

A Question of Backbone: Contrasting Christian Influences upon the Origins of Reform and Liberal Judaism in England

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The late British historian David Englander once described the Judaism practiced by the acculturated upper classes of nineteenth-century British Jewry as “an invertebrate religion”. It was, he explained, “deficient in doctrine, without rigour in ritual, and lacking spiritual warmth.”¹ Many contemporary Jews would have agreed with his assessment and the emergence of Reform Judaism in 1840 and of Liberal Judaism some 70 years later can be viewed as attempts to remedy the situation, to inject some backbone in the religious belief and practice of the Anglo-Jewish community. Without wishing to detract from a range of other historical and sociological explanations, one very significant factor for such developments was the internalisation of Christian criticism of Judaism, and it will be from this angle that the respective beginnings of these two institutions will be compared. The first half will recount and synthesize existing scholarly explanations of early Reform Judaism. The second half, reflecting the dearth of existing scholarship, will look in greater detail at the development of early Liberal Judaism.

¹ “Anglo-Jewry nevertheless bore the stamp of its environment. Among the acculturated upper classes the imprint was most apparent. Judaism as practised by the notables was an invertebrate religion – deficient in doctrine, without rigour in ritual and lacking spiritual warmth – that was much influenced by the prevalent pattern of religiosity within the best circles in which they moved.” D. Englander, ‘Anglicised but not Anglican’, *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. G. Parsons, I (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 269.

I. Exploring the Origins of Anglo-Reform Judaism

The emergence of Reform Judaism in Britain has been explained in at least three ways that make no reference to Christian influence. These explanations include (i) a natural response to ‘modernity’ (mediated through the Jewish Enlightenment), (ii) the influence of the German Reform movement, and (iii) political manoeuvring by a patriotic Anglo-Jewish élite. The first theory, that a reforming tendency came about as part of the Jewish response to ‘modernity’, can be dispensed with quickly. The eighteenth-century Jewish Enlightenment, or *Haskalah*, emphasised the universalist teachings and doctrines of Judaism and expressed rationally the significance of particularistic rituals. While it is tempting to find the inspiration for the reformers’ more universalist tendencies here, there are a number of studies which argue that the German *Haskalah* had, in fact, very little effect on England.² The engagement of English religious Jews with ‘modernity’ was patchy and no direct path leads from the Enlightenment to the founding of the Reform Synagogue in 1840.

A number of historians, including David Philipson, Eugene Black, and Michael Meyer have viewed Anglo-Jewish Reform as an echo of the German Reform movement, itself seen as a product of the Jewish Enlightenment.³ However, establishing the degree to which native British developments absorbed specifically German Reform practices and theory is by no means straightforward. What was the degree of exposure to German thought and the manner in which it was generally received? Certain references to the German movement in England in the 1830s might initially suggest the growing influence of German Reform. A prominent member of

² Ruderman has argued that although it is difficult to speak of an English *Haskalah*, what intellectual life there was “emerged uniquely in England and had little to do with, and in some cases pre-dated, the intellectual developments of German *Haskalah*”. D. Ruderman, ‘Was there an English Parallel to the German *Haskalah*’, *Two Nations: British and German Jews in Comparative Perspective*, eds. M. Brenner, R. Liedtke, D. Rechter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 17. Endelman argues that consideration of the impact of the German *Haskalah* upon Anglo-Reform Judaism is not productive since “it obscures the impress of native currents and structures.” T. Endelman, ‘Jewish Modernity in England’, *Toward Modernity*, ed. J. Katz (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), 242-243.

³ D. Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 2nd edn (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 92. E. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry: 1880-1920* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 67. M.A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: a History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); also M.A. Meyer, ‘Jewish Religious Reform in Germany and Britain’, *Two Nations: British and German Jews in Comparative Perspective*, eds. M. Brenner, R. Liedtke, D. Rechter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 67-85.

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the Orthodox Great Synagogue, Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, wrote a letter to Moses Montefiore in 1831 in which he threatened to establish a new synagogue that would follow the example of the Hamburg Synagogue.⁴ In December 1836, a similar petition was presented to the Sephardi elders at Bevis Marks, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, asking for “such alterations and modifications as were in the line of changes introduced in the Reform synagogue in Hamburg and other places”.⁵ The first Reform Prayer Book, which appeared in 1841 following the establishment of the West London Synagogue in 1840, shared certain ideas with contemporary Continental developments, and therefore also seems to support the view.⁶ In *Response to Modernity* (1988), Michael Meyer offers further evidence which indicates that “British Reform was not so isolated from its counterparts elsewhere, nor so completely different from them.” He identifies close personal ties between a leading British Reform figure and German ones, notes the admiring way in which twelve German sermons were translated, and cites the regular reports in the *Jewish Chronicle* concerning the progress and anti-ritualism of German Reform synagogues. He points out that bibliocentrism (an emphasis on the Bible as the primary authority) and the abolition of the second day of festivals (both conventionally regarded by historians as peculiarly characteristic of early British Reform) had their foreshadowing in the proposals of German rabbis. And, despite admitting that the West London Synagogue was “something other than simply an extension of the German Reform movement”, Meyer fixes upon the Reform congregation in Manchester, established in 1856, as a clear example of where “the German influence was more obvious and direct”.⁷

What does such evidence demonstrate? With regard to early references to German reform, nothing concrete developed from either Goldsmid’s threat or the petition to Bevis Marks. The Reform Prayer Book actually contained no theological

⁴ Cited in L. Loewe, *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, 1983 edn, I (Chicago: Belford-Clarke Co., 1890), 83.

⁵ Cited in D. Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 2nd edn (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 92.

⁶ Goulston has detected the possible influences of the 1819 Hamburg Prayer Book upon the introduction in *Seder Ha-Tefilot – Forms of Prayer* (published from 1841-43 in five volumes), written by the first Reform minister David Marks, in that the criteria given for selecting material was that it should be both rational and aesthetic. M. Goulston, ‘The Theology of Reform Judaism in Great Britain’, *Reform Judaism; Essays on Reform Judaism in Britain*, ed. D. Marmur (Oxford: Alden Press, 1973), 57.

⁷ M.A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity; a History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York &

revolutions (for example, it retained the texts calling for the restoration of Israel, the reestablishment of the sacrificial cult, and the coming of a personal messiah, in contrast to the more radical German Reform liturgies).⁸ The close personal ties cited are limited to Isaac Lyon's uncle, and the translation of twelve sermons hardly demonstrates a very wide interest. Furthermore, while indicating public awareness, contemporary reports in the *Jewish Chronicle* were almost universal in their condemnation and suspicion of German Reform theology as divisive and irreligious. Following the assembly of rabbis at Frankfurt (1845), the *Jewish Chronicle* ran a series of articles depreciating, *inter alia*, the German reformers' hopes for the vernacular replacing Hebrew and for Sunday services replacing the Sabbath. The line taken was that moderate reform was necessary to pre-empt such radical schisms. As David Cesarani has observed, "The example of German Reform was always held up [in the *Jewish Chronicle*] to illustrate where the line must be drawn."⁹

In contrast to, say, the later migrations from Eastern Europe,¹⁰ the emergence of Reform had a well-publicised but relatively minor effect upon communal Anglo-Jewry, reflected by the interests of the small sub-section of the élite who joined. Changes in service ritual were very limited until the arrival of eastern European immigrants in the 1880s. Modifications with regard to decorum and service planning (including the shortening of the services, the formation of a choir, English sermons every Sabbath in 1840 and the introduction of an organ in 1859)¹¹ can best be explained in terms of the self-consciousness of middle-class London Jewry in the light of Anglican norms of decorum and sensitivity to the relative laxity of their own

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 177.

⁸ Sharot remarks that a few original prayers were also added, but that overall "the changes... were certainly moderate compared with changes... in Germany and America." S. Sharot, 'Reform and Liberal Judaism in London: 1840-1940', *Jewish Social Studies* 41 (1979), 212. Englander comments, "Prayer Book reform amounted to little more than abbreviation and omission." D. Englander, 'Anglicised but not Anglican', *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. G. Parsons, I (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 256.

⁹ D. Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17-18.

¹⁰ The arrival in Britain between 1881 and 1914 of over 100 000 poor and mostly unskilled Russian, Polish, Galician and Romanian Jews was to have a profound effect on many aspects of Anglo-Jewish religious communal life. See A. Kershen and J. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840-1995* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), 92; also D. Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 70.

¹¹ S. Sharot, 'Reform and Liberal Judaism in London: 1840-1940', *Jewish Social Studies* 41 (1979), 212, 213.

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synagogue services. And the movement's bibliocentrism and subsequent abandonment concerning the second day of festivals, like many of the external innovations, can be accounted for by other indigenous factors, not least the direct emulation of Anglican services and the impact of the Christian critique of Judaism.

Furthermore the example of Manchester, a Reform congregation in which 29 of the 44 founding members were German-born, is more illuminating in terms of demonstrating the limits of German influence. In *The Making of Manchester Jewry* (1976), Bill Williams recognises the importance of a German social network for generating a critical mass but prefers to explain the emergence of Reform in 1856 in terms of its particularly British components. Arguing on a socio-political level, Williams associates Reform with "the most anglicised section of the community", and contextualises it in the general Anglo-Jewish experience of "the development of an anglicised middle-class community, the struggle for social acceptance and political freedom".¹² Endelman is more emphatic still that German influence was minimal, maintaining that the Manchester reformers did not look to the Continent for guidance in matters of doctrine and liturgy but rather to the indigenous developments of the London Reform Synagogue. He points out that the ideologue of the Manchester movement, Tobias Theodores, was ignorant of the historical developmental framework of German Reform, and that no attempt was made to denationalise Judaism.¹³ And Romain and Kershen's *Tradition and Change* (1995) stresses that the congregation's first minister, the Hungarian Orthodox-ordained Rabbi Solomon Schiller-Szenessy (who was ready "to change direction in order to maintain his career and maintain communal authority") ensured that tradition had a significant role to play "even if it were at odds with the purity of Reform." Even the second minister, Gustav Gottheil, who had trained at the *Reform Gemeinde* in Berlin, was forced to compromise with the congregation's "Anglicised traditionalists".¹⁴ Thus any

¹² B. Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry 1740-1875* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1976), 327, 331, 333.

¹³ There is some room for interpretation of the evidence compiled by Williams. Endelman suggests that Williams is correct for drawing attention to German influence in terms of inspiring the *idea* of modernising Judaism, but rejects any implication that the influence effected specific reforms. T. Endelman, 'Jewish Modernity in England', *Toward Modernity*, ed. J. Katz (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), 234-235.

¹⁴ A. Kershen and J. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840-*

movement towards German radicalism was, in the early stages at least, deflected.

Despite the press coverage, then, the results of German 'Jewish Science' and / or the emergent Continental Reform movement had little or no tangible influence in Britain. In contrast to their more iconoclastic German counterparts, the English reformers' modifications basically amounted to abbreviations and omissions within the Prayer Book; ideas such as moving the Sabbath to Sunday were regarded as "inroads" of assimilation rather than reforms. The cultural and political character of Anglo-Jewry at the time was not conducive to the Reform movement partly because change was associated in the minds of many Englishmen with revolution, and partly because conformity to an established Anglican Church (or Orthodox Synagogue) was characteristic of those aspiring to Establishment status.¹⁵ On the other hand, the militant anti-rabbinism and decrying of rabbinic tradition which was characteristic of English Jewish Reform under the first Reform minister David Marks, to which we will return, had no parallel in Germany or the United States.

The extent of the impact of German Reform upon British Reform has undoubtedly been over-estimated. Even if one were to accept a German source of influence, the remarkably un-radical modifications of service decorum and externalities clearly demonstrate the limits. At the time there was no hint of dissatisfaction with the underlying theology behind the Synagogue services in Britain, and this is something that set it apart from the older and more developed Continental Reform movement.¹⁶ In fact, it was not until the 1930s and 1940s that the Continental rabbis who came as refugees to Britain began to have a more direct influence on

1995 (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), 23, 65, 68.

¹⁵ M. Leigh, 'Reform Judaism in Great Britain', *Reform Judaism; Essays on Reform Judaism in Britain*, ed. D. Marmor (Oxford: Alden Press, 1973), 21. Philipson also held to this explanation, suggesting that "the doctrine of conformity to an established church which represents the prevailing religious attitude in England reacted and reacts without a doubt upon the Jews, and for that reason it proved so difficult for reform to gain a foothold in Anglo-Judaism". D. Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 2nd edn (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 94.

¹⁶ Having established the difficulties inherent in attempting to demonstrate the influence of German Reform upon Anglo-Reform, no further examination of radical innovations in Germany will be attempted here. Further parallels between Anglo and Reform Judaism can be drawn with regard to Christian influence, however. See M. Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: S.C.M., 1994), 145-154. The question is not whether there were parallels but whether there is evidence of direct influence.

