary of admission of the Jews to Citizenship*, Breslau, 1840.

<sup>34</sup> Maybaum, I., *The Jewish Mission*, London, J. Clarke, 1949. However, the term 'Mission' is used in Drachman's translation of Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters of Ben Uzziel*.

Hirsch formulates Jewish Mission in terms of an ideal individual character, the *Yisroel-Mensch* (compare Soloveitchik's typology in his *Halakhic Man*, below). Observance of Torah precepts had the capacity to transform him into a higher type of human being. It was his duty to live in such a way as to embody the ennobling influence of the Torah and become God's witness by representing it in his life. This translated into a social mission when collectively Jews were expected to counteract the idolatrous obsession with prosperity, power and pleasure. In contrast with Geiger and the Reformers the accent was more on Torah law observance than on the Prophets.

The Dispersion was regarded by Hirsch in a positive light for it "opened a new, great and extensive field for the fulfilment of its mission... Israel has accomplished its task better in exile than when it was in the full possession of good fortune."<sup>35</sup> Mission is by example. Hirsch demonstrates this in one place by pointing out that the law of circumcision, which sets Abraham apart from other peoples, is followed immediately by the narrative of Abraham's welcoming hospitality to the three wayfarers, the fulfilment of a humanitarian duty.

Vocation for Hirsch is essentially the importance of the survival of Israel, as a nation in a spiritual sense of being moral exemplars. Whilst he speaks of the goals of a nation, his appeal is aimed at the individual Jew, which he recognized entailed overcoming obstacles of assimilation, the inevitable price of emancipation. Israel's mission imposed upon it a duty of separation, of ethical and spiritual separateness. For Hirsch this was principally an avoidance of the current idolatry of materialism. "It could not join in the doings of other peoples lest it descend to their level and perish in the abyss of their worship of wealth and pleasure. It must remain alone and do its work and live its life as a separate entity until, refined by Israel's teachings and Israel's example, humanity as a whole might turn to God and acknowledge Him as the sole Creator and Ruler. Once that is attained, Israel's mission will have been accomplished."<sup>36</sup>

**Hermann Cohen (1842–1919)** the pre-eminent neo-Kantian Jewish thinker of the 19th Century, influenced by both Geiger and Hirsch, gave the concept of a Messianist mission a place in his philosophy of Judaism. Cohen's views, like Geiger's, have been subject to severe criticism as being antithetical to traditional Judaism, but this is not the place to explore this further.

Prophetic Judaism envisions the unity of humanity.<sup>37</sup> A prerequisite for this is the transmission of the message by Jews. For Cohen it is a Messianic ethical message. The physical dispersion of the Jewish people and the hopes expressed in the prayers are directed towards this goal. Unification all peoples is the sole purpose of the Jewish vocation, and its aim is ultimately the election of humanity.<sup>38</sup>

There is an inevitable necessity of suffering entailed by the dispersion: deprived of land, language and sovereignty, and bound to represent a message which other nations do not want to hear. Thus Israel is the Suffering Servant, the witness exposed to martyrdom. Israel is also the symbol of suffering humanity.<sup>39</sup> Cohen expresses the universalizing mission in neo-Kantian philosophical terms, critical of

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<sup>35</sup> Hirsch, S.R., *Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel*, transl. Drachmann B., Funk, N.Y., Funk & Wagnalls, 1899, pp. 80–82.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, Seventh Letter; p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> Kaplan, L., *Trans. Hermann Cohen: Religion of Reason*, p. 288.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 156; compare Hirsch above on Genesis 12.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, *Religion of Reason*, p. 149. See also: Leo Strauss's 'Introductory Essay' ad loc.

pessimism of Plato's 'Republic' where the masses are unable to take part in scholarship and scientific knowledge. It is also expressed in socialistic terms, where all play a part in building a society with 'no class distinctions anywhere'.<sup>40</sup> It was a non-political programme, which excluded the aims of Zionism. In his debate with Martin Buber he accuses Zionists of a secular misrepresentation of Messianism.<sup>41</sup>

The Jewish prophetic vision had to ally itself with the liberal state; and its ultimate ideal was a confederation of states. To this end the Jew had to be integrated into the modern state, 'like divine dew in the midst of many peoples'. The aspiration for return to Zion had also to be understood in conjunction with other nations. "For hardly ever is it stated that the remnant is to return all by itself. There is almost always a reference to 'many' or to 'all' peoples, which will be flocking to the light of God; and the prophets felt that they themselves had been chosen to bring this light to all nations".<sup>42</sup>

Above all it was pure ethical monotheism from which Christianity diverged, and to which Christians had to be converted. As Franz Rosenzweig presented Cohen's position, he thought that liberalizing Protestantism in his day was already making moves in this direction.<sup>43</sup> Cohen idealized German Protestantism as a fulfilment of prophetic Judaism and in his notorious work *Deutchtum und Judentum* he urged German Jews to support Germany against the Allied Powers in World War I in order to aid the spread of liberalism, a project based upon assumptions which later history proved to be tragically unfounded.

## The Twentieth Century

Progressive Judaism in Europe and America was the wing of Judaism which espoused Jewish Mission most openly and institutionally. In America this sense of a Jewish mission was particularly pronounced, with figures such as Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise maintaining that Reform Judaism, as a progressive, universal and non-authoritarian religion, would one day become the common faith of America.<sup>44</sup> There was, however, little or no concerted effort to bring non-Jews to Judaism, except for the purpose of achieving greater understanding. Even in the 1970's, in the context of growing anxiety about the 'zero population growth' of the American Jewish community, the more active outreach programme of Alexander Schindler was poorly received.<sup>45</sup>

The Shoah and the establishment of the State of Israel inevitably influenced the Jewish self-perception of its role in the world. The optimism and idealism of Hermann Cohen, with its patriotism and progressive belief in the rationalism and ethics of Western culture died in the concentration camps.

The foundations of 20th Century Progressive Jewish thinking on Mission were laid by men who were all born within the last half of the previous century. With the exception of the existentialists Rosenzweig and Buber, they were all influenced by it in their essentialism and idealism.

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<sup>40</sup> Jospe, E., Reason and Hope, Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen, Cincinnati, HUC Press, 1993, pp. 74–75.

<sup>41</sup> See: "A Debate on Zionism and Messianism", in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Mendes-Flohr, P. and Reinhartz, J.A., Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1995: Cohen's response, p. 572.

<sup>42</sup> Jospe, E., op cit. p. 168, Kaplan, L., op.cit. p. 361.

<sup>43</sup> Glatzer, N. Franz Rosenzweig, His Life and Work, Schocken, N.Y., 1953: under 'Zion and the Remnant of Israel', p. 351.

<sup>44</sup> Meyer, M. op cit., p. 227.

<sup>45</sup> This attitude towards the conversion of Non-Jews to Judaism has prevailed to the present. See: Polish, D. 'Contemporary Attitudes to Jewish Mission' in Cohen, M.A., Croner, H., *Christian Mission – Jewish Mission*, Paulist Press, N.Y., 1982.

**Claude Montefiore (1858–1938)** a founding father of British Liberal Judaism, was bold in his assertions. His view of the ideal universalized Judaism, towards the achievement of which Christianity was 'only a stage', was one which would be inclusive of certain aspects of Christianity:

"The religion of the future will be, as I believe, a developed and purified Judaism; but from that developed and purified Judaism, the record which tells, however imperfectly, of perhaps its greatest, as certainly of its most potent and influential teacher, will not be excluded. The roll call of its heroes will not omit the name of Jesus. Christianity and Judaism must gradually approach each other. The one must shed the teachings which Jesus did not teach, the other must acknowledge, more fully, more frankly than has as yet been done, what he did was for religion and for the world."<sup>46</sup>

Montefiore advocated an active outreach to the Christian world as a sign of strength and Jewish self-confidence, overcoming any Christian charges of Jewish particularism and asserting Jewish universalist principles.<sup>47</sup> He sought to reconcile his firm belief in a divine election of Israel with his universalism by asserting that they were 'a chosen people, not chosen for themselves but for others... chosen to diffuse experience... by leading holy lives.'<sup>48</sup> Again, this vocation had to be validated by him in relation to Christianity:

"That Christianity was intended by God to play a great religious part in the world, I firmly believe; but I also believe that its appearance in the world did not betoken the end of Judaism as a religious value. Christianity itself seems to Jews only a stage in the preparation of the world for a purified, developed and universalized Judaism."<sup>49</sup>

**Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929)** writing in the trenches of the First World War, anticipated the change from essentialism to existentialism that characterizes later 20th Century Jewish thought. The experience of the Jewish people takes precedence over time-bound doctrine. Nationalism, including Zionism, inevitably leads to the spilling of blood for soil, which is transient. Israel exists for Torah which guarantees its eternity, 'the eternal life planted within us'. With that gift of the eternal love of God, within the blood as well as the spiritual heritage, Judaism exists in a state of Redemption to which other nations are tending, and in which Christianity is the way towards the goal that Judaism has attained. Christianity has a mission to convert the heathen nations. Judaism does not. The Jew stands outside history.

It is the existence rather than the action or teaching of the Jew which is significant for Rosenzweig. Jewish existence itself, acts as a challenge and a spur to the Church, though this in his view has been profoundly responsible for Christian hatred of the Jew. "The existence of the Jew constantly subjects Christianity to the idea that it is not attaining the goal, the truth that it ever remains – on the way".<sup>50</sup> It is his 'Eternal Protest' to the Christian that the Jew 'purchases the possession of truth with the loss

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<sup>46</sup> Montefiore, C., *The Synoptic Gospels* Vol. 2, London Macmillan, 1910, pp. 162–3, and *Outlines of Liberal Judaism*, London, Macmillan, 1912, p. 293–7 quoted in Kessler, E., *A Reader in Early Liberal Judaism*, London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Langton, D., *Claude Montefiore: His Life and Thought*, London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2002, pp. 190–191.

<sup>48</sup> Montefiore, C., 'The Mission of Israel' op. cit. pp. 162–165.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168–9.

<sup>50</sup> Rosenzweig, F., *The Star of Redemption*, trans. W.H. Hallo, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, Book 3, p. 413.

of the unredeemed world'.<sup>51</sup> From God's point of view, however, 'the Jew and the Christian labour for the same task.'<sup>52</sup> Each contains part of the truth. The whole belongs to God.

The reconciliation that Rosenzweig looks forward to is expressed with Yehuda Halevi's metaphor of the seed producing the tree and the fruit (see above). This is a divine plan, not a human programme. The fruit is the Messiah. All will become his fruits when they recognize him and the tree will become one. They will honour and praise the root, which they had despised.<sup>53</sup> The fruits of the tree will be like the original. This is messianism doing the work of mission. Its eschatological culmination is a return to the roots.

In all, Rosenzweig's approach to Jewish Mission is within the context of Redemption. This is a divinely directed process, and moreover one in which the Jewish people have in a sense 'arrived'. Hence Rosenzweig does not uphold a Jewish role towards the world and human society. He draws a firm demarcation between Christian Mission and Jewish life. Christianity has to expand; its role is to convert the gentile. Judaism is passed on through procreation. The Jew lives in the transcendent sphere which anticipates redemption. The world at large is unredeemed and the Jew suffers for it. He has to wait.

Passivity, whether in terms of genetic transmission of identity, or in suffering for it, by no means sums up the Jewish world role as conceived by Rosenzweig. The life of Torah is, after all, highly active. With all the 'separation' and 'inwardness' that Rosenzweig gives so much positive value to, it is hard to see what, if any, universal role can be assigned to Jewish religious life. Nevertheless a role of cosmic proportions does emerge in the *Star of Redemption* through the somewhat surprising appearance of the Kabbalistic concept of healing the rift in God by uniting the Infinite (*Eyn Sof*) with the Indwelling Divine Presence (*Shechinah*), a rupture which occurred at the time of Creation.

**Leo Baeck (1873–1956)** communal rabbi of Berlin during the rise of Hitler and courageous teacher in Theresienstadt, and later in Britain and America, resolutely upheld that the essence of Judaism is the divine command to redeem humanity from evil through justice and love. As a liberal in his approach to Halachah he maintained that whilst the ceremonial side of Judaism might be modifiable, this commitment was unchanging. He developed a most proactive approach to mission. To bear ethical monotheism was its distinctive purpose, or 'election', and for this its segregation was justified.<sup>54</sup> It is an 'election for the sake of others', giving it a 'responsibility to the rest of the world'.<sup>55</sup> Baeck, in the tradition of Yehuda Halevi, saw the missionary motivations of Christianity and Islam as deriving from Judaism: "Judaism views the mission not as a part of an urge to grow and become powerful, but rather as the expression of an inner need to teach men and convert them".<sup>56</sup> Election declares a 'possession of truth' and entails a duty to represent it. The verb 'to send' is one of 'the most peculiar and significant in the Bible'. Mission, for Baeck, is of the very essence of Judaism.

This world purpose was destined from the beginning with Abraham. The biblical and rabbinic motif of the Seventy Nations (symbolizing universality) underlined this. For Baeck the offering of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 414.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 415.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, Book 2, p. 379.

<sup>54</sup> Baeck, L., *The Essence of Judaism*, N.Y., Schocken Books, 1970, p. 61.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp. 67. 68 cf. Montefiore, see above quotation over note 65.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

seventy sacrifices at Succot as atonement for the nations of the earth was an expression of 'Jewish responsibility for the religious welfare of mankind.'<sup>57</sup> The Dispersion was an act of Providence to benefit the world; this, by a play on words was the meaning of Diaspora.<sup>58</sup> This is no claim for the supremacy of Judaism. The purpose of the mission is what it had always been, the promulgation of monotheism. Acceptance of the unity of God, and the renunciation of idolatry was the Jewish goal. This, moreover, was all that was necessary for proselytism.

Leo Baeck, following his teacher Hermann Cohen, proclaimed the purpose of Judaism as 'guarding the religion of all humanity'.<sup>59</sup> His particularist motive to show the primacy of Judaism appears in his statements about the derivativeness of other faiths and culture from Judaism, as well as tendencies to 'judaise'. Examples which he gives are the religious revival of the Renaissance, the Socialist movement, the Reformation, the Anabaptists and the Unitarian trend in modern Protestantism.<sup>60</sup> He shares Rosenzweig's vision of a return to Jewish roots.

**Martin Buber (1878–1965)** probably more than any other thinker reached out to the non-Jewish world with his Jewish and personal teachings. Israel for Buber has a vocation to play a special part in preparing the Kingdom of God. As a Zionist who was also wedded to a unique blend of religious existentialism, Buber believed that Israel had to pave that path by becoming not merely a 'nation among nations' but also a holy people in its own land. It would achieve this only by 'realizing true communal living'.<sup>61</sup> For Buber this was later to become embodied internally in his support for the kibbutz movement, and externally in his establishment of *Brith Shalom*, an organisation promoting Israeli-Arab understanding. His formulation of the Jewish world mission from a spiritual Zionist standpoint may be summed up in a few sentences: "Israel's function is to encourage the nations to change their inner structure and their relations to one another. Since this can only be accomplished in the rounded life of a community, we must re-assemble, we must again root in the soil, we must govern ourselves."<sup>62</sup>

For Buber, security for the Jewish people has to be understood as expressed in Torah and Prophets, as security in God, which is interpreted within the model of the *I-Thou* relationships of true communal living 'to which Israel was summoned by the Covenant with God'. In common with other thinkers, Buber still believed that there was a positive role to be fulfilled in exile, to enable Israel to fulfil its charge of righteousness and justice towards one nation in the world – the human nation. "The doctrine of nation composed of many nations... is the doctrine of the kingdom of God."<sup>63</sup>

**Ignaz Maybaum (1897–1976)**, author of *The Jewish Mission*, is distinctive in devoting a whole book to this subject.<sup>64</sup> His aim was to show how Progressive Judaism has best expressed and promoted mission's goals, but in doing so he pursued a synthesis between Hirsch and Geiger, offering a surprisingly conservative tone to his reflections. Maybaum's focus, more than that of his predecessors,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, ad loc.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>61</sup> Buber, M. *Israel and the World*, N.Y., Schocken Books, 1948. Lecture delivered at the Frankfort Lerhaus, 1934.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, *The Spirit of Israel and the World of Today*, op.cit., p. 194.

