

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People

MISHKAN

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Lessons from History

John Wesley Speaking with Strangers:

His Ministry to the Jewish People of Savannah 1735-1737

Andrew Barron and Ketzia Barron

Vilifying Judaism While Loving Jewish People:

*Ethical Reflections on the Life and Apologetic Method
of Alexander McCaul*

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Book Review

*The Weird Apostle: The Strange Jewish Mission of
a Global Game Changer by Ryan C. Lambert*

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From the Israeli Scene

Play and Pray

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Cover Design: Heidi Tohmola

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Subscriptions, back issues, and other inquiries
caspari@caspari.com

www.caspari.com

MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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Mishkan is a forum for discussion, and articles included do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or Caspari Center.

Mishkan is the Hebrew word for "tabernacle" or "dwelling place" (John 1:14).

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Dear *Mishkan* readers,

The topic for this issue of *Mishkan* is “Lessons from History.” We have three interesting articles about people who were missionaries in the past, either gentiles with a heart to reach their Jewish brothers for Messiah, or Jewish missionaries to the world. Some of these individuals were controversial, but each one had a heart for evangelism. Still, I believe that we can learn from their lives—both in areas where they succeeded and in a few things that could have been done differently. Through these articles one can evaluate methods of evangelism for future generations to come as well as learn from and give honor to generations past.

Happy reading,

Caspari Center Staff

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John Wesley Speaking with Strangers¹: His Ministry to the Jewish People of Savannah 1735–1737

Dr. Andrew Barron
Ketzia Barron

Andrew Barron, DMin, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, Canada.
andrew.barron@utoronto.ca

Ketzia Barron, MPC, Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto Canada,
ketziabarron@gmail.com

Introduction

“I began learning Spanish in order to converse with my Jewish parishioners; some of whom seem nearer the mind that was in Christ than many of those who called Him Lord.”² This 1736 journal entry occurred during a new and hopeful time in John Wesley’s personal and professional life. Diverted from his original mission to Native people, he found himself in a parish in Savannah, Georgia, where Spanish-speaking Jews lived. Wesley’s encounter with them was probably his first—and potentially only—substantial encounter with Jewish people. His relationship with one Jewish man, initially his Spanish teacher, would change his life.

This was a time in Wesley’s life when he struggled with the assurance of his faith while sharing it with others. His use of the term “nearer the mind”³ is fascinating. We do not see this as a statement of social or cultural identification with the person of Jesus, but of real humility. He seems to acknowledge in his mind an ambiguity that he did not see in these strangers.

Meeting various people on the way to and in Savannah moved Wesley to reflect on his doubts and struggles. What we see in his journals and diaries is a conflicted man grappling with questions while, at the same time, proclaiming the gospel to Jews and others. His journey across the ocean brought him into contact with various strangers—Germans, Black people, Indigenous people, and Jews. This paper examines what it meant for Wesley’s deeply personal reflections to be made public and what that teaches us about his relationship with a specific group of strangers. He recognized and appreciated those with differing worldviews. There are lessons to be drawn on contextual ministry from Wesley’s strategies and experiences.

Wesley was not afraid to talk with strangers. His journal and diaries during this time are ubiquitous with the phrase “religious talk.”⁴ Because of the demographics in Savannah, he lived in proximity to strangers—Wesley counted 518 people in his parish, with 180 in the Church of England and 149

¹ Malcolm Gladwell, *Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don't Know*. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2019). The author encourages readers to approach strangers "with caution and humility" and to be more thoughtful in how we understand others. He challenges society not to give up on efforts to understand, noting that people often overestimate their ability to judge strangers. This exploration aligns with Wesley’s pastoral approach of engaging with strangers.

² John, Wesley. *The Work of John Wesley, Journal and Diaries*. Edited by Reginal Ward and Richard Heitzenrater. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.) This entry in I 178 states that he started lessons on April 4, 1737. However, the lessons appear to have started on June 28, 1736, according to I 398.

³ Wesley, I 178.

⁴ Wesley, I 558 and others.

under the age of 16. He sometimes characterized these talks as *necessary* and other times as *religious*. Sometimes the occasion was a personal visit, and sometimes he walked and talked. Sometimes the talks were *lively*, and other times they were *zealous*. Sometimes the talks were with *many*. Sometimes, early in the morning; other times, late at night. Sometimes the visits were too long, and other times they were with tea.

This paper explores what it meant for Wesley's spiritual journey to have encountered Jewish people and Jewish life in the eighteenth-century American South. We are interested in the impact the Jewish people had on Wesley's ministry and his time in Savannah. We argue that the intersection of spiritual journeys can overcome misconceptions and, in Wesley's case, prompted him to contemplate his faith while embracing the ambiguity of strangers as he tried to make sense of them.

The Jews of Savannah

It was the eighteenth century and "Georgia soon became a melting-pot for religious and social integration, which included the English, the Scots and various German and European groups, and further complicated by the presence of this Jewish community in a Christian context. Savannah was to become a significant meeting place; when the Wesleys, representing the British; the English Jews; the Moravians and the Saltzburgers were all seeking to establish themselves and their diverse groups into this pioneering location in English America."⁵

During this time, a group of Sephardic Jews left London. They were pressured by economic and religious intolerance. They found opportunities and a comfortable life in Savannah. The community was religiously tolerant. They put down roots and began a new American Jewish experience.

The intersection between these Sephardic Jews and Christian colonizers was catalyzed by King George II: "George II had granted the original Charter to Trustees and to the Governor James Oglethorpe in 1732"⁶ as a refuge for England's poor in Savannah. The Jews in Savannah came to help create this community. They were ambitious and quickly integrated into the socioeconomic ventures of the developing colony,⁷ including relations with the Christian settlers. Jews in Savannah occasionally attended the Christian worship services "out of curiosity or as an expression of civic solidarity."⁸ Jews and Christians sought unity with one another, lived together and advocated for one another: "a time when alcohol, slavery, Catholicism . . . were forbidden but Jews were not; rather, the most telling part of Savannah's story is that, unlike most cities that once served as thriving centers of Jewish life and commerce, Savannah never forced its Jews to leave."⁹

Savannah was a sanctuary. The decisions Wesley's predecessors, including Oglethorpe, made in their treatment of the Jews contributed to its thriving, and the town afforded Dr. Nunez, Wesley's soon-to-be teacher, the opportunity to live freely as a Jew and practice medicine.

The Methodist Mission

Wesley's conduct on his trip to North America "provides the first glimpse of how he intended to carry out his ministry in Georgia,"¹⁰ and onboard "he readied himself for the Methodist's agreed goal of primitive Christianity reviving the discipline and practice of the primitive church in the primitive

⁵ Rodney Curtis. "The Wesleys, the English Jews and the Moravians in Georgia from 1733." PhD diss.,(Oxford: Brookes University, 2020),1.

⁶ Curtis, 1.

⁷ Curtis, 3.

⁸ John English, "John Wesley and His 'Jewish parishioners'," *Methodist History* 36.no. 4 (1998). 221.

⁹ Alexander Aciman, "A Stroll Through Jewish Savannah." *TabletMagazine*.

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/a-stroll-through-jewish-savannah>. (accessed July 1, 2024)

¹⁰ Geordan Hammond, "Primitive Christianity on the Simmonds," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 42.

Georgia wilderness.”¹¹ Wesley’s spiritual experiences¹² and his interest in spiritual senses¹³ and the Methodist focus on “primitive”¹⁴ Christianity “provides a particular contrast to the modernizing language and zeitgeist of the eighteenth century. Methodists seemed aware of the oppositional valence of their ‘primitive Christianity’ against the ‘modern’ eighteenth century.”¹⁵ John Wesley’s churchmanship was “firmly rooted in his vision of the primitive church.”¹⁶ Yet, despite setting out to be a missionary among the Native Americans, he was deeply discontented with his faith.

Wesley’s journal points to this time in America as a profound religious experience for him. “Wesley’s encounter with Jews in Savannah was probably his first—and possibly only—significant engagement with real Jews rather than ‘the Jews’ of [Scripture].”¹⁷ His journal demonstrates that this experience mattered deeply to him, but it was also a trying time: “I went to America, to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me.”¹⁸ Wesley reflected that “I was never myself converted to God”¹⁹ and recounted his fear of death and his lack of faith—he feared that his confession of Jesus as the Christ was “vain words.”²⁰ Methodism’s focus on heart religion explains how Wesley continuously reformed and examined his spirituality²¹ and his perception of strangers through his transformational experience in Savannah.

We see self-reflection and self-development in his journals as he “sought to cultivate holy living through personal resolutions to excite himself to strive after God more fervently.”²² Perhaps this is what he meant when he wrote about the Jewish people of Savannah that were “nearer the mind that was in Christ than many of those who called Him Lord.”²³ It was this *nearness* Wesley saw in strangers that he thirsted for. He would later leave America with an emptiness and purposelessness, probably reflecting on his *nearness* that was lacking. It would seem that Wesley was unable to extend the grace to himself that he gave to others.

Wesley’s approach to missionary work was in the Pauline tradition:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.²⁴

¹¹ Hammond., 42–43.

¹² Misty Anderson, “Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 50.

¹³ Anderson., 54.

¹⁴ Anderson., 42.

¹⁵ Anderson, 42.

¹⁶ Hammond, 42.

¹⁷ Simon Mayers, *Representation of ‘the Jews’*, (Manchester: John Rylands Library, 2014) 2.

¹⁸ John Wesley, *John Wesley’s Journal* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1951), 29.

¹⁹ John Wesley, *An Extract*, (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1743) 68.

²⁰ Wesley, *John Wesley’s Journal* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1951), 37.

²¹ Anderson, 37.

²² Hammond, 47.

²³ John Wesley, *The Work of John Wesley*, 178.

²⁴ 1 Cor 9:19–23 (ESV).

Wesley adopted this missional style in his encounters with the Jews and other religious and ethnic groups. In his journals, Wesley uses the phrase *religious talk*. Sometimes these talks are called *necessary* and were with a wide variety of people. What was the purpose behind Wesley's behavior? Victor Shepherd, a scholar of Wesleyan theology and Puritan spirituality, states that "Wesley borrowed from the Puritan notion of 'conversation'; i.e., spiritually helpful discussion. The Puritans maintained that conversation was one of the 'instituted' means of grace, along with Scripture, prayer, holy communion, and fasting. Wesley's 'religious talk' wasn't a formal address; it was a 'casual' conversation that he believed to be owned by God and rendered spiritually fruitful."²⁵

His journal and diary shows Wesley tried to maintain a point of connection. His missional strategy sought this connection with others while still acknowledging the distinctiveness of different worldviews. The Jews of Savannah were steeped in a different history: antisemitism, forced migration from Portugal to London, and then a barred entry to Savannah. This impacted their worldview and how they viewed Christians, but Wesley seemed adaptable and willing to listen. Wesley and those who preceded him brought hope for reconciliation through their style of language learning and through adapting to and understanding other experiences. His approach to conversation allowed Wesley to live in the tension of communicating hope to strangers while struggling with his own.

From Oglethorpe to Wesley's Parish

James Oglethorpe was a British soldier, Member of Parliament, philanthropist, and founder of the Colony of Georgia in British America. A social reformer, he hoped to resettle Britain's unfortunate in the New World. He had a positive and productive relationship with Jews and helped them in their settlement: "the weary [Jewish] travelers joined 275 Christian inhabitants already settled on the bluffs above the Savannah River. Only five months earlier, James Oglethorpe had landed with a charter from King George II and the financial support of trustees."²⁶ However, the Jewish people found themselves in a predicament upon their arrival: the Common Council of Trustees barred their entry in 1732. Nevertheless, Oglethorpe sought to have the Jews let in and praised them for "their good conduct";²⁷ he was essential to their eventual settlement. Without Oglethorpe's empathy, Wesley's interaction with the Jewish people would have been different. Speaking of Oglethorpe, Wesley says, "I soon found what spirit he was of; and asked his advice with regard to my own conduct."²⁸ Oglethorpe was a guide to Wesley in his relations with other cultures and religions in Savannah.

Wesley spoke at length with local clergy, and they all had good things to say about the Jews of Savannah, noting that they were "honest and law-abiding."²⁹ Although there is no extensive treatment concerning the Jewish people in Wesley's journals, his interactions with them and others seemed generally positive as he sought to understand them.

Wesley's parish in Savannah was "two hundred miles long,"³⁰ and Jews and Christians coexisted within the area surrounding the church. Part of Wesley's ministry was to visit "his parishioners from house to house, learn of their spiritual state" and advise and encourage them "to holy living."³¹ Wesley must have encountered and visited many Jewish people on his pastoral rounds and came to think highly of them—he was committed to them as they were inside his clerical jurisdiction. His desire to relate to these Spanish speakers, therefore, motivated him to restart his Spanish lessons with Nunez.

²⁵ Dr. Victor Shepherd, email message to author, September 14, 2021.

²⁶ Mark Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds," (Waltham: Brandeis University, 2006), 27.

²⁷ Greenberg, 28.

²⁸ Wesley, *John Wesley's Journal*, 8.

²⁹ English, 220.

³⁰ Curtis, 6.

³¹ Hammond, 74.

His relationship with Nunez began as an employment contract in language learning to help Oglethorpe in colony business and his communications with the Spanish people of Savannah.³² However, as Wesley took more seriously his duties as a minister of the parish, which included discoursing with Jews about the gospel, his motivation for learning Spanish changed.³³ It seems that he intended to defend the messiahship of Jesus to the Spanish-speaking Jews of Savannah, replacing his initial goal of assisting Oglethorpe in his governance communications.³⁴

Dr. Nunez

Dr. Nunez was among the first Jewish settlers in Savannah and was a crypto-Jew: an “[individual who] complied with the Spanish and Portuguese orders to convert to Christianity but who maintained Jewish traditions in secret.”³⁵ Nunez had also faced battles with his own religious identity. He and his family fled to Britain, where they tried to maintain Jewish practices and took Jewish names, but life was too difficult and they left. Oglethorpe admitted the exhausted Jewish immigrants to Savannah and suggested that Nunez “be employed as physician of the colony.”³⁶ As a result, Nunez “stopped an epidemic which was raging in Savannah.”³⁷ Traditionally, many Christians viewed Jews “with suspicion and distrust,”³⁸ but Nunez and other immigrants to Savannah were essential agents in shifting the Christian understanding of Jews.

During the time Wesley conducted parish visits, he read a book called *The Demonstration of the Messias. In which the Truth of the Christian Religion is Defended, Especially against the Jews*.³⁹ English suggests that Wesley read this book shortly after restarting his lessons with Nunez to prepare himself to talk about Jesus with the Jewish people of his parish. Wesley was probably not completely honest with Nunez, allowing Nunez to believe that Wesley was learning Spanish to help Oglethorpe with colony business rather than facilitating the evangelizing of Spanish-speaking Jews.⁴⁰

Nunez was available to Wesley, and it seems like Nunez provided a place of rest and refreshment to Wesley. Wesley recorded thirty-four visits to Nunez between June and August 1737 as he was most likely looking for friendship and conversation. Wesley’s journal records that he did debate Nunez about Jesus on one occasion, which he immediately regretted.⁴¹ It is unclear who started the debate, but it appears that Wesley lost it: “I was unawares engaged in a dispute with Nunez, a Jew, concerning the Messiah. For this I was afterward much grieved, lest the truth might suffer by my weak defence of it.”⁴² Nevertheless, Nunez and Wesley became and stayed friends, and Nunez became something of an advisor and peer. Ward states that they agreed to disagree and had many shared goals.⁴³ Wesley would go on to study Hebrew with Nunez.⁴⁴

His friendship with Nunez allowed Wesley to be stripped of his conception of the Jew as *Other* and reform his perceptions of strangers. His interactions with Jewish people seem to have been universally

³² English, 222.

³³ English, 223.

³⁴ Mayers, 3.

³⁵ Carol Ebel. “Samuel Nunes.” New Georgia Encyclopedia <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/>. (accessed July 1, 2024)

³⁶ Ebel.

³⁷ English, 221.

³⁸ English, 221

³⁹ Richard Kidder, *The Demonstration of the Messias*. (London: J. Heptinstall, 1684)

⁴⁰ English, 222–224.

⁴¹ English, 226.

⁴² Mayers, 9.

⁴³ John Wesley, Comment by W. Reginald Ward in *The Works of John Wesley: Journal and Diaries I*, 178.

⁴⁴ John Wesley, *John Wesley’s Journal*, June 7, 1737. 515.

positive. Certainly, Wesley's primary interest was evangelism, yet the personal relationship he developed with Nunez "transcended the religious differences between them."⁴⁵

Despite rejecting Jesus as the Jewish Messiah,⁴⁶ Nunez still taught Wesley Spanish for his ministry purposes—which English notes as quite surprising.⁴⁷ The "friendship"⁴⁸ that Wesley and Nunez developed, despite their religious disagreements, reveals how Wesley's voyage to America led to the breakdown of his assumptions about Jews. Although Wesley's goals changed, his relationship with Nunez did not. Perhaps Wesley empathized with Nunez's suffering as a crypto-Jew due to the spiritual battle he himself was facing in America.

Wingeier-Rayo suggests that "John Wesley's attitudes toward people of other faiths and cultures fall into three categories: Noble Savage, Natural Man and eschatological hopefulness."⁴⁹ It seems that through his Savannah ministry, Wesley's view of the *Other* was stripped away. Even after his encounters with Nunez, he still wrestled with his theological views of the Jews.⁵⁰ Wingeier-Rayo suggests that Wesley referred to the Jews as "God's formerly chosen people"⁵¹ because they disavowed Jesus as the Messiah. His deeply personal encounter with Nunez suggests more about Wesley's personal development than his theological views. Wesley experienced a maturation that included an appreciation of different histories, religions, and cultures, resulting in a move from "original innocence to harsh critique to a universal grace of hopeful eschatology."⁵² Nunez was essential to Wesley's thinking—his friendship and Wesley's learning from him "created cognitive dissonance in definitive statements of Christianity [sic] superiority."⁵³

Nunez and Wesley were educated men: "Nunez was a medical graduate from the prestigious University of Salamanca, and John Wesley from Lincoln College, Oxford."⁵⁴ There seemed to be much to talk about. Under normal circumstances, their paths would never have crossed, but in Savannah, at this time, they became collegial.