Anglo-Reform theology.¹⁷

As an alternative to the models that regard Anglo-Reform as a response to modernity, either directly or indirectly as a by-product of the German Reform movement, Romain has suggested that the foundation of the West London Synagogue was a pronouncement of British nationality and citizenship, noting that the sermons were to be in English, that the term 'synagogue' was preferred to the continental 'temple', and that the Hamburg Prayer Book was ignored. He suggests that it was initiated as a means to overcome the Sephardi-Ashkenazi divide, in that the new synagogue was the result of the combined efforts of 24 founder members, largely made up from the Mocattas (Sephardim) and the Goldsmids (Ashkenazim), and that the founders self-consciously regarded themselves as a 'British' denomination.¹⁸ Viewed politically, it can be seen as a vehicle for certain members of the Anglo-Jewish social élite to flex their political muscles. The trend towards assimilation or acculturation of British Jewry as a whole, especially around the mid-nineteenth century, has been explained in terms of the wider political scene by Michael Leigh¹⁹ and Robert Liberles.²⁰ From early in the century there had been demographic pressures upon the growing population of wealthy Jews living in the West End of London to provide for themselves a synagogue which the East Enders refused to provide (these, in turn, were fearful of financial loss and damage to their own membership and status). When the West London Synagogue was finally established in 1842, the founder members were dominated by members of the Anglo-Jewish élite. These families were able to use the new Reform synagogue as a base from which to challenge the temporal, as well as spiritual, authorities. Thus Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, the grandfather of the future leader of Liberal Jewish synagogue Claude Montefiore, was a bullion broker and leading campaigner for political emancipation. Along with

¹⁷ M. Leigh, 'Reform Judaism in Great Britain', *Reform Judaism; Essays on Reform Judaism in Britain*, ed. D. Marmor (Oxford: Alden Press, 1973), 15, 21, 22. See also M. Kramer-Mannion, *The Growth and Development of Reform Judaism in Manchester, 1940-1985* (University of Manchester PhD thesis, 1989).

¹⁸ A. Kershen and J. Romain, *Tradition and Change; A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840-1995* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), 26.

¹⁹ M. Leigh, 'Reform Judaism in Britain 1840-1970', *Reform Judaism; Essays on Reform Judaism in Britain*, ed. D. Marmor (Oxford: Alden Press, 1973), 3-50. Leigh discounts Continental influence (21).

²⁰ R. Liberles, 'The Origins of the Jewish Reform Movement in England', *AJS Review* I (1976), 121-150. Liberles did not find any significant German influence.

other dissidents within the Anglo-Jewish élite, he felt frustrated by the moderate stance of the Jewish Board of Deputies (J.B.D.) and found the West London Synagogue a useful political tool in challenging the J.B.D.'s claim to represent the Jewish community to the government.²¹

A socio-political interpretation goes some way in explaining the timing of the emergence of the new movement, in that certain highly anglicised individuals concerned with the campaign for Jewish emancipation and the struggle for communal authority took the opportunity afforded them. It also allows for the conservative nature of its liturgical reforms since those members of the Anglo-Jewish élite who were involved were not primarily interested in theological innovation: if their main concern was for an alternative political structure to the J.B.D., then they would have avoided any theological controversy that might have weakened their support. But the socio-political argument is not entirely satisfactory. As Feldman has pointed out, programmes for synagogue reform had existed from the 1820s and thus preceded the emergence of Jewish emancipation as a political consideration.²² And as Englander hints,²³ it also ultimately fails to account for the particular emphasis of the reforms introduced, which were initially characterised by external modifications (including the shortening of the services, the formation of a choir, English sermons every Sabbath),²⁴ which increased the solemnity and intelligibility of the public service, and by a discriminatory approach to the Oral Law, a kind of neo-Karaism.²⁵ While many

²¹ A. Kershen and J. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840-1995* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), 14.

²² D. Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 51.

²³ Englander focuses primarily upon the *differences* of Anglo-Reform with reforming movements elsewhere. "Political considerations, though doubtlessly important, do not, however, supply an adequate explanation for the curious combination of liturgical conservatism and militant anti-rabbinism that was without parallel in either Germany or the United States. It is the singularity of Anglo-Jewry that invites attention." D. Englander, 'Anglicised but not Anglican', *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. G. Parsons, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), I, 257-258.

²⁴ S. Sharot, 'Reform and Liberal Judaism in London: 1840-1940', *Jewish Social Studies* 41 (1979), 212.

²⁵ The Karaites were a heretical Jewish sect, who originated in eighth-century Persia, flourished later in Palestine and Egypt, and still exist in the Crimea and in Israel. They rejected the rabbinic traditions and based their tenets upon a literal interpretation of the Bible. I am grateful to Ephraim Nissan for drawing my attention to Yosef Kaplan's treatment of this phenomenon in Europe in the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, which emphasises the influence of Christian (mostly Protestant) Hebraists upon self-proclaimed Karaites in Sweden and the Netherlands. See Y. Kaplan, 'Ha-tesisah ha-ruchanit ba-kehillah ha-Sefaradit—ha-Portugalit be-Amsterdam ba-me'ah ha-yod-zayin' in H. Beinart, ed, *Moreshet Sepharad: The Sephardi Legacy* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 600-621.

of the reformers had political goals, greater significance surely lies in the fact that they were the members of the community most interested in emulating the surrounding culture, and most sensitive to Christian criticism.

II. Reform Judaism and the Christian Critique of Judaism

David Feldman has argued comprehensively in *Englishmen and Jews* (1994) that the changing circumstances of the nineteenth-century meant that Christian criticism of Judaism had a more potent effect than it had before.²⁶ The growing cacophony of disparate, demanding voices – including Evangelicals, tractarians, liberal Anglicans, and non-conformists – which had been brought about by the constitutional reforms of 1829 and 1832,²⁷ allowed many within the Jewish establishment to see themselves as part of the patchwork of early Victorian public life. As a result, they were more sensitive to anything that might prejudice their improved situation. A critique of Judaism was no longer the external attack of a hostile gentile, but increasingly the painful and humiliating jibe of a fellow Englishman. In particular, Feldman focuses upon the effects of certain characteristics of English Protestantism, and in especially Evangelicalism, including anti-Talmudism, bibliocentrism, anti-Catholicism, the idea of Judaism as a fossilised religion, and the importance placed upon faith and spirituality. In explicating how these issues relate to Reform Judaism, further illustrative evidence for his argument will be provided before some additional observations are made.

Some indication of how Judaism was regarded by Christians in the mid-nineteenth century is suggested by popular writings on the subject by acknowledged authorities. One such example was the Rev. Alfred Myers, a “Hebrew Christian clergyman” who converted to Christianity as a boy and who was an active member of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews.²⁸ His book, *The Jew*

²⁶ D. Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews; Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), chap. 2, ‘Rabbinism, Popery and Reform’.

²⁷ The Catholic Emancipation Act (1829) allowed Catholics to sit in Parliament; the Reform Act (1832) reorganised the British political scene, widening the voting franchise.

²⁸ The London Society, which developed from the Missionary Society, was established in 1809 and

(1840), ran to six editions over a period of 34 years. Men like Myers were undoubtedly influential in shaping contemporary views of rabbinic Judaism.

Myers regarded Judaism as unbiblical ritualism and wrote of his wonder that “opinions so much at variance with the scriptures could have gained ascendancy among a studious people such as the Jews.”²⁹ He encouraged a Christian view of Judaism as a faith corrupted by the Rabbis and their Oral Law. In the sense that Rabbinic Judaism was viewed as an elaborate ritual sustained by a tradition that had no biblical support, such a critique was bibliocentric, and distinctly Protestant Evangelical. It also drew upon traditional antagonisms. Comparison to Catholicism provided terms within which Judaism could be understood – Christians saw in ‘rabbinitism’ the same flaws as they found in ‘popery’. Myers suggested that Jewish devotion to Talmudic doctrine “can only be equalled, but not surpassed, by the most zealous devotee in the Church of Rome”.³⁰ This is significant, for throughout the nineteenth century, traditional English hostility towards the Church of Rome pervaded all levels of society. To liken Judaism to Catholicism was to bring into the argument a whole range of negative connotations and to associate it with the arbitrary exercise of power and other allegedly un-English traits.³¹ It was a line of attack that many Jews felt called into question their Englishness, and which many felt duty-bound to refute. Thus, as Cesarani records, after the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850, the *Jewish Chronicle* eventually joined in the hue and cry of anti-Catholicism as a powerful way to prove the loyalty of the Jews to the State.³²

Similarly, Christian writings maintained and reinforced the view of the Jew as existing in a kind of theological limbo. Myers wrote that “the Hebrew olive is by this time paralyzed and dried up to the roots”, and that Judaism currently existed in “a

was dominated by Evangelical Anglicans by mid-century. It was well funded and focused its pamphleteering activities upon the Ashkenazim, despite the fact that statistically the Sephardic community provided many more converts to Christianity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. R.M. Smith, ‘The London Jews’ Society and Patterns of Jewish Conversion in England, 1801-1859’, *Jewish Social Studies* XLIII (1981), 276, 285.

²⁹ A. Myers, *The Jew*, 6th edition (London: London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, 1874), 82.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

³¹ T. Endelman, ‘Jewish Modernity in England’, *Toward Modernity*, ed. J. Katz (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), 238.

³² D. Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

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state of suspension”.³³ While Roman Catholicism was regarded as a perversion of Christianity, Judaism was viewed as frozen in a primitive state. This charge of religious petrification would have been all the more odious in the context of Victorian England’s fixation on Progress.

The charges of rabbinism and devotion to the Talmud were answered in different ways by the Orthodox and by the reformers. The Orthodox Jewish response to Christian claims of rabbinism and petrification was itself varied. Some saw no reason to apologise for their position. Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler argued that Judaism was in fact a living religion, not least because, in contrast to Christianity, “there is no necessity to force our reason to the adoption of theories against which it revolts”, and he stressed that without the Talmud and rabbinic learning, “every doctrine, every ordinance, and every law [in the Hebrew Bible] would be a sealed book, a riddle without solution.”³⁴ Others argued that Christians were simply misinformed and ignorant.

The reformers proper, on the other hand, accepted the charge of rabbinism and petrification as a valid attack upon Orthodoxy and even incorporated it in their own ideological battles with the traditionalists. A well-known example was the first West London Synagogue minister, David Marks, who did this at the same time as openly criticising Christian doctrines in many of his sermons. He denounced “a large class of our Jewish brethren, who receive unconditionally, the rabbinical system as a whole”. In his anti-rabbinic *The Law is Light* (1854) he attacked Nathan Adler’s defence of the necessity of rabbinical authority. Significantly, he did so by drawing upon (familiar) Protestant anti-Catholic feeling.

A doctrine like this, which is so boldly asserted in the sermon of the Reverend Rabbi, may well startle us and induce us to question whether instead of listening to the voice of Judaism, we are not having rehearsed to us the substance, though in a different phraseology, of the

Press, 1994), 20-21.

³³ A. Myers, *The Jew*, 6th edition (London: London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, 1874), 28,26.

³⁴ N. Adler, ‘Solomon’s Judgement: a Picture of Israel’ (London: Wertheimer, 1854), 8-9.

theology of Rome.³⁵

However, the reformers refuted accusations of rabbinism when applied to Judaism in the abstract. Taking the lead from their Evangelical critics, they fell back upon the Bible and attempted to cleanse their new Synagogue of anything that could be used against them to suggest a lack of piety and proper devotion. In his sermon at the consecration of the West London Synagogue in 1845, Marks argued that contemporary Orthodox services lacked devotion, failed to improve the mind or deliver a sense of nearness to God, inculcated indifference, neglected the spiritual development of women, and preserved irrelevant liturgical and ritualistic customs. It was, he maintained, “to remedy these glaring evils that this [Reform] synagogue has been formed, and the improvements we have introduced therein will, I trust in God, prove most effectual in restoring the house of worship to a state so pure, that the presence of God may abide there.”³⁶

Many Orthodox Jews favoured religious change along similar lines and, in fact, reforms which emulated Christian custom had begun to make their way into Jewish practice since the inauguration of the first Chief Rabbi, Solomon Hirschell, in 1802, including the clerical dress of rabbis. Much of the Victorian-Christian decorum desired by the reformers was explicitly advocated by Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler in his *Laws and Regulations* (1847) and ‘new’ practices including the introduction of a choir, of English sermons and of greater service decorum were adopted during the 1850s. These and other innovations are detailed in Michael Hilton’s *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (1994).³⁷ All this had the effect of taking much of the ground away from under the reformers’ feet and partly explains why the Reform Synagogue venture never really caught the imagination of English Jews, in contrast to what

³⁵ David Marks, *The Law is Light: A Course of Four Lectures on the Sufficiency of the Law of Moses as the Guide of Israel* (London: J. Wertheimer, 1854), 8.

³⁶ D. Marks, ‘Introductory Discourse’ in *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (London: Groombridge, 1851), 17-20.

³⁷ M. Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: S.C.M., 1994), 141-160. Minor innovations had been introduced since the 1820s amongst London congregations, including limiting the number of *mishberachs*, requiring *hazzanim* to chant in a straightforward rather than florid manner, prohibiting children from interrupting the reading of Esther on Purim, and some slight modifications of the singing of Psalms on the Sabbath. Endelman suggests that all such modifications were “cosmetic” and not radical in nature. T. Endelman, ‘Jewish Modernity in England’, *Toward Modernity*, ed. J. Katz (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), 231-232.

happened in America and Continental Europe.³⁸

A peculiar characteristic of British Reform, it is often claimed, was its bibliocentricity. An expression of this prioritization of biblical authority was the rejection of the traditional celebration of a festival over two days (according to rabbinic tradition). It was observed that in modern times and with accurate calendars it was no longer necessary to abide by the rabbis' dictates, but the crucial argument was that such a practice was not ordained in scripture. The West London minister David Marks protested that they could not "recognise as sacred, days which are evidently not ordained as such in scripture" and rejected prayers and references made to angels and demons that had no biblical basis.³⁹ In effect, he challenged the claim of traditional rabbinic authority to determine religious practice. The historian Steven Singer was unsure as to the causes of what he described as the "curious neo-Kararite view" of London Orthodox and Reform Jews in general. Sensing that increasing secularisation was an inadequate explanation, he hinted at the influence of Bible-based Victorian evangelism.⁴⁰ Hilton maintained that the "fundamentalist veneration of scripture" among Reform Jews in particular could be understood simply in terms of a Jewish emulation of the Evangelical rejection of Church authorities, effected as if by osmosis.⁴¹ It was left to Feldman, however, to link directly evangelicalism to Reform Jews, citing Marks' explicit advice to his Reform congregation to "rest our hopes and form our observances upon the laws of God alone" in answer to Christian attacks on rabbinism.⁴² Such devotion to the Bible at the expense of the Talmud, Feldman argues, was clear evidence of the impact of Evangelical criticism, since it

³⁸ In addition, the creation of two branch synagogues as in the West End of London under the jurisdiction of the Great Synagogue and Bevis Marks in 1853 and 1855 meant that there were geographical alternatives to the West London Reform synagogue.