<sup>64</sup> Maybaum, I., *The Jewish Mission*, London, J. Clarke, 1949.

is Election, chosenness. Writing with an immediate post-Shoah perspective as a German refugee rabbi, he represented those whom he believed knew that election meant danger, suffering and death better than Geiger and his generation did, from personal experience.<sup>65</sup>

Maybaum draws a distinction, however, between Election and Mission. The one precedes the other. Election is God's work; Mission is an active response to programmes from the world outside, social and political. In this we are 'on the side of Christian civilization'.<sup>66</sup> Nothing divides Jews from Christians in 'propagating the aims of Western Civilization'; both have a shared Mission in this sense. Election, however, is segregation and it is only in fulfilling its Chosenness that Judaism can contribute to the world in its own right.

Mission understood in this way as a consequence of Election is a self-understanding which is to lead to an existential witness. It is an active rather than passive witness, but the social action that flows from it has to be spiritual: 'the Jewish mission is not political mission', although a State of Israel as a 'priestly nation' has its value.<sup>67</sup> In contrast to the Christian Mission, which was always to convert gentiles 'marching in two columns', Church and State with dogma and ideology, the Jewish mission is that of witness, without theories. It is made real first and foremost by the Jew's very existence: 'the mission of the Jew is to be a Jew.'<sup>68</sup> For Maybaum, Geiger represents the prophetic and Hirsch the priestly aspects of Judaism.<sup>69</sup> Both are necessary. He was critical of Geiger's universalism as too much orientated towards citizenship of one's country at the expense of Jewish distinctiveness as – *עם אחד* *am echad*, (one people) hence too political. He argued that today the spiritual mission is needed more than ever since, following the Shoah, Liberal-humanism has broken down.<sup>70</sup>

Maybaum's call for that kind of vision did not, in Britain at least, gain much of a following in the post-war years, probably due to the same kind of sense of well-being amongst Anglo-Jewry which Michael Meyer described as existing in Enlightenment Germany.<sup>71</sup>

**Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935)** the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Mandate Palestine, was a pre-eminent Talmud scholar, mystic and visionary leader of religious Zionism which he regarded as the intervention of God in history and the first flowering of Messianic redemption. In Rav Kook's thought, the special role of the Jewish people is set within the framework of a universalism which is all-embracing, the love of God and the lights of holiness permeating all creatures animate and inanimate, with a two-way flow running between the heavens and earth. An implicit "mission" may be seen in the way this is expressed in his concept of repentance which is central to this dynamic interaction. In it will be seen reflections of 19th Century Jewish Liberalism as outlined above, filtered through the lens of Jewish mysticism. These concepts come from Lurianic Kabbalah as mediated, for example, through the writings of Moses Chaim Luzzatto.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>68</sup> Maybaum, *ibid.* pp. 59, 60.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 29ff.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>71</sup> Meyer, M., *op. cit.* p. 190.

<sup>72</sup> Luzzatto M.H. *Mesillat Yesharim, The Path of the Upright*, trans. Kaplan, M., (parallel Hebrew and English text) Philadelphia, JPS, 1964. See also: Luzzatto, M., *Derech HaShem*, Ch. 5.

Rav Kook writes:

“In truth one cannot rise to the spiritual level of seeking the reformation of society without a deep inner repentance of every sin and wrongdoing. An individual who has repented in this sense is forgiven and the whole world is forgiven with him... The highest sensibility in the soul of the people of Israel is the quest for universality. The people aspire for this by the very essence of its being, and this affects all existence. The desire for penitence תשובה (*teshuvah*) in its highest form is rooted in this hidden longing. The soul of the people of Israel expresses itself in the striving for absolute justice, which, to be effectuated, must include the realization of all moral virtues. It is for this reason that any moral misdeed committed by any individual Jew weakens his link with the soul of the people. The basic step in penitence is to attach oneself again to the soul of the people.”<sup>73</sup>

**Joseph Baer Soloveitchik (1903–93)** developed a two-fold descriptive view of the existence of the Jewish people in history. The duality was that of ברית גורל (*brit goral*- the covenant of fate) and ברית יעוד (*brit ye'ud*- the covenant of destiny). The former is the experience of history, the passive endurance of persecution among the nations; the latter is the transformation of this experience into a purposeful Jewish life.<sup>74</sup> The approach to such a transformation must be an ‘ethico-halachic’, rather than a speculative philosophical one. Here Soloveitchik differed diametrically from Hermann Cohen (see above) on whom he wrote his doctoral thesis and by whom he was otherwise much influenced.

In this context the Jewish purpose is primarily the confrontation with evil and suffering in the world. His response is that suffering exists for the sake of repentance. Judaism exists with the purpose of ‘mending and elevating suffering, with the Divine חסד *hesed* (loving kindness)’. These are received in the form of ‘ethico-halachic’ commands. The same transformation has to occur with the gifts of wealth, influence and honour.

The ethico-halachic ideal for Jewish life is expounded by Soloveitchik in his major work *Halakhic Man*.<sup>75</sup> The second part of this book is a monumental development of the rabbinic idea that the human being is a partner with God in the work of Creation. The goal of all Halachah is “the replenishment of the deficiency in creation, when the real world will conform to the ideal world, and the most exalted and glorious of creations, the ideal Halachah will be actualized in its midst.”<sup>76</sup>

This is the Jewish people’s ‘eschatological vision, the realization of all its hopes. The partnership is of course not only for the Jew since it is between humans and God, and the universal aspect of this is drawn out in Soloveitchik’s classic essay *The Lonely Man of Faith*. The focus in Soloveitchik is primarily the life of the individual, and his ‘self-creation’. It transcends him in community of course, and the individual’s life extends into the future of the people as a whole. All halachic observances are directed towards the realisation of the ideal world on earth: for example Passover, when the individual is enjoined to think of himself as if redeemed, or Rosh Hashanah, when the sound of the shofar foreshadows that of the final

<sup>73</sup> Kook, A.I. *The Lights of Penitence*, 4: 5–7. In Bokser, op.cit., p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Soloveitchik, J., Kol Dodi Dofek, Trans under the title: *Fate and Destiny*, N.J., Ktav, 1992.

<sup>75</sup> Kaplan, L., trans. *Halakhic Man*, Philadelphia, JPS, 1983.

<sup>76</sup> Kaplan, L., *ibid.* p. 99.

Redemption. The regulation of time in the Jewish year, season by season, month by month, day by day, is to inculcate an orderliness which overrides the evanescence of life in favour of eternity.

Prophecy is essential to Soloveitchik's world-outlook, but not in the same way as his 19th Century forbears such as Hermann Cohen and not generally directed to the non-Jewish world.<sup>77</sup> The goal was not merely to uphold the prophetic ethical heritage, but the perfection of the halachic personality to the ideal level of the Prophet, the 'ultimate peak' at which one has fulfilled one's task as creator.<sup>78</sup> Soloveitchik's mission is a perfectionist programme.

**Menahem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994)** The Lubavitcher Rebbe made many statements including halachic rulings, supportive of an active campaign to the gentile world. As exhortations to influence non-Jews to be good Noahides, they are urgently eschatological, for example:

"Our efforts must be geared to the 'final days' in purifying and clarifying ourselves and in influencing the Noahides to accept their G-d-given destiny which will cause the nations of the world to come before G-d and give honour to His Name, with the true and complete redemption through our righteous *Moshiach*, (Messiah) speedily and truly in our days."<sup>79</sup>

It was to be a universal campaign following an interpretation of the Maimonidean concept of *כפייה* *kefiyah* (compulsion) discussed above. Rabbi Schneerson holds that:

"it is obvious and self-evident that in modern times we must carry out the Divine Command we received through Moshe: to compel all human beings to accept the commandments enjoined upon the descendants of Noach. In order that the entire world should be orderly, it is essential that each and every one of the "seventy nations" should be influenced so that they will work on settling the world. It is insufficient for only one nation to be acting properly."<sup>80</sup>

It does not appear to be entirely clear how the Rebbe meant us to understand 'compulsion'. Elsewhere he states that the approach should be didactic and forthrightly dogmatic, following the interpretation of Maimonides that the righteous gentile is one who follows the laws out of a belief in being divinely commanded for the benefit of all humanity:

"In these critical times, when nations are challenging one another and violence is increasing in an unbelievable manner, the Jews have the power to bring about peace in the entire world... Ideally, a Jew should stand proudly before the gentiles and explain to them the Seven Noahide

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<sup>77</sup> There is the principle of *לפרסומי נסא* (*lefarsumey nissa*), publicizing the miracle, applied to candle lighting at Chanukah and the Reading of the Megillah on Purim. The latter clearly applies only to Jews in their own circles. Since the Chanukiah is placed outside the house, or in the window, it could apply either to Jews alone or also to non-Jews. Soloveitchik extends it to non-Jews as well as to Jews. He cites Talmud (Shabbat 21b) which teaches that the mitzvah to light Chanukah candles extends 'until the last people leave the market.' These were the Tarmodai, non-Jews who sold firewood (Rashi). Rav Soloveitchik concludes that if the Gemara uses non-Jews as the criterion for the latest time one may light Chanukah lights, then publicizing the miracle must apply to non-Jews as well as Jews. Moreover, in the Chanukah Prayer *Al Hanissim* it reads, "You have made your Name great and holy in Your world." Hence, Rav Soloveitchik concludes that publicizing the miracle applies to non-Jews as well as Jews. See: Zalman Shurkin, M., "Harerei Kedem II" Jerusalem, 2004, a compilation of Soloveitchik's halachic writings.

<sup>78</sup> Kaplan L., *ibid*, p. 130.

<sup>79</sup> Schneerson, M. M., 'Shabbos Parshas Tsav, 5747'. In *Sichos in English*, vol. 35, Brooklyn, N.Y., p. 76.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

Laws, emphasizing that they should be carried out not because they appear to be logically sound, but because G-d commanded them.... When a Jew carries out *mitzvos* with pride, a non-Jew stands in awe of him and, hence, will not consider war."<sup>81</sup>

There is thus a two-fold obligation, both aspects of which serve universal ends: for the Jew to keep Torah and to urge the non-Jew to keep his God-given laws. Whilst it may sound strange that a Jew should be responsible for the latter, this clearly stems from the fact that the Noahide laws are deemed to be part of the Sinaitic Revelation.<sup>82</sup>

## *In Conclusion*

To return to the questions posed at the beginning of this study:

**How has Jewish Mission been defined?** The guiding principles have been the biblical ones of Divine Election or Vocation, Messianism and Redemption. Mission has implicitly or explicitly been expressed in terms of the covenantal obligations to keep righteousness and justice and to be a priestly nation. This has been taken together with prophetic injunctions to uphold monotheism and ethics which being a servant of God entail. All affirm these principles but special emphasis is given by 19th and 20th Century thinkers of the post-Enlightenment school, both Reform and Orthodox, taking their lead from Geiger and Hirsch.

Witnessing through suffering or by ethical example, including discipline and self-denial entailed in the commandments are also generally affirmed, these aspects being given special emphasis by Leo Baeck and Ignaz Maybaum. Simply living as a Jew is the existentialist position of Rosenzweig, who is the least explicit about mission – since the Jew for him lives outside of history and has arrived at the position of Redemption to which all nations are tending.

Mystical aims are affirmed by Rosenzweig in the unification of *Shechinah* and *Eyn Sof*, also by Rav Kook for whom Repentance has a cosmic function beyond the betterment of society, and (in my view) Rav Soloveitchik, whose *Halakhic Man* draws heaven down to earth in hallowing the everyday.

**What factors have given rise to Jewish Mission concepts?** Periods of politically free, close contact of Jews with the wider world have been those in which mission concepts prevailed rather than those in which the Jewish communities were more enclosed. Whilst legislation banning conversion to Judaism exerted a long-lasting negative influence, antisemitism sometimes acted as a stimulus for outgoing Jewish expression.

The roots of Jewish Mission concepts, whilst by no means comprehensively defined or developed, are found in periods of maximum contact of Jews with others, in the post – rather than pre-exilic Biblical periods, in Hellenistic and Babylonian Talmudic periods, and in the Spain of Halevi, Maimonides, and Crescas. The challenge of Christianity is the single most important factor, arguably

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<sup>81</sup> Yud Tes Kislev, 5743. In *ibid.*, vol. 13, p. 19, 33.

<sup>82</sup> The view that this is an obligation would not seem to have general support among halachic authorities. For a comprehensive treatment of the subject see: Rabbi Michael J. Broyde, 'The Obligation of Jews to Seek Observance of Noahide Laws by Gentiles: A Theoretical Review' in *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, Ed. Shatzet, D. et al., N.J., Northvale, 1997.

in the Talmudic period, clearly visible in responses from Mendelssohn to Montefiore, and together with a philosophical challenge, Rosenzweig. Antisemitism was the single most important influence on Hermann Cohen, as was the Shoah on Baeck and Maybaum.

The rise of Zionism had divergent effects: positive in the case of Buber and Rav Kook, negative in the case of many more: Geiger, Hirsch, Cohen, Rosenzweig, Montefiore and Maybaum. Diaspora had been seen as part of a divine plan for using Israel as emissaries since Talmudic times, and this was emphasised by non-Zionist thinkers more than Zionist. Diaspora takes on an important significance in connection with acting as witness to monotheism and living as moral exemplars in the eyes of the nations.

Since the emergence of modern Israel, a universalist mission for Israel as a nation has become possible, espoused principally by Buber. Buber emphasises a special role as a nation amid a family of nations, and the interconnectedness of the State of Israel with the international community and its Arab population and the building of a model community based on *I-Thou* relationships.

There is also the challenge of secular Messianism which Maybaum deals with at length. In itself, it is another indication that the Mission idea, in its modern formulation, has its correlates within Enlightenment philosophy and nationalism, out of which the secular version of Zionism sprang. It could be argued that Messianism nourished secular Utopianism. The Progressives Geiger, Cohen, Montefiore and Baeck did not see Zionism as a spiritual fulfilment of Jewish Mission. Maybaum found a value in it as such provided it was apolitical.

**What grounds are there for active Jewish missionising and what would this involve?** There is a debate as to whether active Jewish mission is to be didactic or by example, and opinions differ as to whether Maimonides may be interpreted as advocating a prescriptive or even coercive approach over the Noahide Laws and acceptance of monotheism. It would seem, however, that later Halachah would not support an aggressive stance.

It is interesting that advocates of an outwardly missionary approach are to be found at opposite ends of the Jewish theological spectrum: from the Liberal and Reform Judaism of Montefiore and Baeck to the Chabad Hassidism of Schneerson. Talmudic precedent seems to dictate an openness to welcoming converts without going out to seek them. Taking a view of more than half a millennium from the Hellenistic period to the compilation of the Talmud, Bamberger and Braude argue for there having been active missionising. Whilst their work is not polemical, their conclusions have to be seen against the background of their motivation as American Reform leaders in the 1940's, intent on encouraging a more welcoming approach to the growing number of converts in their community. Sporadic attempts by American Reformers to urge a programme of outreach to encourage conversion proved unpopular and were short-lived. The critical view of Martin Goodman which opposes this view on grounds of paucity of evidence, finds a general ambivalence to inclusiveness which is reflected in late 20th Century Western Jewish communities.