There is an ambiguous moment in Wesley's journal where he mentions the Jewish parishioners of the church, and "it is unclear whether Wesley meant that Jews already attended Anglican services or simply that he sought to bring them within the fold."⁵⁵ In either scenario, Wesley learning to speak Spanish was necessary to communicate with the Sephardim in his wide parish, and his relationship with Nunez was important as Nunez served as his "teacher, friend, and confidant."⁵⁶ Although there is little evidence that Wesley had success in his ministry efforts among the Jews, this relationship contributed to his spiritual journey of recognizing the *Other*. Furthermore, their continuing relationship suggests Wesley's adaptable and open missional style.

English imagines that despite the community in Savannah eventually turning against Wesley, Nunez remained a friend: "Whatever the attitude of others, Nunez kept his door open. He provided a haven to which Wesley could retire, at least temporarily."⁵⁷ The two overcame religious differences, and

⁴⁵ English," 220.

⁴⁶ Mark Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds," (Waltham:Brandeis University, 2006), 30.

⁴⁷ English, 224.

⁴⁸ Mayers, 2.

⁴⁹ Philip Wingeier-Rayo, "Wesleyan Theology of Missions," (<https://oimts.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/2013-5-wingeier-rayo.pdf>) (accessed July 1, 2024), 1.

⁵⁰ Wingeier-Rayo, 5.

⁵¹ Wingeier-Rayo, 6.

⁵² Wingeier-Rayo, 10.

⁵³ Wingeier-Rayo, 10

⁵⁴ Curtis, 8.

⁵⁵ Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds," 33.

⁵⁶ Greenberg., 33–34.

⁵⁷ English, 226.

their discourse shifted from Wesley's conversion efforts among the Spanish-speaking Jews to "relaxed conversation on non-controversial topics."⁵⁸

Leaving America: The Lingering Influence of Jewish Parishioners

Wesley left America depressed and distressed. His journal entries are raw—they present a person under construction. The reader sees Wesley's sometimes intolerant notions broken down through his interactions with strangers. What was supposed to be a conversion effort turned into a careful and respectful study of himself through the influence of others. Wesley published his struggles and exposed his vulnerabilities.

On his arrival in England, he is still searching and seeking. He made resolutions after his return: "To use absolute openness and unreserve with all I should converse with. . . . To speak no word which does not tend to the glory of God [and] to take no pleasure which does not tend to the glory of God."⁵⁹ In 1787, Wesley quoted Nunez in a sermon on 1 Corinthians called, "On Charity." He remembered that Nunez said of the passage, "I wish every Jew were to carry it [1 Corinthians 13] with him everywhere he went. . . . [T]his single chapter contains the whole of true religion."⁶⁰ Perhaps Wesley was instrumental in helping his friend understand this passage—perhaps it was the other way around.

Wesley's experience speaking to others in America taught him to take their needs seriously and he wanted to learn to respect cultures and worldviews other than his own. Wesley communicated in a way that was oriented to the hearer's framework. Despite his lack of missional success in Savannah, Wesley's heart was softened toward strangers; his interactions with them changed him, but, in the end, did not compromise his faith. This is the legacy of Savannah

Conclusion

Wesley's theological conceptions of the Jews from Scripture were transformed through interactions with real Jews. He had an idea of Jews in general but no Jews in particular; Dr. Nunez changed that. Wesley's relationship with Nunez forced him to orient himself to his listeners, and his journals reveal a man attempting to look at important issues from a stranger's perspective—only then could he seek understanding. It was this relationship that taught Wesley to use a receptor-oriented approach when interacting with strangers: he took time and thought things through.

The relationship between Wesley and Nunez highlights the essential ways in which Wesley's spirituality developed because of his interaction with strangers. Articulating and debating core beliefs with strangers was essential for Wesley to confront his fears, and Savannah provided Wesley with the opportunity to expand his approach to the *Other*. Wesley is an example to us: he wrestled with the faith he shared while still being dedicated to learning about unfamiliar people.

Wesley was part of this constructive communication between strangers in a new and promising world. The demographics of his parish had a profound purpose in his ability to speak with strangers. Wesley thought he had failed in Georgia, but he had learned lessons and gained experience: in 1775, Presbyterian minister John Zubly spoke before the Georgia Provincial Congress and commended the Jewish community for "actively participating in the colony's struggle for independence. . . . [A]s for the Jewish religion it cannot be charged with favouring despotism. The whole system of that religion is so replete with laws against injustice and oppression."⁶¹

⁵⁸ English, 226.

⁵⁹ Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, 57–58.

⁶⁰ John Wesley, "Sermon 91, December 16, 1787, 'On Charity', <https://www.wordsofwesley.com/libtext.cfm?srm=91>. (accessed July 5, 2024)

⁶¹ Mark Greenberg, *Haven of Benignity*, 562. (The Georgia Historical Quarterly Vol 86 No. 4 Winter 2002), 544–568.

Even within the Jewish community, there were lessons in talking to others. Conflicting Jewish traditions in 1733 matured into a new American Jewry national identity, leaving the original prejudices of Portugal and Germany behind. Intermarriage became accepted.⁶² Congregation Mickve Israel, founded by forty-two Sephardic Jewish immigrants, adopted the familiar Sephardic form of worship, but they would eventually welcome strangers in the form of their Ashkenazi Jewish brethren.⁶³

Lessons Along the Way: Proximity to Strangers

Wesley was committed to this parish. Inside that parish was human difference. Wesley embraced this. He sought it out. This proximity changed Wesley even though his results were unexceptional. The lesson is that he was faithful to this proximity. Strangers who used to be ‘them’ become ‘we’ or ‘us.’ Our interactions with strangers must, as well, be mediated through physical proximity. It must remain the most important way for the church to connect to the world.

Find a Way Inside Other Cultures and Celebrate Human Creativity

Wesley sought out and spent time with people whose worldviews were different to his. This tested and refined his propositions and kept him humble and more human—there is a sense in which Wesley began to enjoy human creativity and human difference.

When we are trying to understand and bring meaning into the social context of our people, we must talk to people who are different. Wesley learned the languages of others, tried to understand the stranger and communicated beyond cultural boundaries. He conversed at length with pastors in Savannah. During these conversations, Wesley probably heard them describe their contact with the Jewish settlers, which may have influenced his attitude toward the Jews of Savannah. One pastor said concerning a Jewish parishioner, “[We] have had several discourses with him concerning Judaism, and given him some passages out of the Holy Scripture to consider on, which seemed to make a strong impression on him.”⁶⁴

Be Open to New Platforms in Communication

Lutheran Pietists were the forerunners of Jewish missions. From 1728, they provided training to missionaries in the Hebrew Bible, Yiddish, and apologetics at the *Institutum Judaicum* in Halle, Germany.⁶⁵ The *Institutum* also published books and tracts for distribution to Jewish readers, and several local pastors used them.⁶⁶ Wesley learned about the theological significance of the Jews from these Pietists. English posits that Wesley had heard about the *Institutum* before leaving England because he was a corresponding member of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. In 1731, the Society asked the *Institutum* for books it could use in conducting a Jewish mission.⁶⁷

The Moravians also influenced Wesley by modeling love for the Jewish people and love for the gospel. Zinzendorf emphasized the teaching of Rom 1:18: “to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.” Wesley’s

⁶² Greenberg., 566.

⁶³ David Morgan, “Judaism in Eighteenth-Century Georgia,” (Georgia Historical Quarterly 58:1, 1974) 50.

⁶⁴ Philipp Reck “An Extract of the Journals of Mr Commissary Von Reck,” (Savannah: Beehive Press:1974), 68.

⁶⁵ Ariel Yaacov, “A New Model of Christian Interaction,” (Journal of Early Modern History 21:1–2), 116–136.

⁶⁶ Samuel Urlsperger, “Detailed Reports on Salzburger Emigrants who Settled in America”, (Athens: University of Georgia Press. 1968), 1: 166; see also 2:98.

⁶⁷ English, 222.

reading of *The Demonstration of the Messiah*⁶⁸ illustrates his willingness to learn new ways of communication.

Have the Courage to Face Opposition

In his proximity to strangers, Wesley would inevitably experience interpersonal and theological conflict. His ministry was one where there was continuous conflict, opposition, and controversy. Opposition also came from colleagues and students at Oxford because of his passion—some even banned him from preaching, thereby forcing him to preach in out-of-the-way locations. This would serve to push him to reach a wider, unchurched audience.

Communicate on the Marging

Wesley visited people in their homes and the marketplace. He walked and talked with people where they were. He talked to strangers where they were and did not ask them to come to him. He used critical judgment regarding material, methods, and projects and would have asked himself questions such as “Does this work?” and “Can I measure this?” Wesley was confessional and self-critical.

Wesley’s journals are raw, honest, and gritty. They show that Wesley saw very little return for much effort, but he did not try to justify his activity compellingly. His underperformance was easy to see. It is easy to hit the side of a barn door and draw a circle around it and tell the world that you made a bull’s eye. We need to be honest about our projects and their results.

Communicate with Strangers

In Savannah, God showed Wesley that he was in a world of strangers—a world in proximity to human difference. God wanted Wesley to live in this kind of world, for his flourishing. Wesley’s extended meditation on that experience was a reflection on the nature of human care and hospitality. Wesley sought to understand and embrace the uncertainty that comes with living in proximity to difference. This should motivate us on how we might better cope with and ultimately be enriched by proximity to human differences. He undertakes a new approach to difference: we must be ready to venture into uncomfortable territory, to “put out into the deep water” (Luke 5:4) and to actively seek out an intimate and open closeness with difference.

Wesley talked to people who did not share his worldview. He had a stake in being attentive to the nuance and complexity of others, as these individuals were in his parish. The illusion of asymmetrical insight—where we acknowledge the complexity of self while denying it in others—is something Wesley seemed able to resist. He did not see other people’s behaviors as reductive and one-dimensional, and he was generous in granting complexity to others’ thinking and motivations. Wesley was teachable and changeable, and he revisited assumptions—a form of humility he possessed. The lessons Wesley learned remind us that it takes time to understand the inner emotional state of strangers. He had a stake in not jumping to conclusions and in not inferring things that might not be accurate. He was open to being corrected and did not fall for confirmation bias. Changing his mind made things better for him.

⁶⁸ Kidder.

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- Anderson, Misty G. "*Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*." Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2012. Anderson's article outlines how British Methodism was construed and the ideas surrounding the movement. She details plays and novels that defined Methodism and argues that it was a movement interrogating the self and its relationships. The authors of this paper used Anderson's discussion of Methodism, particularly in examining how Wesley focuses on himself, his spiritual development, the reform of the heart that Methodism provokes, and his goal of obtaining "primitive Christianity" in the colony.
- Barnett, Richard D. "Diplomatic Aspects of the Sephardic Influx from Portugal in the Early Eighteenth Century." *Transactions & Miscellanies (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 25 (1973): 210–221. Access date September 11, 2021. www.jstor.org/stable/29778843. Barnett is a unique and often cited figure in his field of study. In this work, he recounts the influx of Sephardic Jews to London because of the Inquisition—which is essential to understanding the tumultuous history of the Jewish people before their arrival in Savannah. The authors specifically used one of his points regarding the Jewish rituals these immigrants had to participate in to claim their Jewish identity after the Inquisition.
- Cleland, Lauren. "Visit the Only Gothic Synagogue in North America." *Visit Savannah*. Access date September 9, 2021. <https://www.visitsavannah.com/article/visit-the-only-gothic-synagogue-north-america>. Cleland's short article details the remarkable synagogue, Mickve Israel, founded by the forty-two Sephardic Jews who immigrated in 1735—just before Wesley arrived in the colony. The authors used her article to talk about the resilience of the Southern Sephardic Jewish community and the significance of this grand synagogue's presence in Savannah today.
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background on Nunez's roots. Taken from Ebel's article are proof of Nunez's status as a crypto-Jew and of the aid he provided in Savannah during a Yellow Fever outbreak.

English, John C. "John Wesley and His 'Jewish parishioners': Jewish-Christian Relationships in Savannah, Georgia, 1736–1737." *Methodist History* 36, no. 4 (1998): 220–227. Access date September 24, 2021 <http://archives.gcah.org/bitstream/handle/10516/6236/MH-1998-July-English.pdf?sequence=1>.

John English is one of the foremost scholars and is highly cited for his focus on Wesley's interaction with Dr. Nunez. English argues "that Wesley showed some interest in converting the Jews of Savannah to the Christian religion [but] that he and Nunez eventually established a personal relationship which transcended the religious differences between them." (220) English also traces Jewish/Christian lines of solidarity in Savannah. The authors took up English's line of argument in this discussion of the interaction between Nunez and Wesley.

Gladwell, Malcolm. *Talking to Strangers*. New York: Little Brown and Co, 2019.

Greenberg, Mark I. "One Religion, Different Worlds: Sephardic and Ashkenazic Immigrants in Eighteenth-Century Savannah." In *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, edited by Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, 27–45. Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2006.

The book's first chapter provides background on Jewish immigration to the South from London, the trials the Jews faced upon their arrival, and Oglethorpe's assistance in allowing them entry. Greenberg traces Jewish history in Savannah in a way that was useful to the authors' understanding and reflection on Jewish-Christian relations in the South in the eighteenth century. Greenberg also provides some brief insight into the relationship between Wesley and Dr. Nunez and their Spanish lessons.

Greenberg, Mark I., and Marcie Cohen Ferris. "Introduction: Jewish Roots in Southern Soil." In *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, edited by Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, 1–26. Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2006.

Greenberg and Ferris's book traces the history of Jewish presence in the American South and the founding of the Jewish community in Savannah. They examine the Southern Jewish experience and its distinctiveness, and their work proves that Southern Jewry is worth studying as a unique entity. The authors used their introduction to discuss how Jews immigrated to the South and the life they developed there upon their arrival.

Greenberg, Mark I. "'Haven of Benignity'": Conflict and Cooperation Between Eighteenth-Century Savannah Jews." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 544–568.

Hammond, Geordan. "Primitive Christianity on the Simmonds." In *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity*, 42-78. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Accessed September 11, 2021. <https://www-oxfordscholarship-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198701606.001.0001/acprof-9780198701606-chapter-3?print=pdf>.

This chapter from Hammond's book handles Wesley's development of thought on the way to America. It outlines his theological thought and practices, which are important to understanding his ministry in Savannah. This chapter, along with Anderson's work, helped us define primitive Christianity and Wesley's understanding of it in his life and work in the parish.

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<http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/784513/27385906/1482318882317/background-mayers.pdf?token=8H90dl5abkmSoGCYjsbSFsX90bM%3D>.
 Mayers's report emphasizes Wesley's unique interaction with Jews. Mayers states that this was transformational since Wesley's only other interaction with them had been in Scripture. Mayers's work closely resembles that of John English, so the authors took their points in conjunction in this paper.
- Morgan, David. "Judaism in Eighteenth-Century Georgia." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (1974): 41–54.
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- Wingeier-Rayo, Philip. "A Wesleyan Theology of Missions: A Re-Reading of John Wesley through His Encounters with People of Non-Christian Faiths." Paper presented to the Mission and Evangelism Group at the Oxford Institute for Methodist Studies, Durham, NC, August 3, 2013. <https://oimts.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/2013-5-wingeier-rayo.pdf>.
 Wingeier-Rayo's transcript helped the authors to understand Wesley's comprehension of the marginal groups he encountered, including the Jews. Particularly with this people group, Wingeier-Rayo points out that Wesley was torn between his theological and scriptural conceptions of them and his personal experiences with them in Savannah. His relationship with Dr. Nunez, Wingeier-Rayo argues, is what caused this cognitive dissonance. The authors used this work to examine Wesley's thought and character development considering his interactions.
- Yaacov, Ariel. "A New Model of Christian Interaction with the Jews: The Institutum Judaicum and Missions to the Jews in the Atlantic World." *Journal of Early Modern History* 21, no. 1–2, (2017): 116–136.

Vilifying Judaism While Loving Jewish People

Ethical Reflections on the Life and Apologetic Method of Alexander McCaul

Brian J. Crawford, DMin

Feinberg Center for Messianic Jewish Studies, Talbot School of Theology
Director of Digital Evangelism, Chosen People Ministries
bcrawford@chosenpeople.com

Alexander McCaul's Enigmatic Relationship with the Jewish People

In 1840, a Franciscan monk and his servant disappeared in Damascus, and in response, baseless medieval accusations of Jewish ritual murder were revived and leveled at the Jewish community.⁶⁹ News of the controversy, called the Damascus Affair, quickly spread across Europe, where the cause of Jewish emancipation was a pressing political concern. Among the many voices that protested the accusation against the Jewish people was the Anglican Reverend Dr. Alexander McCaul (1799–1863), a missionary with *The London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews*.⁷⁰ In a response dedicated to Queen Victoria, McCaul provides a passionate and multi-pronged defense of the Jewish people against all historical claims of ritual murder.⁷¹ To close his appeal, McCaul makes an affectionate plea based on his work as a missionary to the Jewish people:

Nineteen years of intimate acquaintance with Israelites, and study of their literature, have produced in me a profound respect for their genius, their kindness of heart, and their preference for learning and religion before wealth and luxury. Never was a people more misunderstood and misrepresented than the Jews. I confess, that from the Bible I had learned to regard them with awe. A nearer approach has taught me to look upon them with respect and affection. The promises of God, respecting the glorious destinies which yet await them, present them to our view as the hope of the world.⁷²

These warm words, written by McCaul in 1840, are typical of his loving attitude toward the Jewish people throughout his works. As a Protestant evangelical, a premillennialist, and a Zionist, McCaul was motivated by deep theological conviction about the Jewish people's present dignity and future glories as taught in Scripture (cf. Rom 11; Ezek 36).

Nevertheless, while McCaul communicated a heartfelt love for Jewish people, his love did not extend to their Judaism or their religious leaders. In the nineteenth century and today, McCaul has been best known for his comprehensive and relentless attack on Orthodox Judaism in his series of essays entitled *The Old Paths*, first published as one volume in English in 1837 and in Hebrew in 1839.⁷³ In *The Old Paths*, McCaul attacks rabbinic halakhic innovations, Jewish sayings about

⁶⁹ Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷⁰ This organization was founded in 1809 and still exists under the name of The Church's Mission among Jewish People (CMJ), <https://www.cmj.org.uk/>.