³⁹ Letter from David Marks to the elders at the Orthodox Bevis Marks Synagogue, August 1841, cited in D. Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 50.

⁴⁰ S. Singer, 'Jewish Religious Observance in Early Victorian London, 1840-1860' *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 28 (1986), 117-137. In examining the changing role of the rabbi towards an ideal modelled upon the Anglican cleric (i.e. Talmudic expertise becoming subservient to pastoral and preaching abilities) Singer emphasises the anglicisation and secularisation of Anglo-Judaism. S. Singer, 'The Anglo-Jewish Ministry in Early Victorian London' *Modern Judaism* 5:3 (1985), 279-299.

⁴¹ M. Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: S.C.M., 1994), 130, 145-146.

⁴² Letter from David Marks to the elders at the Orthodox Bevis Marks Synagogue, August 1841, cited in D. Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 50.

was the conversionists who kept up the attack and who alone were bibliocentric. Certainly the London-based Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, which emerged in 1809 from the Missionary Society, was dominated by Evangelical Anglicans during its most active phase from 1830 to 1850.⁴³

There is a danger of over-emphasising Anglo-Reform's bibliocentricism. While certainly characteristic of David Marks's theology, not all reformers toed the line. Later ministers at the West London Synagogue did not adopt his vehement anti-rabbinism and the consequent regard for the Bible as the sole religious authority. For example Morris Joseph, who succeeded Marks in 1893, defined his own position in *Judaism as Creed and Life* (1903) as

midway between Orthodoxy which regards the *Shulchan Aruch*, or at least the Talmud, as the final authority in Judaism and the extreme liberalism which, settling little store by the historic sentiment as a factor in the Jewish consciousness, would lightly cut the religion loose from the bonds of tradition.⁴⁴

The same is true outside the metropolis. In September 1856, Marks wrote to the first minister of the Manchester Reform congregation, Schiller-Szenessy, requesting confirmation that Manchester would operate along the lines dictated by Marks' own bibliocentric, anti-talmudic stance.⁴⁵ While Schiller-Szenessy replied in the affirmative, pointing out that "there is a vast difference between appreciating the merit of the Talmudical writings and believing in the inspiration of their contents", yet the Hungarian-born Schiller-Szenessy remained a strictly observant Jew himself and insisted on retaining the two days for festivals.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Marks was senior minister of the most influential Reform branch in Britain and maintained a powerful presence until his death, aged 98, in 1909. His commitment to biblical authority and denigration of the rabbis is useful in clearly indicating the influence of Christianity

⁴³ "The twenty years ending in 1850 may be considered the palmy days in the entire history of the London mission, which then reached its highest level. The work of these years has never been surpassed." W.T. Gidney, *History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1908), 158-159, 216-217.

⁴⁴ M. Joseph, *Judaism as Creed and Life* (London: Routledge, 1919), preface to 1st edition, v.

⁴⁵ Letter from D. Marks to S. Schiller Szenessy, 28 Sept 1856, reproduced in P.S. Goldberg, *The Manchester Congregation of British Jews, 1857-1957; A Short History* (Manchester: Manchester Congregation of British Jews, 1957), chapter two.

⁴⁶ Letter from S. Schiller Szenessy to D. Marks, 6 October 1856. Ibid.

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upon early Anglo-Reform.

Arguably, Christian attacks on what was viewed as a particularistic, primitive religion exaggerated and reinforced differences between Reform and Orthodox on the issue of universalism versus nationalism. Rabbinic, Orthodox Judaism tended to emphasise election, exile, expiation and restoration within a Jewish nation, while Reform Judaism rejected the notion of a Chosen People and saw its role as the bearer rather than the sole beneficiary of God's grace. The Orthodox messiah was transformed into the reformers' messianic age, which would be initiated by the priesthood of the whole people of Israel, not by an individual of the House of David. A universalist tendency meant that Judaism was reinterpreted in terms of a religious community and not in terms of a nation. Ironically, this flew in the face of an emerging trend towards what is now described as Christian Zionism. Since the time of Cromwell's readmission of the Jews to England in 1655, the English had been fascinated with the idea of the restoration of the Jews to the Promised Land. Among those concerned with mission in the nineteenth-century, part of the attraction to the Jews lay in the powerful myth of the providential nature of the survival of the Hebrew religion during centuries of exile – and what might lie ahead for the Chosen People.⁴⁷ Paul Merkley has argued in *The Politics of Christian Zionism* (1998) that the kind of philosemitism demonstrated by Lord Shaftesbury (1801-85) and other proto-Christian Zionists involved prophecies and expectations concerning the regathering of the Jews and the Second Coming of Christ.⁴⁸ Thus while many Englishman suspected that the Jew could not be trusted to be loyal to England – thereby encouraging a non-nationalistic interpretation of Judaism among Reform Jews – growing numbers of Christians delighted in the romance of prophecies concerning the Jews' return to the Holy Land. In this complex English context, the Reform Jews' repudiation of their links to the Land provoked complex reactions. Among those who disapproved of this innovation was the University College London lecturer in Hebrew and leading member of the Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, Alexander

⁴⁷ R.M. Smith, 'The London Jews' Society and Patterns of Jewish Conversion in England, 1801-1859', *Jewish Social Studies* XLIII (1981), 279-281, 284.

⁴⁸ Paul C. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism, 1891-1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1998). John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a Plymouth Brethren minister, is generally regarded as the father of dispensationalism and its progeny, Christian Zionism.

McCaul, who lamented,

Reform [Judaism] has unjudaized all its disciples... Their national language has been disposed from its place... They have renounced the land of their forefathers... Reform, wherever it has prevailed, has robbed the Jews of their holy nationality, and sunk them to the level of a common-place religious sect...⁴⁹

In seeking to identify the source of reforms, Feldman highlights Evangelical criticism. This does not, however, adequately explain why the actual pattern or style of service adopted by the Reform Synagogue was so obviously influenced by the Church of England's majestic form of worship. Endelman has argued that this emphasis on decorum was a reflection of the desire of certain members of the Anglo-Jewish élite to conform to Anglican or Victorian norms of conduct. While a self-conscious concern over manners may seem simplistic and inadequate at a causal level, it probably goes a long way toward describing the determining factors upon the form in which the Reform Synagogue shaped itself; after all, the Church of England was the church of the Establishment. In this sense, the Anglican Church supplied the major influence upon the minority religion, as Englander put it.⁵⁰

Another way to view the reform of decorum is to view it as an external expression of the search for an inner religion. The reformers internalised the cross-denominational Christian criticism that ritual and rabbinism did not encourage the development of a personal piety. The Orthodox service was regarded as antiquated and unsuited to inspire a devotional frame of mind. Certainly Marks' inaugural sermon of 1842 celebrated "the spirit of devotion that will mark this house" as a result of the freedom of the new congregation from rabbinic tradition.⁵¹ And others, too, were sensitive to how traditional worship was perceived in the wider non-Jewish

⁴⁹ A. McCaul, *The Old Paths* (London: British Society for the Jews, 1846), 66-68. Originally a series of 60 weekly pamphlets, *The Old Paths; or A Comparison of the Principles and Doctrines of Modern Judaism with the Religion of Moses and the Prophets* (1837) sold more than 10 000 copies in its first year and was translated into nine languages; a second edition was published in 1846. W.T. Gidney, *History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1908), pp.159-160; W.T. Gidney, *Missions to the Jews* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1912), p.68.

⁵⁰ D. Englander, 'Anglicised but not Anglican', *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. G. Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), I, 237.

⁵¹ D. Marks' inaugural sermon (24 January 1842), cited in J. Mills, *The British Jews* (London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1853), 226.

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community; the *Voice of Jacob* informed its readers that it was “highly important that every rite should be divested of all that can possibly... expose it to ridicule.”⁵² The new Reform service style reflected the congregation’s desire to conform to what in Victorian Christian circles would have been regarded as the decorum appropriate for a more spiritual worship. In summary, then, the increased decorum in both Reform and Orthodox Synagogue services was caused by the desire for a religion of the heart (mirroring the Evangelical emphasis), and was shaped by the Victorian-Christian service ethos (particularly that of the Church of England).

III. Attempts to Reform Reform Judaism

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the more conservative German reformers (now known as Liberals to be distinguished from the more radical *Reformgemeinde* or ‘Friends of Reform’ in Berlin) included the majority of religiously orientated Jews in Germany.⁵³ The neo-Orthodox, despite reassessing their situation and making certain concessions, had nevertheless become entrenched and isolated from much of the surrounding world. Like the *Reformgemeinde*, they were small fringe groups with little or no religious authority and less political clout.⁵⁴ In England, on the other hand, it was the reformers who had been sidelined and who survived in the margins, and the neo-Orthodox who retained the dominant position. Institutionally, the reformers’ situation had improved considerably from the low point in January 1842, when Chief Rabbi Hirschell pronounced a *herem* on anyone using the Reform Prayer Book. The ban itself was lifted in 1849 and a licence to register marriages in the West London Synagogue was granted in 1856.⁵⁵ Yet there was little expansion of the movement in Britain during the nineteenth century. No attempt was made to establish an academic institution to train Reform rabbis or to contribute to

⁵² *Voice of Jacob* 23 June 1848 cited in S. Singer, ‘Jewish Religious Observance in Early Victorian London, 1840-1860’ *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 28 (1986), 119.

⁵³ Most German Jews, however, were keener supporters of Liberalism than they were of *Liberales Judentum*. M.A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity; a History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 210.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵⁵ Blocking Marks’ applications to register marriages in the Reform Synagogue was one of the many ways Moses Montefiore used his influence as head of the Board of Deputies to make life difficult for the movement.

Anglo-Jewish scholarship, and new Reform congregations emerged only at Manchester in 1856 and Bradford in 1873.⁵⁶ In practice, many Orthodox customs continued to be observed, including the wearing of phylacteries and prayer shawls.⁵⁷ As Philipson observed in 1931, British Reform “has continued along the lines first laid down, but has not made much further headway in this direction; in fact it has become quite wedded to its traditions as are the orthodox congregations to theirs.”⁵⁸

There are many factors which contributed to this paralysis and which meant that, from a world-wide perspective, Reform did not really become a ‘movement’ in Britain until later in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁹ In contrast to their German counterparts, the Anglo-Orthodox followed the example of the Church of England in asking only for a generalised adherence to vague principles. The United Synagogue had been constituted in 1870 by an Act of Parliament, which recognised the headship of the Chief Rabbi. Membership of such a body, boasting establishment status and not requiring strict observance, proved decisive in retaining the support of a conservative Anglo-Jewish élite. The Orthodox also took the wind out of the reformers’ sails by replacing their own elderly, out-of-touch leader, Solomon Hirschell, with Nathan Adler, who had been college-educated and who was prepared to institute regular vernacular sermons and to increase standards of decorum, which were outlined his reforms in *Laws and Regulations* (1847).⁶⁰

The belief that the West London Synagogue needed to go further led to a number of attempts to introduce a second wave of reforms within Reform Judaism a generation later. In *Response to Modernity* (1988) Michael Meyer has observed that, on a world-wide level, the Protestant environment was more conducive to the Reform Judaism than the Catholic. It provided a greater impetus in terms of the theological model, the rejection of an old hierarchy, the vernacular liturgy, the central importance

⁵⁶ There were also Reform services held in Hull in the 1850s and in Clapham 1875-77.

⁵⁷ D. Englander, ‘Anglicised but not Anglican’, *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. G. Parsons, I (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 259.

⁵⁸ D. Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 2nd edn (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 106.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁰ According to Roth, Hirschell tended to speak publicly in Yiddish. For an anecdotal account of Hirschell’s rabbinate, see C. Roth, *History of the Great Synagogue* (London: Goldston, 1950), chapter VIII.

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of the sermon in services and the lessening of the importance of ritual.⁶¹ This remained true even of the new innovations, the majority of which were championed by Claude Montefiore, a wealthy scholar and philanthropist, and Oswald Simon, a communal worker and lay preacher. In 1881, they introduced a synagogue ‘Sunday School’. These religious classes for the young, which met on Sunday mornings and followed a brief synagogue service, were non-congregational in character and were taught by voluntary lay teachers. At the time, they were regarded positively both inside and outside the reform community.⁶² More radical developments followed in the shape of special ‘supplementary services’, which allowed greater freedom for sermons and music. Around 1885, the two men were involved in organising Saturday morning services at the Hanway Street School, which attracted between 120-200 congregants, mostly women and children.⁶³ Saturday afternoon services were held at West Hampstead Town Hall from 1890. About 200 people attended the first one-hour service, which included modifications to the ritual, instrumental accompaniment and a mixed choir.⁶⁴ The progression from a school to a hall, and from an audience of children to adults, made this service more unsettling to many observers and Simon was forced to publicly defend charges that people were paid to attend.⁶⁵ By the time Simon initiated the Sunday Movement in 1899 with the public support of Montefiore,⁶⁶ the idea of supplementary services had become a good deal more controversial. The parallels to a Christian service were not lost on the *Jewish*

⁶¹ M.A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity; a History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 143.