**How does Jewish thinking interreact with Christianity over Mission concepts?** The challenge of the Christian Mission concept coupled with the struggle for Emancipation were strong factors in the development of conceptions of Jewish Mission. These began as justifying arguments in the tradition

stemming from Mendelssohn's debates with his Christian contemporaries. Over time, less defensive and more self-confident assertions of Jewish Mission arose which were outward looking.

Some of these, notably those of Hermann Cohen and Martin Buber, were supportive of an eschatology in which Jewish existence and its suffering served a unified humanity. Others, notably Geiger, Rosenzweig, Baeck, Montefiore and Maybaum, saw the denouement, on the part of Christianity principally, in a return to Jewish roots. It would appear to be a post-Shoah development, in which Montefiore and Rosenzweig were ahead of their time. This has in some cases been set as a challenge to Christianity, in Hermann Cohen's terms as a 'purified monotheism', though not explicitly stated as having to be purged of Trinitarianism. On the Jewish side, following Geiger, Montefiore led the way in urging a more forthright acknowledgement of the Jewishness of Jesus. There are also the challenges to Christological messianism posed by Rosenzweig and Maybaum, where the Jew acts as the constant reminder of a world that is unredeemed.

It is clear from the foregoing that whilst conceptions of Jewish Mission are, in their explicit form, a phenomenon stemming from the Enlightenment, their roots trace back to rabbinic and biblical times and they emerge from a stock of teachings which define Jewish duties towards one's neighbour and to the world. What is significantly absent from classical sources to modern is any expression of duty towards people specifically insofar as they are adherents of other faiths. In this respect it may well be the case that in the current climate of dialogue, we could be witnessing an expression of Jewish Mission which includes the duty to ensure greater interfaith understanding.

Among the many examples, personal and institutional, of how this has been expressed we have the lecture given to the Lambeth Conference in July 2008 by the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in which he gave as a paradigm for Jewish-Christian relations Soloveitchik's concept, cited above, of a covenant of destiny. He translated it less literally as 'fate', which we all share, in contrast to a covenant of 'faith' in which we differ. The covenant of fate preceded the covenant of faith, as in the case of God with Noah and Joseph with his brothers, both of which involved forgiveness. Such a covenant of fate, he said, (taking the concept beyond Soloveitchik who limited it to the Jewish people) could be perceived in the creation of the Council of Christians and Jews by Archbishop William Temple in 1942, 'and since then Jews and Christians have done more to mend their relationship than any other two religions on earth'. He called for a renewal of that covenant to tackle world problems of 'poverty, hunger, disease, hate and environmental catastrophe' together in the 21st Century.

Sacks, following Soloveitchik, was in principle advocating a shared social mission, what might be called **תיקון עולם** *Tikkun Olam* (Repair of the World), without any theological component, whilst being careful to distinguish between fate and faith. Given that Jewish and Christian communities both face common challenges from modern forms of idolatry which attack spirituality, it is surely also the case that both now have common cause to pursue joint missions to explore and expound issues of faith.

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# CHRISTIAN MISSION AND JEWISH CHRISTIAN PARTICULARITIES

Patrick Morrow

## Introduction

“The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ:  
To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom  
To teach, baptise and nurture new believers  
To respond to human need by loving service  
To seek to transform unjust structures of society  
To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

The Anglican Communion’s Five Marks of Mission (above) make clear that the term ‘mission’ is understood by this Church as a positive good, as a description of purposeful Christian living, and of a generous and caring outgoing spirit.<sup>2</sup> Coercion and manipulation in the name of mission – though they have undoubtedly been part of the history of missions – have always been sinful distortions. Equally as clear, nonetheless, is that the proclamation of the Good News to those who are not Christian – those to whom it will be genuinely novel news – remains an intrinsic part of mission.

However broadly and carefully such a mission is defined, in our days it seems set to remain controversial, perhaps above all in relation to Judaism. Blu Greenberg is one amongst many Jewish thinkers who feel contemporary mission to have the darkest of precursors. Christians cannot simply close their ears to the question:

“Would those who preach conversion for all Jews really want a world *Judenrein*, a world free of Jews? Having come so close, we are all forced to ask ourselves that terrible question: what would a world with no Jews really feel like? After the Holocaust, can any well-meaning Christian look into my eyes and make that claim, the call for a kind of ‘spiritual genocide’?”<sup>3</sup>

What, if anything, would be an authentic, chastened Christian mission to Jewish people? Within this article we will have as presumptions (a) that authentic mission can never be aggressive or manipulative; (b) that it can take the form of service and solidarity, alongside Jews and without any intention of conversionary moves; (c) that Christians will always show pastoral openness to an

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm> [accessed 20.06.11] citing: Anglican Consultative Council 6, *Bonds of Affection*, 1984, p. 49; Anglican Consultative Council 8, *Mission in a Broken World*, 1990, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> The Church of England is itself currently involved in reflection on how it might become more ‘Mission-shaped’, see: Church of England Mission and Public Affairs Council Working Group, *A Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, London, Church House Publishing, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Fry, H. (ed.), *Christian – Jewish Dialogue: A Reader*, Exeter, University of Exeter, 1996, p. 86.

individual person who feels called to become a Christian, and, while they may discourage conversion for any number of pastoral and theological reasons at least for a time and a season, they will never refuse to prepare someone whose consciousness and conscience are clear and insistent. Moreover, we can for these purposes take as read that there is some kind of 'common mission' between Jews and Christians, as the Lambeth Conference of 1988 stated, though its nature would require extremely careful articulation.<sup>4</sup> And we may also assume some 'mutual witness',<sup>5</sup> such that we seek to 'provoke each other to jealousy' (cf. Rom 11.14), by demonstrating as high a degree of holiness and compassion as we can.

All that said, we are now free to refine the question: is there a place, alongside all of these issues, for Christian *mission-as-invitation* to the Jewish people?

Among the great names within Christian missiology we must name are Bosch,<sup>6</sup> Bevans & Schroeder,<sup>7</sup> Kraemer,<sup>8</sup> Rahner,<sup>9</sup> and Donovan.<sup>10</sup> A reflection on some of these, and their critics, is available in the web version of this paper. What is striking for our purposes is that few, if any, of such mainstream Christian missiologists deal with the argument that, from a Christian point of view, Jews/Israel/Judaism may be different from other faiths. For example, Gillet says of Kraemer's seminal work, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, that only two of 455 pages are devoted to the putative mission to Israel.<sup>11</sup> The working assumption seems to be that Judaism is simply one of the set of non-Christian religions, or, better, of religions other than Christianity. In other words, such theologians have tended not to engage in serious depth with their colleagues involved in Jewish-Christian relations in their particularity, who at least consider explicitly the argument that Judaism is different from other non-Christian religions.<sup>12</sup>

Here a number of overlapping themes present themselves, including the possibilities that:

- (a) Judaism, for Christians, must be strictly unique, *sui generis*, because the bonds between the two faiths are without parallel;
- (b) the bonds take the form of an inter-relationship of covenant/election, because the biblical covenant(s) preceding Christ cannot be and are not revoked by God;
- (c) Christians have misunderstood the messianic difference Jesus Christ makes, and need to finesse or even replace their Christology, which will in turn radically change their understanding of the differing Jewish claim;

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<sup>4</sup> Christians may rush to assume that this would take the form of 'belief in God and revelation', although within some forms of Judaism commitment to the heritage of the people of Israel and its ways of living may take precedence.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Williamson C.M. (ed.), *A Mutual Witness: Toward Critical Solidarity between Jews and Christians*, Missouri, Chalice, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Bosch, D., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, N.Y., Orbis, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Bevans, S.B. & R.P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, N.Y., Orbis, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Perry, T.S., *Radical Difference: A Defence of Hendrik Kraemer's Theology of Religions*, Ontario, Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Rahner, K., 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions', in *Theological Investigations*, vol.5, London, DLT, 1966, pp. 115–134.

<sup>10</sup> Donovan, V.J., *Christianity Rediscovered*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, London, SCM, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Gillet, L., *Communion in the Messiah: Studies in the Relationship between Judaism and Christianity*, Cambridge, J. Clarke, 1942, p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> See: Yoder, J. H., 'Judaism as a Non-Non-Christian Religion' in Cartwright, M.G. and Ochs P., (eds.), *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*: John Howard Yoder, Michigan, Eerdmans, 2003, pp. 147–159.

- (d) Christians bear guilt for a 'teaching of contempt' of Jews and Judaism, the eradication of which will change both Christianity and its approaches to Jews and Judaism;
- (e) Christians bear complicity, if not guilt, for the Shoah (or Holocaust) in particular, which makes the repentance required as radical as can be, such that mission must be reformulated from scratch.

Whether or not these arguments are logically discrete, in practice they are often treated as a network of mutually re-enforcing claims. Some would insist that this is a strength, that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. But there must be some gains from trying to think of each of these – and more – in turn. This does not mean that by engaging with these possibilities the nature of any 'Christian mission to the Jews' will be automatically clarified. Most obviously, if Judaism is unique, we must then ask: is there a call for a unique Christian mission to the Jewish people, or, alternatively, for a unique principled refraining from any such mission? The assertion of Jewish uniqueness does not in itself tell us. Nevertheless, it is only by tackling these questions that the special intricacies involved in any Christian reflection on a would-be 'Christian mission to the Jews' can be examined.

## I. Christian Mission and Jewish Uniqueness

That Christian missiologists have tended to think of Judaism as 'one of the set' of non-Christian religions is not to be dismissed out of hand. It might even be said to be based on a sophisticated knowledge of the living religion of Judaism. This would mean insisting that the 'Judaisms' of the Christian Bible (both Testaments) are different from the Judaism of the Rabbis, of the Oral Torah alongside the Written Torah, of Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash. This Judaism – in effect, the only living Judaism which any missionary would encounter<sup>13</sup> – has its own integrity and history of development. It cannot be seen as Christianity's parent, or roots. It is a sibling religion, or arguably a more distant cousin. Allowing for this then permits one to see Judaism as not necessarily different in kind from, say, Islam. After all, it is the latter which speaks of Jesus as Messiah, born of a virgin, and triumphant over death.

Nevertheless, there is a cumulative counter-argument. This would stress that Rabbinic Judaism is not a different faith from the Judaism(s) of the late Second Temple period, in other words, that it is the same religion that was the milieu of the New Testament. There is sufficient continuity between them to mean that the New Testament's engagement with things Jewish itself continues to place a sacred duty on Christians to reflect on Judaism, in a way they need not necessarily with other faiths. It might even be said that the very harshness of the patristic *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition, which heaped up such negative judgements on the Israel of its day, using the warnings and curses of the Hebrew Scriptures, paradoxically makes this point.<sup>14</sup> The tradition makes sense only because it (grudgingly) acknowledges that the Jews who followed Judaism still formed Israel, or, if the Church is the new Israel, formed a rival Israel whose case to be the real thing was too strong to dismiss or ignore.

That Judaism is unique is most obviously the attitude taken by the Roman Catholic Church, where the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews comes under the Pontifical Council

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<sup>13</sup> This statement hypothetically could be contested by the presence of Samaritans and Karaite Jews, but stands as a statistical probability.

<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom is often viewed as the archetypal rhetorician of this tradition. Cf. Harkins, P.W., *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, Washington, Catholic University of America, 1977.

for Promoting Christian Unity, rather than that for Interreligious Dialogue. The Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2001), draws remarkable conclusions as a consequence. Cardinal Ratzinger, as he then was, wrote the affirmative Preface, citing the substantive text (para 22) to uphold that: 'the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Scriptures of the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading, which developed in parallel fashion'. He then notes that the document 'adds that Christians can learn a great deal from a Jewish exegesis practised for more than 2000 years.' Of no other faith does the magisterium speak of possible, analogous and parallel religious developments alongside those of the Church; it does so of Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>15</sup>

The Anglican Communion does not have an authoritative magisterium, and so would struggle to reach such a unified conclusion on this point. Whilst the *Lambeth Conference of 1988* and the Church of England's 2001 discussion paper, *Sharing One Hope?* both address this topic, neither claims to be more than a survey; and, consequently, no view is either condoned or condemned.<sup>16</sup>

If we turn from documents of official or semi-official status to what is prayed liturgically (on the principle, important to Anglicans, of *lex orandi, lex credendi*<sup>17</sup>) we find similar uncertainty. The Book of Common Prayer is still normative. Thus the third collect of Good Friday, still stands:

"O merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather than he should be converted and live: have mercy on all Jews, Turks and Infidels, and Hereticks, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord..."<sup>18</sup>

Here the claim of uniqueness could be seen to be dismissed: the Jewish people are placed simply as at the head of those for whose wider conversion we pray. However, it should be noted that this prayer is rarely used, and that the newer, and equally authoritative text of *Common Worship* is significantly different in its orientation:

"Let us pray for God's ancient people, the Jews, the first to hear his word: for greater understanding between Christian and Jew, for the removal of our [sic] blindness and bitterness of heart, that God will grant us grace to be faithful to his covenant and to grow in the love of his name..."

Lord God of Abraham, bless the children of your covenant, both Jew and Christian; take from us all blindness and bitterness of heart, and hasten the coming of your kingdom, when

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<sup>15</sup> For a more extensive discussion on this see: Morrow, P., 'Pope Benedict XVI, Europe and Interreligious Dialogue' in Faltin, L. and M. J. Wright, *The Religious Roots of Contemporary European Identity*, London, Continuum, 2007, pp. 156–167.

<sup>16</sup> Amongst other resources, I was unable to detect any direct grappling with the question of Jewish uniqueness in either the 1995 report by the Doctrine Commission: *The Mystery of Salvation*, or the 2010 text from General Synod: *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*.

<sup>17</sup> This maxim can be loosely translated as "the law of prayer is the law of faith", a maxim used to explore and illustrate the importance of liturgy in doctrine.

<sup>18</sup> Book of Common Prayer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 121.

the Gentiles [sic] shall be gathered in, all Israel shall be saved, and we shall dwell together in mutual love and peace, under the one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>19</sup>

This emphasis on inclusion, and the need for a Christian change of heart, rather than the conversion of others, is striking. But perhaps of equal importance is the way in which this prayer is concerned with Christian approaches *to Jews alone*; it is the next prayer that addresses 'those who do not believe'.<sup>20</sup>

The question of whether Judaism (or some form of Judaism) is unique must be directly relevant to our question. If it is not, then our attitude to Christian mission, singular, will determine our attitude to approaches to Jewish people. This is of course a position well represented within the Church. We have inferred it to be the presumption of the classic Christian missiologists. One writer who makes this claim explicit is Jakob Jocz. He writes:

"God is no respecter of persons. Before Him, the Holy One, men stand not as *Jews* and Gentiles, but as sinners who are in need of grace. Jesus the prophet may be speaking to the Gentiles; but Jesus the Son of God speaks to mankind. Jesus the martyr may be *appealing* to some and not to others; but Jesus the Lamb of God challenges the whole human race. God's word is *one* word, and God's way is *one* if it is *the* way of God."<sup>21</sup>

If this homogenisation is resisted – if, that is, Christianity remains essentially missionary, *and* if Judaism in Christian eyes remains essentially unique – then it follows logically and semantically that there must be a unique Christian mission to the unique Jewish people. However, we must stress at once that many would see the logical and semantic truth of this, and would also insist that putting it this way can only mislead. Thus we must ask explicitly: does the alleged unique mission to the unique Jewish people have an *invitational* element, such that the language can stand, or is it uniquely devoid of that invitational element, such that the language might best be replaced?