⁷¹ Alexander McCaul, *Reasons for Believing that the Charge Lately Revived Against the Jewish People Is a Baseless Falsehood* (London, UK: B. Wertheim, 1840), <http://archive.org/details/reasonsforbelie00mccagoog>.

⁷² McCaul, *Reasons*, 54–55.

⁷³ Alexander McCaul, *The Old Paths; or, A Comparison of the Principles and Doctrines of Modern Judaism with the Religion of Moses and the Prophets* (London: London Society's Office, 1837), <https://archive.org/details/oldpathsoracomp00mccagoog>. All subsequent references to *The Old Paths* will cite this first edition. For Hebrew, see Alexander McCaul, *נתיבות עולם: יכלכל ערך העקריות והיסודות של דת היהדות נגדתורת משה* (London, Macintosh, 1839).

Gentiles, the rabbinic practice of astrology and magic, rabbinic treatment of women, the oral law's contradictions with the Tanakh, and rabbinic oppression of the poor.⁷⁴ He accuses the Talmud of absurdity and rabbis of being selfish peddlers of superstition who oppress Israel and put her in spiritual and moral bondage. For example, he writes,

But where the law of God interfered with [the rabbis'] worldly interest, their profit or their gain, they fearlessly made void the law, and inculcated a system of guile and evasion. . . .

The cruel oppression of the poor is bad enough. The enslaving the consciences of the weak is worse; but the corrupting the minds of the simple by such pernicious doctrines, is the worst of all. Yet this is the work of the Jewish religion, as taught in the oral law, and as recognized in the prayers of the synagogue.⁷⁵

These words—*corruption, cruel, oppression, pernicious*, and the like—are present throughout *The Old Paths* and serve to define Judaism and the rabbis as malevolent forces of sin.

Thus, in the span of three years, Alexander McCaul published a passionate attack on Judaism and also published a heartfelt appeal in defense of the Jewish people. He vilified Judaism while loving Jewish people. How did this ironic juxtaposition coincide in the mind and heart of Alexander McCaul? In this essay, I will reflect upon a recent monograph on McCaul's life and work by David Ruderman,⁷⁶ and I will assess the ethics of his evangelistic strategy through a matrix developed by Elmer Thiessen.⁷⁷ I will conclude that McCaul's love for the Jewish people, while admirable and sincere, was morally tainted by his hostile rhetoric and his vehement attacks upon his audience's communal identity. He provides an example of the folly of practicing the non-biblical maxim "love the sinner, but hate the sin." It is my goal to assess what McCaul got right and how his approach could be modified for a more ethical evangelistic appeal to Jewish people today.

David Ruderman's *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis*

In the nineteenth century, The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews was the oldest and most influential Jewish mission,⁷⁸ and Alexander McCaul was its most celebrated missionary.⁷⁹ Despite McCaul's stature, there was no published study of McCaul's life and works until David Ruderman's 2020 monograph, *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis: The Evangelical Alexander McCaul and Jewish-Christian Debate in the Nineteenth Century*.⁸⁰ Ruderman, a

⁷⁴ The original 1837 edition of *The Old Paths* did not include headings for each of the essays, but this was rectified in future editions, such as the 1846 second edition. New readers may find the later editions more accessible for this reason.

⁷⁵ McCaul, *Old Paths*, No. 14, 56.

⁷⁶ David B. Ruderman, *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis: The Evangelical Alexander McCaul and Jewish-Christian Debate in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

⁷⁷ Elmer Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011).

⁷⁸ A. E. Thompson, *A Century of Jewish Missions* (Chicago, IL: Fleming H. Revell, 1902), 279–280.

⁷⁹ London Society historian William Thomas Gidney wrote in 1908, "No one ever rendered higher services to the Society than McCaul, who was successful as missionary, as Principal of the College, and as a tract writer. His name looms very large in the history of the Society. Of all the men who have, at different times, left their mark upon it, McCaul stands in the very foremost rank. Indeed, he stands alone, or almost alone." William Thomas Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews: From 1809 to 1908* (London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, 1908), 159, cf. 330. This exuberant praise of McCaul might be expected in an official history of the Society. However, Gidney leaves unmentioned McCaul's unceremonious exit from the Society in 1855 because of McCaul's criticisms of the Society's financial stewardship. Ruderman discusses this unfortunate parting in Ruderman, *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis*, 47–50.

⁸⁰ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 11, notes that a Hebrew-language master's thesis written by Yaakov Shahak studied McCaul in 1999, but this thesis was never published. McCaul has been overlooked by the recent Jewish missions movement as well, but two issues of *Mishkan* have briefly addressed McCaul or his close associates. Jorge Quinonez, "The Doyen of 19th Century British Jewish Missions," *Mishkan* 43 (2005): 75–82; Kelvin Crombie, "Michael Solomon Alexander and the Controversial Jerusalem Bishopric," *Mishkan* 15 (1991): 1–14.

professor of Modern Jewish History at the University of Pennsylvania, is to be commended for his impeccable scholarship on McCaul and his fair treatment of evangelicalism and the missionary enterprise. He correctly noted the need for the historian to take a missionary's theology seriously, and he did this well as a Reform rabbi and scholar.⁸¹

Ruderman's book investigates the life and works of McCaul and traces his impact on his colleagues and adversaries. In chapters 1–3, Ruderman details McCaul's ministry with the London Society, the writing and impact of *The Old Paths*, and McCaul's lesser-known emphasis on defending biblical inerrancy toward the end of his life. These chapters present a textured profile of McCaul from a variety of original sources. For example, Ruderman documents an 1826 letter by McCaul illustrating his genuine interest and skill in a wide variety of Jewish works while serving in Warsaw, which was a hub of Orthodox Jewish life at the time.⁸² Ruderman also presents touching vignettes of McCaul's life from his daughter Elizabeth Finn (1825–1921).⁸³ Finn claimed that her father had written out the Torah in Hebrew five times, and that he taught her Hebrew, Yiddish, and cursive Hebrew script as a girl.⁸⁴ Ruderman's profile gives depth to McCaul's skills and motivations, providing a unique window into this prolific and influential evangelical missionary to the Jewish people. After discussing the remainder of *Missionaries, Converts, and Rabbis*, I will return to the content and the strategy of *The Old Paths*.

The following chapters of Ruderman's book are devoted to the reactions of McCaul's friends and adversaries. Ruderman writes, "McCaul unconsciously forged [an] unusual assembly of intellectuals" through his *Old Paths*,⁸⁵ eliciting both support and challenge from a multinational array of Christian and Jewish readers. Chapter 4 details the life of Stanislaus Hoga (1791–1860), a Jewish believer in Jesus who translated *The Old Paths* into Hebrew in 1839, but subsequently repudiated the book and the work of the London Society. He objected to McCaul's aggressive approach to criticizing Judaism and the Society's insistence that Jewish believers cease practicing the Mosaic law.⁸⁶ Chapter 5 profiles two Christian opponents of McCaul, Reverend John Oxlee (1779–1854) and magazine editor Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna (1790–1846), both premillennial Zionists who forged idealistic attitudes toward Judaism.⁸⁷ Oxlee was originally a supporter of the London Society, but he promoted the adoption of Kabbalistic metaphysics and the observance of Torah by Jewish converts, ultimately leading to a break with the Society and their evangelistic goals.⁸⁸ Tonna also insisted that Jewish believers should be encouraged to observe the Torah, but she disavowed direct evangelism as ineffectual until the return of Christ to Zion.⁸⁹ Chapter 6 focuses on the tragic life of Moses Margoliouth (1818–1881), a Jewish convert and follower of

⁸¹ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 10.

⁸² Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 17–18.

⁸³ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 20–22.

⁸⁴ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 20.

⁸⁵ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 29.

⁸⁶ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 72–74.

⁸⁷ That is, their warm opinions about Judaism were less based upon live interactions with contemporary Jewish people than upon their studies of biblical and rabbinic works. Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 8, 107.

⁸⁸ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 87, 92. For Oxlee's syncretism of Trinitarian thought with Kabbalah, see John Oxlee, *The Christian Doctrines of the Trinity, and Incarnation Considered and Maintained on the Principles of Judaism*, 3 vols. (London, UK: J. Wertheimer & Co., 1815–1850), https://books.google.com/books?id=6JA2QU_6RWwC. Ruderman includes amusing rebuttals of Oxlee's efforts by Coleridge (84) and Theodores (92–93). Coleridge wrote of Oxlee and Kabbalah, "I am far from denying that an interpreter of the Scriptures may derive important aids from the Jewish commentators. . . . But Mr. Oxlee takes it as he finds it, and gravely ascribes this patchwork of corrupt Platonism or Plotinism, with Chaldean, Persian, and Judaic fables and fancies, to the Jewish Doctors, as original, profound, and pious philosophy in its fountain-head! . . . The Cabalistic theosophy is Pantheistic." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1868), 461–462, https://books.google.com/books?id=22K-_BosoVMC. For more on the philosophical background of Kabbalah, see Brian J. Crawford, *The Scandal of a Divine Messiah: A Reassessment of Maimonidean and Kabbalistic Challenges to the Incarnation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2025).

⁸⁹ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 99–108.

McCaul who published his own anti-Talmudic work in the style of *The Old Paths*.⁹⁰ Margoliouth was supposedly a model convert, repudiating Torah observance and obtaining ordination in the Church of England before experiencing antisemitism in Christian circles and souring to the prospects of getting many Jewish converts.⁹¹ He, too, came to be a sharp critic of the London Society. Finally, chapters 7–8 focus on a selection of McCaul’s Jewish opponents, Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788–1860), Samuel Joseph Fuenn (1818–1890), and Raphael Kassin (1780–1871). These men wrote responses to *The Old Paths* from enlightened Reform positions, and Ruderman notes the irony of reformers—who downplayed Jewish tradition—defending the Talmud and rabbinic tradition against McCaul’s attacks.⁹²

During his profile of this unusual assembly, Ruderman highlights several themes that continue to have relevance in Jewish-Christian relations, Messianic Jewish identity, and Jewish missions. One recurring theme is how the Jewish community distinguished between “good converts” and “bad converts” in the nineteenth century.⁹³ The good converts were not “conversionists”; that is, they did not support overt evangelism as promoted by the London Society. Moreover, good converts continued to speak highly of the Torah and integrated the mitzvot into their lifestyle. In contrast, the bad converts were overtly evangelistic and spoke against Torah observance. Gentile Christians could be good or bad for the same reasons. To illustrate this phenomenon, Ruderman highlights multiple times where Jewish periodicals spoke highly of “good” converts and Christians who sought to undermine the work of McCaul and the London Society.⁹⁴

A second theme is the ineffectiveness of evangelism that emphasizes a hostile deconstruction of the target audience’s worldview and lifestyle. As we will see below, *The Old Paths* was uncompromising and harsh against rabbinic orthodoxy and practice while spending comparatively little time building up reasons for following Jesus. At first, McCaul’s deconstruction seemed to be working. McCaul and his associates made remarks attributing the growth of the Jewish reform movement to the success of McCaul’s attacks on rabbinic authority.⁹⁵ They apparently believed that the loosening of Jewish religious observances through Protestant attack would make a smoother transition toward believing in Jesus.⁹⁶ McCaul’s role in encouraging the reform movement is sharply disputed by many throughout Ruderman’s book. Whether or not he was a significant factor, both McCaul and his detractors eventually realized that the trend toward reform in the Jewish community was not a step toward believing in Jesus. Hoga, Oxlee, Tonna, and eventually even Margoliouth came to criticize the London Society’s aggressive evangelistic methods as ineffectual. McCaul himself came to lament, “Jewish reform has just done as much for real improvement as the

⁹⁰ Moses Margoliouth, *The Fundamental Principles of Modern Judaism Investigated* (London, UK: Wertheim, 1843), <http://archive.org/details/thefundamentalpr00marguoft>.

⁹¹ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 136–141.

⁹² Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 142–144.

⁹³ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 89.

⁹⁴ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 75–79, 89, 94, 95, 107–109.

⁹⁵ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 21, 38–42, 137, 192. McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 59, 233.

⁹⁶ After discussing positive developments that were increasing the probability of the return of the Jewish people to their homeland, in an 1838 sermon, McCaul preached, “The impediments in the way of their conversion are in a similar process of removal. The principal were the exhibition of image worship—the contempt, oppression, and persecution of those calling themselves Christians—and the power of Talmudic superstition. The Reformation has, in a great measure, removed the first by presenting to their view a religion not idolatrous. The consequent diffusion of the true principles of the Gospel, and the consequent practice of Christian charity, have much diminished the second. The events of the last fifty years, combined with the other two, have emancipated a large portion of the nation from the fetters of Rabbinism, so that the conversion as well as the restoration of the Jewish people is, to human judgment, far more probable now than at any previous period since their dispersion.” Alexander McCaul, *The Eternal Sonship of the Messiah: A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of Saint Paul, on the Feast of the Annunciation and in the Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, on Sunday Morning, April 29, 1838, with Notes and an Appendix* (London, UK: B. Wertheim, 1838), 28, <http://archive.org/details/eternalsonshipof00mccaiala>.

Council of Trent did for reformation. It has talked a great deal—it has done nothing.”⁹⁷ Ruderman comments, “McCaul’s initial high hopes that Reform Jews would ultimately enter the Christian fold seem to have been dashed as time went on and the reformers failed to take the next step of conversion.”⁹⁸ Construction of Christian belief, it appears, was more complicated than the deconstruction of Judaism.

A third significant theme was the role of McCaul’s Protestant self-identity in his apologetic strategy. As evidenced in his 1840 repudiation of blood libels, McCaul was mindful of historical persecutions of the Jewish people, and he made sure to label those persecutions as Catholic in nature.⁹⁹ McCaul portrayed himself as a tolerant English Protestant who rejected the repressive coercion of the Catholic Church.¹⁰⁰ Ruderman writes, “English Christians believed that they were more tolerant and appreciative of their Jewish citizenry and the evangelicals in particular had elevated the status of the Jews as key actors in the hopes of national restoration and the Second Coming.”¹⁰¹ By shifting the blame of historical antisemitism onto Catholics and seeing Protestants as immune to the phenomenon, McCaul felt more at liberty to speak harshly against Judaism and rabbinic leadership. Nevertheless, in light of the Holocaust perpetrated by a Protestant-majority Germany (let alone Luther’s diatribe *On the Jews and Their Lies*), McCaul’s description of antisemitism as a Catholic-only phenomenon can no longer be sustained. His proclamation of Protestant innocence in this regrettable matter is a rhetorical relic of his pre-Holocaust era. A fourth theme to consider is how the controversy generated by McCaul led to “mingled identities” among the respondents to his work. Ruderman writes in his conclusion,

In the final analysis, the story of McCaul and each of his seven associates and their intense encounter with the other was less about mutual affection and admiration and more about the acquisition of self-knowledge through contrast and contestation, through an intense exposure to the other, leading ultimately to the construction of religious and cultural identities sometimes internally inconsistent and even conflicted.¹⁰²

Several examples of this are provided in the book. Ruderman describes Jewish-Christians Hoga and Margoliouth as “very much suspended between their Christian faiths and their Jewish selves. They were truly hyphenated figures living between the two faith communities.”¹⁰³ Gentile Christians also responded from an integrative approach, as exemplified by Oxlee mixing kabbalistic and Trinitarian metaphysics and hermeneutics.¹⁰⁴ The Jewish critics of McCaul did not escape this dynamic, but rather reformulated their vision of Judaism by “bringing the Jewish heritage closer to the ethical core of the Christian heritage, where the two meet in celebration of each other.”¹⁰⁵

The last theme I will consider is how Ruderman highlights the ever-changing Jewish community in the nineteenth century, which made McCaul’s Talmud-focused approach less relevant as the decades passed. Ruderman writes, “McCaul’s argument rested on the assumption that the rabbis were still a force to contend with and that most Jews still valued the Talmud as the basic foundation of their

⁹⁷ Alexander McCaul, *Sketches of Judaism and the Jews* (London, UK: B. Wertheim, 1838), 122, <https://books.google.com/books?id=IicsAAAAYAAJ>.

⁹⁸ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 41.

⁹⁹ McCaul, *Reasons*, 1–2: “The mercy, which Protestants have learned in the New Testament, has put an end to the use of the rack and the wheel, and extinguished the flames in which formerly so many Israelites perished. . . . [B]ut occasion has hence been taken to bring a general charge against the whole Jewish nation, and to excite universal prejudice, which, if allowed to spread, must again end in outbreaks of popular fury such as used to disgrace Christendom in the days of Popery.”

¹⁰⁰ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, 24, 36, 42, 68. McCaul, *Eternal Sonship*, 28.

¹⁰¹ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 37–38.

¹⁰² Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 201.

¹⁰³ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 200.

¹⁰⁴ Oxlee, *The Christian Doctrines of the Trinity*.

¹⁰⁵ From an email to me from David Ruderman, dated October 8, 2021. Also see Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 200–201.

Jewish identity.”¹⁰⁶ This assumption became less relevant as the nineteenth century went on. Indeed, McCaul watched the unraveling of orthodox Judaism into many different ideologies that *The Old Paths* did not address in 1837. Decades later in 1892, London Society missionary R. S. Spiegel lamented how the approach of *The Old Paths* was ineffectual in reaching the contemporary Jewish community. Ruderman quotes him as saying,

Most of our tracts have been written for Jews of one mind and religious thought, losing sight of the manifold and various characters (and education) of the Jews we have to deal with. To have to reckon with the orthodox Talmudicals, the Reformed or rather De-formed, the educated, the illiterate, the Chasidic-superstitious, the Socialistic, the Atheistic, the Infidel, the merely National Jew; we have to provide missionary literature for Jews who think that Judaism is more a misfortune than a religion. . . . We want tracts for each and all of the enumerated classes and we have to meet them on their own fulcrum which we have to lead up to Scripture.¹⁰⁷

In the twenty-first century, the situation is mostly reversed; few missionary tracts are written toward “orthodox Talmudicals,” making McCaul’s work a rarity in the English language. However, given the current trends of the Jewish community toward a resurgent Orthodoxy,¹⁰⁸ an ironic application of Spiegel’s advice in the twenty-first century may involve re-learning how to communicate the gospel to the Orthodox like McCaul, but with a more appropriate methodology.