⁶² The minister, David Marks, commented on “his deep interest in it”, while the *Jewish Chronicle* wished the movement every success. *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 December 1881, 7.

⁶³ Oswald Simon wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1891 claiming to have supported with Montefiore the Saturday morning services for six years. Those attending were mostly women and children “and a few men and boys”. It was “a simple service with proper singing on the part of the girls.” *Jewish Chronicle*, 23 January 1891, 8.

⁶⁴ *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 February 1890, 11.

⁶⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 February 1891, 7.

⁶⁶ Montefiore and Oswald Simon were both associated with plans for a regular Sunday morning service to be held at the Hampstead Reform Synagogue in June 1899, Saturday being a workday for the wider society. An open letter explained “that whilst being determined to safeguard the observance of the seventh day Sabbath, it is an *indispensable* feature of this new movement that the daily morning service shall be so adapted as to enable many persons with children to avail themselves of public worship on Sunday mornings.” *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 June 1899, 8. Montefiore himself wrote an open letter explaining his involvement. “For my part I cannot bear that a single life should be lost to Judaism... If these people will come to a service on Sunday, let them have a service on Sunday; if they will come to one on Wednesday, let them have one on Wednesday.” He could not avoid the temptation to point out that “according to the newer view of Judaism and of the Bible, there is no divine *seventh* day at all.” *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 June 1899, 8-9.

Chronicle which noted that the first service featured a hymn by Wesley, a prayer for the Queen of England, a sermon, mixed seating, musical accompaniment and a ladies' choir. It commented that of the eighty people attending, "a good sprinkling were Gentiles", and noted that the service ended with a collection plate held at the door "to complete the Gentile analogy".⁶⁷ In 1896 Montefiore pressed for various modifications to the Reform service ritual, involving further readings in the vernacular and psalms sung in English, together with certain prayer book omissions, but after lengthy consideration these were rejected by the council of the West London Synagogue in 1896,⁶⁸ and again in 1898.⁶⁹ Towards the turn of the century, then, there was an increasingly radical constituency whose members felt that their needs were not being catered for by the Reform Jewish Synagogue. Part of the reason for this was that the practical innovations that the radicals were seeking to introduce were perceived by many (both inside and out) as overly influenced by Christianity.

On a more theoretical level, the failure to engage with the emergence of biblical criticism arguably also contributed to the paralysis of Reform Judaism in Britain. Many German Jews in the generation following Mendelssohn had become familiar with the idea and Reform Jews came to see the biblical critical research of Protestant scholars as a model for approaching their own religious texts. Thus, interwoven with practical, external reforms came historical criticism and an undermining of the literalist approach to scripture, as evidenced in the work of the leading Reform Rabbi Abraham Geiger.⁷⁰ These new 'Jewish Science' principles

⁶⁷ Simon held his services in the Cavendish Rooms, Oxford Street, London. That Montefiore was away in Bristol at the time was duly noted (despite a letter from Montefiore signalling his continued support for the "lofty aims and the pure Jewish idealism" of the scheme). "The meagreness of Mr Simon's following is at once laid bare," the report concluded, "and the absurdity of those who clamoured that his efforts were directed to satisfy a wide-spread yearning in the community is strikingly demonstrated." *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 November 1902, 8, 18.

⁶⁸ At a special meeting of the West London Synagogue council in April 1896, Sir Philip Magnus was unable to defeat an attempt by Montefiore to reduce the majority needed to adopt the Revision of Ritual (based on the recommendations of the Report of the Ritual Revision Committee submitted in March and April the previous year). In the event, Montefiore achieved only a 2 vote majority (not the one-fifth majority he needed) when the vote was taken in May, despite arguing against the claims that Hebrew was a necessary part of Judaism and that the adoption of the changes would encourage "American Judaism". *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 April 1896, 7 and 22 May 1896, 10.

⁶⁹ The council vote supporting the introduction of English prayers ('the prayer for the congregation') into the Reform Synagogue ritual failed with only 21 voting for and 16 against, again despite Montefiore's contribution to the debate. *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 April 1898, 13.

⁷⁰ Geiger's writings are characterised by a 'comparative religion' approach (e.g. his doctoral dissertation demonstrated the influence of Jewish tradition upon the Koran) and a sharply historical-

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were incorporated institutionally in several German rabbinical colleges that were set up in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷¹ One consequence was that the Bible was not regarded as any more divine than was the rabbinic literature or, at least, that there was not much of a difference.

In England the Christian tendency was more dogmatic. The historical-critical analysis of religious texts did not become a topical issue until around the time of the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860.⁷² The ensuing storm of controversy in the Anglican world was closely followed by the *Jewish Chronicle*, under the editorship of Abraham Benisch. This was the first time that the Anglo-Jewish community had showed any great interest in the question of biblical criticism⁷³ and by this time, of course, Anglo-Reform had already taken shape. The result was that, while in Germany the reformers could offer a modern, scientifically informed alternative to Orthodoxy, in Britain the reformers were as unprepared and unfit to answer the challenge of biblical critical theory (as applied to the study of the Bible) as were the Orthodox. It comes as no surprise, then, that a rabbinical training college incorporating modern critical scholarship, Leo Baeck College, was not established in Britain until 1956 (and came about largely as a result of the efforts of *German Jewish refugees*).

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, biblical criticism had taken root within British universities and was familiar to the Christian clergymen they produced. Liberal thought and the idea of Progress were in the ascendant. Amongst the very

critical approach to the development of Judaism (e.g. *Judaism and its History*, originally published in 1865). His lifelong fascination with early Christianity is treated in S. Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁷¹ 'Jewish Science' or *Jüdische Wissenschaft* heavily influenced the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary (1854) and the Berlin Liberal College for Jewish Studies (1870) in Germany, and Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati (1871) and the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York (1886) in America.

⁷² F. Temple, *Essays and Reviews* (1860) was a collection of essays by seven authors which represented the most sensational theological development in nineteenth-century England after Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). The works were shocking not so much because they considered the "historical question" and therefore questioned biblical authority and inspiration – Strauss' *Life of Jesus* (1835-6) had already done this – but because they were derived almost entirely from Oxford educators and thus represented an attack from within, not a threat from without, such as German rationalism had. Popularly, it introduced theological issues to the educated public and made for a more liberal attitude towards religious differences.

⁷³ D. Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 45-46.

earliest Anglo-Jewish thinkers to face the inevitable question of whether or not Judaism should follow suit was Claude Montefiore. His article, 'Some Notes on the Effects of Biblical Criticism upon the Jewish Religion' was published in 1891 and laid open the way for a fresh alternative to the Judaism espoused by either the Bevis Marks Synagogue or the West London Synagogue. He argued that should Jews incorporate the findings of historical-critical methodology, the two foundation stones of Judaism would remain unaffected, namely, the belief in a personal, theistic God, and the Moral Law. In line with other Reform thinkers, Montefiore was convinced that it was the 'Mission of Israel' to disperse these fundamental truths throughout the world. Where he went further than most was in acknowledging the fact that in themselves such beliefs did not differentiate Judaism from other religions, that the practices and rituals peculiar to Jewish tradition were, in themselves, non-essential to the Gentile world.⁷⁴ In this context Montefiore appears very much a pioneer, standing alone in publicly and consistently arguing for a biblical critical approach to Jewish religious texts. His interest in the implications of historical-criticism, in terms of both the rabbinical and biblical literatures, found little support among the Reform community, perhaps because of perceptions of the German experience. This, as much as the limited practical reforms, appears to have contributed to the failure of Reform to gain as popular a following as that enjoyed on the Continent.

IV. Liberal Judaism as an Alternative to Orthodoxy and Reform

The significance placed upon Montefiore in the account which follows may seem out of proportion in light of the relatively insignificant place accorded him in the only institutional history of Liberal Judaism to date, Rigal and Rosenberg's *Liberal Judaism; the First Hundred Years* (2004).⁷⁵ There Montefiore is eclipsed by Lily Montagu and Israel Mattuck, to whom we shall return, the one an able

⁷⁴ C.G. Montefiore, 'Some Notes on the Effects of Biblical Criticism upon the Jewish Religion', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, IV (1891-92), 297-298.

⁷⁵ L. Rigal & R. Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism; The First Hundred Years* (London: Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 2004). Edward Kessler's *An English Jew; the Life and Writings of Claude Montefiore* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1989) is an edited selection of Montefiore's work and provides only a brief overview. His *Four Founders Of Liberal Judaism: Israel Abrahams, Claude Montefiore, Lily Montagu And Israel Mattuck* (International Specialized Book Service, 2004) has not yet been published at this time.

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administrator, preacher and youth-worker, the other the first minister of the new congregation. The priority given here to Montefiore simply reflects a different concern, namely, an interest in the intellectual origins of Liberal Judaism.⁷⁶ As a result, the focus will be upon Montefiore who was its indisputable theological powerhouse and spiritual leader. At the same time this section will treat in detail the movement's early activities so as to properly contextualise, and thereby demonstrate the limits of, the influence of Christianity upon early Liberal Judaism.

Montefiore's movement away from Reform was by no means abrupt. It seems more accurate to speak of a gradual shift from liberal Jewish thought *within* the official camp to Liberal Judaism *outside* it. In an address to the Unitarian students of Manchester College, Oxford, in 1896, he felt rather that he was "speaking as a reformed, liberal or unorthodox Jew, whichever adjective one may choose to adopt".⁷⁷ He defined such "liberal Jews" a few years later as those *within* the Orthodox and Reform communities for whom "the Jewish religion, as it is currently expounded, and as in outward form and embodiment it actually exists, does not seem to appeal".⁷⁸ This somewhat negative, vague self-definition did not yet suggest a permanent split. Rather, Montefiore urged liberal Jews to "attempt a reform from within [the existing synagogue organisations]".⁷⁹ It seemed that at this time he was prepared to sacrifice "theological difference and difficulties" in the interest of religious brotherhood,⁸⁰ and was prepared to accept, albeit with dissatisfaction, that "liberal Judaism" in England had "no organised expression or embodiment".⁸¹

Thus the founding of the Jewish Religious Union (J.R.U.) in 1902 marks an important development, the point at which Montefiore felt that some institutional effort would be more effective in rejuvenating the Anglo-Jewish religious community

⁷⁶ Arguably, the disinterest in Montefiore's theology also reflects embarrassment in his obsession with Christianity and New Testament Studies, which will be outlined in what follows. In any case, both Rigal and Rosenberg graduated from the Liberal Jewish youth movement to go on to become leaders, and Lily Montagu undoubtedly occupies a special place in their hearts.

⁷⁷ C.G. Montefiore, 'Unitarianism and Judaism in their Relations to Each Other', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, IX (1896), 245. Originally an address to Manchester College, Oxford, 20 October 1896.

⁷⁸ C.G. Montefiore, 'Liberal Judaism in England: Its Difficulties and Its Duties', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, XII (1899-1900), 622.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 648.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

than would continued exhortation or essays. The success of this institutional effort, however, was largely the result of the work of the lay religious leader and youth worker Lily Montagu, as Ellen Umansky demonstrated in *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism* (1983). Involved in the Liberal cause from early on, Montagu had written an article in Montefiore's *Jewish Quarterly Review* on 'The Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today' (1899), which gave vent to the "vague thoughts and aspirations which were seething in the minds and hearts of [Montagu's] co-religionists".⁸² In November 1901 she organised a provisional committee and in early 1902 a letter was circulated to around a hundred potential supporters asking for their assistance in establishing a "Progressive" movement.⁸³ In so doing, she had persuaded Montefiore, whom she admired enormously and perhaps was even in love with,⁸⁴ to make the transition from scholar-thinker to what she described as "the great protagonist of the Liberal cause". Dependent upon his theological teaching and spiritual leadership, Montagu focussed her energy upon the general administration of the growing movement, and in particular to the promotion of religious education for Jewish women and girls. Montefiore, who highly valued her organisational abilities, appeared content to leave her to set the Liberal agenda (for example, Montagu was responsible for organising the first world conference for Progressive Judaism in 1926).⁸⁵ Undoubtedly, her fierce commitment to the cause and revolutionary fervour, made more acute by her father's disapproval,⁸⁶ left her frustrated at times with

⁸¹ Ibid., 618.

⁸² L. Montagu, 'The Jewish Religious Union and Its Beginning', *Papers for Jewish People* XXVII (1927), 1-2.

⁸³ The *Jewish Chronicle* published a report of the development of the J.R.U. *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 15.

⁸⁴ There is some evidence that Montagu's life-long admiration for Montefiore had once been love. Ellen Umansky speculates, "The semi-autobiographical references in her [Montagu's] novels as well as references in other published works and letters indicate that Lily Montagu at one time may have been in love with Claude Montefiore... As her secretary Jessie Levy confided, once the man that she loved (presumably Montefiore) married, she directed her love towards God and humanity in general." E. Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 238.

⁸⁵ Writing privately in 1926 of her organisation of a world conference for Progressive Judaism, Montefiore enthused, "It is a wonderful achievement; the unaided work of one woman: a remarkable result of faith, enthusiasm, patience, courage and systemised attention to detail." Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Lucy Cohen, 20 June 1926. L. Cohen, *Some Recollections of Claude Goldsmid-Montefiore 1858-1938* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 155.

⁸⁶ Lily's father, Samuel Montagu, was a founder member and president of the Federation of Synagogues, an affiliation of *chevras* and synagogues based in the East End of London which reflected a range of orthodox perspectives.