That the uniqueness of Judaism requires a unique Christian mission to the Jewish people with an irreducible invitational element is most obviously the position of the Christian Ministry among Jewish people (CMJ). Its mission (sic) is: "To encourage Jewish people to come to faith in Yeshua (Jesus) as their Messiah, to support them in serving him as Lord in the light of God's purpose for them, and to equip the church to be involved in this mission".<sup>22</sup>

Others draw a radically different conclusion. Epitomising a strand of contemporary Christian thinking conscientiously opposed to anything intending the conversion of Jews is Paul Van Buren. He holds to the language of mission, but redefines it:

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<sup>19</sup> Common Worship: Times and Seasons, London, Church House Publishing, 2006, p. 317.

<sup>20</sup> In this the Church of England has undoubtedly been influenced by Roman Catholic liturgical reform.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Eckardt, A.R., *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians*, N.Y., Schocken, 1967, p. 64, emphasis original.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.cmj.org.uk/about> [accessed on 08.05.11]. CMJ has 'A Code of Practice for Evangelism', available on request from their head office. It includes the commitment: 'To show clearly that the Jewish people who believe in Jesus remain Jews, and are in fact fulfilled in their Jewishness, so that familial, social and political responsibilities, where they do not militate against the Messiahship of Jesus, are still to be recognized: Jewish identity still counts'.

“The church, called to be a witness to Christ among all the nations, and having a special relationship to Israel, has the specific mission to the Jewish people of serving them in their task of being a light for the nations. In fulfilling this special mission, the church will be witnessing to Jesus as the one Jew through whom God has brought it to the service of his people, which is the foundation of all its service to their; his, and now its own God and Father. . .

Of course the church is mission; nothing but mission, but it is the mission of the God of Israel. A God of Israel who had lost his Israel, the God of the covenant who had lost the covenant partner, could hardly be the God who had called together a Gentile church in fulfilment of a part of his promise to Abraham and in confirmation of all his promises to his people Israel. . .

Instead of pursuing such a self-contradictory and ultimately self-defeating project [as a Christian invitational-mission to the Jews], it would be better for the church to think through again the meaning of its special relationship to the people Israel. Only on the basis of that relationship can it discover and carry out its proper mission to the Jews.”<sup>23</sup>

Less dramatically perhaps, but just as significantly, Eugene Fisher insists that, on the basis of the post-conciliar reforms, the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of Judaism as unique has the corollary that invitational mission is deliberately absent from its theology, liturgy and institutions.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Christian Mission and Covenant

Many Christians associate the unique bond between Christians and Jews with the divine commitment to covenant and election. D'Costa offers an effective summary of a whole network of scholars, whose position (of which he is critical) he calls the 'dual covenant'. Such scholars, he suggests:

“have urged that Christians should view the Jewish and Christian traditions as two distinct yet complementary covenants. Jews, in remaining Jews rather than becoming Christians, are being faithful to their covenant with the same God who forged a further complementary covenant into which the gentiles were grafted. Neither negates the other; they are, rather, two distinct, complementary, and related ways to God. The fulfilment model should be abandoned as should mission toward the Jews.”<sup>25</sup>

Pawlikoski also offers a survey of dual-covenant scholarship.<sup>26</sup> Amongst the more original is Rylaarsdam, who argues that two covenantal schools are already found in tension *within* the Hebrew Scriptures, (a) that with Israel through Moses, which builds on history and is open-ended, and (b)

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<sup>23</sup> Van Buren, P.M., *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality: A Christian Theology of the People Israel*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1987, pp. 320–328. Van Buren has concrete proposals for 'serving' Israel, to be understood as a united people (p. 329) including being a gentile 'anti-defamation league' for Jewry and offering sympathetic truth-telling on the State of Israel (pp. 334–337).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Kessler, E. and E. J. Fisher, 'Dialogue of Head and Heart' in *The Tablet*, 18.11.00, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/6874> [accessed 20.06.11]; Fisher, Eugene J, 2008, 'God's Plan for the Jews' in *The Tablet*, 05.04.08, pp. 12–13.

<sup>25</sup> D'Costa, G., 'One Covenant or Many Covenants? Toward a Theology of Christian-Jewish Relations' in Gill, R., *Readings in Modern Theology*, SPCK, London, 1995, p. 173.

<sup>26</sup> Pawlikowski, J. T., *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, Stimulus, N.Y., 1982.

that with David, which by contrast 'celebrated a supra-temporal order of meaning'.<sup>27</sup> Whether or not this is ultimately convincing, it reminds us that there are many more options than simply seeing the covenant in Christ as replacing or complementing the singular old covenant.

The argument that the covenant(s) with Abraham and Moses were never revoked by or in Jesus is strong. Beyond and before any details of New Testament exegesis (where Romans 9–11 provides the crucial if also bewildering test-case), this argument relates to the theological conviction that the One who calls is always faithful (cf. 1 Thess 5.24), even if those called are at times unfaithful. If this is denied, how can it be claimed that God has kept faith with the sinful Church, or should keep faith with it?

Some Christians have sought to appropriate some covenantal understanding from Franz Rosenzweig, who famously proposed a Jewish-Christian symbiosis in *The Star of Redemption*.<sup>28</sup> Within this model the covenant with Moses formed a star/sun, which then grew to accommodate believers in Jesus, whose ministry formed the rays for the wider world. Christianity was for gentiles, for all gentiles in principle, but only for gentiles. Following this trajectory, some Christians have been content to speak of the covenant enlarged by Jesus. The new covenant is the covenant renewed, the renewal consisting of an openness and welcome to gentiles. However, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the renewed covenant is welcoming of gentiles *as gentiles*, i.e. without the intervening stage of their coming under the protection of the *shechinah* by becoming Jewish, an option which was always – or nearly always – there.

This is supremely the position of Van Buren. It is the central rationale for his insistence that Judaism is unique. He writes: 'What makes Israel to be Israel is the covenant – and therefore ultimately its election – and nothing else.'<sup>29</sup> He notes that 'we [in the Church] are today almost all Gentiles',<sup>30</sup> and reflects:

"Our Gentile identity is a strange fact. A Gentile is by definition anyone who is not a Jew. It is, however, notoriously difficult to identify exactly who is a Jew... We define ourselves by reference to the Jews because our Way has no starting point and no possible projection except by reference to the Way in which the Jews were walking before we started and are walking still... we are Gentiles, not Jews, although Gentiles who worship Israel's God."<sup>31</sup>

The consequences for mission are substantial. Approaches to Jews and to fellow gentiles differ utterly:

"The desire to share a blessing which we have received can only be commended. This is one of the more attractive ways in which to define the missionary motive that has always been strong among Christians. So the desire to show other Gentiles that there is a Way through the mess of this world is appropriate.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Rosenzweig, F., *The Star of Redemption*, Indiana, University of Notre Dame, 1985.

<sup>29</sup> Van Buren, P., *Theology of People Israel*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1987, p. 333.

<sup>30</sup> Van Buren, P., *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality: Discerning the Way*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1987, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

It would be a total denial of our own Way if we even pretended to try to show it to the Jews, for they already have their way of being in the Way, and, indeed, our way of being in that Way presupposes the validity of the Way in which their ancestors were traveling before we came along and in which they continue to walk. All we can show them is how some Gentiles have come to a manner of walking in the Way in which they already walk. To ask them to come walk as we do would be a denial that, along *with* Israel's way, there is *also* a way for the Gentiles. The only 'call to faith' that is proper for us to give to a Jew would be the call to a fully secularized Jew asking him or her to be faithful to the walking of his or her own people."<sup>32</sup>

Within this same school we must place A Roy Eckardt, who stated:

"The effrontery of traditional gentile Christianity is almost indescribable. We Christians have dared to speak of the exclusion of 'the Jews' from the household of salvation when in plain truth we are, as Karl Barth has said, mere guests in the house of Israel. In the presence of original Israel the gentile has no business asking, 'What must the Jew do to be saved?' The rightful existential question of the gentile is entirely different: 'How is it possible that I could ever be included in the unbroken Covenant with Israel?'"<sup>33</sup>

The great pioneer of Jewish-Christian rapprochement, James Parkes, might himself be said to be in critical dialogue with Rosenzweig's stance.<sup>34</sup> He is certainly insistent that there is a Jewish-Christian symbiosis. Neither faith can replace or absorb the other, without the loss of a revelation vital to humankind. However, he does not say that Christianity is a neatly 'gentile' phenomenon. In part, this is because, from its earliest days and throughout its history, there have always been Jews who are Christians. Equally, Parkes maintains, Judaism is not so neatly Jewish either. Even though it does not have a desire to convert gentiles to its religion as such, it may well have its own message *for the gentiles*. Everett cites a letter from Parkes, offering a pertinent summary:

- "1. Judaism and Christianity are not simply the religions for Jews and Gentiles, but they are religions that have universal application...
2. While Christianity is a missionary religion, its relationship to Judaism is unique and calls for a different approach.
3. Both Sinai and Calvary are channels for God's power.
4. Both religions are part of one revelation of God. Judaism emphasising the community, while Christianity emphasises the person.
5. Christians need to see this meaning of Sinai.
6. Only by doing so will we see God's purposes more clearly."<sup>35</sup>

Eckardt is in turn critical of Parkes' division of labour (or, better, of emphasis), in associating the communal with Sinai and the personal with Calvary. Eckardt for his part seeks a family of possible ways of seeing the two faiths as complementary:

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 53, emphasis original. Cf pp. 63–65, on proselytising.

<sup>33</sup> Eckardt, *Elder and Younger*, p. 158.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. Parkes, J., *Prelude to Dialogue: Jewish-Christian Relationships*, London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1969, p. 198.

<sup>35</sup> Everett, R.A., *Christianity without Antisemitism: James Parkes and the Jewish-Christian Encounter*, Oxford, Pergamon, 1993, p. 45.

“There are varied ways of bringing out the functional contrast between the two faiths, a contrast that entails not only difference but also unity. One way is to emphasize that Judaism faces inward to the Jewish people while Christianity faces outward to the gentiles. A second is to say that the Jewish role is one of ‘being’ while the Christian role is one of ‘doing.’ A third is to affirm that the Jew fulfills his vocational calling by ‘staying with God’ while the Christian fulfills his calling by ‘going out’ into the world.”<sup>36</sup>

Whether any of these schemas succeeds in capturing a true distinction is an open question. But what all such thinkers have in common is that they associate their theology with a refutation of any Christian invitational-mission to the Jewish people. One important ecclesial statement which at least comes close is from the Synod of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland (cited elsewhere in this paper). Eckardt and Eckardt summarise:

“It insisted on the permanent election of the Jewish people, their continuing significance for salvation history, the recognition that through Jesus Christ the church is taken into the covenant of God *with his people*, and especially the following: ‘We believe that in their calling Jews and Christians are always witnesses of God in the presence of the world and before each other. Therefore, we are convinced that *the church may not express its witness toward the Jewish people as it does its mission to the peoples of the world.*’”<sup>37</sup>

The Eckardts’ own formulation of this theological premise is striking:

“If the Jewish people are not the elder brothers and sisters within the family of God, it follows that the gentiles as reputedly adopted younger brothers and sisters actually remain lost and without hope (see Eph. 2:12). The covenant into which they are ostensibly led by means of the event of Jesus the Jew becomes a delusion. Conversionism aimed at Jews reverses the true course of the history of salvation and turns upside down the structure of salvation history. Such conversionism implicitly assails Christianity. It is a Christian impossibility – not for pragmatic reasons, so dear to some religious thinkers, but for reasons of theological principles.”<sup>38</sup>

Bracing and refreshing though these revisions of Christian covenantal thinking are, it is too little said that the affirmation of God’s covenant with Israel cannot itself be the sole decisive factor in determining a Christian assessment of Judaism, and so of the (in)validity of Christian invitational-mission. Biblical – including New Testament – theologies of covenant predate what we know as Judaism by centuries. And the Christian affirmation may logically be of historical and eschatological Israel, while bypassing the current reality known as Judaism. However misguidedly, *logically*, one can affirm the Sinaitic covenant *and* see rabbinic religion simply as a holding bay, as it were, wherein the covenant (or the covenant outside the Church) is held in inactive suspension. In other words, it is much like that with David and his descendants, which was also promised ‘for ever’.<sup>39</sup> Ironically

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<sup>36</sup> Eckardt, Elder and Younger, p. 145.

<sup>37</sup> Eckardt, A. L and Eckardt, A.R, *Long Night’s Journey into Day: A Revised Retrospective on the Holocaust*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Detroit, Wayne State University, 1988, p. 132, emphasis in original.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 131.

<sup>39</sup> See: Psalm 89.

perhaps, it is Roy Eckardt who sees this, arguing that this is not his own position, but seems to be that of Paul in Romans:

“It is faulty reasoning to maintain that since God has not rejected his people (and hence has not destined them to final exclusion from salvation), the church has therefore not taken over Israel’s role.”<sup>40</sup>

But if this sounds unhelpfully negative, it is also too seldom said that from a biblical perspective, one’s location inside or outside the covenant does not determine one’s access to God, salvation, or the world to come. There have always been righteous gentiles. Differently, within a modern Catholic frame, it is clear that those outside the covenant(s), in as much as they follow their consciences, can be confident that God’s Spirit will supply what is necessary for salvation.<sup>41</sup> The covenant is at least as much a burden as a privilege: to have it taken away is in that sense to find release from a humanly impossible task. Again, Eckardt states:

“Divine election is hardly something for human beings to covet. If anything, nascent Christians may well be distressed, humanly speaking, by the imminent end to their happy, pagan days; while for their part Jews could be immeasurably relieved, humanly speaking, where the yoke of election ever lifted in fact. ‘It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God’ (Heb. 10:31).”<sup>42</sup>

Covenantal theology, while of vital importance to any Christian turning to the New Testament for guidance on our question, cannot be decisive. We can, then, take some comfort from the fact that Jewish scholars are themselves divided as to whether the concept of covenant is central to understanding Judaism (as Elliot Dorff has maintained),<sup>43</sup> or marginal, in comparison with the idea of *mitzvot*, as Norman Solomon counters.<sup>44</sup>

### 3. Christian Mission and the Messiah, the Christ

The Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 2001 text reads (para 21):

“Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulant to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like them, we too live in

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<sup>40</sup> Eckardt, Elder and Younger, p. 55f. The context is Eckardt’s examination of Romans 9–11, and Paul as a whole. Paul, he contends, believes in divine approval and blessing for Israel before Jesus, and Israel as eschatologically fulfilled, but not in Israel in denial of the messiahship of Jesus. This Israel is neither damned nor blest. Eckardt distances himself from this position.

<sup>41</sup> For example, from *Gaudium et Spes*, para 22: ‘All this holds true not for Christians only but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all [sic] the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery’. Flannery, Austin (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Dominican, Dublin, 1992, p. 924.

<sup>42</sup> Eckardt, Elder and Younger, p. 69.

<sup>43</sup> Dorff, E.N., ‘The Covenant as Key: A Jewish Theology of Jewish-Christian Relations’, in Klenicki, L., *Toward a Theological Encounter*, Mahwah, Stimulus, 1991, p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Solomon, N., ‘Themes in Jewish-Christian Relations’, in Klenicki, Encounter, 1991, pp. 16–42, 19–21.

expectation. The difference is that for us the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us.”