In sum, David Ruderman has provided a multifaceted portrait of McCaul and those he influenced, skillfully tracing their conflicting motivations, theologies, strategies, perspectives, and attitudes. His monograph sheds light on a significant moment in the early Jewish missions movement, and that moment is not without relevance today. For the remainder of this paper, I will further investigate McCaul’s *Old Paths* and provide a rubric by which his approach to Jewish evangelism may be modified for ethical Jewish-Christian engagement today.

McCaul’s *Old Paths* Compared to Predecessors

Alexander McCaul was a new breed of missionary to the Jewish people. Unlike pre-medieval apologists to the Jewish people (i.e., Tertullian, Cyprian),¹⁰⁹ McCaul was intimately familiar with Jewish culture, the Hebrew language, and principal Jewish religious works. Unlike several medieval apologists (i.e., Peter Alfonsi, Pablo Christiani, Abner of Burgos, Raymundus Martini),¹¹⁰ McCaul acquired his learning not by being a convert from Judaism, but by being an interested Gentile Christian who devoted himself to Jewish learning. Finally, unlike post-Reformation Gentile

¹⁰⁶ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 202.

¹⁰⁷ Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 30.

¹⁰⁸ Orthodox Judaism will have an increasing influence in the American Jewish experience in the decades to come, according to population statistics in Pew Research Center, *Jewish Americans in 2020* (Pew Research Center, 2021), 9.

¹⁰⁹ For a historical overview of apologists to the Jewish people, see A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird’s-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance*, Reprint (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Williams often laments how rarely Christian apologists truly understood the Judaism they were opposing.

¹¹⁰ Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*, ed. Gregory F. LaNave, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006); Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); David Berger, “Christians, Gentiles, and the Talmud: A Fourteenth-Century Jewish Response to the Attack on Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations* (Boston, MA, 2010), 158–176; Ryan Szpiech, “From Testimonia to Testimony: Thirteenth-Century Anti-Jewish Polemic and the Mostrador de Justicia of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006); Richard S. Harvey, “Raymundus Martini and the Pugio Fidei: A Survey of the Life and Works of a Medieval Controversialist,” (Master’s thesis, University College London, 1991); Görg K. Hasselhoff and Alexander Fidora, eds., *Ramon Martí’s Pugio Fidei: Studies and Texts* (Santa Coloma de Queralt, Spain: Obrador Edendum, 2017); Syds Wiersma, “Pearls in a Dunghill: The Anti-Jewish Writings of Raymond Martin O.P. (ca. 1220 – ca. 1285)” (PhD diss., Tilburg University, 2015).

apologists (i.e., Eisenmenger, Wagenseil),¹¹¹ McCaul conveyed a love for Jewish people and a hope for their future as a nation. Ruderman gives the following assessment of McCaul's uniqueness:

What was new about McCaul's assault was the author's impressive command of rabbinic literature, history, and thought, his powerful rhetoric, and his intimate understanding of contemporary Jewish life. McCaul was also dangerous because, as a Protestant evangelical, he professed to love Jews and their culture with great intensity. He composed numerous books, sermons, and addresses displaying his vast Jewish erudition and his genuine appreciation for Jewish culture.¹¹²

McCaul knew that his approach was unique. In his preface to *Old Paths*, McCaul says that he has "carefully avoided the tone in which Eisenmenger and others have treated this subject."¹¹³ This is significant because a positive word of encouragement or praise towards Jews was rarely to be found in many historical works against Judaism. McCaul does not fall into this unsympathetic vice that has ensnared many apologists. For example, he praises the Jewish people for their "devoted constancy . . . in the most troublous times" regarding the celebration of Passover.¹¹⁴ He praises Israel's Zionist hope in the future: "Their expectation of the future restoration of Israel is well founded, and their faith in the promises relating to it worthy of all imitation."¹¹⁵ At the beginning of this essay we saw McCaul's tender admiration of the Jewish people. Sometimes, he could even praise individual rabbis, such as in this remark on Maimonides: "One of the mightiest intellects that ever dwelt in a tenement of clay was that of Moses, the son of Maimon; a man whose learning and industry were equal to his genius."¹¹⁶ However, his praise of Jewish religious leaders in this way was rare.

McCaul was also unique in that he addressed his work to the ear of Jewish people, rather than for the education of Christian readers, as Eisenmenger and Oxlee had done. McCaul could speak empathetically and pastorally to his Jewish audience in a way that his predecessors did not even attempt. He often wrote to his audience in the second person ("you"), vacillating between tenderness and personal challenge. In one example, he writes, "We rejoice to think that notwithstanding all the vain traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees, it has pleased God to keep alive in your hearts the memory of his past mercy, and the hope of his future goodness."¹¹⁷ He found ways to both commend and challenge his audience:

The Jewish nation is a great and intellectual people, highly gifted by God with those powers that adorn and dignify humanity. But this is not the estimate formed by the world at large. Why not? Because the world at large knows only the fables and absurdities of the Talmud, but is ignorant of the real monuments of Jewish genius.¹¹⁸

He also did not hold contemporary Jews responsible for theological errors inherited from their rabbinic forefathers.¹¹⁹ These are but a few examples of McCaul's empathetic rhetoric toward his Jewish audience. However, as can be seen in these quotes, McCaul practices a divide and conquer

¹¹¹ Johann Andreas Eisenmenger, *Entdecktes Judentum* (1704). Johann Christoph Wagenseil, *Tela Ignea Satanae* (1681). Ruderman discusses McCaul's differentiation from these enemies of the Jews in *Missionaries*, 15. McCaul disapprovingly calls Eisenmenger an enemy of the Jewish people in *Reasons*, 6, 26. He also explicitly distances himself from Eisenmenger's approach in the preface to *The Old Paths* (see below).

¹¹² Ruderman, *Missionaries*, 4.

¹¹³ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, "Advertisement," n.p.

¹¹⁴ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 11, 41.

¹¹⁵ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 12, 45.

¹¹⁶ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 4, 16.

¹¹⁷ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 12, 45.

¹¹⁸ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 18, 72.

¹¹⁹ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 8, 29. Also see No. 16, 61, for McCaul's exoneration of Jewish people from the guilt of praying prayers written by the sages.

strategy, where he personally appeals to his cultured and liberal English Jewish audience (“you”) to rise up against the backward rabbis (“they”) about whom he has fewer positive things to say.

Finally, *The Old Paths* was innovative in its streamlined methodology. Whereas Eisenmenger was content with broadcasting unsavory bits of rabbinic teaching anywhere in the rabbinic corpus for ridicule and shaming,¹²⁰ McCaul knew the workings of Judaism better. He was aware that Judaism was primarily practiced according to the halakhic law codes, such as the *Shulchan Aruch* and *Mishneh Torah*, that Scripture was understood through principal commentators like Rashi, and that the prayer book (*siddur*) was the primary source of Jewish spirituality and belief. In his preface to *The Old Paths*, McCaul states that he will confine his quotations to these common sources and the Talmud,¹²¹ which results in him targeting man-on-the-street Judaism rather than an abstraction built from obscure sources.

Despite McCaul’s uniqueness compared to his predecessors, as listed above, Hebrew Christian scholar Jakób Jocz (1906–1983) correctly remarked that McCaul was one of the final examples of a now-outdated paradigm of Jewish-Christian engagement. That old paradigm was to exalt Christianity at the expense of Judaism and to triumphantly declare that Christianity was superior over a false and lifeless contemporary Judaism.¹²² Instead, Jocz remarks that the modern missionary approach is as following: “Judaism is presented not as an erroneous religion, devoid of all truth, separated in letter and spirit from the Old Testament, but as of the same essence as Christianity, yet at a less developed stage.”¹²³ This more sympathetic approach, which encourages a more porous line between contemporary Judaism and Christianity, is much to be preferred over McCaul’s sharply demarcated polemics.¹²⁴ While errant theological teachings still need to be called out, Jocz’s strategy encourages a winsome approach of giving weight to commonalities as well as differences, rather than unrelenting criticisms based on harsh contrasts.

¹²⁰ In a critical review of Eisenmenger’s *Entdecktes Judenthum*, G. Dalman remarks, “It could no more be called a faithful representation of Judaism than an indiscriminate collection of everything superstitious and repulsive within Christian literature could be termed characteristic of Christianity.” G. Dalman, “Johann Andreas Eisenmenger,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, Summer 1908), 4:101.

¹²¹ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, “Advertisement,” n.p.

¹²² Although this may sound similar to what R. Kendall Soulen calls “economic supersessionism,” McCaul was not a supersessionist who believed that Israel was superseded or rejected in the plan of God. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 29–30. Instead, McCaul was a Zionist premillennialist who portrayed normative Judaism as only one form of Judaism that the Jewish people could have adopted. The better Judaism was the Judaism offered to Israel through the Jewish apostles in the New Testament: “We are not opposing a Gentile religion to a Jewish religion, but comparing one Jewish creed with another Jewish creed.” McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 1, 1. He saw the true faith—whether called Christianity or the Judaism of the apostles—as the uninterrupted heir of the pre-Jesus Judaism. Contemporary Judaism was not false, per se, but was only false and lifeless inasmuch as the rabbis deviated from their original stock.

¹²³ Jakób Jocz, *The Jewish People & Jesus Christ*, Digital Edition (Jocz.ca, 2019), 196–197.

¹²⁴ In a brief caveat, McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 3, 9, attempted to deflect the charge that he saw “the oral law as a system of unmixed evil.” No, he did not think that, but rather, “a system based on the law and the prophets must and does contain much, that is good and worth of admiration.” But later in the paragraph, and indeed throughout *The Old Paths*, McCaul neutralizes this sentiment by saying, “the explanation and development of these good principles [by the rabbis] shows that the system itself is radically bad, and therefore cannot be from God.” Thus, the oral law as a system is “radically bad”—contradicting his previous caveat. Taken as a whole, *The Old Paths* rarely shows evidence of seeing Orthodox Judaism as anything but “a system of unmixed evil.”

A Sampling of McCaul's Arguments Against Judaism in *The Old Paths*

“The great object of these papers has been to compare Judaism, as it at present exists, with the religion of Moses and the Prophets, and thus to ascertain whether the Jews of the present day walk in the good old paths pointed out to their forefathers.”

—Alexander McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 59

In *The Old Paths*, McCaul holds to the following theory: since Jews believe what rabbinic authorities say about Jesus, the rabbinic authorities must be exposed as illegitimate leaders. Once the rabbis and their Talmud are moved out of the way, the Jewish people's brilliant minds will be freed from religious bondage, and they will have an easy pathway to believe in Jesus. Consequently, McCaul's strategy is to attack rabbinic authority and the Talmud from every angle he can think of, including historically, scripturally, logically, and morally.

At the end of *The Old Paths*, McCaul provides a recapitulation of his principal arguments. He structures his summary in four points as follows: “(1) That Judaism is a false religion, (2) That Judaism has for its authors wicked men, unworthy of credit, (3) That their testimony against Christianity is of no value, (4) That in all those points where the oral law is weak, the New Testament is strong.”¹²⁵ McCaul spends the majority of his time on the first point, under which he includes twelve reasons why Judaism is a false religion. He writes,

- . That the oral law is altogether destitute of external evidence.
- . The oral law itself is full of manifest fables.
- . It is directly subversive of the state of things established in the written law.
- . The oral law encourages those heathen superstitions expressly forbidden by Moses and the Prophets.
- . The oral law loosens the moral obligations [i.e., provides loopholes for mitzvot].
- . It leads men to put trust in mere external acts as a compensation for moral delinquencies.
- . Though called an oral law, because not written with ink, it is really written in blood [i.e., cruel punishments].
- . It degrades the female sex.
- . It oppresses and insults slaves.
- . It is a persecuting and intolerant system.
- . It forbids the exercise of the commonest feelings of humanity to those whom it calls idolaters.
- . It leaves those Gentiles who are not idolaters without religion.¹²⁶

Thus, while McCaul could show sympathy and give praise to his Jewish audience, he had an unsympathetic view of Judaism as a whole. He saw Judaism as a calcified growth to be surgically removed from a victimized Jewish people. The rabbis and their system were his enemies to attack, and Israel was his prisoner to rescue.

McCaul's attacks resonated with fellow evangelicals in the London Society's circles, and the substance of his arguments may be of some value in Jewish evangelism among the Orthodox today. However, the merits of the arguments notwithstanding, McCaul was attacking an entire religious system, believed in by Jewish people, who themselves saw no problem with their religious system and worldview. Actions that McCaul judged to be degrading to the female sex, for example, were widely accepted and noncontroversial among his Jewish audience. Practices labeled as superstition

¹²⁵ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 60, 237–239.

¹²⁶ McCaul, *The Old Paths*, No. 60, 237–238.

by McCaul were accepted as rabbinic tradition by his audience. Put simply, McCaul's orthodox audience did not have negative intuitions about these things like McCaul did—and if they did, they usually ended up with the Jewish reform movement rather than with Christianity. McCaul was an alien force entering into a Jewish space while making negative moral judgments that consisted of irony, shaming, and exposé. What would biblical ethics have to say about McCaul's evangelistic approach?

The Ethics of Rhetoric in the Scriptures

On the one hand, Paul gives a prescriptive command: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col 4:6). Many other passages require persuasive and winsome argumentation toward others.¹²⁷ On the other hand, Jesus demonstrates a rhetorical barrage: “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” (Matt 23:33). There are many other examples of harsh and condemning rhetoric from Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets.¹²⁸ Is harshness in evangelistic rhetoric justified—even serving as an imitation of Messiah himself? Or should the harsh examples set by Jesus and the apostles be set aside so that evangelism may always be done “with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15)?

In my view, there are multiple ways to reconcile these passages and end up with a normative ethic of winsome, respectful, and gentle evangelism that avoids, as a rule, the harsh rhetoric sometimes employed by Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets. First, there is a categorical distinction between believers today and biblical role models. They were infallible prophets with inspired revelation from God about how to speak to their erring audiences. As inspired mouthpieces for God himself, they played by different rules because God is uniquely righteous and omniscient in his judgments and rhetoric. Moreover, Jesus, as the divine Son of God, knew the eternal destiny of his listeners. Believers today have no such infallible revelation and thus should not pattern their rhetoric upon those who did.¹²⁹ Second, much of the harsh rhetoric in the Scriptures is between Jews with a common culture; namely, polemics in Scripture are usually in-group family disputes where the shared intimacy of being fellow Jews shifts the rules of rhetoric and makes room for harsher appeals. Third, a common reconciliation between the biblical handling of murder and killing may be applied here as well. One of the Ten Commandments is “You shall not murder” (Exod 20:13), yet many of Israel's heroes killed other human beings, sometimes with God's direct approval and instructions.¹³⁰ The common ethical reconciliation, grounded in divine command theory,¹³¹ is that the prohibition against killing is normative at all times, except in individual cases where God overrules through divine inspiration and employs human servants to execute his judgments without

¹²⁷ Prov 22:11; 26:21; 29:8; Eccl 10:12; Matt 5:22; Eph 4:29; Col 4:6; 1 Thess 2:3–8; 2 Tim 2:24–26; 1 Pet 2:12; 3:15–16; Heb 13:18; Jas 3:2–11.

¹²⁸ Num 5:22; Deut 28; 1 Sam 15:33; 1 Kgs 18:27; 1 Kgs 21:20–23; Amos 4:12; Matt 3:7; 11:21–24; 12:39; 16:23; 17:17; 23:3–36; Acts 7:51–52; 1 Thess 2:14–16; Jas 4:4; Jude 4; Rev 2:9.

¹²⁹ The believer's imitation of Messiah has limits. He is the incarnate Son of God and a Jewish man. Thus, he has differences when compared to other human beings that make imitating him fully out of reach (due to his divinity) or even sinful. For example, as the Son of God he drew upon his omniscience in certain situations (Matt 9:4; John 4:16–18), but believers today should not presume that God will also grant the same insight to them today. Likewise, a Gentile Christian man should not ask, “What would Jesus do?” regarding circumcision, since he would sin in following Messiah by circumcising for religious and covenantal purposes (Acts 15; Gal 5). His difference from Messiah obligates him *not* to follow Messiah in this way.

¹³⁰ Abraham: Gen 14:15. Moses: Exod 2:12; 32:26–28. Joshua and his armies: Josh 6:21; 8:24–29. Samson: Judg 15:14–16. Samuel: 1 Sam 15:33. David: 1 Sam 17:50–51; Ps 18:37–42.

¹³¹ Steve Wilkens, ed., *Christian Ethics: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 125–164; Garrett J. DeWeese and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophy Made Slightly Less Difficult: A Beginner's Guide to Life's Big Questions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 95–100.

human beings incurring guilt for the killings.¹³² Those exceptions by divine inspiration do not overturn the normative prescription of “You shall not murder.” In the same way, just because Jesus spoke harshly against the Pharisees, this particular example does not overturn the normative prescription given to those who are not the Son of God to answer each person graciously and without wrath.

In sum, I believe biblical *prescriptions* about evangelistic rhetoric hold more weight than biblical *descriptions* of rhetoric in the biblical narratives. In my view, Alexander McCaul and many other believers in history neglected these distinguishing factors, thinking that they could speak harshly to Jews because Jesus, the apostles, and prophets spoke harshly to Jews. This justification does not hold. A better ethic of rhetorical engagement in evangelism is needed.

An Ethical Assessment of McCaul’s *Old Paths*

In his book, *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defence of Ethical Proselytizing and Persuasion*, Elmer Thiessen develops a fifteen-point matrix for assessing the ethics of any evangelistic endeavor, and he grounds it in biblical ethical commands and ontological realities, rather than inferences from rhetorical examples.¹³³ His criteria are applications of the biblical teachings of the image of God in all human beings (Gen 1:26–27), the ethical foundations of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20), Jesus’ Golden Rule (Matt 7:12), and Paul’s preaching philosophy (1 Thess 2:3–8). In this section, I will briefly assess McCaul’s *Old Paths* against Thiessen’s ethical criteria.