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Montefiore's less confrontational, more cautious approach.⁸⁷

At this early stage in the existence of the J.R.U., the group was conveniently amorphous and vague enough to meet the needs of a wide variety of individuals. The initial private meeting arranged by Montagu in February 1902 had simply set-up a provisional committee to organise "special services supplementary to those now held in the synagogues".⁸⁸ The first circular issued by the governing committee of the newly formed organisation had also been modest in scope. Sent out in June 1902 and published in the *Jewish Chronicle*, it read:

Object – To provide the means for deepening the religious spirit among those members of the Jewish community who are not in sympathy with the present Synagogue Service, or who are unable to attend them. The Committee... has decided that Saturday Afternoon Services shall be held weekly... The services will be held in a suitable hall, and the worshippers will sit together, without distinction of sex... The services, which will last about an hour, will be mainly in English... The musical portions (with instrumental accompaniment) will, it is hoped, be led by a voluntary choir.⁸⁹

As a result, the J.R.U. included a number of ministers belonging to the Orthodox United Synagogue, such as Simeon Singer, and to the Reform Synagogue, such as Morris Joseph, in addition to lay preachers like Israel Abrahams and Montefiore himself.⁹⁰ There were some difficulties in obtaining a suitable hall; Chief Rabbi Herman Adler declined to allow the J.R.U. to use any synagogue under his jurisdiction,⁹¹ and the Reform Synagogue set down so many stipulations that

⁸⁷ "Indeed, he gave the other man's point of view so fully, so fairly, and so attractively, that his own teaching sometimes became a little confused just because he could not be dogmatic." L. Montagu, 'Claude Montefiore – His Life and Work', address to the Liberal Jewish Synagogue (Sun 30 January 1944). "We sometimes thought that his own beliefs were not given the emphasis they deserved, because of the explanation he gave of the opinions of those who thought differently from him." L. Montagu, 'Claude Montefiore as Man and Prophet', sermon at Liberal Jewish Synagogue (7 June 1958). MS 282/3/7 Lily H. Montagu Papers, Sermons and Addresses, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁸⁸ *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 15.

⁸⁹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 June 1902, 11.

⁹⁰ L. Montagu, 'The Jewish Religious Union and Its Beginning', *Papers for Jewish People* XXVII (1927), 20.

⁹¹ It was decided that the instrumental music during their services would be abandoned if the Chief Rabbi agreed with their request. With his refusal, the J.R.U. went back to their original plan. *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 15.

Montefiore reluctantly advised his colleagues to decline the invitation to use the Berkeley Street Synagogue.⁹² Nevertheless, the first public meeting was held in October 1902 and the *Jewish Chronicle*, which followed the progress of the movement closely, reported it was attended by between 300 and 400 people of a variety of backgrounds.⁹³ Predictably, Union services were denounced as ‘un-Jewish’ because the group was perceived to be breaking with tradition.⁹⁴ The *Jewish Chronicle*, for example, noted that in the Union’s provisional Prayer Book (1902) the prayers for the restoration of the Temple and of the return to Zion had been removed, and no mention had been made of the Sabbath or of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.⁹⁵ The services were characterised by a paucity of Hebrew prayers, no reading from the Scroll,⁹⁶ and hymns from altogether too unacceptable a source; the Chief Rabbi complained that “one of these [hymns] has been composed from so essentially a Trinitarian standpoint that two lines had to be modified”.⁹⁷ Two Orthodox ministers left the J.R.U. in response to the Chief Rabbi’s criticism,⁹⁸ and Montefiore complained of the increasing difficulty in persuading other ministers to preach.⁹⁹ Even so, the majority of members would have regarded themselves as remaining under the authority of the Chief Rabbi, especially since the official Prayer Book, published in 1903, was less radical and reinstated a greater portion of the traditional

⁹² The invitation from the Council of the Reform Synagogue had no doubt been issued as a means by which to control a potential break-away. Service stipulations included: that only Jews could preach, that men and women would be seated separately, that the Ark would be opened and a portion of the Law would be read in Hebrew, that no hymns would be sung that had not been written by Jews, that only previously approved prayers in English could be used, that the *Amidah* would be read, that significant portions of the Hebrew liturgy be retained, and that the general service ritual would have to be approved first. *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 April 1903, 13. David Marks himself was more accommodating, although he recommended that “our own ministers should take no active part in that service.” *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 April 1903, 12. Montefiore argued against the option due to its “restrictive conditions”. *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 April 1903, 11.

⁹³ Montefiore gave a talk on “the validity of different ‘types’ of Jewish services” (which was warmly complimented by the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*) while Rev. Simeon Singer conducted the service. Caps were kept on. *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 October 1902, 9.

⁹⁴ Sabbath services were held at a hotel in the ‘Wharnccliffe Rooms’ at the Hotel Great Central from 1902-11, except for a short interruption from June to November 1903 when no services were held, and for a short spell at Steinway Hall when services resumed. *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 15 and 13 November 1903, 12.

⁹⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 November 1902, 17.

⁹⁶ *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 October 1902, 9.

⁹⁷ Sermon reported in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 12 December 1902, 8.

⁹⁸ Members of the United Synagogue included: Albert Jessel (vice-president), Felix Davies (treasurer); Simeon Singer, Aaron Green, J.F. Stern (ministers). Singer, who was also a vice-president for almost a year, left after pressure from his congregation. S. Sharot, ‘Reform and Liberal Judaism in London: 1840-1940’, *Jewish Social Studies* 41 (1979), 219.

⁹⁹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 16.

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liturgy and particularistic Jewish prayers.¹⁰⁰ At this point in time, the 300 members of the J.R.U. saw their Union “merely as an élitist intellectual movement which was retaining the interests of Jews who might otherwise have eschewed religion or defected to Christianity”.¹⁰¹ Within a few years, however, dissonant voices began to be heard, and cracks began to appear, regarding self-definition and Union policy.

In terms of its original remit (namely, rescuing the large numbers of those in the Jewish community who were in danger of falling away from their ancestral faith) the J.R.U. was not a spectacular success. Reports in the *Jewish Chronicle* indicate that the London membership remained around 300 for the first two years.¹⁰² In 1904, Montefiore was making public appeals for larger attendances and admitting that the ‘modern’ style of service had not attracted the numbers he had originally envisaged.¹⁰³ At the annual meeting in 1905 he accepted that the J.R.U. had only brought some 30 or 40 individuals back to Judaism, commenting that “the problem is more complicated, more deeply rooted, than, perhaps, we had estimated”.¹⁰⁴ By 1907, attendance figures had improved only marginally upon those of four years before.¹⁰⁵ The establishment of an East End branch in 1903 had fared even worse; with audiences of only 60-100 recorded in 1905, it had been closed down altogether by 1911.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 October 1903, 15.

¹⁰¹ A. Kershen and J. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840-1995* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), 105. J.R.U. services were held in “the Hill Street building” in Marylebone from 1911. In 1925, the Liberal Jewish Synagogue was opened in St. John’s Wood Road. *Ibid.*, 100, 106; also D. Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 2nd edn (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 416, 417. A report published in the *Jewish Chronicle* states an attendance of 299. *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 15.

¹⁰² *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1903, 15.

¹⁰³ *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 June 1904, 13.

¹⁰⁴ *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 February 1905, 26. The implication is that these individuals were lapsed Jews, rather than reclaimed converts to Christianity. Zangwill described such individuals as “indifferentists”. Letter from Israel Zangwill to C.G. Montefiore, 13 December 1907. MS A36/133, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

¹⁰⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 May 1907, 30.

¹⁰⁶ *Jewish Chronicle*, 23 October 1903, 9, 24 February 1905, 27, and 24 March 1911, 10. The East End branch came about as a result of the J.R.U.’s conviction that the needs of the largely immigrant population of the East End were “even more pressing than for the West End.” It always reflected a more traditional approach to Judaism and was the only one at which there was separate seating for men and women and where readers were required to wear a *tallit* or prayer shawl. L. Rigal & R. Rosenberg, *Liberal Judaism; The First Hundred Years* (London: Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 2004), 29-30, 44.

In his paper ‘The Jewish Religious Union and Its Cause’ (1908), Montefiore commented that he had come to see that the original role of the J.R.U. as “something more than a society, something less than a synagogue” was not enough. If, he reasoned, the J.R.U. had been in complete sympathy with the theory and practice of official Judaism, then its existence could never have been justified. Yet if it really did represent something different to that which Orthodoxy or Reform could offer, then the time had come to move on and develop. The negative definition – the stripping away of what was unnecessary – was no longer satisfactory. As he wrote elsewhere,

The liberalism which comes to a man from his *reaction* against tradition is *not* the liberalism which is good for him. This [is] not the *positive, warm, eager* inspiring liberalism which I want from him.¹⁰⁷

Instead, the J.R.U. should be understood as the representative of the “Cause and the Idea” of progressive, Liberal Judaism (upper case ‘Liberal’ replacing lower-case ‘liberal’). He was at pains to make it clear that this did not mean a fixed or dogmatic creed but rather “certain progressive principles”; in this way he was able to distance himself from the Orthodox whilst at the same time avoiding committing himself to a position that would immediately divide or offend. He concluded the paper by hinting that a clear break from Orthodox Judaism, although not the original intention, seemed to be the direction in which they were heading.

It may be true that some of us, when this Union was first founded, did not realise fully what we were doing and whither we were going. It may be true that the real reason for our existence and the Cause to which we pay allegiance,... have to a certain extent been only revealed and realised since our establishment.¹⁰⁸

In 1909, following a survey of J.R.U. members, the “storm period of our existence began” with the decision to form a new congregation.¹⁰⁹ It was generally

¹⁰⁷ Letter from C.G. Montefiore, undated. MSS 169 ‘Claude J.G. Montefiore’, Hebrew University National Library, Jerusalem. Montefiore once wrote, “Mere negation is not necessarily of value. A noble life which observes the dietary laws is not necessarily nobler for giving them up.” Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Lily Montagu, 12 April 1899. Microfilm No 2718, Correspondence of Lily H. Montagu, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹⁰⁸ C.G. Montefiore, ‘The Jewish Religious Union and Its Cause’, unpublished address (1908), 10.

¹⁰⁹ L. Montagu, ‘The Jewish Religious Union and Its Beginning’, *Papers for Jewish People* XXVII (1927), 20.

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agreed that services would be held on Friday evenings, Saturday mornings and afternoons, and two weekdays a month (one of which was to be a Sunday).¹¹⁰ In contradiction to the original charter of the J.R.U., which had forbidden the establishment of an independent congregation, a manifesto of the breakaway Liberal group was published in the *Jewish Chronicle* in October of that year denying the divine authority of the Bible and outlining the deficiencies, as Montefiore saw it, of traditional Judaism.¹¹¹ In addition to provoking a public outcry,¹¹² this resulted in the departure of four members of the Committee, including Oswald Simon, and the resignation of many other Orthodox members.¹¹³ With the establishment of a Liberal Jewish synagogue in 1910, Montefiore signalled his own and his fellow Liberal Jews' disassociation from both the Orthodox and the Reform positions.¹¹⁴ The main weekly service was distinctive in being conducted mainly in English (Hebrew was retained in the form of the *kaddish*, part of the *Shema* and the *Adon Olam*), and included a reading from the Bible and a public address; it also neglected to call up anyone to read Torah.¹¹⁵ At the same time, Lily Montagu initiated a Liberal Jewish 'Sunday School'.¹¹⁶

The increasing radicalisation of Reform movements throughout the Continent and United States at around this time occurred for a variety of historical and sociological reasons – not least the impact of the ebb and flow of anti-Semitism and the ever-increasing pressure to appear reasonable and less distinctive to the non-

¹¹⁰ *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 October 1909, 19.

¹¹¹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 October 1909, 19-22.

¹¹² The *Jewish Chronicle* was highly critical of the "spirit of revolt" stirred up by the J.R.U., and gave considerable coverage to Montefiore's critics. One edition published four pages of furious letters of complaint. *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 October 1909, 20-23. Another three pages of letters were published the following week, including a number of negative pulpit responses. *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 October 1909, 17-19. The Chief Rabbi's response in the form of a sermon was published the week after that, together with more letters. He was highly critical of what he described as "the 'fluid' principles on which the new synagogue is to be built." *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 November 1909, 18-19.

¹¹³ Oswald Simon, who had worked closely with Montefiore on various reforming experiments since 1881 and who had led the Sunday Movement in 1899, published his letter of resignation to Montefiore in the *Jewish Chronicle*, in explicit protest of the manifesto's denial of the external and divine authority of the Bible. (This, he implied, was the result of Montefiore being too greatly affected by the results of the "New Criticism"). He also made it clear that he did not share Montefiore's attitude towards traditional and Orthodox Judaism. *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 October 1909, 17.

¹¹⁴ For example, Lily Montagu felt obliged to resign from her youth work with the Reform Synagogue. *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 October 1909, 23.

¹¹⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 February 1911, 19.

¹¹⁶ L. Montagu, 'The Jewish Religious Union and Its Beginning', *Papers for Jewish People* XXVII

Jewish world. But while this helps explain why such radical expressions of Judaism were becoming more popular (although not amongst Zionists!), it is less useful in accounting for the specifics of the new theologies. To do this, it is necessary to remain in the sphere of religious thought and look more closely at the appropriate guiding spirits.