We share, then, a messianic orientation. The very title of the Church of England's document *Sharing One Hope?* also places this idea at the centre of its exploration. While the question mark must not be obscured, the text does cite approvingly from the 1988 Lambeth Conference: 'Christians and Jews share one hope, which is for the realisation of God's Kingdom on earth. Together they wait for it, pray for it and prepare for it.'<sup>45</sup>

This idea of a shared hope is central to Lev Gillet's position, which can be called a mystical understanding of Messiah and messianism. Within this model Judaism and Christianity, regardless of appearances, share a divine mystery:

“There is a Mission of the Christian Church to Israel. There is a Mission of Israel to the Christian Church...

For the word 'conversion' we would substitute 'communion', giving it all the richness and also the indefiniteness of the Greek *koinonia*: sharing fellowship, common life, community... A Jew who accepts (not only intellectually) Jesus as Messiah enters into communion with the Messiah *as Jesus*, and with the community of the followers of Jesus. Reciprocally, a Christian who becomes aware of the Jewish contents of his own faith and inwardly responds to this new awareness enters into communion with Jesus *as Jewish Messiah* and invisibly with the Messianic community of Israel, insofar as the Messiah displays an immanent activity inside it. Thus the Mission – the two-fold Mission – ends in communion...

This communion has two aspects: an obvious and a hidden one. The obvious aspect consists in the fact that both the Christian and the Jew hold fast certain beliefs, certain hopes and a certain charity objectively connected with the Messianic King, or His Father, or His reign. The hidden aspect consists of the immanence of the Messiah Himself under all the aspects of Messianic piety (and both Jewish and Christian piety are Messianic). The Messiah Jesus is Himself the substance of all Messianic faith, all Messianic hope, all Messianic love, all Messianic grace. A true Christian and a true Israelite communicate in the same Messiah. This communion is partial and implicit. God will make it some day total and explicit.”<sup>46</sup>

Yet to others, both Jews and Christians, all of this is altogether too sanguine, indeed naïve. Van Buren is pithy: the New Testament texts 'recollect what was *not* expected by the authors of the Scriptures – e.g. a Messiah who brought no messianic age and no restoration for Israel.'<sup>47</sup> Further; it could be said that it is precisely these incompatible Messianic understandings that divide us. Martin Buber said this candidly:

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<sup>45</sup> Interfaith Consultative Group of the Church of England *Sharing One Hope?* The Church of England and Christian-Jewish Relations a contribution to a continuing debate, London, Church House Publishing, 2001, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Gillet, op cit. pp. 195f. Cf. p. 107: 'Speaking again from the strict Christian standpoint... there is no action whatever; sincerely made for the sake of the Messianic Kingdom, which is not made for and in the Messiah... The Jews who work for the Kingdom may perhaps not know with whom they have to do. When the Messianic Kingdom appears, they will learn the truth and the Messiah will manifest Himself.'

<sup>47</sup> Van Buren, *Theology of the People Israel*, p.29, emphasis original.

“He who acknowledges Jesus to be the Messiah already come cannot belong to us; he who tries to weaken or divert our belief in a redemption still to come, there is no agreement with him.”<sup>48</sup>

That bad Christology is perhaps at the heart of the problem of Christian approaches to Judaism, and that the true mission of Christianity is an internal revolution in its own understanding of Jesus, is the position most influentially expressed by Rosemary Ruether. For Ruether, whilst anti-Judaism takes the forms of a set of ‘schisms’ – judgement vs promise, particularism vs universalism, letter vs spirit – in which Judaism always falls on the wrong side of the divide, these problems pale in comparison to the consequences of asserting that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. Ruether asks: ‘Is it possible to say “Jesus is Messiah” without implicitly or explicitly, saying at the same time “and the Jews be damned”?’<sup>49</sup> The two have gone together, and indeed are already found together, with differing degrees of explicitness, in the New Testament.

“Theologically, anti-Judaism developed as the left hand of Christology. Anti-Judaism was the negative side of the Christian affirmation that Jesus was the Christ. Christianity claimed that the Jewish tradition of Messianic hope was fulfilled in Jesus. But since the Jewish religious teachers rejected this claim, the church developed a polemic against the Jews and Judaism to explain how the church would claim to be the fulfilment of a Jewish religious tradition when the Jewish religious teachers themselves denied this...

In effect, Christian theologians set out to demonstrate the rejected status of the Jewish people and the spiritual blindness of its exegesis and piety in order to vindicate the correctness of its own exegesis and its claim to be the rightful heir of Israel’s election.”<sup>50</sup>

One interpretation of this is that the early Christians were aware that the self-evident nature of Jesus’ messianic role was not obvious: rather it relied upon the dehistoricisation and spiritualisation of Messianic hope. Within this framework the fact that the Jewish people did not make this spiritual reality their own could not be put down to an innocent difference of opinion, based on a different reading of ambiguous historical evidence, but is alternatively characterised as a fundamental misunderstanding of God’s ways, a wilful and sinful act. It is for these reasons that Ruether believes the spiritualisation of Messianic hope must be rooted out, and replaced with a ‘proleptic’ understanding of Jesus as a sign of future redemption. This requires a manifold humbling of Christians:

“The ultimate eschatological event, the ultimate ‘coming’ of the Messiah, must still signify that final future when ‘every tear will be wiped away.’ This clearly has not taken place, nor has Christianity appropriated its message in a way that has been a very convincing means to this ‘end’. The attribution of an absolute finality to the heightened expectations surrounding the life

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Gillet, *op cit.* p. 103.

<sup>49</sup> Ruether, R., *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oregon, Wipf and Stock, 1997, p. 246.

<sup>50</sup> From Ruether, ‘To Change the World’, cited in Fry, H. (ed.), *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: A Reader*, Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1996, pp. 23f.

and death of Jesus must be regarded as a flawed way of appropriating the real meaning of the eschatological encounter...

To reaffirm Jesus' hope in his name, then, is not to be able to claim that in Jesus this hope has already happened, albeit in invisible form. Nor does it mean that it is now only in his name that this hope can be proclaimed. It is simply to say that, for those who were caught up with him in that lively expectation, it is now in his memory that they reaffirm his hope. They are sure that his death was not in vain."<sup>51</sup>

In this, there is no place for a mission to the Jewish people. In the Exodus, Jews have their own, adequate story of redemption anticipated.<sup>52</sup> Is this the correct diagnosis and remedy? Christians have not agreed. But at the very least it can point us to the fact that, given the ambiguities of history, and of Church history, no ill-will need be imputed to any (whether Jewish or other) who cannot see in Jesus' life the dawning of universal redemption.<sup>53</sup>

## 4. Christian Mission and the History of Contempt

"With a hardhearted, unspeakable lack of sensitivity to Israel's hopes of redemption for an unredeemed world, the church presumed to tell Jews that Israel's Messiah had already come. It did this while it was giving Jews the most convincing evidence imaginable that what it said could not possibly be true. This too is part of the setting for rethinking the mission of the church to the Jewish people."<sup>54</sup>

One way of describing the difference Jesus the Christ has made to the world is to draw all manner of contrasts between him and his contemporaries, be they 'the Pharisees' or 'the Jews'. Within this model it thus became commonplace to describe the Judaism of Jesus' day as 'late' – cold, legalistic and lifeless. This rhetorical comparison soon gained even more poisonous elements: a teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism that, at best, deemed Judaism as inauthentic, and, at worst (from Melito, c. 180AD, on), denounced the Jewish people as murderers, the killers of Christ, guilty of 'deicide'. This charge, sadly, cannot be called an exceptional fringe in theological writing. The Church Fathers who worked so thoroughly on creedal orthodoxy also widely maintained that Jews – all Jews everywhere – were Christ-killers. This charge of an embedded 'teaching of contempt' (as Jules Isaac so memorably put it) is surely just; the Church as a body has little choice but to plead guilty.

Van Buren is thus right (above), that any 'mission to the Jews' must start with evidence of the fruits of repentance from such contempt. As Locke has argued:

"A mission to any people obliges those who would undertake it to carefully examine themselves and their past with respect to those to whom the mission is directed, lest it be

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<sup>51</sup> Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, pp. 248f.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. *Ibid.* p. 256.

<sup>53</sup> This is a self consciously cautious argument. This has merit, since, as Ruether shows (and see the following), such ill-will has typically been imputed by Christians.

<sup>54</sup> Van Buren, *Theology of the People Israel*, p. 331.

seen as a massive effort in hypocrisy. In the case of the Jews, there remains – in the words of Jesus – a huge beam in the eye of Christians that is two millennia of anti-Jewish attitudes, sentiments and behavior. Christians would do well to work on removing this beam, before thinking about any mission to the Jews.

For many Christians, therefore, the appropriate stance of the Church in the presence of the Jewish people is that of penitence, not proselytisation.”<sup>55</sup>

From Gillet’s position, this aspect of penitential reflection is found in the privileging of service (*diakonia*) over preaching (*kerygma*). This may well be insufficient, but perhaps sets out a necessary minimum:

“In respect to the Jews, the *diakonia* should always precede the *kerygma*. Let this be the first principle... When Christians address people other than the Jews, they may begin with the message; the Apostles themselves did so... The reason why we cannot do it now is that, since Christianity began, nineteen centuries have elapsed during which the Jews have suffered in greater or less degree at the hands of Christians. We have no right to approach the Jews now as if our hands were clean. We must first of all atone for our gross violation of the law of our Master and deserve the forgiveness and confidence of Israel... The second principle is that there should be no *kerygma* without not only prior, but also a concomitant *diakonia* of some sort, though we must be careful never to make the acceptance of the *kerygma* a condition for sharing the benefits of the *diakonia*. A third principle is that the *kerygma* should in some way shine through the *diakonia* and our personal life, so that the Christian preaching would consist only in naming and systematizing the realities which our action would already have made manifest to the Jews... At the same time, we should make it clear that we love the Jew not in order to win him over; but because we, as Christians, must unconditionally love him... Rabbi Lyons says: ‘Treat all Jews with the humanitarianism of a Jesus and we shall love Him more for your example; whereas we shall never be drawn to Him or to you for your theology.’<sup>56</sup>

## 5. Christian Mission and the Shoah, the Holocaust

Is repentance for a teaching of contempt, as itself a form of approach to the Jewish people, enough? Or might such repentance fall so short of what is required as to be counterproductive? Dare Christians own their complicity for the crimes against humanity which were the Shoah, the Holocaust? Without a shred of doubt, many of those who counsel the principled abandonment of any invitational-mission to the Jewish people start from these questions when they call for a chastened post-Holocaust theology.

One does not need to follow the Eckardts in suggesting that the whole numbering of years should now date from Auschwitz to see merit in this.<sup>57</sup> Hitler’s boast, that he was simply acting in accordance

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<sup>55</sup> Locke, H.G., ‘On Christian Mission to the Jews’ in Rittner et al. (eds.), *The Holocaust and the Christian World*, London, Kuperard, 2000, p. 206. The whole volume is pertinent to this theme.

<sup>56</sup> Gillet, op cit. pp. 189f.

<sup>57</sup> Eckardt and Eckardt use the designations B.F.S. and F.S. to signify Before the Final Solution and Final Solution: Eckardt and Eckardt, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, p. 147.

with Luther's ideology, must be taken with the utmost seriousness.<sup>58</sup> That so many baptised people were involved in every way in Nazism, while others were uncomplaining bystanders, causes serious grounds for reflection on Christianity's right to offer anything to others. Van Buren, for example, writes:

"That some of our outstanding canonized figures of the past should have contributed in this way to the slaughter of one-third of God's beloved people is surely grounds for seeing to it that we come to a right teaching, a real orthodoxy, in this matter, no matter how seriously we depart from what has been said of old."<sup>59</sup>

D'Costa offers a more muted presentation of this position. Whilst retaining a robust defence of a single covenant definitively renewed in Christ, he argues that this no longer necessarily leads to a Christian invitational-mission, as the association of Christianity with coercion, and more specifically with complicity in the Shoah, would render any such mission as theologically unjustifiable. As he expounds:

"Rabbi Abraham Herschel reminds us that history, and especially the history of the Holocaust, shapes Jewish perception of Christian mission: 'To the Jew such an attempt to "convert him" appears as an attack on the very existence of the Jews, a call to self-extinction.' As long as such perceptions validly exist, it would be crass insensitivity to proselytize among the Jews. This is not a pragmatic restraint on mission but one founded on theological grounds. If mission violates the 'psychological freedom' of an individual and suggests 'external coercion', then theologically it is questionable and unjustified. All Jews may not agree with Heschel, but, as long as there is even one voice of protest, Christians must seriously consider the appropriateness of mission to the Jews, in view of the Holocaust."<sup>60</sup>

While this is true, for many this still falls hopelessly short: the actuality of the Holocaust demanding nothing less than the complete rebuilding of any form of mission to the Jewish people. Thus, at the other end of the scale from D'Costa (as it were) is the forceful exposition of Franklin Littell. An American Methodist Minister engaged in the task of de-nazification within the German Protestant Church, Littell sought to uncover the causes of Christian complicity in the Holocaust through continued Christian self-examination. How could baptised Christians have participated in or witnessed such atrocities? The answer, he suggested, was found in a systematic teaching of contempt:

"For centuries Christians have presumed to define *the old Israel, the Hebrews, the Jews, Judaism,* and so forth in ways generally patronizing, contemptuous, or demeaning. The habit began at the theological level among the gentile church fathers, was reinforced at law during the millennium and a half of 'Christendom' and in the modern period has led directly to genocide."<sup>61</sup>

The only response, Littell maintained, was one of *internal* Christian mission, a mission that aimed to render the Church truly Christian:

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<sup>58</sup> For a nuanced reading of Luther and his heritage, see: Huchet-Bishop, Claire, 'Response to John Pawlikowski', in Fleischner, E. (ed.), *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, New York: Ktav Publishing, 1977, pp. 179–190.

<sup>59</sup> Van Buren, *Discerning*, p. 56.

<sup>60</sup> D'Costa, *op cit.* p. 183.

<sup>61</sup> Littell, F.H., *The Crucifixion of the Jews: The Failure of Christians to Understand the Jewish Experience*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Georgia, Mercer University, 1996, p. 1, emphasis original.

“As Alexander Donat, a Jewish survivor, reported the question raised in a Death Camp: ‘How can Christianity survive the discovery that after a thousand years of its being Europe’s official religion, Europe remains pagan at heart?’ That is the key question, and it has not yet been answered because the churches have not yet lifted it up to discussion, prayer and fasting. Therefore, among other things, it is not yet certain that Christianity can survive.”<sup>62</sup>

Only a theological revolution can help, so deep-seated is the problem still:

“Once the human and genteel level is surpassed, the breakdown of basic communication between Jews and Christians still yawns wide. Christians have difficulty in understanding that the passage through the Holocaust to a restored Israel is for the Jewish people comparable to crucifixion and resurrection. And the difficulty is not just blindness toward recent Jewish history; it arises because proud church establishments have no place for either crucifixion or resurrection in their understanding. Jews have difficulty in accepting the thought that the cross might be a sign of ultimate victory because their treatment by the Christians has made it something quite different and immediate; for the Jews, the Christian cross is a sign of crusading slaughter, pogroms, and mass murder.”<sup>63</sup>

A critique would require a close reading which is beyond our scope. Questions would have to include whether antisemitism is unique, and uniquely the source of other hatreds in the way that Littell suggests; whether Christian origins are so essentially bound up with anti-Semitism; and whether his undoubtedly just criticisms of items of Christian teaching merge into a less honourable argument for collective guilt or guilt-by-association. No doubt Christians will hope that the truth lies some way between D’Costa’s caution and Littell’s force.<sup>64</sup>

## 6. Christian Mission and the ‘Gentilisation’ of the Church

Many of the above reformers of Christianity and of mission to the Jewish people have worked on the basis that it is self-evident that the Church is a gentile phenomenon. However, the case that the Church is gentile is more complex than it seems. Firstly, there has never been a time when the Christian Church has been without persons who are ‘ethnically’ or ‘halachically’ Jewish, through conversion. Again paradoxically, it is those who are ethnically but maybe not halachically Jewish who may be more evident, in that their ethnicity will be marked, if only by self-designation. In halachah, one’s Jewishness is determined (if not by authorised conversion to Judaism) by one’s matrilineal ancestry, usually hidden to most of us beyond a couple of generations. Thus there are an unknown and unknowable number of people who are halachically Jewish but whose family and faith are Christian, perhaps for generations. Both ethnic and halachic Jews doubtless form a small minority of the global Church. But they may well be a larger minority than those who define themselves as Jewish

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp. 45f.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 130.