(1) *The Dignity Criterion*. Thiessen writes, “Ethical proselytizing is always done in such a way as to protect the dignity and worth of the person or persons being proselytized.”¹³⁴ In this respect, McCaul was better than his predecessors, but his care for his audience’s dignity was divided. He accorded little dignity to the rabbis of the Talmud, describing them or their religious system using emotive language such as *absurd*, *spiritual tyranny*, *corruption*, and *bondage*. While he took pains to convey respect and love to his Jewish audience, it is unlikely that his audience received his rhetoric as affirmations of their dignity because of his attacks on their communal and religious identity, as discussed in the identity criterion (No. 12) given below.

(2) *The Care Criterion*. Thiessen writes, “Ethical proselytizing is always an expression of concern for the whole person and all of his or her needs—physical, social, economic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual.”¹³⁵ McCaul broadly succeeded in communicating his care for his audience. He fought against antisemitism—including its physical, social, and political ramifications—and contended for the intellectual and spiritual lives of his audience. However, while he empathized with his audience

¹³² It is important to note that murder (intentional extrajudicial non-wartime killing) is different than manslaughter (unintentional killing, Num 35:9–34), judicial executions (Gen 9:6; Num 35:30), killing in self-defense (Exod 22:2), and wartime killing. God gives the latter three divine warrant in certain contexts, and not in others.

¹³³ Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*. Chapters 7 and 8 develop an ethical theory in detail, but Appendix 1 (pages 234–237) gives the fifteen ethical principles in shorter form. Moishe Rosen, the late founder of Jews for Jesus, once gave a paper on the ethics of Jewish evangelism with a similar ethical taxonomy derived from Emory A. Griffin, *The Mind Changers: The Art of Christian Persuasion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1976). See Moishe Rosen, “An Ethical Basis of Witness to the Jewish Community” (Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, North America, Dallas, TX, 1985). Ethics in Jewish evangelism was also the theme in Ole Chr. M. Kvarme, ed., “Jewish Evangelism and Biblical Ethics,” *Mishkan* 19 (1993).

¹³⁴ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 234.

¹³⁵ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 234.

at times, he was likely less effective at communicating emotional care because of his divided rhetoric.

(3) *Physical Coercion Criterion*. McCaul repeatedly and proudly proclaimed his rejection of physical coercion. He portrayed the New Testament as his ally and the Catholic Church as his enemy in this area. McCaul therefore earns a high mark in his rejection of physical coercion.

(4) *Psychological Coercion Criterion*. Thiessen describes this criterion as avoiding psychological manipulation, such as exploiting the vulnerabilities of children and individuals facing personal crises. It also avoids excessive appeals to emotion or fear. McCaul was not guilty of any of these tactics, for he wrote intellectually to fellow intellectuals. He did not, for example, attempt to repeatedly terrify his audience with the threat of hell.

(5) *Social Coercion Criterion*. This criterion involves abuses of power relationships, such as when King James I of Aragon convened a Jewish-Christian debate in Barcelona in 1263 and then exiled the Jewish participant, Nachmanides. In contrast, McCaul had no position of power over his readers, who were choosing to read *The Old Paths* of their own accord.

(6) *Inducement Criterion*. McCaul never enticed his audience to convert in order to receive material or social compensation. Others in his era may have enticed Jews to be baptized to enter the guilds or the universities, but McCaul did not do so.

(7) *Rationality Criterion*. Thiessen writes, “Ethical persuasion includes the providing of information in order to make such a decision [to convert]. It also includes giving reasons for the proposed change of heart and mind.”¹³⁶ Of any area that McCaul excelled in, it is this one.

(8) *Truthfulness Criterion*. Thiessen writes, “Ethical proselytizing is truthful. It seeks to tell the truth about the religion being advocated. It is truthful also with regard to what it says about other religions. . . . Proselytizing [should not be] accompanied by hidden agendas, hidden identities, lying, deception, and failure to speak the truth.”¹³⁷ This criterion is more complicated to assess for McCaul. He was not guilty of hidden agendas or lying or portraying his evangelical Christianity in false ways. However, the accuracy of his portrayal of Judaism is debatable. Nevertheless, because of his streamlined strategy of only using common Jewish sources, and because of his extensive personal acquaintance with Orthodox Jews in Warsaw and elsewhere, McCaul was likely among the nineteenth century’s best Gentile missionaries in this regard.

(9) *Humility Criterion*. “Proselytizing becomes unethical when it becomes arrogant, condescending, and dogmatic in the claims being made.”¹³⁸ McCaul’s work was not characterized by humility, so he does not do well in this criterion.

(10) *Tolerance Criterion*. “Ethical proselytizing treats persons holding beliefs differing from that of the proselytizer with love and respect. While it does not preclude fair criticism of other religious or irreligious beliefs, it treats the same with respect, and avoids hostile attitudes or the use of insulting and abusive language against other religions and worldviews.”¹³⁹ Apparently, McCaul’s understanding of tolerance was limited to restraint from physical coercion and did not extend to rhetoric. McCaul’s attitude toward his rabbinic opponents and Judaism in general is consistently hostile and shaming, so he fails in this criterion.

¹³⁶ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 235.

¹³⁷ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 236.

¹³⁸ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 236.

¹³⁹ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 236.

(11) *Motivation Criterion*. Thiessen writes that the primary motivation for evangelism ought to be love for one’s neighbor, and not for personal aggrandizement, domination, or feeling good about making a convert. McCaul showed no evidence of these unethical motivations but consistently conveyed his concern for his audience.

(12) *Identity Criterion*. Thiessen writes, “Ethical proselytizing will take into account and show some respect for the communal identity of the proselyte. Proselytizing which completely disregards the dignity of the individual as rooted in his or her social attachments is immoral.”¹⁴⁰ This criterion encapsulates a significant ethical error on McCaul’s part. He treated his audience as a collection of individuals oppressed by a social and religious structure, rather than a collection of individuals who found purpose, meaning, and joy in their interconnected social structure built and sustained by revered rabbinic leaders. McCaul was unsympathetic to the societal rootedness of his audience, and to the relational, communal, and social pain that would be inflicted upon those who would consider his arguments. If an Orthodox Jew were to come to believe what McCaul believed, what should such a convert do about his disapproving wife and children? His associates in his business? How should he handle his connections in his *schul*? McCaul had no answer for these things in *The Old Paths* because he treated his audience as autonomous individuals who needed to escape an oppressive system at all costs.¹⁴¹ No doubt, such an escape would include leaving the Jewish community, joining the Anglican church, and shedding evidence of one’s Jewish observances and traditions. By treating his audience as something other than they were—social beings deeply rooted in a social structure—McCaul’s evangelism was unethical.

(13) *Cultural Sensitivity Criterion*. Thiessen writes, “Ethical proselytizing is sensitive to the culture of the persons being proselytized. It values the uniqueness of each culture, and attempts to retain what is good or neutral within each culture.”¹⁴² McCaul’s former associates and opponents criticized McCaul’s approach in this respect. They objected to his hostility and insensitive rhetoric in his written word, and his disavowal of Jewish religious observance after coming to faith in Jesus. McCaul and Margoliouth had no place for a continued Jewish identity that was rooted in any way in Torah observance. They accepted a stark contrast between Christianity and Judaism on this manner, rather than following apostolic precedent for observance of Jewish traditions. Because McCaul viewed Jewish culture as the product of an illegitimate Judaism, he railed against the culture of his audience. Thus, McCaul failed this criterion.

(14) *Results Criterion*. Thiessen writes, “Success in persuasion . . . should be seen as a by-product of ethical proselytizing.”¹⁴³ This criterion is difficult to judge, since McCaul’s friends hailed the many Jews who believed in Jesus because of *The Old Paths*, and McCaul’s opponents mocked him and the London Society for their low numbers of converts.

(15) *Golden Rule*. Thiessen writes, “Ethical proselytizing operates under the assumption that the other has the right to proselytize as well. It is immoral to assume, or to work towards a monopoly of the proselytizing enterprise.”¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Christendom has been guilty of violating this

¹⁴⁰ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 237.

¹⁴¹ Jesus spoke of the joy of a new believer selling all he owns to pursue the kingdom of heaven (Matt 13:44–46; cf. Luke 14:33) and stated that one cannot put wife and children before him (Matt 10:37; Luke 14:26). If a new believer is *forced* to choose between his family and Messiah, he must choose Messiah. But the dilemma is not always so stark. Cannot the new believer sometimes remain within her community, within her family, within her marriage, and live a Messiah-honoring life without causing relational destruction? Are there missiological principles of wisdom to put in place that could lead to the eventual salvation of the unbelieving spouse, children, and community? McCaul spoke to none of these possibilities, only calling upon individuals to leave everything for Messiah. This strategy can lead to a short-term win, but a long-term loss for Jewish evangelism.

¹⁴² Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 237.

¹⁴³ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 237.

¹⁴⁴ Thiessen, *Ethics of Evangelism*, 237.

principle with Jewish people, such that Christian kings used political coercion to transform Judaism into a non-proselytizing religion.¹⁴⁵ However, the principle still holds that in Jewish evangelism, the missionary ought to allow an audience to reply and defend their position. The nature of *The Old Paths* is that of a printed monologue, rather than dialogue, so this criterion is not directly applicable to my assessment of McCaul.

Concluding Remarks on McCaul's Approach

“Love the sinner, but hate the sin”¹⁴⁶ is a common maxim in Christian circles, and one that Alexander McCaul appeared to agree with. By associating Judaism and the rabbis with “corruption,” “bondage,” and “pernicious doctrines,” McCaul placed Judaism in the category of sin. However, McCaul insisted, this sin may be considered separately from Jewish sinners, whom he loved underneath the corruption hindering their souls. In McCaul’s application, the maxim became “Love the Jew, but hate the Judaism.” But how, it may be asked, may the Jew be loved if his core worldview and lifestyle are passionately abhorred?

When writing against the rabbis of the oral law, McCaul routinely lacked warmth, charity, and humility. He treated the rabbis’ system as uniformly pernicious, rarely separating the wheat from the chaff.¹⁴⁷ When addressing the general Jewish person, McCaul had a different approach: he wrote with a dichotomy where he could divorce the error of Judaism from the beloved and victimized Jewish person hidden underneath, thus freeing McCaul’s conscience for continued hostility toward Judaism. Although this was a step in the right direction compared to McCaul’s even more aggressive forebears, the dichotomy is not biblically tenable.

In his rebuttal to the common maxim of “love the sinner, but hate the sin,” Augustus Hopkins Strong responds, “There is no abstract sin that can be hated apart from the persons in whom that sin is represented and embodied.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, persons are more intertwined with their sinful choices, and their worldview and lifestyle choices, than the maxim allows. Indeed, the Hebrew Scriptures include many passages where God says that he both loves (Exod 34:6–7; Hos 11; Neh 9:17) and hates (Ps 5:5; 11:5; Jer 12:8; Mal 1:3) *human sinners*, not just the sinful actions they commit. Thus, to the extent that one has integrated a sin into his or her character, or a false belief

¹⁴⁵ Apparently, Jewish proselytizing of Gentiles and their conversion to Judaism were common phenomena such that many Christian kings and councils saw the need to outlaw the practices repeatedly throughout the years 300–800 CE. See James William Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1964), 179–182, 389. For evidence of Jewish proselytism during the Second Temple period, see Michael F. Bird, *Crossing Over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

¹⁴⁶ This maxim, which is not found in the Bible, is commonly attributed to Augustine’s *Letter 211*, where he writes, “love for the persons and hatred of the sin.” However, Origen predated Augustine when he wrote in his commentary on Romans, “those who are perfect will love the sinner but hate his sin.” St. Augustine, *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 566; Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 308.

¹⁴⁷ He did so in one instance with Pesach (*Old Paths*, No. 12, 45) and remarked in the following issue (*Old Paths*, No. 13, 49) that “When we say that the rabbinical system is false, we do not mean that the Pharisees held no truth. On the contrary, we showed in our last number that some of their expectations were agreeable to the Word of God, and therefore true. All we intend is, that the peculiarities of Rabbinism of which the system is composed are erroneous.” This is a laudable statement, but McCaul’s approvals of rabbinic doctrines are so rare that this comment gets drowned out.

¹⁴⁸ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 290. In his commentary on Psalm 92, Motyer writes, “The adage that the Lord hates the sin but loves the sinner needs correction; those who set themselves against the Lord will find that he is personally set against them.” D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 547.

into his or her worldview, the individual and their error are inseparable.¹⁴⁹ The Scriptures do not describe all people by a sin-sinner dichotomy; rather, all people are sinners who sin (Isa 53:6; Rom 3:23), and it is the *whole* sinner who deserves the wrath of God (Deut 32:41; Ps 7:12–13; Nah 1:2). People are character-action-belief unities whose worldviews and lifestyles mutually inform each other within the heart.¹⁵⁰ A biblical theology cannot separate out one part of a person and treat that part as unaffected by the whole. It is only through the atonement and new birth through faith in Messiah that the stain of sin may be considered separately from the person who committed it (Rom 6:6–7; Gal 5:24; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9).

Therefore, if the dichotomy between error and the one who commits it is not tenable outside of the atonement of Messiah, then two options remain for the evangelist: hate the erroneous sinner (as a whole), or love the erroneous sinner (as a whole). Only the latter is acceptable for a follower of the crucified Messiah, whose sacrificial death is the pinnacle of love for sinners (Rom 5:8). The exhortations of the New Testament only confirm the norm that believers ought to love the erroneous sinner,¹⁵¹ and that any argument against the sinner’s beliefs and actions must be according to biblical ethical principles and grounded in love.¹⁵² Such principles include arguing against erroneous positions without turning to hostile personal attacks. As Paul wrote, citing the Torah, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rom 12:19; cf. Deut 32:35).

God may both love and hate sinners, but followers of the Messiah must leave that double prerogative to the holy and righteous Judge alone. Followers of the Messiah, fallible as we are to corrupt intentions, should not encourage any hatred that interferes with the normative commandment to love one another, even our enemies. If we harbor seething hatred toward a belief system that is deeply integrated into a person’s life, then we risk violating the commandment to love our neighbor (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39) who is created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). The Psalmist says, “I hate and abhor falsehood” (Ps 119:163), and thus there is a place for righteous human anger toward sin and erroneous teaching. There are also appropriate avenues for magistrates to administer human justice against sinners (Rom 13). The evangelist, however, is not to operate in that way. To the extent that another person has integrated falsehood into their life, an evangelist’s hatred of falsehood *must* be modified by an overarching love for the other, with a corresponding change in evangelistic rhetoric, tone, emotion, and approach.

There may be many clever and accurate things that evangelists to the Jewish people can learn from Alexander McCaul. He had a unique command of rabbinic material, a keen wit, and was capable of showing a soft heart. His arguments are often compelling and smartly constructed. However, they

¹⁴⁹ For biblical examples of this dynamic, see Luke 6:43–45; Matt 15:19; Jas 3:11–12; Prov 4:23. A classic nonbiblical example of the reciprocal relationship between the heart and actions is found in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, an ethical system often called “virtue ethics.” Aristotle explains how, for example, a greedy person becomes such by repeated greedy actions. The actions become integrated into the character, or to use biblical language, the heart.

¹⁵⁰ James Sire, in his initial editions of his popular apologetic work, *The Universe Next Door*, considered “worldviews” to be cognitive in nature, that is, divorced from character and action. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977). However, in his follow-up work, *Naming the Elephant*, Sire has criticized his previous view and written, “On the one hand, our actions act to form and reform our heart. On the other hand, our actions display what the content of our heart actually has come to be. Who we are is not just who we think or proclaim ourselves to be. It is who we show ourselves to be by the way we behave. Likewise, what our worldview actually is is not just what we think it is but what we show it is.” James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 2nd edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 51.

¹⁵¹ Matt 5:43–48; 1 John 4:19; Gal 6:1–2; Rom 11:28; 15:1; Jude 22–23. In his discussion on “whether we ought to love sinners,” Aquinas distinguished between the nature and the guilt of the sinner, as well as between the actuality and the potentiality of the sinner. Aquinas’s multifaceted discussion illustrates how the common maxim’s brevity is an oversimplification that should not be trusted as accurate theology. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II–II q.25.

¹⁵² 1 Pet 2:12; 3:15–16; 1 Thess 2:3–8; Col 4:6; Heb 13:18; Jam 3:2–11.

were embedded within a framework that lacked humility, eschewed cultural sensitivity, and attacked the dignity of his readership by harshly criticizing their communal identity. David Ruderman's excellent monograph illustrates the kinds of effects that may happen when McCaul's style of evangelism is practiced, and Elmer Thiessen's ethical framework may assist evangelists in correcting McCaul's deficiencies.

Alexander McCaul's nineteenth-century example remains ever relevant today; in the twenty-first century, the names of the principal characters may be different, but the same issues, debates, and schools of thought are present in contemporary Jewish-Christian relations. We would all be wise to learn lessons—both good and bad—from this fascinating evangelical apologist to the Jewish people.

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Jewish Missionaries to the Nations: Their Colorful Careers and Their Theological Significance

Rich Robinson, PhD

Senior researcher with Jews for Jesus

rich.robinson@jewsforjesus.org

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There are quite a few existing biographies of Jewish believers in Jesus both past and present, and many, especially of the older type, are hagiographic in nature. In this paper I am not going to present hagiographies, nor for that matter just general biographies. I want to focus on five Jewish believers who were missionaries to non-Jewish peoples. Then I will present a theological perspective on the fact that *Jewish* believers were missionizing *the nations*.¹⁵³

Sometimes it has seemed almost axiomatic that Jews who come to faith should evangelize their fellow Jews. That was not the case with those I describe here. For one reason or another, they chose to bring the gospel to non-Jews. Their stories are in many ways quite remarkable.

Three of the five have been extensively written about, both popularly and in scholarly works, and I therefore will have more to say about them. I will present them first. The other two have not yet had the same attention paid to them, and I will say less about them.

¹⁵³ There are actually many more than five such missionaries, but space allows me to cover only a few of them. Nor do they only live in the mists of history. Present-day Jewish missionaries to the nations would have to include Martin Goldsmith (to Muslims), Peter Gittlen (Wycliffe translator among the Mixtecs of Mexico), and others.