Montefiore had been working on a theological framework to describe his movement from before the publication of *Liberal Judaism* in 1903.¹¹⁷ By the time of his 1920 article, 'Is there a Middle Way?', the theological distinctions between Liberal Judaism and Orthodoxy were not only obvious, but formed the main argument. While a certain nebulosity remained – inevitable if the ideas of progression and evolution were to have any meaning for the future – Montefiore could now confidently define Liberal Judaism theologically as

- (1) accepting the results of biblical criticism;
- (2) abandoning the doctrine of verbal inspiration;
- (3) accepting the human element in the Hebrew Bible;
- (4) accepting the moral imperfection and growth within the Hebrew Bible;
- (5) accepting the concept of progressive revelation;
- (6) regarding "the past" as authoritative but not binding;
- (7) separating the "universal" from the "particular";
- (8) emphasising the Mission of Israel to the world.¹¹⁸

Such an outline of the central tenets of Liberal Judaism offered a straightforward challenge to "Historic or Traditional Judaism", Montefiore argued, since a middle ground was impossible: if the traditional Jew could accept elements (1) to (6), then he would be "really much nearer to Liberal Judaism than to Orthodox Judaism". Yet if these doctrines were accepted, then the idea of a "national religion... as different as possible from its environment and, especially, as different as possible from Christianity" seemed too much "a sad and narrow conception" to satisfy.¹¹⁹

(1927), 24.

¹¹⁷ A review at the time commented, "The merit of the book consists in this: it is constructive... [I]n no other English book has there been so full, so inspiring a discussion of the fundamentals of the Jewish religion." *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 February 1903, 24.

¹¹⁸ C.G. Montefiore, 'Is There a Middle Way?', *Papers for Jewish People* XXIII (1920), 12.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

V. Inter-denominational Controversy: A Jewish-Christianity?

The situation became more 'radical' for Anglo-Liberal Judaism upon the arrival in January 1912 of Rabbi Israel Mattuck, a graduate of Hebrew Union College, who had been hand-picked for the London pulpit by Montefiore after a month long search of U.S. Reform congregations.¹²⁰ Generally speaking, the two men got on well. Mattuck himself referred to Montefiore as "our leader" and "teacher" and was content to work under Montefiore who continued with the Presidency of the Liberal Synagogue and J.R.U.¹²¹ He was well received by the members of the Liberal Synagogue, and the increased attendance under his permanent leadership delighted Montefiore who was quite aware of his own limitations in terms of drawing a crowd and holding its attention.¹²² Membership of the new Liberal Synagogue rose from 146 in 1912 to 446 in 1915,¹²³ and other London branches were established.¹²⁴ Marriage and burial requirements were met by 1913,¹²⁵ and the number of children attending

¹²⁰ Montefiore had considered many possibilities for a suitable rabbi. In a letter dated 22 May 1910, Israel Zangwill wrote, "I am posting you an American paper with a portrait of Rabbi Charles Fleischer because I have read somewhere that he is one of those in your mind for your movement. He certainly impressed me favourably when I met him in Boston." MS A36/133, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem. Montefiore settled on Mattuck after he had spent over a month in America. He attended the Conference of American Reform Rabbis, and visited Reform Temples in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Cincinnati. C. Bermant, *The Cousinhood; The Anglo-Jewish Gentry* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), 318.

¹²¹ I. Mattuck, 'Our Debt to Claude G. Montefiore', sermon (1938).

¹²² "Very large congregation today. They *do* like M[atuck]" Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Lucy Cohen, 30 March 1928. L. Cohen, *Some Recollections of Claude Goldsmid-Montefiore 1858-1938* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 173. "I fear that I am not a sensitive person enough in some directions. E.g. Mattuck says he can always feel if his audience is bored or interested, sympathetic or antagonistic. I feel nothing, one way or the other." Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Lucy Cohen, 9 September 1931. *Ibid.*, 205.

¹²³ Actual attendance was considerably lower. *J.R.U. Bulletin* (March 1915), cited in S. Sharot, 'Reform and Liberal Judaism in London: 1840-1940', *Jewish Social Studies* 41 (1979), 221.

¹²⁴ The West Central and Golders Green & District branches were both created in 1914 and conducted monthly meetings. The first had a membership of 51, and the second of 44. *J.R.U. Bulletin* (November 1914), (March 1915), cited in S. Sharot, 'Reform and Liberal Judaism in London: 1840-1940', *Jewish Social Studies* 41 (1979), 221. The North London Liberal Jewish congregation was established in 1921 with M. Perlzweig as minister. 300-400 people attended each of the first four sessions at which Mattuck, Montagu and Montefiore preached. *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 May 1921, 30, 38.

¹²⁵ In 1913 the Reform Synagogue placed a number of grave spaces at the disposal of the Liberal Synagogue. *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 January 1913, 30. In September 1914, Montefiore opened the 2-acre Liberal Jewish Synagogue cemetery on Pound Lane, which was designed to hold 1500 grave spaces, and in which there was erected a chapel and a columbarium "for the reception of cremated remains." *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 October 1914, 9. The Liberal Synagogue was granted the right to solemnise civil marriages at the same time as the religious ceremony was performed in 1913. *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 February 1913, 20.

the Liberal Jewish Religious School was recorded as 64 in 1914.¹²⁶ In the same year a waiting list was initiated for those wanting to join the synagogue, prompting plans for a larger building.¹²⁷ From the mid-1920s on, its congregation of around 1500 exceeded that of the West London Reform Synagogue.¹²⁸ Mattuck's spirited reforms included giving women permission to preach (1918) and to read prayers from the pulpit (1920), although Lily Montagu was certainly the driving force in forwarding the role of women within the synagogue and indignantly complained at the "thirteen year delay" before they were able to partake in leading the service.¹²⁹ Sunday services took place from 1920 in Mortimer Hall until they became a regular feature of the religious activity of the congregation in 1926.¹³⁰ (According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, the numbers attracted to the Sunday service were higher than at the Sabbath morning service).¹³¹

Inevitably, conflict arose between the growing movement and the established orders, and some of it was very bitter indeed. A bizarre example of the enmity of some among the Orthodox was the forgery by parties unknown of a letter from the Liberal Synagogue inviting guests to a Christmas evening celebration.¹³² Less dramatic were the sermons and writings of Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz, which often contained criticisms of Montefiore and which are useful in indicating the areas in which Liberal Jewish teaching was perceived as heretical. Over the years Hertz condemned Montefiore's "notorious article" on higher criticism for undermining the authority of the Pentateuch,¹³³ denounced his failure to respect the rabbinical Law in

¹²⁶ This number was twice that of the year before. *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 February 1914, 19.

¹²⁷ 30 households had joined in 1913-14. *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 February 1914, 19.

¹²⁸ Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St John's Wood: 784 (1921), 1491 (1928), 1622 (1939). West London Reform Synagogue: 1197 (1924), 1266 (1930), 1386 (1936). S. Sharot, 'Reform and Liberal Judaism in London: 1840-1940', *Jewish Social Studies* 41 (1979), 221-222.

¹²⁹ L. Montagu, 'The Jewish Religious Union and Its Beginning', *Papers for Jewish People* XXVII (1927), 27. Montefiore had made public his support in principle for women ministers in 1920. *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 March 1920, 21.

¹³⁰ D. Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, 2nd edn (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 417.

¹³¹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 October 1925, 13, 23 March 1928, 20, 29 March 1935, 38.

¹³² In a letter to Lily Montagu, Montefiore fumed, "What a scandalous shame! I have never heard such a thing in my life. The enemies of the Liberal Movement sent out a forged circular from the Gov. Body of the Liberal [Synagogue?] inviting people to a Xmas evening function and Xmas tree in the Synagogue. I must relate the whole affair to you on Saturday." Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Lily Montagu, 15 December, year uncertain. Microfilm No 2718, Correspondence of Lily H. Montagu, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹³³ J.H. Hertz, 'The Five Books of the Torah', *Affirmations of Judaism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 41n. Montefiore complained of the Chief Rabbi, "I see that our C[hief] R[abbi] has been

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matters of marriage and divorce,¹³⁴ and roundly refused Montefiore's request that the qualification 'Orthodox' be added to any future 'Jewish' pronouncements.¹³⁵ Similarities with Christian practice made it especially easy to question the authenticity of Montefiore's 'Jewishness'. Thus his experiments with Sunday Synagogue worship were regarded as "a menace to Judaism calculated to undermine and sap the most sacred institution of our race",¹³⁶ and his abrogation of Jewish Law was "an echo of Paul, as of every Jewish apostate since Paul's day, and is at absolute variance with the truth".¹³⁷ Not unsurprisingly it was Montefiore's conciliatory approach to Christianity which provoked the fiercest recriminations. Hertz, a disciple of Solomon Schechter from his time at the Jewish Theological Seminary, sided with those who felt that "the London movement" was an "attempt to start a Jewish Christianity".¹³⁸ In one highly public dispute, he went so far as to imply that Montefiore was trinitarian¹³⁹ – Montefiore was infuriated with what he described in the press as "deftly chosen" quotations from his *The Old Testament and After* (1923), but Hertz responded coolly that "if he *does* say these things, he must not object if he is told by Jews that the doctrine of Unity is still 'an open question' to him".¹⁴⁰

Although Todd Endelman and others have demonstrated that nineteenth-century Christian conversionist efforts did not actually have a very great effect upon Anglo-Jewry and that relatively few converted (especially among the Ashkenazim),¹⁴¹

kicking about again. I don't mind when he vituperates, for vituperation is in a sense neither true nor false, but when he speaks about criticism, and says that Wellhausen is all crumpled up, it makes me sad – that any one should venture to say such awful busters I feel ashamed – for him." Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Stephen Wise, 28 May 1927. MS 19/27/7, Jewish Institute of Religion Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹³⁴ J.H. Hertz, 'Marriage, Divorce and the Position of Women in Judaism', *Sermons, Addresses and Studies* (London: Soncino Press, 1938), 64-65.

¹³⁵ The argument had concerned *shechitah* which Hertz had described in *The Times* as "the Jewish method of slaughter". Montefiore's request was regarded as divisive and antagonistic. J.H. Hertz, 'The New Paths II', *Affirmations of Judaism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 187.

¹³⁶ 'Revolution in Judaism', *The Express* (1909). ACC/3529/4/9, London Metropolitan Archives.

¹³⁷ Address at Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers (July 1927), J.H. Hertz, *Sermons, Addresses and Studies*, II, (London: Soncino Press, 1938), 156-157.

¹³⁸ Hertz quoted S. Dubnow in 'The New Paths II' in *Affirmations of Judaism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 170.

¹³⁹ Hertz suggested that "Liberals would be prepared to subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity, if they were permitted to put their own interpretation on it, or that of advanced Christian theologians." J.H. Hertz, 'The Unity of God', *Affirmations of Judaism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 19, 20.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20n.

¹⁴¹ T.M. Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History, 1656-1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 97. R. Smith has argued that conversions among Ashkenazim, although

Jewish religious leaders were deeply suspicious of and generally hostile towards interaction with Christianity, partly for fear of conversion. This attitude found its way into the Jewish media – the *Jewish Chronicle* of the period is full of articles refuting Christian teaching and theology¹⁴² – and into popular Jewish consciousness. Combined with the threat of Christian conversion was the very real threat of the dilution of Jewish culture by the effect of the surrounding Christian culture. Together with the traditional anti-Christian bias, these fears explain the angry opposition Montefiore’s attitude towards Christianity met with from many Jews. A well-known New Testament scholar with a hermeneutical interest in the teachings of Jesus and Paul,¹⁴³ Montefiore himself reported that fellow Jews often told him, “You know, Montefiore, I would join your movement if you would only give up your pre-occupation with Jesus and the Gospels.”¹⁴⁴

Such conflicts emerged in spite of the fact that Montefiore went to great lengths not to antagonise his opponents unnecessarily. Areas in which he was prepared to sacrifice certain liberal principles for the higher sake of continuity and to avoid offence included: retaining a ‘traditional’ stance on circumcision and the regular Saturday Sabbath; and rejecting the use of the New Testament in synagogue services, something that he was certainly very interested in.¹⁴⁵ In his concern lest Liberal Jews be cut off by themselves from “the great general mass of Jews with whom we desire to keep in touch”,¹⁴⁶ he curtailed many of the progressive reforms to be found in the German and the American liberal movements. This concern to

rare, were often the result of a religious conviction, in contrast to the many more conversions among the wealthier Sephardic community in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which are explained in terms of social and political disability, the effects of intermarriage and business expediency. R.M. Smith, ‘The London Jews’ Society and Patterns of Jewish Conversion in England, 1801-1859’, *Jewish Social Studies* XLIII (1981).

¹⁴² For attacks against Christian conversionists in particular, see D. Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 11, 21, 27-28, 39, 58-59.

¹⁴³ See D.R. Langton, ‘Claude Montefiore in the Context of Jewish Approaches to Jesus and Paul’, *Hebrew Union College Annual* LXXI (2000).

¹⁴⁴ Cited in L. Edgar, ‘Claude Montefiore’s Thought and the Present Religious Situation’ (London, 1966), 21.

¹⁴⁵ In an unpublished paper, Montefiore “went through the N[ew] T[estament] picking out bits which would be suitable for reading out at Sabbath services in Synagogue, if that time *ever* came when such readings would not do more harm than good.” Mrs. MacArthur, Montefiore’s secretary, cited in L. Cohen, *Some Recollections of Claude Goldsmid-Montefiore 1858-1938* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 110.

¹⁴⁶ C.G. Montefiore, ‘The Jewish Religious Union; Its Principles and Future’, *Papers for Jewish People* (1918), 11.

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preserve what Jewish unity he could was reflected in correspondence with Lily Montagu before the J.R.U. was formed. “Clearly we must, especially as regards public worship and the outward embodiment of religion, keep... our relation with other Jews. There must be a certain unity amid variety... There is something very valuable in historical continuity.”¹⁴⁷ And writing as late as 1935 in an open letter for the Governing Body of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, Montefiore publicly reiterated his ‘live and let live’ policy with regard to the Orthodox.

For many generations yet there will be many Jews who will find this [Orthodox] way to God, who will continue to believe in him and love him, through the medium, and on the basis, of Orthodox Judaism. Let them do so. Let us neither disturb them nor fail to do them honour.¹⁴⁸

The role of Progressive Judaism was, he reiterated, simply to keep within the Jewish fold those for whom “modern science and philosophy” made the traditional path impossible.