<sup>64</sup> Among the revolutionaries we must include the Eckardts: ‘It is impossible to overcome Christian enmity towards Jews without vanquishing the absolutism of the Christian gospel... If it is the case that the German Nazi *Endlösung* comprises an ultimate incarnation of the church’s teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism, the only way to wage effective war upon this consequence is through a pervasive revolution in Christian doctrine and behavior; involving the most radical surgery and the most radical theological reconstruction.’ Eckardt and Eckardt, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, p. 127.

within the global population (0.3%?). This is not a frivolous point. It means we must be surprisingly and resolutely reticent in our claims, not only about the supposedly ontologically 'gentile' Church, but also about the putative Jewish 'no' to Christ – even to the Church's Christ.

A different point is that, if the Church can authentically claim to be a legitimate development of reflection on the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth – as every Christian must hope it can – then Christians may find that they must insist that Christianity is, theologically, 'a Judaism'. This is of course a theological judgement, not a phenomenological one. It is not likely to impress a sociologist or anthropologist of religion. Neither is it something we should expect Jews who follow Judaism to accept. It is overwhelmingly likely to be a point of real disagreement between us. It is based on what is now recognised concerning Jesus: namely that he was a Torah-observant Jew of his day. He was critical of Temple and other practices, but because of perceived corruption, not a false foundational theology. He cited the Hebrew Scriptures as God's word. He never sought to break with any of this, not even, be it noted, in the resurrection accounts.

That any of this needs articulating is significant and suggests the necessity of addressing the 'gentilisation' of the Church. Briefly, this narrative recalls the staged change from an insistence that *gentiles* within the Church *need* not follow Torah to the equally powerful insistence that *Jews* also *must* not, even in its basic forms (e.g. circumcision, kashrut, shabbat).<sup>65</sup>

While second-century Marcion's proclamation of another God to triumph over the god of the Old Testament was rejected as heresy, this did not settle the question of the Christian relationship to the 'Old Testament' and those 'others' who also clung to it. Ignatius of Antioch (early second century) warned of 'Judaism' within the Church (which might mean 'judaising' gentiles): 'It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and practice Judaism [*ioudaizein*]'<sup>66</sup> he writes, in the first known contrast of 'Judaism' with 'Christianity'. Also from the first or second century comes the *Epistle of Barnabas*. Its author extends the well-established idea that material in the Hebrew Scriptures might be allegorical, stating that apparent laws on kashrut and circumcision (etc.) were always meant to be understood *only* spiritually, but the Jewish people, wrongly, interpreted them physically; thus seeking to delegitimise the whole phenomenon of Judaism as a living practice. Justin Martyr also argued that the prime meaning of the Scriptures, including the law codes, was spiritual. His argument was different, however, namely that the Jewish people had been right to interpret them literally – but as a localised corrective to remedy their hardness of heart. Tellingly, for him, if a Jewish person wished to join the Christian community, they could, but did not need to continue following Jewish practices, though the question is evidently already fraught:

"I say such a man will be saved, unless he exerts every effort to influence other men (I have in mind the Gentiles whom Christ circumcised from all error) to practice the same rights as himself, informing them that they cannot be saved unless they do so... [But] there are some Christians who boldly refuse to have conversation or meals with such persons."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The following overview is indebted to Kinzer, M.S., *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*, Grand Rapids, Brazos, 2005, 187ff. But this should not be understood as endorsing his position on Messianic Judaism.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 193f.

In the *Epistle to Diognetus* (late second century), however, things have moved so far from the plain meaning of the alleged first Christian Testament that the author himself feels free to ridicule the Torah-inspired practices of kashrut, shabbat and festivals.

With the Constantinian settlement, it became harder *in law* for Jewish-Christians to practise Judaism. This movement reached a certain conclusion in Canon 8 of the second Ecumenical Council of Nicea, 787 CE:

“Since certain [people], erring in the superstitions of the Hebrews, have thought to mock at Christ our God, and feigning to be converted to the religion of Christ do deny him, and in private and secretly keep the Sabbath and observe other Jewish customs, we decree that such persons be not received to communion, nor to prayers, nor into the Church; but let them be openly Hebrews according to their religion, and let them not bring their children to baptism, nor purchase nor possess a slave. But if any of them, out of a sincere heart and in faith, is converted and makes profession with his whole heart, setting at naught their customs and observances, and so that others may be convinced and converted, such an one is to be received and baptized, and his children likewise; and let them be taught to take care to hold aloof from the ordinances of the Hebrews. But if they will not do this, let them in no wise be received.”<sup>68</sup>

This progression needs demonstrating at some length, so that it becomes clear that the Jewish non-acceptance of the Church's (and Empire's) claims about Jesus as Messiah/Christ means different things in different contexts. What it meant to Paul, in, arguably, his personal-existential agonies as recorded in Romans 9–11, is radically other than what it would have meant to a synagogue member at the close of the second century and beyond. By this time, it was a 'no' (either explicit or more often implicit) to a form of life which would have denied the central aspects of Torah-faithfulness. It denied Jewishness as a form of life altogether. It required Jews to disassociate themselves from their Judaism, a way of life which Jesus himself had practised (although perhaps in a different mode, given the realities of historical development).<sup>69</sup>

This means that there are plausible theological grounds for Christians to argue that, at least from the late second century on, there was only one way for a Jew to be faithful to the way of life which the Jew Jesus thought was proper for his fellow Jews. That way was to reject the Church's claims and embrace those of the rabbis. Additionally, but no less importantly, it might also be said that for a Jew to reject Judaism – which is what Christianity now required – is to introduce a psychological and spiritual disturbance which can almost never lead to spiritual health and growth, but rather encourages a sense of rootlessness and confusion, if not the guilt of betrayal. This claim, be it noted, stands even before any mention of the real-life history of Christian contempt, oppression and worse, over and against Jews, although that history is undoubtedly also psychologically powerful in itself, not least to our post-Shoah generations.

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<sup>68</sup> Cited in *ibid*, p. 209.

<sup>69</sup> An interesting variation of this claim is found in Yoder. Writing from a pacifist-Anabaptist perspective, he adds to this argument that the rabbinic eschewal of coercive power in the wider world effectively keeps rabbinic religion closer to Jesus than the church. Cf. Cartwright and Ochs, *op cit*. pp. 81f.

A large part of the motivation for Parkes' work was his own realisation of how harmful the mission to the Jewish people had been to those who had embraced it. The effects were often corrupting, both to the missionaries and to any 'successfully' missionised Jews:

“When we examine the record of the missions to the Jews, there are two facts which appear to me even more significant than their extremely limited success. The first is that I do not believe there is any other activity of the Church in which good men from deeply religious motives have done such wicked things...

Nor can we shelter ourselves by the comforting belief that all these things happened a long time ago. In our own day [1940's] we can witness the complacent attitude of certain missions to the enticement of children away from their parents which has earned no general condemnation from the Churches.<sup>70</sup>

It remains true that the greatest traitors to the Jewish people throughout their history have been Jews who have professed the Christian religion, and have been supported by the Christian Churches in the libels they have issued.”<sup>71</sup>

Here then is an argument worthy of consideration in its own right, based not on biblical exegesis or dogmatic theology on covenant etc, but rather on the assertion that Church history has contained within itself a tragedy from its earliest days. Whilst existing as a synthesis of some Jewish and some gentile persons, and whilst being able to claim that it is not ridiculous to see Christianity as, ultimately, 'a Judaism', it has yet denied both. It has allowed itself – or willed itself – to gain a 'gentilised' self-presentation. And once this tragedy or distortion – or some would doubtless argue creative paradox – has set in, then the case for invitational mission to the Jewish people is necessarily undermined. This position would stress that, in as much as the Church is gentilised, only the community which follows Judaism forms the 'Israel' God willed into existence.

## I. Christian Mission and the Future?

**Uniqueness.** The case that Judaism and Jewry are *sui generis* for Christians who take biblical revelation seriously could be challenged. But, in as much as the rabbinic case to *be Israel* is strong, it must have abiding import for any (among them, all Christians) who would worship the Unique One revealed as the God of Israel. But all claims to be 'Israel' need careful testing. The argument will always be cumulative, rather than logically watertight.

Christians who want to make simple definitive claims about Jews and Judaism must recognise that often, if not always, they will be making covert choices about what counts as Judaism (and therefore who is a Jew). There many who make claim to being the true inheritors of the Jewish way, including Samaritans, Karaite Jews, Rastafarians, Mormons, as well as Rabbinic Jews and some Christians, as discussed above. Even within the world of Rabbinic Judaism, there are different definitions (Chassidic,

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<sup>70</sup> Parkes, J., *Judaism and Christianity*, p. 169. Parkes has just noted (p. 168) that Jewish persons as such may enquire after membership of the Church and, if so, should be received hospitably. His opposition is to deliberate invitational-missionary endeavours.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Liberal, Reconstructionist, Humanist etc.). Some consider other forms to be inauthentic. To point this out is not mere pedantry. To affirm one form of Judaism in one setting, as an authentic outworking of the covenant, is to make a claim which other followers of Judaism will find misleading or even heretical.

This does not make all such affirmation impossible. It simply means that it will always (or for as long as there is no consensus among the Jewish community) need to be qualified. When we affirm, we must say something like: 'in as much as the Judaism you describe is true to the original charism of Israel – which I cannot ultimately judge, though I can hope it with considerable confidence – I have Christian grounds to affirm it'. Even then, while it is important to reflect on the question of the uniqueness of Judaism, when it is affirmed, it will always lead to a further question: whether this calls for a unique invitational mission or a unique refusal.

**Covenant.** Any Christian student of the New Testament (and what Christian is not?) will have to ponder the nature of the new/renewed covenant. Certainly, a blessing of our days is that there is arguably an emerging consensus that the covenant at Sinai (and with Abraham) has not been revoked. God does not abandon his own. But I have suggested, and here insist, that this claim in isolation is much less helpful to our questioning than it at first seems. In itself, it does not *logically* mean that, in this period, after the First and before the Second Coming of the Messiah, anything outside the community honouring Christ authentically bears the mark of the covenant. But, as covenant-bearing is at least as much a burden borne on behalf of others as a blessing, even if it were as 'bad' as that, this would not necessarily require a mission to the Jewish people. Why not let Jews enjoy their freedom from this particular burden?

**Messiah.** Are Jews and Christians partners, sharing one messianic hope? Undoubtedly, an ultimate global or indeed cosmic hope is shared. But, if the qualifier 'messianic' is to have real content, rather than simply standing for 'something in an unimagined future', then this is a point of departure. Christians could, however, more readily admit that the claim that Jesus is the Messiah is not obvious. Indeed, it is difficult: we offer a paradoxical, indeed a tragic Messiah. We offer an austere messianism in some ways, proclaiming that we have already received the only Messiah we are going to get.<sup>72</sup> In any event, we should not impute ill-will to any individual – Jewish or other – who cannot follow this as an argument. Any urgent invitational mission based on a residual desire to rid Jews of their 'blindness' must therefore be dropped, immediately.

**Repentance for Contempt and Worse.** Arguably, it will still take a considerable theological overhaul to rid Christianity of its teaching of contempt. To focus our energies on this task rather than invitational mission would be right and proper. To get this right is assuredly the work of generations. How important is Christian complicity in the Shoah in this? It is striking that even those who describe the Shoah as 'revelation' often end up claiming that it only brought horrifically to light what had always been the case. In this, Roy Eckardt's criticism of Rolf Rendtorff is exemplary:

"The Christian endeavour to evangelise Jews is not in order in a post-*Shoah* world, yet if it is out of order, as Rendtorff maintains, not because of the *Shoah* but upon the abiding

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<sup>72</sup> Naturally, the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus makes this joyful also. But 'even' this does not count as direct evidence that the messianic age has concretely come, which is where Rabbinic Judaism begins.

theological principle that the church has not superseded Israel, then plainly it was out of order throughout the pre-*Shoah* centuries and accordingly its impropriety today has nothing of substance to do with the *Shoah*-event.<sup>73</sup>

## 2. Conclusions

If there is to be a Christian mission to 'the Jews' (over and above a warm pastoral response to Jewish seekers), it must be based on a theological understanding of the Jewish people, as, in some senses at the very least, the Israel of the Bible's promises and election (even if joined by another *de facto* Israel, known as the Church). But what is emerging here, is to the extent that the followers of Judaism are still 'Israel' in God's eyes, the Church has no particular wisdom to impart to Israel. To that extent, we might say that Israel is the people of divinely inspired faith, outside the Church. Alternatively and more complexly, Israel could be seen as the people of faith always linked essentially-mystically to the Church, but also separated from the Church phenomenologically-historically. As such, Israel is never readily intelligible to the Church, even the Church at its most wise, holy and open. If 'Israel' is 'Israel', it possesses its own vocation, which Christians disturb or disrupt to the peril of both.

This does not necessarily rule out any sense of Christian mission. But based on a theologically grounded confidence that God has spoken to Israel, authentically – that God *speaks* here authentically – in tones different from those God shares with the Church (in as much as the premise here is right) mission must take the form of service, prayer and a singularly active listening. Given these premises (challengeable though they be), what further 'mission' could there be?

None of the above is exhaustive. This writer would claim that it is out of the ongoing dialogue between Jews and Christians that new life will come, which will lead to a richer and deeper understanding of the interrelationship between the two communities. This understanding would clarify – or gloriously complicate yet further – the questions we are facing. In this respect, mention may be made of the emerging praxis of Scriptural Reasoning,<sup>74</sup> a process that is currently enabling an engagement with the Scriptures we share (and those which divide us), and goes helpfully beyond any question of (say) the number of covenants that there may be.<sup>75</sup>

In all of this it remains a commonplace trope to see Judaism and Christianity as sibling rivals (certainly, we are more 'siblings' than we are 'parent and child'). And yet the Bible has much to say about how painful and real such a rivalry can be. But there is also hope precisely here. Real-life siblings often, in one way or another, compete for the attention of real-life parents. Yet, if God is God, as we both hold God to be God, we are in no sense competing for God's loving attention. Ridding ourselves of the illusion that God's electing love is a scarce resource for which we compete must surely be an impressive form of Christian mission in its own right.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Eckardt, A.R., 'Is There a Mission to the Jews?' in Williamson, C., *Mutual Witness*, St. Louis, Chalice Press, 1992, p. 69.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Ochs, P., and D. Ford, 'The Third Epoch: The Future of Discourse in Jewish Christian Relations', in Aitken, James and Kessler, Edward, *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations*, Mahwah, Stimulus, 2006, pp. 153–170.