Bernard Jean Bettelheim, 1811–1870 The Eccentric Missionary Doctor



Bernard Jean Bettelheim has the distinction of being the first Protestant missionary to Okinawa, also known at the time (mid-nineteenth century) as the Ryukyuan Kingdom.

We know something of his early life and circumstances. He was born in 1811 in Pressburg, Hungary, which today is the city of Bratislava in Slovakia. Standing on the border of both Austria and Hungary, Pressburg was home to numerous ethnic groups. By the eighteenth century it was the largest and most prestigious of Hungary's cities, of whose kingdom it formed a part. Mozart and Haydn gave concerts there, and Beethoven slept within its confines. By the end of the eighteenth century, though, the city was already in decline and subject to the political vicissitudes of the times. Austria and France concluded the Peace of Pressburg in 1805, but then France invaded the city only four years later, in 1809.¹⁵⁴

Jews have navigated life in Gentile lands whether their host countries were prosperous or not. And so even in its downward years, by the end of the eighteenth century Pressburg was home to a small Jewish community of two thousand, boasting a yeshiva whose head was Meir Halberstadt.¹⁵⁵ In 1806, another yeshiva, the Pressburg Yeshiva, was established by Moses Sofer. As it turned out, this became “the largest and most influential”¹⁵⁶ of Central Europe's yeshivot.

Like the head of the Pressburg Yeshiva, Bettelheim's father was also named Moses, though he was a merchant rather than a rabbi. We know little of Bernard's early life, though reports tell us that by the time he was eight or nine years old, he was proficient in writing Hebrew, French, and German. This did not necessarily indicate that Bettelheim was a prodigy; it was and still is far more common for continental Europeans to know several languages than for others. According to some, he was being groomed to be a rabbi, which would have meant engaging in studies at the Pressburg or another yeshiva. A rabbi, at that time and in that place, did not necessarily entail having a congregation but being competent to decide matters of halacha or Jewish law. In any event, after becoming bar mitzvah at age thirteen, young Bernard tutored in languages for a while before deciding to embark on a medical rather than a rabbinical career.

¹⁵⁴ The relationship between Hungary and Austria is a bit complex at this point in time, so both nations are mentioned in the histories.

¹⁵⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Bratislava#Early_history.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

His medical studies took him to Padua, Italy, where in 1836 he received his MD degree with a specialization in cholera. He was then twenty-five years old. The Medical School of Padua was renowned, and remains so to this day. In medieval Europe, it “remained the only institution under the Catholic reign still open to Protestants, Anglicans, Jewish, and Orthodox students and professors.” Though somewhat past its prime by the nineteenth century, it was especially known for its “extraordinary” school of anatomy, whose early-eighteenth-century professor Giovanni Battista Morgagni was a pioneer in the field of anatomy and pathology.¹⁵⁷

Upon graduating, Bettelheim’s first medical practices were with the Egyptian Navy as well as the Turkish regiment, where he was a surgeon. Since Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire at the time, it was a seamless transfer for Bettelheim to move from one to the other. And, in fact, Egypt may well have been the place where Bettelheim learned about smallpox vaccination, which he was later to introduce to Okinawa. For Egypt was a pioneer in introducing the vaccine, discovered in 1796, to its population. By the 1820s French physicians were deployed to vaccinate children and to teach others the method. The effort ran into snags—parents complained that many vaccinated children ended up contracting the disease anyway—but it continued to good effect, with a central coordinating office established in 1836, the year Bettelheim graduated from medical school. Resistance to the inoculation on the part of many eventually gave way to acceptance.

At age twenty-nine, Bettelheim embraced faith in Jesus after coming into contact with two missionaries from the Church Missionary Society near Smyrna, Turkey.¹⁵⁸ We have no details to my knowledge about his coming to faith; we do know that he proceeded to write a booklet in French, published in 1840, called *La Ruine du Talmud. Épitre adressée au Grand Rabin de Smyrne à l’occasion de sa note insérée dans le N. 84 de l’Écho de l’Orient* (The Ruin of the Talmud. A Letter Addressed to the Grand Rabbi of Smyrna on the Occasion of His Note Inserted in Number 84 of *The Echo of the Orient*.) It is a lengthy anti-Talmudic screed, and at the end is a brief biographical note which reveals very little except for Bettelheim’s strong opinions:

Now I am a Rabbi, because I want to preach Jesus to my lost brothers; now I am a doctor, because Jesus made me learn what is the disease of mankind and taught me to cure myself first; now I’m a surgeon, for I’ve learned that the Talmud is a horrible overgrowth that must be cut out. So I practice ophthalmology, opening the eyes of Jews and their Rabbis; no less am I a midwife, distinguishing that only the Gospel of Jesus is the mature fetus of the Law and the Prophets, and that the Talmud is only the runt of the litter.¹⁵⁹

The harshness of Bettelheim’s views is not unusual among some Jews of the time, whether those who claimed to follow Jesus or not. But harsh it is, there is no doubt.

As for missionary work, Bettelheim at first wanted to engage in Jewish evangelism, but for various reasons that are not entirely clear, that did not work out. At about thirty-four years of age, he ended up working with the Loochoo Naval Mission which found him qualified to serve as a medical missionary. As his field of service, Bettelheim chose Okinawa, where he lived with his wife from 1846 to 1854.

Why Okinawa? For one thing, he hoped to preach to the “lost” Jewish communities of the Far East, in the belief that the Okinawans (known also as Ryukyans) were descended from the Ten Lost

¹⁵⁷ Fabio Zampieri, “Exchanges and Interactions between Padua and Vienna Medical Schools in the XIX Century,” online at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32458369/>.

¹⁵⁸ These were John A. Jetter and someone with the last name of Fjellstadt, and Bettelheim undertook studies in Christianity under their tutelage (see Yoshihiko Teruya, “Bernard J. Bettelheim and Okinawa: A Study of the First Protestant Missionary to the Island Kingdom, 1846–1854” (PhD dissertation, University of Colorado, 1969), 15–16.

¹⁵⁹ Translation provided automatically by deepl.com.

Tribes.¹⁶⁰ Elsewhere he mentions that he wanted “to delight my soul in the results of Protestantism on a virgin soil.”¹⁶¹ Tapping both into his Jewish heritage and his own entrepreneurial spirit, it seems what he really wanted was to be a pioneer.

Some would describe Bettelheim’s personality as “rough around the edges,” or worse. If you like, you can call his behavior “stubborn creativity.” There is a good deal that has been written about Bettelheim’s life and his time in Okinawa, and there is a significant amount of first-hand information as well, ranging from his own diary to his first-person mission reports, to the accounts of the Loochoo Naval Mission under whose auspices he toiled away on the Ryukan islands. One writer thought him “likely mentally ill”; another spoke of his “off-putting personality,” his “offensive behavior,” his life as “colorful” and an “embarrassment,” his “aggressive, uncompromising, and highly undiplomatic behavior,” and his “lack of tact.” These reports give every impression that Bettelheim was what we today would call a “piece of work.”

Based on existing sources, it seems that his evangelism in Okinawa took place in three stages, each one leading to a more “creative” response on Bettelheim’s part. First, after a period of relative freedom to preach the gospel, officials started ordering people to close the gates to their homes whenever Bettelheim approached. Bettelheim therefore turned to preaching to crowds at the market. The authorities, however, drove his listeners away with bamboo sticks, dispersing the crowds until Bettelheim found himself speaking to the empty air. In response, Bettelheim’s second move was to write tracts and throw them into homes or yards, right over their back walls. This time the official response was to collect the tracts, tie them in bundles, and dump them right on Bettelheim’s doorstep. For his third method of evangelism, we need to quote Bettelheim in his own words:

Shut out entirely from street labor, nothing remained but boldly to venture into people’s houses . . . I . . . seated myself in the first room I could get access to. You will perhaps ask in surprise, at the outset, how I could gain access into houses. . . . The answer is simple. I did not enter by the door, at least in most cases, for I could not, but found my way in through the deep gaps in dilapidated back walls.¹⁶²

He reports how children of the “inmates”¹⁶³ would scream, or all run off. Not only homes, but businesses too were subjected to the same treatment; one time those who were meeting in an office jumped out of their ground-floor window when Bettelheim barged into their private conference. Why they did not force him out of their homes and offices physically is a question best answered by the fact that reprisals from England were always on the minds of the Okinawan authorities. No doubt they had instructed people not to lay a hand on Bettelheim.

It can be surmised that Bettelheim was not very successful in personal evangelism. Yet it was as a physician that Bettelheim really shone. He did much to stem the tide of cholera and gave public talks on hygiene and health. Most notably, he introduced the smallpox vaccine to the Okinawan islands in 1848, no small achievement. This contradiction of a man also lectured on public health, translated the Scriptures into the local language, and helped open Okinawa and Japan to the West.

In his later years, Bettelheim came to the United States, where his “quarrelsome” character followed him as he served as a surgeon in the Union Army during the Civil War. He enlisted on August 10, 1863, in the 106th Infantry Division. Within four months,¹⁶⁴ he was court-martialed on the grounds of three charges:

¹⁶⁰ Teruya, “Bernard J. Bettelheim,” 282.

¹⁶¹ Teruya, “Bernard J. Bettelheim,” 17.

¹⁶² “Letter from B. J. Bettelheim,” *The Chinese Repository*, January 1850, p. 48; February 1850, p. 58.

¹⁶³ An older term for inhabitants.

¹⁶⁴ ancestry.com gives his muster out date as December 28, 1863, and his residence as Cayuga, Illinois.

He was accused of neglect of duty for leaving a soldier to die who had been taken to a field hospital. However, in the court-martial proceedings, there was conflicting testimony by witnesses, and the accusation of neglect of duty could not be proven.

However, in addition to the charges of neglect of duty, Bettelheim was accused of ordering the private who drove the hospital wagon to go fishing for him and of eating the food for patients without paying for it. The third charge of conduct unbecoming of a gentleman and an officer was that he had repeatedly criticized senior officers in the regiment as drunkards. The court found him guilty on the two charges of eating the patients' food and of disrespect to his superiors. The court ordered him to be discharged from the Army.¹⁶⁵

Benard Bettelheim died at age fifty-nine, in Brookfield, Missouri, where his grave can still be seen.¹⁶⁶ A colorful life indeed!

¹⁶⁵ “British missionary Bettelheim court-martialed during American Civil War,” *Ryukyu Shimpo*, August 13, 2013, english.ryukyushimpo.jp/2013/09/02/11662/. On the details of the court-martial, see Thomas P. Lowry and Jack D. Welsh, *Tarnished Scalpels: The Court-Martials of Fifty Union Surgeons* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), 51–53. Bettelheim’s name is consistently misspelled as “Bettleheim” for most of the chapter.

¹⁶⁶ For pictures, visit findagrave.com.

Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky, 1831–1906 The Disabled Translator Missionary¹⁶⁷



BISHOP SCHERESCHEWSKY IN 1895

Schereschewsky is probably the best-known of the missionaries that I am highlighting. That is certainly the case in the Anglican/Episcopal church, where every October 14 has been officially designated as the Feast of Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky.¹⁶⁸

Schereschewsky was born May 6, 1831, in Tauroggen, Lithuania. Orphaned at an early age, he went to live with someone who may have been a half-brother. Faced with being drafted into the Russian army (where observance of Judaism was prohibited), he decided to attend rabbinical school—one of the few ways to escape conscription. And so at age fifteen, off he went to seminary in the town of Krazi, and then to the Zhitomir seminary quite a bit south of where he grew up. We also know that he had a trade, that of a glazier.

The Zhitomir seminary was not a traditional yeshiva, which Schereschewsky could not afford. Rather, it was a government-sponsored school designed to turn out “modern,” somewhat secularized rabbis. At this school, it appears that at some point—Schereschewsky was fifteen to nineteen years old during his stay there—a copy of the New Testament made its way into his hands.

While it is sometimes said that the New Testament was “smuggled” into the seminary, it may not have been necessary for it to have arrived so surreptitiously. For Zhitomir appears to have been what today we would call a “party school,” where having a good time far exceeded the desire for study. One scholar speaks of

. . . the ‘scandalous and impious’ behaviour of the rabbinical students—‘the future leaders of the Jewish people’, as they were often called in official documents. The *bursaki* (‘students living in the dormitories’), even if Jewish, behaved much like the notorious *bursaki* in the seminaries of the Russian Orthodox Church. They brawled in the theatre, engaged in thievery, frequented ‘public women’, and composed obscenities about the local rabbi’s wife and daughter.¹⁶⁹

In that atmosphere, it is not surprising that a New Testament turned up. It may have been sourced from the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, which worked in several

¹⁶⁷ A full-length biography is Irene Eber, *The Jewish Bishop and the Chinese Bible: S.I.J. Schereschewsky (1831–1906)* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

¹⁶⁸ A collect for the day is found at https://emmanuelchatham.typepad.com/emmanuel_episcopal_church/2016/10/feast-of-samuel-isaac-joseph-schereschewsky.html, which, however, mentions his “infirmity” but not that he was Jewish.

¹⁶⁹ Efim Melamed, “The Zhitomir Rabbinical School: New Materials and Perspectives” in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry Volume 14: Focusing on Jews in the Polish Borderlands*, 2001. 105–115.

European centers. At any rate, Schereschewsky made his way next to Breslau in Germany, of which place one of his biographers writes:

His daughter recalls his mention of an experience in a German cathedral. As he stood in the rear of the nave looking toward the altar, a shaft of light suddenly struck the crucifix, illuminating it with what seemed, for the moment, an unearthly glory. It appears to have been accompanied by a moment of inner illumination, or at any rate, so to have impressed him that it became connected in his mind in some way with his ultimate acceptance of Christianity.¹⁷⁰

It may be that Schereschewsky had come to an intellectual/emotional belief in Jesus. But his spiritual journey continued as he came to meet other Jews who professed faith in Jesus. While still in Germany, he likely met S. Neumann, a Jewish believer in Jesus who taught Hebrew at the University and also worked with the London Society. (Incidentally, Neumann also was instrumental in bringing another Jewish man, Isaac Helmuth, to faith in Jesus, who went on to become an Anglican bishop in Ontario, Canada.)

In 1854, at about twenty-three years of age, Schereschewsky left for America from Hamburg, Germany. It was in Hamburg that he met yet another Jewish believer named Jacobi, who gave him “letters of introduction” to John Neander (born Marcus Hoch¹⁷¹), who was yet one more Jewish believer, pastoring the First German Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York.

It was finally in 1855 that Schereschewsky came to faith in Jesus—which, according to one account, happened at a “messianic” Passover seder.¹⁷² James Muller, an early biographer of Schereschewsky, writes:

The group of Christian Jews with whom he had been associating asked him to join them in their celebration of the Passover. The Passover meal was eaten with the accustomed Jewish ceremonies, but at the end each one rose and told what faith in Christ had meant to him. It is not hard to imagine how such an occasion, recalling the most solemn associations of his boyhood and linking them to his newer convictions, moved the young man.¹⁷³

It is with Schereschewsky that we get the clearest picture of the various elements that were instrumental in someone Jewish coming to faith: exposure to the New Testament; meeting other Jews who believed; attending a seder in which Jesus was central.

What precisely motivated him to want to engage in missionary work we do not know, but that indeed became his desire. However, he did not want to be a missionary to the Jews—because he felt that the results were too discouraging!¹⁷⁴ The same year as the pivotal Passover seder, he ended up enrolling at Western Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. (It has since become part of Community College of Allegheny County). He was mentored by Professor William Plumer, but before graduating Western, it became clear that he had theological differences with Presbyterianism. He became Episcopal and transferred in 1858 to the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, New York City, when he was twenty-seven years old.

¹⁷⁰ James Arthur Muller, *Apostle of China: Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky 1831–1906* (New York and Milwaukee: Morehouse Publishing Co., 1937), 30–31.

¹⁷¹ Jewish believers often adopted a new name upon profession of faith in Jesus, one that reflected their new spiritual situation.

¹⁷² Louis Meyer, *Louis Meyer's Eminent Hebrew Christians of the Nineteenth Century: Brief Biographical Sketches*, ed. David A. Rausch (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 82. The term “messianic” in regard to this seder is my own.

¹⁷³ Muller, *Apostle of China*, 32.

¹⁷⁴ Eber, *Jewish Bishop*, 53: “. . . forestalling any suggestion that he become a missionary to the Jews, [he] noted in his letter of application the discouraging results of such work among them.”

Schereschewsky expressed a desire to go to China in order to translate the Bible. He therefore sailed to Shanghai under the auspices of the Episcopal Church. Incidentally, his name was known in Chinese as: 施約瑟, or Joseph Shi.

We can note that by temperament, Schereschewsky was inclined to be stubborn, opinionated and to rub his co-workers the wrong way¹⁷⁵—rather the same sort of things that were said about Bettelheim! In fact, it appears that *every one* of the Jewish missionaries covered here who was born in Eastern Europe is described in similar terms. (Emilia Baeyertz, whom we will meet below, was from Wales.) They were all “aggressive” or “off-putting,” and so on. I can’t help suspecting that we are dealing at least in part with cultural differences between Eastern European Jews and English Gentiles. As if to underscore this matter of personality, one writer fancifully imagined himself as an acquaintance of Schereschewsky, and the latter does not come off well in this fictional meeting:

Oh, it was such a pleasure recently to reconnect with my good old friend Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky. Now, he was not a friend because he was a particularly pleasant man; in fact, he wasn’t. Nor were we friends because he was particularly good with people; he also really wasn’t.

In fact, he was so notoriously bad with people that in his 40-plus years as a missionary in 19th-century China, he “converted” only “one family and a lad,” at the same time suffering a continual turnover of co-workers who typically could not stand to be with the man for more than a few weeks.