In more general terms, the psychological and social effect upon Anglo-Jewry of Montefiore’s Liberal Judaism was not inconsiderable. On the one hand, the concern generated by the setting up of a Liberal Jewish Synagogue focussed the minds of both Reform and Orthodox ministers considerably with regard to modernisation; Steven Sharot suggests that while the religious services of the West London Reform Synagogue were closer to those of the Orthodox United Synagogue before about 1920, they gradually became closer in both content and form to the Liberal synagogues from that point on.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, there was also a direct ‘ripple effect’ of Montefiore’s theology as his own notoriety grew and people were forced to take sides; for example, in 1912 the radical minister of Manchester Reform

¹⁴⁷ In the same letter Montefiore wrote, “‘New Judaism’ should keep Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, New Year and Atonement. You can’t create new festivals. Our present ones are a bond of union; they can be spiritualised and universalised.” Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Lily Montagu, 12 April 1899, marked “strictly private and confidential”. Microfilm No 2718, Correspondence of Lily H. Montagu, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Lily Montagu, 14 July 1935, formally a letter to apologise for missing the meeting of the Governing Body of the World Union in Holland. Microfilm No 2718, Lily H. Montagu Correspondence, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹⁴⁹ Mixed seating (1923); services altered to meet the “religious needs of the young” (1928); some traditional prayers were removed and English prayers added; an English hymn was sung and certain prayers read out loud by the congregation (1928). *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 March 1923, 12, 24 February

Synagogue, Harry Lewis, a supporter of the J.R.U., resigned his position after the synagogue's lay leadership refused to sanction sermons by Montefiore and Israel Mattuck.¹⁵⁰

VI. Liberal Judaism and the Christian Critique of Judaism

Setting aside the overtly polemical charge of Montefiore's Christianisation of Judaism, the question remains: to what extent can the distinct ethos of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue be attributed to Christian influences? The issue is complicated by the need to differentiate between (1) liberal Jewish responses, and particularly the responses of its moving spirit, Montefiore, to the contemporary Christian critique of Judaism and the internalisation of distinctly Christian modes of thought, and (2) the common concerns of Christian and Jewish thinkers more generally which were the result of living and engaging with modernity.

Religious apathy and secularisation characterised both Christian and Jewish communities throughout nineteenth-century Europe and provided a subject for much heated debate. In contrast to Montefiore, many Jews believed assimilation posed a mortal threat to Judaism and that their future in Western society looked likely to see a slow, lingering death for Jewish culture and religion. In a letter to Montefiore in 1907, Israel Zangwill wrote,

Nothing has more convinced me than my visit to the provinces of the absolute necessity for a Jewish renaissance, whether territorial or religious. Manchester and Birmingham are object lessons in Jewish disintegration. The communities are in a state of rapid decay, and are honeycombed not only with indifferentists but with converts. Almost every family of the better class is a house divided against itself... I see no sign of any inherent strength in the Jewish fabric to resist the environment, and if your Religious Union is to build a dam it will have to go about the work much more strenuously.¹⁵¹

1928, 12, 9 March 1928, 15.

¹⁵⁰ A. Kershen and J. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840-1995* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), 108. Lewis, a Zionist Cambridge graduate, left for the States in 1913 to become chaplain and principal of the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York.

¹⁵¹ Letter from Israel Zangwill to C.G. Montefiore, 13 December 1907. MS A36/133, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

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In contrast with those who blamed their Christian or secular environment for the crisis, Montefiore felt that the high number of “nominal” Jews was not merely due to “indifferentism, ignorance or sloth”. Although he recognised the contribution of these factors to the deteriorating situation, he did not think that they fully accounted for the facts. What was missing, he insisted, was a Judaism that answered the modern Jew’s feelings of “aloofness or estrangement... [and] dissatisfaction” with regard to the Orthodoxy.¹⁵² He saw with Zangwill that a more pro-active approach was needed, urging that, unlike his “traditionalist brother”,

the Liberal Jew has not merely to sit tight and keep still, guarding the rampart, maintaining the fort, he has to go forward and, in going forward, to grow... We have to do what we can to persuade, to alter, to convert.¹⁵³

Montefiore agreed with contemporary Jewish wisdom that, as a result of secularisation or “materialism”, things were changing for British Jews. Where he differed was in failing to view the “prevailing indifference and growing apostasy” as inevitable unless Jews closed ranks and fought against the on-coming tide of assimilation. Rather than fight it, he felt that they should embrace it, and gloried in his doctrine of “the Englishman of the Jewish persuasion”.¹⁵⁴ What was more, in contrast to the Reform and Orthodox Synagogues, he did not find the idea of a radical reformulation of Judaism unthinkable. Quite the contrary, he saw the need for a progressive Judaism, one that would complement the findings of science and biblical criticism, as essential for its survival; general Jewish indifference and atrophy simply illustrated the failure of the Reform and Orthodox to meet the challenges of modernity. It could hardly be said, he felt, that “the so-called reform synagogue in London, with its allies in Manchester and Bradford,” had achieved the organised presentation of Judaism necessary for retaining “modern Jews”.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² C.G. Montefiore, ‘Liberal Judaism in England: Its Difficulties and Its Duties’, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, XII (1899-1900), 626, 631.

¹⁵³ C.G. Montefiore, ‘The Jewish Religious Union and Its Cause’, unpublished address at the service of the Union on 20 June 1908.

¹⁵⁴ C.G. Montefiore, ‘Liberal Judaism in England: Its Difficulties and Its Duties’, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, XII (1899-1900), 618.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 621.

The J.R.U. hoped primarily to combat Jewish “indifferentism” more effectively than the Reform movement had done and to continue from where they had left off with regard to developing a religion of the heart. Lily Montagu’s article, ‘Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today’ (1899), focused upon the need to correct the deficiencies of both “West End Jews” whose Reform Judaism was disinterested and materialistic in character, and “East End Jews” whose more vigorous observance was lacking appreciation of the “God within”.¹⁵⁶ Many of those who joined the new movement had grown up in Reform synagogues in West London, Manchester and Bradford¹⁵⁷ (Montefiore himself was a warden of the West London synagogue and a council member) and were familiar with a reforming ethos and sensitive to the Christian critique of Judaism. This critique shaped the vocabulary with which they expressed their own dissatisfaction with current Reform theology and practice. Development in this direction was possible due to their relative freedom from political interference; for the Anglo-Jewish élite, the J.R.U. served no useful political purpose (as the West London Reform Synagogue had done before) and the criteria for change no longer depended upon the non-theological concerns of its wealthiest supporters. This independence allowed the J.R.U. greater scope and gave it its particular character, concerned as it was with rescuing Jews, incorporating biblical criticism, developing individual piety, expanding its horizon as a truly universalist religion, and its interest and concern for Christian thought and figures. Such concerns reflected specific changes and emphasises within Christianity at this time and arguably represent an internalisation of Christian modes of thought.

If the majority of the reforms of the West London Synagogue are to be explained in terms of Evangelical bibliocentricity and anti-rabbinism, then the critically-informed liberal Jewish movement should be understood in terms of Anglican liberalism and the biblical criticism which had been gaining ground from Evangelical literalism from as early as the 1850s. The decline in Evangelicalism was linked to a decline in the religious authority of the Hebrew Bible brought about by the

¹⁵⁶ L. Montagu, ‘Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism Today’, *Jewish Quarterly Review* XI (1898-1899), 216-218.

¹⁵⁷ Reform congregations were established in West London (1840), Manchester (1856), Bradford (1873). Reform services were also held in Hull in the 1850s and in Clapham 1875-77.

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results of biblical criticism. It left the Anglican liberals in the forefront. In terms of the Christian critique of Judaism there was a corresponding shift of emphasis from Evangelical to Anglican liberal concerns: Jewish ritualism and rabbinism were no longer attacked or emphasised as much. From this time on, the perceived deficiencies focused upon inferior, out-of-date Old Testament principles and Jewish particularistic teachings. In 'Liberal Judaism in England' (1899), for example, Montefiore wrote that "a sort of critical shiver" ran through him when the sacred scroll was elevated during the synagogue service, and he cited the idea of a perfect law given to Moses and passed on as the Pentateuch to Israel as the first of a number of biblical critical stumbling blocks facing the educated Western Jew.¹⁵⁸

The Evangelical view of the Jews had been conditioned to a great degree by their veneration of the Hebrew Bible. They had had sympathy for the Jews as the Chosen People and for the part they were destined to play in future times, in accordance to the Word of God. The Jews had exemplified the fallen nature of mankind and the inevitability of divine punishment; rabbinism and the Talmud had been understood as the cause of Jewish stagnation. In contrast, the Anglican liberal view of the Bible as non-verbally inspired meant that Judaism was stripped of its special role. While they agreed with the Evangelicals that the development of Judaism had been arrested, the liberals did not see this to be the outcome of rabbinism but as a matter of essentials; Judaism had been intrinsically flawed from Old Testament times onwards. Implicit in the celebrated *Essays and Reviews* (1860), for example, was the idea that Israel's spiritual understanding had developed through time. This idea meant that Judaism was regarded as an early stage in God's progressive revelation to mankind. The perception that it had failed to develop meant it was now regarded something of an anachronism.

Recoil from Evangelical doctrines in mid-Victorian England meant that there was a growing emphasis of the humanity of Christ at the expense of the doctrine of Atonement in much Christian teaching.¹⁵⁹ One result was that many Christians

¹⁵⁸ C.G. Montefiore, 'Liberal Judaism in England; Its Difficulties and Its Duties', *Jewish Quarterly Review* XII (1899-1900), 627.

¹⁵⁹ There were at least two distinct reactions against the Evangelical doctrine of the Atonement:

(initially Anglicans but later non-conformists) began to think of Jesus more as a noble exemplar than as a saviour, a trend which reflected Victorian society's concern for ethics and high morality. 1860-1880 has been described as something of a hey-day for 'Incarnational thought' and saw Anglicanism come to the forefront.¹⁶⁰ This had two important ramifications for Liberal Judaism, or at least, for its father-figure, Montefiore. These had to do with attitudes towards rabbinic authority and with the need for a religious hero, an ideal from whom could be derived spiritual inspiration. Firstly, then, Anglican exemplarist theology was at odds with what was regarded as the legalism implicit in Talmudism and, predictably, while Jewish Orthodox and Reform apologists attempted to justify their loyalty to traditional authorities, the liberals sided with the Anglicans on this matter. In one of his later *Papers for Jewish People*, Montefiore was keen to contrast the position taken by the J.R.U. with that of the traditionalists.

We recognise no binding outside authority between us and God, whether in man or in a book, whether in a church or in God, whether in a tradition or in a ritual. Most, if not all, of our differences from the traditionalists spring from this rejection of an authority which they unhesitatingly accept... To free ourselves from the heavy bondage of the Rabbinic law and of the Shulchan Aruch... is desirable and necessary.¹⁶¹

The Liberals' sensitivity to Christian criticism of Judaism as a limited, particularist religion is not only reflected in the emphasis they placed on the universal nature of Liberal Judaism, but also in the need they felt to explain such apparent discrepancies as the absence of Jewish missionaries. In October 1932, Mattuck wrote an article, 'Why the Jews have no Missionaries',¹⁶² as a response to Christian critics who interpreted the phenomenon as evidence of its national, tribal or racial nature (his argument contained numerous explanations as to how the situation of Christianity differed to that of Judaism). While he accepted the criticism as to some extent valid as

Incarnationalists such as Westcott, Gore and Temple emphasised Christ's role as bringing about the revitalisation of mankind, the perfecting of humanity. Exemplarists such as Jowett and Rashdall emphasised Christ's ethical example. For both, the humanity of Christ was central.

¹⁶⁰ D. Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews; Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 83.

¹⁶¹ C.G. Montefiore, 'The Jewish Religious Union; Its Principles and Future', *Papers for Jewish People* (1918).

¹⁶² I. Mattuck, 'Why the Jews have no Missionaries', *Liberal Jewish Monthly* (October 1932), reproduced in C.G. Montefiore & I. Mattuck, 'Jewish Views on Jewish Missions', *Papers for Jewish*

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directed towards Orthodox Judaism,¹⁶³ his main argument was that Judaism's historical lack of missionaries had nothing to do with its alleged particularism. In a pamphlet they published together a year later, Montefiore went further and argued that Christians and Unitarians had strengthened themselves by their missionary endeavours and that Jews too often dwelt on the Christian missionary failures and ignored their successes. His own position was that once the practical barriers to missionary work among heathen were overcome, much would be gained if their example was followed by Jews.¹⁶⁴ Thus Montefiore came to champion an active missionary stance at least partly as a response to the Christian criticism of Judaism as a particularist religion, so as to demonstrate Liberal Jewish confidence in their own universalist Judaism.

Secondly, Anglican exemplarist thought led to one of the most radical departures undertaken by a progressive Jewish thinker in the early twentieth-century: the recognition of Jesus not only as a heroic first-century Jew, but as an inspirational religious radical whose teachings revealed him as a kind of archetypal Liberal Jew. As has been argued elsewhere, for several reasons this appreciation of Jesus went well beyond the wider phenomenon of a Jewish appropriation of Jesus in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries.¹⁶⁵ It is of course important to be able to differentiate between an individual's position and that of his immediate religious community. Montefiore's obsession with Jesus of Nazareth has not had a long-term impact upon the Anglo-Liberal synagogue. Nevertheless, in terms of understanding the origins of Liberal Judaism, the views of its pre-eminent theologian must be taken seriously.

People (1933).

¹⁶³ "There has developed a kind of reluctance to accept proselytes. It is very strong in Orthodox Judaism." *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17, 42.