<sup>75</sup> Part of the glorious complication is that Scriptural Reasoning is often a 'trialogue' with Jews, Christians and Muslims.

<sup>76</sup> Or, in as much as this analysis is right, it is a form of mutual and common witness. On the theologies of scarcity and abundance, see: Wells, S., *Power and Passion: Six Characters in Search of Resurrection*, Michigan, Zondervan, 2007, p. 21 et passim.

Christians need not look for an essential definition of Judaism, before they assess whether there can be an invitational mission to the Jewish people. The above suggests that finding any putative Jewish 'essence' will cause as many theological problems as it seeks to solve, whether it relates to 'covenant' or 'community' or 'messianic hope' or another theologoumenon. But, overall, can Christians really deny that they see in Judaism, in Wittgenstein's memorable phrase, a 'family likeness'? It is not that we are the same; we are not twins! Nevertheless, there is a nexus of concerns and convictions, where we do not exactly have things in common, but where the material may be 'common-enough'. Salient among these are:

- the Scriptures we draw upon;
- our anthropology, proclaiming that human beings are in the 'image of God' and our ethics, determined by this understanding;<sup>77</sup>
- our shared heritage of belief in the resurrection from the dead (which, seen existentially rather than abstractly, underlines the idea that it is this mortal life that has eternal value);
- our doctrine of God, as able to 'speak', to be an agent in the world co-operating with human beings, leaving some things to human communities, and our claim that this enhances rather than diminishes God's transcendence;
- our understanding that corporate worship at its best is strengthened and not strangled by 'set' liturgies;
- a series of beliefs which rationalists may consider decorative but which perhaps are not, such as a belief in angels.

Even when we clearly differ, there is a fascination which we Christians (at least) cannot drop (and this too may turn out to be mutual). So I do not believe I abandon reason in the name of personal preference if I nail my colours to the mast by saying that I for one do not want to see a successful invitational mission to the Jewish people. I am passionately fascinated by this living other, so alien and so familiar at once. I hold that I and my coreligionists have much to learn from their vital presence. Indeed, making Lionel Blue's motif my own, let me say: I am in love!<sup>78</sup>

## I. A Personal Coda on Christian Mission

'But what of evangelism?' a friend has been asking throughout the time we have been thinking of mission and Jewish-Christian particularity. 'Here is the hard bit. Is there not some over-sophisticated obfuscation in talk of mission as *missio Dei*, or covenantal theology, and all the rest? I am brought alive by my experience of the Spirit, drawing me to love Christ. How can I not want to share that with others, as the most important thing in my life?' I have struggled to respond.

Perhaps our temperaments are different. Perhaps our biographies, in that I did not have one overpowering conversion experience, which I could effectively isolate and say 'others must come to know precisely *this*'. I am also aware that no two Christians, and certainly no two Christian groupings,

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<sup>77</sup> This is not to forget that for many Jews it is the people rather than God that is the organising principle. But, even for such, Israel remains a 'worshipping' and a 'God-discussing' people. I say again that here I am setting out areas somewhat in common, not a common essence.

<sup>78</sup> Blue, L., *My Affair with Christianity*, 2nd edition, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1999.

share the same experiences. Must Christians spend their lives 'evangelising' each other, lest their sisters and brothers are missing out on the heart of things?

Over and above all such questions, there is the bedrock conviction that God is loving. God loves the whole of humankind as it is, and is involved with us all. And God is faithful. Moreover, God, being God, is greater than the collective wisdom and pious imagination of the Church, even at its wisest and most holy. The same can be said of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Neither the Trinity nor the Persons of the Trinity is the possession of the Church.

To my friend, I must ask about the experience of 'non-Christians', who tell movingly of their knowledge of gracious intimacy with God. Must their experience be in all respects a different order of thing from his own? If he claims that it is, that claim is not itself the direct result of his intense experience (how could it be?), but of the theology he has developed around it. So testing its veracity requires the very theological discernment which is allegedly so troublesome.

I am also reminded of another friend, who, if asked whether he is a Christian, replies: 'If my life does not give the answer, I cannot think what my words would add'. The Christian life is lived, perhaps, between the exuberance of the first and the humility of the second friend. Its centre is the conviction that the one who calls is faithful, and that the one who calls is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and remains the God of Israel.

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# INSTITUTIONAL STATEMENTS CONCERNING 'MISSION'

Daniel Langton

A good number of institutional or representative statements concerning the relationship between Christians and Jews and their respective faiths have been published in the past few decades. Among the many issues raised, 'mission', in the sense of conversion, remains one of the most contentious. Of course, the related words Witness, Conversion, Ministry, Evangelization and Proselytisation can mean very different things to different people and a wide variety of perspectives on the subject can be found in the documents. Such institutional statements often reflect subtle (and not-so-subtle) differences in terms of: how to define oneself religiously, how Christianity is understood to relate to the Jewish people and vice versa, how scripture and tradition should be interpreted, the extent to which ecclesiastical or rabbinical authority should be accommodated, and how, if at all, the lessons of the often troubled history of Jewish-Christian relations might be applied. One might have expected the issue to be more highly contested among Protestants than among Catholics, bearing in mind the surge of interest among Protestants in institutional proselytisation of the Jews in the nineteenth-century and the energy of many contemporary Evangelical Protestants today; yet if one considers a broad spectrum of denominations, the differences between the views expressed in Catholic and Protestant statements are not dramatic, no doubt because the fundamental theological considerations are largely shared. Similarly, one might have expected a wholly negative reaction among Jews to the idea of mission (commonly assumed to be a *Christian* concern) but, as we shall see, this is not the whole story since Jewish theologians have also engaged with the language of mission and witness in relation both to the people of Israel and to the wider non-Jewish world.

How important are institutional or representative statements? On the one hand, they are of great importance, for they not only represent the 'official' policy of the institution or representative group but are, by their very nature, to be valued as the product of long study and extensive consultation. On the other hand, one should not exaggerate the impact of such pronouncements upon the faith communities, for the resolutions of the national and international leaders are not always effectively transformed into practical policy or communicated to the laity with the due care and attention that might have been hoped for. And one should also bear in mind that, not infrequently, their claim to speak on behalf of a particular faith community will be challenged. What follows is by no means a comprehensive survey of such statements,<sup>1</sup> but rather a loosely chronological selection of excerpts of some of the more important contributions to an on-going debate that has been, and continues to be, of vital significance for Jewish-Christian relations.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the absence of statements by the Orthodox Christian churches on the subject is mainly due to their relative lack of interest in Jewish-Christian relations more generally. The exceptions to the rule include the occasional joint interreligious statements known as 'Academic Meetings Between Orthodox Christianity and Judaism', several of which very briefly and somewhat indirectly address the issues that relate to conversion and a shared sense of mission.

The issue of mission to the Jews has become a pressing topic for many within the Christian churches ever since the publication of that major statement of Catholic-Jewish relations, '**Nostra Aetate**' ('In Our Time', 1965). This spoke of 'a spiritual patrimony common to Jews and Christians' and of a desire to 'foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues.' It also asserted that 'the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the call He issues'.<sup>2</sup> The document did not address the issue of mission directly and, following a sharp condemnation of anti-Semitism, ended with an expression of belief in salvation through Christ's death and of the obligation of the Church to preach its Gospel, sentiments that carry heavy import in a statement that sought to define Catholic-Jewish relations.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as we shall see, many have seen it as heralding a new kind of relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and some have derived from it a conviction that the continuation of organized conversionary efforts would undermine the intended rapprochement and is entirely inappropriate in the light of the Second Vatican Council's commitment to religious freedom. In fact the '**Guidelines**' that the Vatican issued in 1974 in order to clarify how '**Nostra Aetate**' was to be implemented within the Church, appeared to make such understandings more explicit.

"Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is; above all, respect for his faith and his religious convictions... Lest the witness of Catholics to Jesus Christ should give offence to Jews, they must take care to live and spread their Christian faith while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty..."<sup>4</sup>

The '**Guidelines**' also hinted at what might be perceived as a common mission for the two faith communities when it expressed a hope that 'In the spirit of the prophets, Jews and Christians will work willingly together, seeking social justice and peace at every level – local, national and international.'<sup>5</sup>

For some Christians, the prickly issue of how they should relate to Jews could be resolved by a commitment to interfaith dialogue, which made conversion besides the point. '**Recommendations on Jewish-Christian Relations**', which was issued in 1977 by the World Council of Churches, a multi-denominational collection of Christian groups (excluding Roman Catholics), provides an ecumenical example.<sup>6</sup>

"Historical developments [i.e. the phenomenon of anti-Semitism and the resurgence of the Jewish people] would by themselves suggest the necessity for a review on the part of the Church of its traditional attitude of proselytism. Christians, however, have been facing

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<sup>2</sup> '**Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions**', Second Vatican Council (28 October 1965), No.4.

<sup>3</sup> '[A]s the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.' Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> '**Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate"**' (n. 4), section I (Dialogue). Commission for the Catholic Church's Religious Relations with the Jews (1974).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., section IV (Joint Social Action).

<sup>6</sup> For another statement from the WCC, see: '**Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue**', 4.6. World Council of Churches (16 July 1982).

the challenge and demands of religious pluralism by a new way of relating to Other Faiths epitomized by dialogue. Meeting in dialogue is more radical than renewing academic interest in comparative religions or merely updating traditional attitudes and approaches. It demands respect at a deeper level and acceptance of the integrity of the faith of the other.”<sup>7</sup>

A slightly earlier document with similar concerns had been drafted by the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, whose members had been reflecting on their collective guilt for the churches’ moral failings at the time of the Third Reich. In **‘Towards Renovation’** (1980)<sup>8</sup> an explicit acknowledgement was made that the Jewish people represented a special case when it came to matters of proselytism, and that a more productive form of interaction lay in a common witness to the Creator and a common mission to promote social justice.

“We believe that in their calling Jews and Christians are always witnesses of God in the presence of the world and before each other. Therefore we are convinced that the church may not express its witness towards the Jewish people as it does its mission to the peoples of the world... As we are turning around we begin to discover what Christians and Jews both give witness to: We both confess God as the creator of heaven and earth, and know that we are singled out in the ordinary life of the world by the same God by means of the blessing of Aaron. We confess the common hope in a new heaven and a new earth and the power of this messianic hope for the witness and work of Christians and Jews for justice and peace in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

Of course, such calls for radical revisions of traditional attitudes and practices have provoked strong reactions among some Christians. One example of the kind of response offered by conservatives was the Evangelical statement known as **‘The Willowbank Declaration’** (1989), published by a consortium of North American Evangelical Protestants. It condemned those church leaders who had ‘retreated from embracing the task of evangelizing Jews as a responsibility of Christian mission’. It looked forward to the fulfillment of biblical prophecies concerning the conversion of the Jews, and accepted that professed Christians had viciously abused Jews in the past, without in either case surrendering the Christian’s duty to evangelize the Jew. The idea of interfaith dialogue, that is, the attempt ‘to understand each other better’ and to foster ‘cooperation in the quest for socio-economic shalom’ was viewed as an entirely inadequate conception of Christian mission. As the Declaration had it:

“WE AFFIRM THAT the Bible promises that large numbers of Jews will turn to Christ through God’s sovereign grace. WE DENY THAT this prospect renders needless the active proclamation of the gospel to Jewish people in this and every age... WE AFFIRM THAT anti-Semitism on the part of professed Christians has always been wicked and shameful and that the church has in the past been much to blame for tolerating and encouraging it and for condoning anti-Jewish actions on the part of individuals and governments. WE DENY THAT

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Guidelines/Recommendations on Jewish-Christian Relations’, 4. World Council of Churches Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People, 3rd revised text of the British Working Group (1977).

<sup>8</sup> For a North American parallel, which sets out a comprehensive list of manifestations of ‘unwarranted proselytism’, see: ‘Dialogue: A Contemporary Alternative to Proselytization’. A Statement of the Texas Conference of Churches: Jewish-Christian Relations (1982).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Toward Renovation of the Relationship of Christians and Jews’, 4:6–8. The Synod of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland (1980).

these past failures, for which offending Gentile believers must ask forgiveness from both God and the Jewish community, rob Christians of the right or lessen their responsibility to share the Gospel with Jews today and for the future. . . WE AFFIRM THAT dialogue with other faiths that seeks to transcend stereotypes of them based on ignorance, and to find common ground and to share common concerns, is an expression of Christian love that should be encouraged. WE DENY THAT dialogue that explains the Christian faith without seeking to persuade the dialogue partners of its truth and claims is a sufficient expression of Christian love.”<sup>10</sup>

While such a reaction to progressive developments within Jewish-Christian relations represents the more extreme end of the spectrum,<sup>11</sup> there was (and remains) a widespread concern or confusion among many Christians about how to reconcile new ideas of a shared mission with Jews with more traditional, universalistic conceptions of mission, if this was indeed possible or even desirable. By 1985 the Catholic Church had returned to the debate with '**Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church**'. The authors, who did not mention conversion or proselytism, acknowledged that historically the people of Israel had been able 'to carry to the whole world a witness – often heroic – of its fidelity to the one God.'<sup>12</sup> They were also able to reaffirm the possibilities for a shared mission of sorts, once again focused on the shared commitment to social justice.

“Attentive to the same God who has spoken, hanging on the same word, we have to witness to one same memory and one common hope in Him who is the master of history. We must also accept our responsibility to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah by working together for social justice, respect for the rights of persons and nations and for social and international reconciliation. To this we are driven, Jews and Christians, by the command to love our neighbour, by a common hope for the kingdom of God and by the great heritage of the Prophets. Transmitted soon enough by catechesis [oral instruction], such a conception would teach young Christians in a practical way cooperate with Jews, going beyond simple dialogue.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet 'Notes' also made it clear that such ideas left unaffected any conception of the 'divine mission' of the Church as “the all-embracing means of salvation” in which alone “the fullness of the means of salvation” can be obtained.' It emphasized that 'Church and Judaism cannot then be seen as two parallel ways of salvation and the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all.'<sup>14</sup> In this, the statement seems to have been intended to clarify some of the possible misconceptions that might have been read into the Roman Catholic Church's previous statements, and to address the fears of those who saw any accommodation or revision of traditional attitudes or practices towards the Jews as threatening to their own Christian self-identity.

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<sup>10</sup> 'The Willowbank Declaration', articles III:16, III:17 and V:25. World Evangelical Fellowship of Wheaton, Illinois (1989).

<sup>11</sup> For a more extreme example of a conservative Evangelical approach, see: 'Christian Witness to the Jewish People', I (Why go to the Jews?). Lausanne Occasional Paper 7, Mini-Consultation on Reaching Jewish People, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (1980).

<sup>12</sup> 'Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church' VI:1. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (June 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., II:11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., I:7.

The Church of England has also struggled to balance the internal debates and tensions about what it means to be a Christian in a multi-faith society. The 1988 Lambeth conference of Anglican bishops saw the publication of a statement entitled '**Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue**'. In addition to repudiating 'all proselytising, that is, aggressive and manipulative attempts to convert', the authors asserted the ideas of a shared social mission and of dialogue as a form of witness.