(Ironically, his general inability to connect with people did not prevent him from setting out to walk the 1,500 miles from Beijing to Shanghai when he heard that an unmarried female missionary was to arrive on a boat from the U.S. Apparently, no other transportation was available to him because of the severe winter weather. Though they had never met before, he welcomed her boat in Shanghai, and in no time they were married.)¹⁷⁶

So yes, just as Bettelheim’s gifts were more in the area of medicine than in preaching and evangelism, it became clear that Schereschewsky’s gifts were more in the area of linguistics. He moved to Peking (the older name for Beijing), where his main work became translating the Old Testament into Mandarin Chinese, spoken in northern China. Though not the first such translation into Chinese, Schereschewsky’s translation became (along with the New Testament done by himself and others) the most widely used translation in China until 1919. Says one scholar:

A translation of the Bible into northern vernacular was a major priority. It would be understood by more than half the population of China, [Schereschewsky] wrote, and in its written form would be understood by everyone. . . . It was therefore accessible to a much larger audience (of either readers or listeners) than any previously translated Bible in classical Chinese or one of the spoken southern languages. As the first translation into northern vernacular (called *guanhua* then and later *guoyu*), the Mandarin Bible served as a prototype to the translators of the Union Bible, still in use in many Protestant churches.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ See Eber, *Jewish Bishop*, 235.

¹⁷⁶ Jost Zetzsche, https://www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit/10_April_Schereschewsky.pdf, accessed Nov 12, 2024. According to Wikipedia, Zetzsche “is a German–American English translator, sinologist and writer who lives in Oregon. Since 2016 he has been the curator of United Bible Societies’ online Translation Insights and Perspectives (TIPs) tool.”

¹⁷⁷ Irene Eber, *Jews in China: Cultural Conversations, Changing Perceptions* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), 103, 88.

While he did work in committee settings, among the Peking missionaries, Samuel Schereschewsky stood out. . . . Schereschewsky's knowledge of Hebrew together with a thorough acquaintance with both Jewish and Christian biblical scholarship persuaded his Peking colleagues to entrust the entire OT translation to him.¹⁷⁸

Not only that, but . . . whereas the NT was translated from the Greek, the OT—the work of Bishop S. I. J. Schereschewsky—was rendered from the original Hebrew and included his explanatory notes, which were largely based on the Jewish commentary tradition.¹⁷⁹

This last comment means that Schereschewsky's yeshiva training did not go to waste.

In 1877, at age forty-five, Schereschewsky was elected Bishop of Shanghai. But tragedy struck in 1881. After an unusually hot day, he was laid out with an illness—perhaps malaria or sunstroke, we cannot tell—that left him paralyzed for life. Suddenly, his natural stubborn independence gave way to the dependent life of a disabled man who needed care. Schereschewsky and his wife Susan (mentioned in the fictional account above) spent thirteen years in Europe and the United States seeking a cure and adjusting to his lifestyle changes. Yet during this period, Schereschewsky still spent seven years typing a revision of his Old Testament translation—*with only one finger*—on an English typewriter. In addition, he began a translation of the entire Bible into literary Chinese.

Eventually, he returned to China and then to Japan (where printing was less expensive) and continued this work. As if two major translations were not enough, he also completed a set of notes for both translations, producing something like what today we would call a study Bible. Four years before his death in 1906, Schereschewsky remarked, “I have sat in this chair for over twenty years. It seemed very hard at first. But God knew best. He kept me for the work for which I am best fitted.”¹⁸⁰ One wonders if a verse such as 2 Tim 2:10 was very far from his mind: “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

To conclude our story about Schereschewsky, let us take note of his views on culture and mission, which were rather ahead of his time:

The aim of the mission, he stated, was the creation of a native and thoroughly Chinese Christianity, “trained on the soil and for the soil.” At a time when ethnicity and identity were hardly subjects of discourse, he argued that nothing must be done to destroy Chinese “ethnic characteristics”; “foreign traits” must not be grafted onto the Chinese character.

. . . . Schereschewsky profoundly respected Chinese civilization, . . . it is this respect, I would suggest, that led to his firm belief that becoming Christian did not mean becoming Westernized, that a genuinely Chinese Christianity was both possible and desirable. . . . His belief was, no doubt, reinforced by his own experience of becoming a Christian. Conversion had not changed him into an Anglo-Saxon.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Eber, *Jews in China*, 90.

¹⁷⁹ Eber, *Jews in China*, 88.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted on a variety of websites.

¹⁸¹ Eber, *Jews in China*, 103, 115.

Furthermore, he believed in the importance of close collaboration with Chinese assistants and teachers as indispensable partners in the translating enterprise.¹⁸²

Long before *contextualization* was a missions buzzword, Schereschewsky was practicing it in his own ministry. Therefore we can be thankful for his sensitivity to ethnic concerns; his recognition of the need for partners in ministry (which may or may not conflict with the accounts that he was insufferable in personality); his bringing his own cultural background to bear on his translation work; and the role of temperament—a bit obsessive-compulsive?—put to good use.

Schereschewsky died in Japan in 1906. Today, the Anglican Church remembers him on his feast day of October 14 with this prayer:

O God, in your providence you called Joseph Schereschewsky from his home in Eastern Europe to the ministry of this Church, and sent him as a missionary to China, upholding him in his infirmity, that he might translate the Holy Scriptures into languages of that land. Lead us, we pray, to commit our lives and talents to you, in the confidence that when you give your servants any work to do, you also supply the strength to do it; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

¹⁸² Eber, *Jews in China*, 104, quoting Prof. John K. Fairbank.

Emilia Baeyertz, the “Jewish Lady Evangelist” (1842–1926)



Emilia Baeyertz is a fascinating example of a Jewish believer bringing the gospel to non-Jews. She is the only female representative here, and as far as evangelism is concerned, she likely outshone anyone else we are discussing.

Baeyertz was born March 29, 1842, to John and Maria Aronson. Unlike the others profiled here, she was not from Eastern Europe but from Bangor, Wales. The Aronson family had originally come from Prussia, it is true, but like other Jews had made their way first to England and then just over the border into Wales, where peddling could provide an income. From peddling, opportunities opened to other professions, and John Aronson opened a jewelry store in 1851. (The original building still stands, now operating as the HSBC Bank.) With eleven siblings, Baeyertz’s home was a lively and undoubtedly warm one.

But sadly, several tragedies entered her life. The first was the death of her fiancé to tuberculosis when she was about twenty-one or twenty-two years of age. To recover emotionally, as well as for reasons of physical health and to join some family members, she relocated to Australia and embarked, as she put it, on a life of “pleasure.” Not long afterwards, she met Charles Baeyertz, a non-Jewish banker and an Anglican, and they were secretly married in Christ Church in 1865, when she was twenty-three years old. Their eventual two children were raised Anglican, and she herself became a sort of “pseudo-Anglican.” But Charles died in a hunting accident when he was twenty-nine years old, bereaving Emilia for the second time. In her grief, she ended up asking existential questions, met Christian friends, and read John’s Gospel. As with Joseph Schereschewsky, it was a confluence of factors that led to her coming to faith in Jesus.¹⁸³

Baeyertz then entered a life of evangelism. At first, she brought the gospel to the local prison and hospital. With the encouragement of missions enthusiast H. B. Macartney Jr., she engaged in direct Jewish evangelism for what appears to be about two years. During this time, she experienced opposition, at least one death threat, and may also have been underfunded. She had no special training, nor did she work with a team. In any event, she left Jewish evangelism and directed her energies to general outreach.

¹⁸³ For biography on Baeyertz, including these and the following details, see Robert Evans, *Emilia Baeyertz, Evangelist: Her Career in Australia and Great Britain; An Historical Study, and a Compilation of Sources* (Hazelbrook, N.S.W. 2779, Australia; Research in Evangelical Revivals, 2007); Betty Baruch and Amanda Coverdale, *This Is My Beloved: The Story of Emilia Baeyertz, Jewish Christian Lady Evangelist* (Nunawading, Victoria, Australia: Emilia Baeyertz Society Inc., 2017); Garth Coverdale, ed., *This Is My Beloved Companion: For Readers of This Is My Beloved, The Story of Emilia Baeyertz, Jewish Christian Lady Evangelist* (Nunawading, Victoria, Australia: Emilia Baeyertz Society Inc., 2017).

At some point, she underwent a period of great consciousness of sin, leading to the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” and involvement in the “Holiness” movement, an orientation that would characterize the rest of her ministry. In addition, she was what today we would call “fundamentalist”: she opposed the theater, concerts, dancing, card playing, and reading novels, and when she addressed an audience, she wore black clothing.

We know a good deal about how she worked. In any given city, she would conduct two-week long “missions” under cross-denominational sponsorship, with meetings in the afternoon for Christians, and evening sessions for evangelism. Wednesdays were set aside for women and girls; Thursdays for men and boys. She held “after-meetings” where serious inquirers could learn more. And as widely reported in the press, she had quite large crowds in attendance, at times overflowing the church buildings. She had at least one well-known convert, T. C. Hammond, who wrote a book widely used some decades ago, *In Understanding Be Men*, a reference to the King James translation of 1 Cor 14:20 and a title which would not work today!¹⁸⁴

What is interesting about Baeyertz’s missions is that she may well have reached more Jews for the gospel than when she was engaged in direct work. Jews, she wrote, “flocked” to her meetings, inquired “anxiously,” and “came wonderfully.” While we don’t know exactly what that meant, we do have a report that one Jewish troublemaker changed his mind when he heard her speak.

And she incorporated her Jewish background while addressing general audiences. She spoke frequently about Passover, her most popular message, spreading out a seder table just as many in Jewish missions do today when speaking in churches; one man was willing to walk four miles to hear it! She also spoke about Yom Kippur. She told about her Jewish upbringing, and her Christian applications are a bit reminiscent of midrash. After a full and energetic career, Baeyertz died in London April 26, 1926. She was eighty-four years of age.

¹⁸⁴ The ESV translates the phrase as “in your thinking be mature.”

Isidor Loewenthal, 1826–1864 The Murdered Scholar Missionary



Now we move on to two missionaries about whose lives we do not know as much as we would like. Of the five whose lives we are looking at, we know the least about Isidor Loewenthal. Born in 1826 in Posen, Poland, Loewenthal was raised in a somewhat liberal Jewish home, was a very good student, and was something of a political activist. In fact, he wrote and published what was considered “subversive” poetry, which in that time and place meant certain arrest. Fearing the authorities, Loewenthal fled first to Germany and then to the United States, where he tried to support himself by doing farm work. He was not, however, up to that kind of physical labor,¹⁸⁵ so he tried his hand at door-to-door peddling, common among Jewish immigrants.¹⁸⁶

While peddling his wares in 1846, at nineteen years of age, Loewenthal came to the home of Rev. S. M. Gayley, a Presbyterian minister in Delaware. Gayley struck up a conversation with him and quickly learned that Loewenthal was fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, and French, and had added English to the list since coming to America—like Bettelheim, a polyglot. Gayley ended up securing him a job as a French and German instructor at Lafayette College.¹⁸⁷

Loewenthal’s roommate at Lafayette turned out to be a Jewish believer in Jesus named Victor Herschell, who had himself only recently come to faith. One wonders if the administrators deliberately put them together—We have two Jewish students, it would be good for their mutual encouragement to be roommates. Or even, We might as well just stick the Jews in the same room! Like typical college students (though an instructor, Loewenthal was only twenty years old) they talked into the night about spiritual things. One time, Herschell prayed out loud for Loewenthal’s

¹⁸⁵ One writer described him as a “sufferer from a spinal disease which made him really a dwarf in physical nature.” See David A. Rausch, ed., *Louis Meyer’s Eminent Hebrew Christians of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1983), 4.

¹⁸⁶ Peddling was often a stepping-stone to something more for Jewish immigrants. Leading department stores such as Macy’s or Bloomingdale’s were established by Jews who began their life in America by peddling. “The names Guggenheim, Lehman, Seligman, and Straus(s), including both the Straus family associated with Macy’s department store, and that of Levi Strauss, whose denim pants have persisted into the twenty-first century, stood at the apex of the peddler success route” (<https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entries/german-jews-and-peddling-in-america/>, accessed Nov 12, 2024).

¹⁸⁷ See also “Obituary: Rev. Isidor Loewenthal,” S. A. G., *The Foreign Missionary*, April 1865, p. 2.

salvation. Something tipped the scales; by morning Loewenthal had come to faith in Christ.¹⁸⁸ So through Gayley and Herschell tag-teaming, so to speak, Loewenthal came to know Yeshua and publicly professed Him in 1847.

He then entered Princeton Theological Seminary, where he gained a reputation as a writer and scholarly essayist. It was there that he decided to become a missionary to India—the reasons are not clear—and was appointed by the New York Presbytery as missionary to the Afghan Muslims, who lived in India as well as Afghanistan (the latter being closed to missionaries at the time).

Loewenthal quickly learned Pushtu (or Pashto), the chief language among the Afghan people, and translated the New Testament into that language. He preached daily in the local bazaar and elsewhere and has been described as “brilliant” with an “aggressive personality.”¹⁸⁹ But after just eight-plus years on the field, at only thirty-eight years of age, Loewenthal was shot dead by his own watchman, who supposedly mistook him for a robber. Some people suspected a conspiracy, but the full facts never came out. The watchman was sentenced to two years of hard imprisonment. Strangely enough, Loewenthal’s friend Victor Herschell had in the meantime similarly become a missionary, and also died on the field. In Herschell’s case, death came in Jamaica during a mob attack in 1865.

Loewenthal’s life combined the mind of a scholar with a commitment to the life of a missionary, and his translation work was likely his main contribution on the field. If you visit Princeton Theological Seminary’s Stuart Hall, you will see a plaque bearing the name of Loewenthal along with that of five others. Titled, “Of whom the world was not worthy,” the plaque includes the legend, “Isidor Loewenthal, Class of 1854. Shot accidentally or by design at Peshawur, India.”

¹⁸⁸ According to the account in Rausch, *Eminent Hebrew Christians*, 3–4.

¹⁸⁹ Matthew Ebenezer, “American Presbyterians and Islam in India 1855–1923: A Critical Evaluation of the Contributions of Isidor Loewenthal (1826–1864) and Elwood Morris Wherry (1843–1927)” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 2.

Solomon L. (Levi) Ginsburg, 1867–1927
The Feisty Southern Baptist Missionary



Like Isidor Loewenthal, Ginsburg was born in Poland, but a generation later, in 1867. Exposed to both traditional Judaism in his father’s home and the liberal Judaism of Germany by his maternal grandfather, he opted for the latter, leaving Poland for London, where he stayed with an uncle. It was there that he met a Jewish believer who invited him to listen to a message on Isaiah 53. Over a period of some three months, Ginsburg came to faith and was subsequently kicked out of his uncle’s home. He ended up studying for ministry at the Regions Beyond Missionary Training School.¹⁹⁰

At the school, there was a woman who had connections with missions in Brazil, and who offered to pay the way, along with a sum of money, to anyone who would learn Portuguese and become a self-supporting missionary to Brazil. Ginsburg jumped at the chance, and at twenty-three years of age, went to Portugal to study the language. A product of his times, and no doubt of his own personality as well, Ginsburg was virulently anti-Catholic. While in Portugal, he wrote a tract called “Sao Pedro Nunca Foi Papa!” (“Saint Peter Was Never a Pope!”), came in danger of imprisonment by the Jesuits, and fled to Rio de Janeiro. Some thirty years later, in 1921, Ginsburg’s views on Catholicism had not changed: a report from a Southern Baptist convention noted that Ginsburg “comes from Brazil with a message against the Catholics, whom they seem to consider the only thing to be feared. He has been a missionary there twenty-five years. Mr. Ginsburg stated that it takes men of strength to attack such a strong force as the Roman Catholic church. . . . In closing his address Mr. Ginsburg said: ‘The same God that sent the Catholic church as a scourge is the same God through whose power and glory the work is accomplished.’”¹⁹¹

Having originally come under Congregational influence, Ginsburg was also initially anti-Baptist until he studied further and ended up becoming a Baptist himself. Along the way, as a result of his gospel proclamation, he brought on himself the ire of the Catholic priests, and experienced his share of physical violence as he preached in the open air and distributed Bibles and tracts. He was, shall we say, a feisty fellow. He stood up to the authorities who prohibited preaching—“You see,” he told them, “I am a Baptist and we Baptists do not accept orders in matters of religion from any civil authority, neither from you, nor the governor of the state nor even from the president of the

¹⁹⁰ For these and subsequent details, see Ginsburg’s own account in Solomon L. Ginsburg, *A Missionary Adventure: An Autobiography of Solomon L. Ginsburg* (Nashville, TN: Baptist Sunday School Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1921), also published in 1922 under the title *A Wandering Jew in Brazil: An Autobiography of Solomon L. Ginsburg*.

¹⁹¹ *Baptist and Reflector* (Nashville, Tennessee), May 19, 1921, p. 14.

republic. We have orders from one who is superior to all of you,” and then quoted from Matt 28:18–19.

Why didn't Ginsburg enter the field of Jewish evangelism? In his own words, he explained:

Paul, the Apostle, the most eloquent and competent of the Lord's disciples had to turn his back upon his brethren according to the flesh and labor among the lost Gentiles. His life and work stand until this day as a monument of blessing and power. This same result is noticeable, though not to such a wonderful degree, in the labors of each converted Hebrew who has given himself to the work of evangelization among the Gentiles.¹⁹²

This dovetailed with his opposition to the Catholic church. His reason for why Jews do not come to faith in Jesus is one not likely to be found compelling by most missionaries to the Jews:

Why then did I go to work among the Catholics? Why not to the teeming millions of China? For the simple reason that I came to the conclusion that the greatest obstacles to the conversion of the Jews (and Gentiles also), and, therefore, the greatest obstacles to the evangelization of the world, is the Catholic church, with its claim of being Christian and yet with its idolatry, its materialistic customs and traditions, and its degrading superstitions.¹⁹³

Ginsburg's legacy was manifold. He pioneered Southern Baptist missions in Brazil. He recognized the importance of having indigenous workers. He developed a Brazilian printing ministry. And he was steadfast in the face of Roman Catholic opposition and even assassination attempts. On the flip side, he was vehemently against those he disagreed with (Roman Catholics, initially Baptists, then those who were not Baptists). His methods were of a piece with evangelism of the time—for instance, selling Bibles as a means of evangelism.