¹⁶⁵ See D.R. Langton, 'Claude Montefiore in the Context of Jewish Approaches to Jesus and Paul', *Hebrew Union College Annual* LXXI (2000). The most comprehensive treatment of this subject remains D.A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus: An Analysis and Critique of the Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984). Hilton remarks, "The Conservative scholar Louis Ginzberg, hearing a sermon of a Reform Rabbi about Jesus, shortly after his arrival in the USA in 1900, is said to have quipped that he knew he was in a synagogue, because Jesus was no longer a fashionable subject in Church!" M. Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: S.C.M., 1994), 204.

For Montefiore, Jesus was primarily a Prophet. In *Some Elements in the Religious Teaching of Jesus* (1910), he argued that Jesus' preaching had been prophetic in its denouncing of sin and oppression, and also in its self-assurance of his own divine inspiration.¹⁶⁶ One of the ways by which Montefiore had distinguished his own Liberal Judaism from Orthodox Judaism had been to contrast the former's prophecy-orientated position with the latter's Law-orientated one. To his mind, the writings of the Hebrew prophets lay at the root of true Judaism as the revealers of ethical monotheism, and he was keen to foster the impression that Liberal Jews were simply following in their footsteps. Since Liberal Judaism derived so much from the prophets, he argued, it should come as no surprise that it could find much to admire and use in Jesus, the ethical teacher.¹⁶⁷ Studying the Gospels thus gave him a useful opportunity for propounding the Liberal Jewish cause, albeit indirectly. In language strikingly similar to that with which he himself attacked the dogmatism of Orthodox Judaism, Montefiore maintained,

Jesus would have upheld, or rather would not have touched, the validity of the *written* Pentateuchal law; what he would have attacked was the interpretation put upon the Law of God by human commentators and casuists.¹⁶⁸

He justified Jesus' somewhat strained relationship with the Law by claiming that it was a result of his having preached the Prophets' message under conditions which had not existed in earlier times. "In the face of the Law which makes no clear distinction between morality and ceremonialism, but demands them both with equal insistence and equal authority," he asked, "how could a new teacher enunciate afresh the doctrines of the Prophets, in direct application to the conditions and life of his time, without coming at least near to a conflict with the letter of the Law?"¹⁶⁹ This echoed the argument which he had used to justify the need for a Liberal Jewish movement in the face of Christian criticism: that the changing circumstances of the modern, progressive world necessitated new expressions of the old ethical, monotheistic teachings. Montefiore, who himself experienced the difficulty of emphasising spirit over law in a tradition-bound context, marvelled that "the conception of the Law and

¹⁶⁶ C.G. Montefiore, *Some Elements in the Religious Teaching of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1910), 21.

¹⁶⁷ C.G. Montefiore, *The Old Testament and After* (London: Macmillan, 1923), 229.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

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of scripture, to which the attitude of Jesus points forward, was not theoretically reached until modern times”.¹⁷⁰

Montefiore also used Jesus to promote his anti-nationalist view of Judaism, which partly explains his attraction to Jesus. In *Some Elements in the Religious Teaching of Jesus* (1910) he reacted strongly to those who claimed for Jesus a nationalistic understanding of Judaism, describing the idea of Jesus as a purely political messiah as nothing less than “a caricature”. He argued that such a view over-emphasised the Jewish hopes for outward prosperity, the World Empire, the warrior-king, and the vassalage of the nations, at the expense of the equally Jewish hopes for the righteous ruler, the righteous judge, peace, goodness, the knowledge of God, and the conversion of the heathen to the true religion. “It is an unattractive picture”, he wrote, “and can be shown to have been alien to the character and convictions of Jesus.”¹⁷¹ As a successor of the Prophets, Jesus had never considered race as a protection against sin but had been “against this false and irreligious confidence, which could so easily lead to careless living and odious sins, far more than against any theoretic particularism”.¹⁷² Furthermore, there was good evidence to suggest that, like the prophets before him, Jesus had imagined that Gentile believers in the Kingdom would take up the places of sinful Jews.¹⁷³ Montefiore was even prepared to suggest that Jesus’ universalism had been his most important legacy to the world. In ‘The Significance of Jesus for his own Age’ (1912), he addressed himself to the question of what factors lay behind the “gigantic results” of Christianity. These included the manner and occasion of Jesus’ death, the widespread belief in his resurrection, the life and teaching of Paul, and the influence of non-Jewish doctrines and cravings.¹⁷⁴ Yet these four causes did not adequately explain the world-wide phenomenon of Christianity for Montefiore. Something else was required, and this something else was best understood as the success of Jesus in bringing about the

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 103. He added, “One could hardly expect the rabbis to be 1900 years before their time, and if the suggestion were right, the high originality of Jesus and of his glorious inconsistency would, perhaps, even be diminished.”

¹⁷¹ C.G. Montefiore, *Some Elements in the Religious Teaching of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1910), 129, 130.

¹⁷² Ibid., 67.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 70-71.

diffusion and universalism of some of the fundamental tenets of Judaism.¹⁷⁵ This “diffusion of Judaism” into the Gentile world was, self-evidently, of far greater significance for those outside Judaism than for those within, but this did not make it any less Jewish a phenomenon. As Montefiore saw it, a Judaism which had re-appropriated this fundamentally Jewish teaching could only prosper; it was an important element of the Liberal Jewish agenda. Reinforced by the Liberal Anglican universalist view of Jesus with which he had become so familiar at his student days at Oxford, Montefiore thus used Jesus to forward his universalist message. In these ways and others which have been considered at greater length elsewhere,¹⁷⁶ Montefiore’s presentation of his own Liberal Jewish views was facilitated by his analysis of what he regarded as Jesus’ improvements upon the Judaic system. His view of Jesus as an extemporary (Liberal) Jew fascinated and attracted many among the Christian scholarly community and similarities between contemporary Protestant scholarship and his presentation of the prophet from Nazareth should not be regarded as coincidental.

In spite of the increased influence of the Church of England in general, in spite of his Broad Church contacts (through his Oxford mentors) and their influence upon him regarding his conception of Jesus, and in spite of his friendships with leading Anglican intellectuals such as Hastings Rashdall, Montefiore’s comments on Christianity often seem to presuppose Evangelical Christianity. That is, when Montefiore spoke about Christianity, he often seemed to have in mind the sort of Protestant who emphasised salvation by faith through the atoning death of Christ. This could be explained by a lifelong exposure to the London scene where the Evangelical conversionists tended to concentrate their efforts and where, through his own extensive philanthropic interests, he would have been very aware of their high profile social work. The Evangelical stressed personal commitment of time and energy to practical expressions of the gospel of salvation, and by the second half of the nineteenth-century evangelicals had come to dominate the voluntary charitable

¹⁷⁴ C.G. Montefiore, ‘The Significance of Jesus for his Own Age’, *Hibbert Journal* X (1911-12), 766.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 767.

¹⁷⁶ D.R. Langton, ‘Claude Montefiore in the Context of Jewish Approaches to Jesus and Paul’, *Hebrew Union College Annual* LXXI (2000).

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sector.¹⁷⁷ After all, according to Englander, Jewish philanthropic organisations consciously “mirrored the theory, practice and discourse of the Evangelical movement”.¹⁷⁸ Certainly, Evangelical models can be found for societies such as Montefiore’s own ‘Jewish Association for the Protection of Women and Children’.¹⁷⁹ So while Montefiore generally thought in terms of Liberal Christianity (especially when in an academic, theological context) he also understood Christianity in its Evangelical form. And while he might have deplored its conversionist policy,¹⁸⁰ he also recognised certain benefits to missionary endeavour. The seeking out of the lost and fallen was, he felt, an element of Christ’s teaching which was not emphasised enough in Judaism and which he felt his fellow Jews would do well to imitate.

In this context, the relationship between Montefiore and his colleague Israel Mattuck is particularly revealing, for Montefiore complained often and at considerable length about what he saw as Mattuck’s unwarranted hostility towards Christianity. In one letter he wrote,

The something else which I object to, and consider fallacious, in your sermons is common to you and heaps of other Jews. It is common to most American Rabbis, so far as I know, common to their Teachers, common to the Teachers of their Teachers... It is a constant side reference to, and depreciation of, Christianity. It is a constant attempt to make up differences

¹⁷⁷ Geoffrey Best, *Mid Victorian Britain 1851-75* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 154-155. Heasman has suggested that “as many as three-quarters of the total number of voluntary charitable organisations in the second half of the nineteenth century can be regarded as Evangelical in character”. K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action; An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd, 1962), 13-14.

¹⁷⁸ D. Englander, ‘Anglicised but not Anglican’, *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. G. Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), I, 244.

¹⁷⁹ Lady Battersea, one of the founders of the Association, even attributed its origins as due to Christian influences. She tells the story of becoming involved in Jewish social work after a Christian social worker came to her after having been approached by two needy Jewish girls, having failed to discover a “Jewish Home or shelter”. “Mrs Herbert [the social worker] expressed in no measured terms her astonishment that the Community owned no harbour of refuge for those of our own Faith.” Shamed, the ‘Jewish Ladies’ Society for Preventative and Rescue Work’ was established, later to become the ‘Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women’. Constance Battersea, *Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 419-421.

¹⁸⁰ Montefiore attacked Christian missionary activities many times. One example, originally printed in *The Times* read, “It is a remarkable thing that the proselytising activities of the various conversionist societies seem to limit the sphere of their operations to the poorer and less cultivated class of Jews. Is it that only such persons are susceptible to the teas and treats and ‘medical missions’ with which our East End workers are so familiar? People in my class of life receive once a year a silly little tract, but otherwise we are left severely alone...” *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 May 1902, 11. In 1916 he resigned as patron from the Committee of Russian Jews Relief Fund in Edinburgh as soon as he discovered that it

between Judaism and Christianity, to the great advantage of Judaism... I wish, when you revise your sermon, you could blot out from your mind the very existence of Christianity! I wish you could imagine yourself in a purely Buddhist or Confucian majority, or that you could forget all other persons but Jews!¹⁸¹

Montefiore objected to the contrast between a very modern Judaism with an illiberal Christianity, that is, a Christianity of isolated texts from the New Testament or evangelical tracts. If one was to confront Christianity on equal terms, he argued, then it had to be Liberal Christianity taken at face value, and he urged his colleague to learn the lesson from the misrepresentations that Judaism had suffered throughout its history.¹⁸² Deep down, however, what Montefiore reacted to was not so much Mattuck's defining of Judaism in terms of Christianity, so much as his aim to demonstrate the superiority of the one over the other. As has been argued elsewhere,¹⁸³ Montefiore was himself engaged in defining Judaism in terms of Christianity, but with a quite different goal; while Mattuck defined Judaism negatively in terms of how Judaism differed from Christianity, Montefiore attempted to define Judaism in terms of those positive elements which the two faiths shared in common. Montefiore's position was very much the unconventional one and, despite great respect for their spiritual leader, Mattuck and those who followed him never fully reconciled themselves to or agreed with Montefiore's sympathetic fascination with Christianity.

VII. Conclusion: Breathing Life into the Dry Bones of Judaism?

In discussing the roots of Reform Judaism in Britain, it is important to understand the extent to which Jewish reformers were sensitive to criticism from their Christian contemporaries. Reform Judaism was, at least partly, a reaction to and

was "closely associated with missionary work among the Jews." *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 February 1916, 8.

¹⁸¹ Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Israel Mattuck, undated. MS 165/1/12, Sheldon and Amy Blank Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹⁸² Montefiore warned, "For us Liberals to say, 'If you think thus and thus, you are not a Christian' or 'such an opinion in you is not Christian' is a very dangerous argument. Surely we have suffered from, and indignantly reject, such an argument ourselves." Letter from C.G. Montefiore to Israel Mattuck, undated. MS 165/1/12, Sheldon and Amy Blank Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹⁸³ D.R. Langton, 'Claude Montefiore and Christianity: Did the Founder of Liberal Judaism Lean too Far?', *Journal for Jewish Studies* 50:1 (Spring 1999).

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internalisation of the position of bibliocentric evangelical Christians who regarded Judaism as fossilized in terms of theology, as parodies of the papacy in their respect of rabbinic authority, as incapable of true devotion in practice and ritual. In contrast to Reform, the roots of Liberal Judaism lay in a period of intellectual reflection that preceded its establishment as an institution. Despite the differences, many of the issues that concerned Montefiore were determined once again by a Christian agenda, particularly the emphasis on universalist religion and the biblical-critical approach of the liberal Anglicans, and also Evangelical concerns for rescue and the inculcation of individual piety.

In a sermon for the Jewish Religious Union in 1902, Harry Lewis, minister at the Manchester Reform Synagogue, warned that “without renewed enthusiasm it [religion] would gradually wither and die.” He argued, however, that a revival of religious feeling should not be brought about by breaking with the past but by using the example of those that went before. Thus, he claimed, referring to Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones, “God’s spirit is breathed upon the dry bones, so that they live once more.”¹⁸⁴ Critics, then and now, would argue that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-Jewish reformations do not represent a reanimation of older forms of Judaism but rather the introduction of new forms and, crucially, the contamination of Christianity. From this perspective, in attempting to address the challenge of Englander’s “invertebrate religion”, the reformers resurrected the wrong bones. In intra-Jewish disputes between traditionalists and progressives, the charge of ‘Christianisation’ remains provocative and difficult to dismiss.

¹⁸⁴ Harry Lewis, ‘The Past and the Present’, *Jewish Addresses Delivered at the Services of the Jewish Religious Union During the First Session 1902-3* (London, 1904), 33. As it happens, the prophetic reading at the very first service of the J.R.U. (18 October 1902) was also Ezekiel’s vision.