"Christians and Jews share one hope, which is for the realisation of God's Kingdom on earth. Together they wait for it, pray for it and prepare for it. This Kingdom is nothing less than human life and society transformed, transfigured and transparent to the glory of God... Jews, Muslims and Christians have a common mission. They share a mission to the world that God's name may be honoured: 'Hallowed be your name.' They share a common obligation to love God with their whole being and their neighbours as themselves. 'Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.' And in the dialogue there will be mutual witness. Through learning from one another each will enter more deeply into their own inheritance. Each will recall the other to God, to trust him more fully and obey him more profoundly. This will be a mutual witness between equal partners..."<sup>15</sup>

This statement was followed up in 1994 with '**Christians and Jews: A New Way of Thinking**', a joint Jewish and Christian report by the Churches' Commission for Interfaith Relations, and in 2001 with the resource '**Sharing One Hope?**' (2001), which was written as an in-house reflection upon Church of England perspectives on the subject. It is worth reproducing in full the section of 'Sharing One Hope' that was dedicated to the complicated question of 'Christian Mission and Jewish People', since it usefully highlights the key fault-lines within the worldwide Anglican community:

"Christian 'mission' in relation to Jewish people has traditionally been thought of in terms of attempts to persuade them to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Such attempts have generally met with strenuous opposition from Jewish religious and community leaders. Contemporary Christian views about the possibility, morality, or wisdom of such missions 'to' Jews are very diverse; the three positions identified below are all represented within the Church of England today. At the same time, a broader and holistic understanding of the meaning of mission opens for Christians the possibility of discerning a mission 'with' Jews to the world as a sharing in the work of God's kingdom, though it would have to be recognized that most Jews would feel uncomfortable with the language of 'mission' in this context. There is also a very considerable range of opinion among Christians about the relation of proclamation to dialogue within the overall context of a holistic view of mission. Some see dialogue as the only appropriate context where witness to Christian faith can be made, while others distinguish proclamation and dialogue as distinct activities. There is a consensus among Christians, however, that it is wrong to use dialogue covertly as a cloak for proselytising.

i) Some within the Church of England today feel that it is not appropriate for Christians to believe that they have any kind of 'mission to Jews'. Often this view is based on a particular theological understanding of God's covenant with the Jewish people. Many further believe that Christian responsibility for the 'teaching of contempt', and therefore for anti-Judaism and

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<sup>15</sup> 'Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue', 14, 27. Report of the Dogmatic and Pastoral Section Lambeth Conference (1988).

antisemitism down the centuries, makes it unthinkable for Christians to seek to persuade Jews to change their minds about Jesus and 'become Christians'. The point is also strongly made that conversionist endeavours of this kind can destroy the foundations of trust between Christians and Jews, and so adversely affect the development of dialogue and cooperation which should be the imperative in Jewish–Christian relations. Christians should think in terms of 'a common mission' with Jews, in the sense that 'they share a mission to the world that God's name may be honoured, a common obligation to love God with their whole being and their neighbours as themselves'.

ii) Others feel that it is entirely appropriate that Christians who establish relationships of genuine friendship and trust with Jews should continue to see these relationships in the context of Christian mission. In open and frank dialogue they see no reason why Christians should not seek to share their beliefs about Jesus with Jews, provided they do so with genuine respect and sensitivity and carefully listen to what their Jewish friends have to share. There is no place, however, for special 'targeting' of Jews, still less for methods involving any kind of coercion or manipulation. In the history of our tragic past, the priority today must be to establish a new, constructive relationship with the Jewish people; this will mean trying to understand Judaism from a Jewish point of view, affirming common ground, but also sharing our most deeply held convictions even where this entails disagreement. Within this general understanding, some Christians find it possible to think in terms of both a common mission shared by Christians and Jews and a distinctive mission of Christians towards Jews. However, it is not evident that the possibility of such a position would be recognized by most Jewish people.

iii) Yet others feel that Christians have a responsibility to try to convince Jews about Jesus as Messiah. This stems from the desire that they should become Jesus' disciples. Some would go further and say that, on the basis of Paul's conviction about the need to bring the gospel 'to the Jew first, and also to the Greek' (Romans 1.16), Christians have a special responsibility to evangelize Jews in particular; and this is likely to require special approaches directed to the Jewish community and taking account of their particular context and history. Jewish community leaders have expressed particularly vigorous objections to this approach, which is that generally promoted by Messianic Jewish believers. It should be noted that in 1992 the Archbishop of Canterbury, in declining an invitation to be Patron of the Church's Ministry among Jewish People distanced himself from mission organizations entirely directed towards specific other faith communities. Among those committed to evangelism among Jewish people there is considerable debate about the appropriateness of particular forms of mission; CMJ, for example, have published their own 'Code of Practice' in this area."<sup>16</sup>

In comparison to the Christian world, public declarations made from within the Jewish community on the subject of Jewish-Christian relations are relatively rare. Although it has been a long time coming, the first broadly representative Jewish statement, '**Dabru Emet**' ('Speak Truth'), was published in 2000. In their consideration of the issue of conversion and the vexed question of religious truth, the signatories, an inter-denominational group of scholars, carefully maintained the lines of separation between the religious systems.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Sharing One Hope? The Church of England and Christian-Jewish Relations, A Contribution to a Continuing Debate', 4. The Archbishop's Council, Church of England (2001).

“The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture. Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition. That difference will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other; nor by exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians’ faithfulness to their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.”<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, the idea that Jews and Christians possess a sense of shared social mission to humankind, a sentiment frequently expressed in the Christian statements, was warmly welcomed.

“Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace. Jews and Christians, each in their own way, recognize the unredeemed state of the world as reflected in the persistence of persecution, poverty, and human degradation and misery. Although justice and peace are finally God’s, our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our world. In this enterprise, we are guided by the vision of the prophets of Israel.”<sup>18</sup>

The document was self-consciously written in response to widespread public Christian acknowledgement of guilt for the historical mistreatment of Jews and Judaism, and to the corresponding attempt of many Christian denominations to reform their teaching and preaching. Dialogue was presented as the development of a new relationship based, at least in part, on the recognition that Jews and Christians ‘worshipped the same God’, sought authority from the same book, the Bible, and accepted the same moral principles of the Torah, especially the belief that humankind was created in the image of the Creator.<sup>19</sup> Sensitive to Jewish fears, the authors insisted that such dialogue would not lead to ‘a false blending of Judaism and Christianity’, nor would it ‘persuade more Jews to convert to Christianity’.<sup>20</sup>

Soon after, in 2002, another remarkable document appeared. ‘**Reflections on Covenant and Mission**’ was jointly published by representative groups of North American Catholic bishops and rabbis; the two groups offered separate ‘reflections’ side by side.<sup>21</sup> The Jewish section began by articulating for Judaism a ‘three-fold mission’. The first mission was that of Covenant, that is, ensuring the continuity of the Jewish community which was ‘the physical embodiment of God’s covenant’; this covenant was understood both in physical terms, relating to the People and the Land of Israel, and in spiritual terms since it involved ‘walking in His ways’.<sup>22</sup> The second was that of Witness, that is, to proclaim certain

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity’, 6. National Jewish Scholars Project (2000).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 2, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> A scathing official Church critique would be offered seven years later: ‘A Note on Ambiguities Contained in Reflections on Covenant and Mission’, 1 and 2. Committee on Doctrine and Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (18 June 2009).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Reflections on Covenant and Mission’, Jewish sub-section on ‘The Mission of Covenant’. Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues and the Bishops’ Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Committee (12 August 2002).

theological truths including God as the creator and the power of His redemptive love, 'the witness of God who redeems His people.'<sup>23</sup> The third was that of Humanity, that is, the task of perfecting or repairing the world in partnership with God, especially with regard to social justice. As they put it,

"Therefore, in Judaism, the absolute value of human beings, their creation in the divine image, as well as God's overriding concern for justice and mercy is at the basis of a universal joint community of the created, a community called to respond to the love of God by loving other human beings, by setting up the structures of society that maximize the practice of justice and mercy and by engaging unendingly in the religious quest to bring healing to the broken world... *L'taken olam b'malkhut Shaddai*, to perfect the world into the Kingdom of the Almighty. *Tikun ha-olam*, perfection or repairing of the world, is a joint task of the Jews and all humanity. Though Jews see themselves as living in a world that is as yet unredeemed, God wills His creatures to participate in the world's repair."<sup>24</sup>

The Catholic section of 'Reflections on Covenant and Mission' presented itself as a natural development of previous Catholic statements, and controversially and unequivocally called for the ending of missionary activities among the Jews. The rationale given was based on the premises that Christianity has an utterly unique relationship with Judaism, and that Christianity and Judaism each have a distinctive, divinely-ordained mission. On the one hand 'This mission of the Church can be summarized in one word: evangelization... It is the Church's continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ, who embodied the life of the kingdom of God.' Such evangelization was said to include 'the Church's activities of presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; Christian worship, prayer, and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and proclamation and catechesis.'<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, interreligious dialogue was defined as a way of engaging in the Church's mission. On the other hand,

"According to Roman Catholic teaching, both the Church and the Jewish people abide in covenant with God. We both therefore have missions before God to undertake in the world. The Church believes that the mission of the Jewish people is not restricted to their historical role as the people of whom Jesus was born "according to the flesh" (Rom 9:5) and from whom the Church's apostles came."<sup>26</sup>

While it was left for Jews to articulate precisely what the Jewish mission entailed, nonetheless 'the Church does perceive that the Jewish people's mission *ad gentes* (to the nations) continues.' And, went on the Catholic authors, while the Church also understands that it has a mission to preach to the wider world, the logic of the stated principles inevitably led them to the conclusion that 'this evangelizing task no longer includes the wish to absorb the Jewish faith into Christianity and so end the distinctive witness of Jews to God in human history.'<sup>27</sup>

That same year a statement was released that was in effect a North American Christian parallel to the multi-authored Jewish scholarly statement 'Dabru Emet'. It was entitled '**A Sacred Obligation**'

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 'The Mission of Witness'.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 'The Mission of Humanity'.

<sup>25</sup> 'Reflections on Covenant and Mission', Christian sub-section on 'The Mission of the Church: Evangelization'. Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues and the Bishops' Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Committee (12 August 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., section on 'Evangelization and the Jewish People'.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

and boasted both Protestant and Catholic signatories. It, too, argued that Christians should no longer regard Jews as being in need of salvation, and thus should not target them for conversionary activities. Rather, drawing upon the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*, it called for a sense of solidarity that would, among other things, work for justice in post 9/11 world.<sup>28</sup>

Such liberal attitudes towards mission are self-evident to many of those active within the interfaith community. For example, the Council of Christians and Jews in a short position statement in 2008 ('**Mission, Evangelism and Proselytising**') laid out the practical requirements for dialogue, explaining that 'In order to provide a "safe space" for dialogue where Jews and Christians can meet together in a spirit of trust, CCJ does not tolerate the use of its meetings, seminars or literature for the purposes of proselytisation' (defined as 'aggressive and manipulative attempts to convert'). Although there was recognition that sometimes some individuals may 'cross boundaries', members of the CCJ were described as making "'journeys of faith" within our own traditions' and the focus was firmly on 'serving others and witnessing to their faith through deeds and dialogue'.<sup>29</sup>

One of the most comprehensive statements on the subject of mission, also written from an interfaith perspective, is that of a joint discussion group of Jews and Christians, published in 2009 under the auspices of the Central Committee of German Catholics. '**No to Mission, Yes to Dialogue Between Jews and Christians**' set out the arguments from both Jewish and Christian perspectives. The authors had felt obliged to write their statement in order to assuage any concerns that 'the Catholic Church is open again to a mission to the Jews' following Pope Benedict XVI's amendments to the Good Friday Prayer in 2008. The Jewish participants were laudatory about the radically positive shift in relations between Jews and Christians with 'Nostra Aetate' (1965), which they interpreted as having made Christian mission to the Jews impossible, but went on to express their concern that Benedict XVI appeared to be reverting to a pre-Vatican II assumption of the Jewish need for salvation through Christ.

"From the Jewish perspective, there are two ways of interpreting this new Good Friday Prayer:

- If the prayer is to be interpreted that we Jews here and today should recognize Jesus as the Messiah, then the basis for the Catholic-Jewish dialogue is destroyed. This would throw us back decades into the time before the Second Vatican Council.
- If the Church defers this hope to the end of times and combines it with a clear rejection of the mission to the Jews... then this would be a significant release of tension. Nonetheless, the impression remains that Judaism in the eyes of the Church may not be a fully valid way of salvation. If this impression persists, the prerequisites for dialogue and unselfconscious dialogue are in danger of no longer being met.

From the Jewish perspective, the only acceptable form of the Good Friday Prayer is thus the version from 1970, in which the decision regarding how and when God saves the whole of Israel rests with God alone."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> 'A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People'. Statement by the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations (1 Sept 2002).

<sup>29</sup> 'Mission, Evangelism and Proselytising', Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) Position Statement (2008).

<sup>30</sup> 'No Mission to the Jews, Yes to Dialogue Between Jews and Christians', II:3 and II:4. Discussion Group 'Jews and Christians', Central Committee of German Catholics (9 March 2009).

Such Jewish concerns were shared by their Catholic partners in dialogue who confirmed that, according to their understanding, '[Ever] since the Second Vatican Council, the formula 'dialogue without mission' has characterized the new Jewish-Christian relationship.' They went on to develop this position theologically, arguing that 'Nostra Aetate' had shown that the Church 'has a spiritual bond to the stock of Abraham', and that an appreciation of this truth 'ties Judaism to the Church in a unique manner'. For the authors, 'Romans 9–11 must be the principal witness for the calling of the Jews' and they cited the apostle Paul's teachings as a reminder that God controls the destiny of the Jews, that gentiles should not elevate themselves above them, and that 'all Israel shall be saved'. They pointed to Pope John Paul II's emphasis on the 'never revoked covenant' and to the dire theological consequences of accepting that the enduring covenant with Israel had been destroyed: 'An insurmountable contradiction would arise with the biblical belief in God, at whose center is the message of God's love and faithfulness (Exod. 34:6–7).' The key theological assumption behind this Catholic statement was that

"This covenant [of the New Testament] does not replace the covenant with Israel, rather it opens anew and strengthens the salvation history of God with all peoples. Israel and Church are, together and each in its own specific way, instruments of God for the coming of His universal Kingdom."<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

Looking back over these institutional statements about Mission and Witness, one is struck by the great tensions within both the Catholic and Protestant faith communities, ostensibly along conservative and progressive lines. Despite considerable effort at diplomatic language, it is obvious that the subject provokes passionate feeling. The simple reason why mission remains 'a central, unresolved question in the Christian-Jewish dialogue', as one commentator has put it, is that 'Mission has been at the very heart of Christian self-understanding. To renounce it for the Jews is to touch the very nerve center of the Christian faith.'<sup>32</sup> The question is not only one of how to relate to Judaism but, more profoundly, one of Christian self-definition and of the challenge of interpreting the obligation to witness to the Gospel message. It is also clear from our overview that interreligious dialogue is, in the main, regarded as a good thing; not even the most fervent defenders of mission to the Jews have tended to denounce it, although they might value it somewhat differently. Especially for those committed to dialogue, and who see it as the ideal paradigm for future interfaith relations, the obvious viable alternative to conversion is mutual witness, usually expressed in terms of social action. This general appreciation of dialogue and a vision of a shared practical programme to 'repair the world' also appears to hold true for those Jewish groups who have chosen to articulate publically their views on the subject of mission. Thus the pragmatic imperative to defend the Jewish people against organized Christian proselytisation has on several occasions been complemented by a willingness to express the importance of mission, or something approximating to mission, for Judaism. It seems safe to conclude with the observation that the complexity of the theological, historical, and social issues relating to Mission will demand further engagement and reflection from the leadership of these communities for a long time to come.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., III:3

<sup>32</sup> John Pawlikowski, 'Reflections on Covenant and Mission Forty Years After Nostra Aetate', *Cross Currents*, 56:4 (Winter 2006–7) 90.

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