About those assassination attempts: there are several recorded in Ginsburg's autobiography, *A Wandering Jew*. Here is one account:

The priest found it [an open-air meeting] a good occasion to show his power and, in combination with the leading authorities of the place, arranged with a bandit to assassinate me while I was preaching in the open air. On the day I was to preach, the priest and all the police authorities, even the soldiers left the city; the public prosecutor and all the judges went away so that I would have no one to appeal to and the assassin could accomplish his job without being hindered. . . .

I began my sermon and preached about the various doctrines the Baptists believe. I spoke for about an hour, expecting every minute for some one to start the persecution, but nothing happened. I was beginning to get disappointed. . . .

What had happened? A very simple thing. The priest in withdrawing every civil authority from the place had forgotten to remove King Alcohol, one of his best allies. The poor fellow who was bought to accomplish the job, needed courage, and to obtain that, he went to drinking and once started on that track he overdid it, for drink over-powered him and put him to sleep. Here is one good job King Alcohol accomplished, saving my life. When he awoke from his sleep the open-air meeting was over and he had missed his opportunity. The poor fellow was so impressed with that happening, that he began to frequent the meetings and two months afterwards made his public profession of faith, and, with tears streaming down his face, told the church what had happened on that memorable day.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ginsburg, *A Wandering Jew*, 238.

¹⁹³ Ginsburg, *A Wandering Jew*, 239

¹⁹⁴ Ginsburg, *A Wandering Jew*, 126–128.

Theological Reflections

All these lives hold much interest in and of themselves. But since these were particularly *Jewish* believers who evangelized among *the nations*, are there any theological conclusions we might be able to draw? The first thing that may come to mind is that Israel was called to be a light to the nations, and so here we have examples of that in the lives of these Jewish missionaries. But can we say more? It turns out that we can.

A key New Testament passage about missions is Acts 13:46–48, in which Paul refers the motif of being a light to the Gentiles to the ministry of himself and Barnabas:

⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,
“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Here Paul and Barnabas are quoting from Isa 49:5–6:

⁵ And now the LORD says,
he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him;
and that Israel might be gathered to him—
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD,
and my God has become my strength—

⁶ he says:
“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

How is it that Paul can apply these verses which refer to God’s servant—whether Israel or an individual does not matter for our question—to himself and to Barnabas?¹⁹⁵ Is it simply that, as Craig Keener comments, “As followers of Jesus, Paul and Barnabas take up the servant’s mission, part of which was revealing the way of salvation to the Gentiles”?¹⁹⁶ Or is it the case that, in the words of Christopher Wright, Paul has taken a “bold hermeneutical step”?¹⁹⁷

The relationship between the Isaiah and Acts passages has attracted a good deal of attention. In one article, “Paul and the Servant(s): Isaiah 49,6 in Acts 13,47,”¹⁹⁸ Michael A. Lyons proposes that Paul’s hermeneutics here derive from the text of Isaiah itself. To quote Lyons:

. . . Isa 56–66 extends and develops the earlier arguments about the Servant in Isa 40–55 to claim that a righteous community called the “servants” would derive their values and mission from the Servant. A number of Second Temple period texts show awareness of this

¹⁹⁵ There is also the question of what Paul means by “so the Lord has commanded us” in Acts 13:47—since there is apparently no command given in the Isaiah passage. I do not have the space here to enter into that discussion.

¹⁹⁶ Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), electronic edition (version 2.2) in the Accordance Bible program, under Acts 13:47.

¹⁹⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 519–520, Kindle edition.

¹⁹⁸ *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 89/4 (2013): 345–359.

argument strategy in Isaiah. It is likely, then, that Acts 13,47 links the mission of the apostles to that of Jesus on the basis of the Isaian argument about the relationship between the Servant and the servants.¹⁹⁹

Lyons further says, “What is significant is that after chapter 53, the Servant figure vanishes from the book, and is replaced with descriptions of a community called the ‘servants’ or the ‘offspring.’”²⁰⁰

Lyons adduces a large number of verses to support his thesis, which I cannot address in the scope of this paper. But his observations have been noted by many others. Suffice it to say, the Servant of Isaiah 40–55, which includes the four famous “Servant Songs,” shades into an entire community of servants in Isaiah 56–66. I will add that this shading is also found in Daniel 7, where the reign of the “son of man” of 7:13–14 shades into the reign of “the saints of the Most High” in 7:18. In reverse sequence, it can be argued that the collective “servant of the Lord” in Isaiah, referring to the nation of Israel, shades into an individual in 52:13–53:12 and elsewhere. In the two large blocks of the Isaiah text under discussion (40–55 and 56–66), Lyons argues that “a righteous community (the “servants”) would carry out the mission of the Servant.” If this is so, then Paul and Barnabas are speaking as part of a larger community tasked with reconciling Israel and the nations to God.

But there may be something else at play here as well. The arguments have raged fast and furious over the identity of Isaiah’s “capital-S” Servant.²⁰¹ Is it Israel? Is it an individual—whether the Messiah or someone else? But is it not the case that we have both going on at once? The ambiguity, such as it is, serves to show that the one result of the individual Servant’s mission is to enable the collective servant Israel to properly fulfill *its* mission of being a light to the nations. The capital-S Servant restores the lowercase-S servant, enabling the latter to carry out its appointed task. While Lyons sees a community of individuals in Isaiah 56–66 who take up the Servant’s mission, it may also be the case that there is a more fluid idea going on whereby the individual Servant—someone from within the nation—imparts his own servanthood to Israel, including not just the task of reconciliation but the task of taking on suffering and rejection. In this understanding, the capital-S Servant is not *replaced* by the community of servants but in fact the capital-S Servant and lowercase-S servant are *somehow both the same*. A New Testament parallel can help here. The Body of Christ, as described by Paul, is not a *replacement* for Jesus but the *embodiment* of him, for the members of the Body are “in Christ.” Similarly, the lowercase-S servant is “in” the capital-S Servant. There is at some level a kind of identity between them.

Thus Paul can apply the Isaiah passage to himself and to Barnabas. One question that arises, then, is whether the Isaiah passage can equally apply to Gentile missionaries as to Jewish missionaries. Perhaps so. Yet if the mission of the Servant of the Lord includes restoring Israel to its own servanthood, then there is a unique way in which the Isaiah passage would apply to Jewish missionaries. The full explication of that must await another time.

And so Bettelheim, Loewenthal, Schereschewsky, Ginsburg, and Baeyertz can be seen as following in Paul and Barnabas’s footsteps, fulfilling the restoration of Israel’s mission to be a light to the nations. In the modern Messianic Jewish context, one may wonder at their lack of identity with the Jewish community beyond continuing to personally identify as Jewish. As far as we know, they did not pass on a sense of Jewishness to their children. But there can be no doubt that these five Jewish missionaries brought light to one degree or another to the nations that they sought to reach with the gospel, and that they embodied Isaiah’s vision of a restored Israel’s mission to the nations.

¹⁹⁹ Lyons, “Paul and the Servant(s),” 359.

²⁰⁰ Lyons, “Paul and the Servant(s),” 351.

²⁰¹ In English, of course; Hebrew has no capital letters.

And one final reflection: we can extend this line of thought to Jewish followers of Jesus who were not missionaries but pastors to largely, or exclusively, Gentile congregations.²⁰² Surely that is another way to be a light to the nations. One such person was Samuel Weyler (1863–1898), who like many of those described in this article, hailed from Eastern Europe, came to faith in Jesus in America, and found himself—even while pastoring—interacting with the Jewish community about Jesus. Weyler suffered from health problems and died young and unmarried. But he was beloved by his congregation, and I have written up his story as “The Amazing Life of Samuel Weyler.”²⁰³

There have been, and still are, Jewish missionaries to the nations and Jewish pastors to non-Jewish flocks. Among the former in modern times we can mention Peter Gittlen, instrumental in translating the Bible into the Mixtec language of Mexico; Martin Goldsmith, long a missionary to Muslims; and perhaps the late Gunter Helft, whose work in Japan and Sudan straddled the border between missionary, parish priest, and educator. And today I know of several pastors who are Jewish followers of Jesus, whose congregants come from the “nations” of the world. There is much of all their stories yet to be told.

²⁰² As opposed to messianic congregations.

²⁰³ *LCJE Bulletin* 139 (December 2021): 9–15.

Book Review

by Rich Robinson, PhD

Ryan C. Lambert. *The Weird Apostle: The Strange Jewish Mission of a Global Game Changer.*
Roswell, GA: Ryan Lambert Forum, 2024.

Overview

Ryan Lambert, a Jewish believer in Jesus, has brought us a delightful and stimulating book entitled *The Weird Apostle*. With a clear gift of communicating, Lambert distills the latest scholarly views on Paul and his Jewishness, compactly presented in a form any lay person can understand. This may be the only presentation to date that offers a popular-level presentation of the “Paul within Judaism” and the New Perspective on Paul schools of scholarship. For that, Lambert is to be commended.

The book itself intersperses an imaginary conversation between the author and the apostle with explanations of various facets of Paul’s life and ministry, and not a few references to contemporary music! The “weirdness” of the apostle—Lambert attributes that word to other authors before him²⁰⁴—comes from seeing Paul through new eyes, at least new to the majority of the intended readers. Each chapter title contains the word *weird*, so that we end up with Paul’s weird upbringing, “flash moment,” mission, message, view of time, lifestyle (over two chapters), rule (likewise over two chapters), and a final chapter on “The Weird Apostle for Today.” Footnotes are few, apropos to a lay readership, though there is a substantial bibliography at the end for those who want to delve deeper. Much of the thrust of the book, as the author frequently reiterates, is to improve Jewish-Christian relations. I think in this purpose it will largely succeed, as least as far as Paul’s influence is concerned. Chapters end with how the point at issue “changes the game” for Christians and Jews.

Detailed Summary

Chapter 1 is “Paul’s Weird Upbringing.” Here we learn—uncontroversially these days, but undoubtedly new to some—that Paul did not reject his Jewish upbringing but continued to identify as a Pharisee. There is also a discussion of popular misrepresentations of the Pharisees in negative terms; and in fact, far from being legalistic and narrow, the gospels see them as “too lenient” (drawing here on scholar Pamela Eisenbaum). While the opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees was real, their harsh oppositional language was characteristic of the rhetoric of that time,²⁰⁵ and the “hypocrisy” Jesus spoke against was not representational of all Pharisees. (This view, whatever its difficulties, is to be preferred over the idea that the confrontational language was retrojected onto Jesus and the apostles by the later church.)

Chapter 2 is “Paul’s Weird Flash Moment,” referring to his experience on the Damascus road, and carries the subtitle “Paul Was Called, Not Converted, on the Damascus Road.” This too is an increasingly accepted view, though perhaps it has not yet filtered down to the lay level. Paul did not “convert” from Judaism to Christianity; rather, he experienced a call “to a new vocation,” much as did prophets of the Tanakh, a view pioneered by scholar Krister Stendahl. “Saul” and “Paul” were

²⁰⁴ *Weird* is one of those current buzzwords. Another buzzword is *deconstructing*. I sometimes think if I could include the words *weird*, *deconstructing*, and others such as *postcolonial* in a book title, I would have a certain best-seller in the world of biblical studies!

²⁰⁵ This view has also been applied to some of Jesus’s language about “the Jews” in John’s Gospel. See, e.g., Luke T. Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108:3 (Autumn 1989): 419–441.

typical double names for Jews; the change to “Paul” did not reflect a change from Judaism to Christianity. Galatians 1:13, often translated as “my former life in Judaism,” could better be rendered as “my earlier life in Judaism.” That is, Paul lives a different kind of Judaism now than he once did.

In chapter 3 we come to “Paul’s Weird Mission.” His mission was not to start a religion called Christianity, but rather to bring non-Jews to relinquish their pagan gods and give their allegiance *exclusively* to the God of Israel. But such a mission ran counter to the ethos of Roman society; to call non-Jews to abandon their gods in favor of the Jewish God alone would invite dangerous pushback by Rome against the Jewish community, all the more so as the early Jesus-movement was indistinguishable from the larger Jewish community as far as Rome was concerned. Further, the Jewish opposition Paul experienced was *not* because he proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah; it was because Paul’s opposition to idolatry would bring about “reprisal from the Roman authorities” against the Jewish community. This is a crucial point:

Merely being a public advocate for a messianic candidate would not justify, and likely would not have produced, such severe responses from the Jewish community. Being the catalyst for citywide disturbances that produced peril for the Jewish community would.

“Paul’s Weird Message” is chapter 4. Following the New Perspective on Paul, Lambert says that the Judaism of Paul’s time was not legalistic or based on works righteousness, but was a religion of grace. Paul therefore taught *not* that we can all now be saved without earning our salvation, but rather that Gentiles, through Jesus’s death and resurrection, can now be equal members of God’s family alongside Jews—a rather substantially different message! This also explains why Paul opposed Torah observance *for Gentiles*: the whole point of what God was doing was to bring Gentiles *as Gentiles* into the family of God alongside Jews.

In chapter 5 we come to “Paul’s Weird View of Time.” Here we learn that Paul was “apocalyptic”: that is, he believed that he was living on the cusp of Jesus’ return and the end of history, and that he would be amazed to find out that Jesus has not come back to this day. Key passages here are 1 Thess 4:15–18; 1 Cor 7:29–31; and 1 Cor 10:11. In this belief, Paul connects with a prophet like Haggai who also expected events to occur within his own lifetime that actually did not happen (Hag 2:6–9). Rather than state baldly that Paul was wrong, Lambert points to the nature of prophecy that often depicts a possible but not inevitable future. What this means is that “that does not put him out of compliance with the internal principles of how Jewish biblical prophecy works. . . . It just means Paul was like other Jewish end-times (eschatological) predictors whose clocks were not synchronized with their prophetic forecasts.” Because of this, modern readers must take into account Paul’s “short-term outlook when applying his instructions to a modern audience.” This chapter is probably the least satisfying in the book; while passages such as 2 Pet 3:11–12 suggest that the return of Jesus can be “hastened” by our behavior, I am not clear on how that interfaces with Paul’s passages. Moreover, Lambert goes on to say that Jesus himself spoke of the future that did not come to pass according to the “timeline” that he gave, as in Matt 24:30, 33–34. The implication seems to be that, as in some Jewish sources, the end of time can be delayed past its expected time based on human behavior. See further below on all this.

Chapter 6 brings us “Paul’s Weird Lifestyle, Part 1.” This chapter argues, in keeping with recent scholarship, that Paul was Torah-observant, even when he was among Gentiles. This contravenes the traditional understanding of 1 Cor 9:20–23, namely, that Paul adapted his behavior vis-à-vis Torah to his environment. Here Lambert builds his argument on numerous verses in Acts, in Paul’s own letters, and from the writings of recent scholars. He notes that Paul even offered sacrifices in the Temple (Acts 21:17–26 and 24:17–18) and concludes that “Later Christian theology viewed the sacrifice and priesthood of Jesus as replacing the Torah’s sacrificial and priestly system. Paul did not seem to share this view. . . . For him, the temple offerings and sacrifices complemented but did

not compete with the atoning work of Jesus.” This will invite further discussion even among those who agree that Paul was a Torah-observant Jew. Colossians 2:16–17 can actually be read as an *encouragement* by Paul for non-Jews to participate in Jewish praxis, while Gal 4:10–11 is best read as referring to pagan, not Jewish, observance.

Chapter 7 is “Paul’s Weird Lifestyle, Part 2.” Here we return to 1 Cor 9:19–23. Following Jewish scholar Mark Nanos, Lambert offers that Paul’s “adaptability” in those verses refers to his *rhetoric* rather than his *lifestyle*. Chabad’s worldwide presence in a variety of countries and cultures is given as an example of exactly that kind of adaptability. One takeaway from Paul’s lifestyle is an encouragement for non-Jewish Christians to appreciate the value of the Torah and the Tanakh.

Chapter 8 is “Paul’s Weird Rule, Part 1.” This rule is found in 1 Cor 7:17–20, which harmonizes with Paul’s writings in Galatians, namely, that Jews and Gentiles have equal access to salvation but distinct roles. Interestingly, if something is called a “rule” it should be considered of high importance, yet these verses have historically played little role in understanding the apostle. Writes Lambert, “Paul’s rule is a call to protect distinct identities within the family of God.” I rather like how Lambert acknowledges that though this rule *does* build walls, they are actually “shalom walls” intended to bring peace and unity, namely peace between Israel and the nations. Further, the term “one new man” (Eph 2:15) along with 1 Cor 10:32 (“Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God”) do not encourage a “third race theology” in which a “Christian” identity replaces Jewish and Gentile identities. Rather, in the ESV’s “one new man in place of the two,” the translators have supplied “in place of,” which does not appear in the Greek.

In chapter 9 we find “Paul’s Weird Rule, Part 2.” This covers the Acts 15 council, which eventuated in Gentile followers of Jesus required to observe only four commandments, which “would allow Gentiles to have a smoother enculturation process into Jewish space. Remember, non-Jews were entering a Jewish movement and space at this time—not the other way around.” Thus, Gentiles were expected to keep part, but not all, of the Torah. Here a brief argument is offered for culturally specific churches (Korean, Latino, etc.—what others would call “homogeneous”), suggesting that a Jewish congregational expression is also valid. Likewise, Jews in churches should be encouraged by their congregations to live Jewishly.

Finally, chapter 10 is “The Weird Apostle for Today.” Lambert is not asking his readers to jettison wholesale all they have learned about Paul. But he *is* encouraging them to try changing their perspective, because understanding Paul in his original context will help Christians and Jews alike, as well as further the cause of Jewish-Christian relations.

Evaluation

There is much to appreciate about *The Weird Apostle*:

1. It is accessible for the average church person. Many books on Paul's theology assume at least a college-educated readership that can parse semi-academic prose. *The Weird Apostle* is able to garner a broader audience than that.

2. It is stimulating and challenging—in a good way—especially for those who do not tend to think about the Jewishness of Paul. If this book were used in a church class setting, a lively discussion would ensue. New perspectives that generate fresh ways of looking at things can offer a creative set of lenses to view overly-familiar material.

3. It distills much of contemporary Pauline scholarship and draws from numerous recent writers. Scholars now speak not only of the New Perspective on Paul, but the Radical Paul, Paul within Judaism, and more. Scholar Michael Bird has written that “Paul Within Judaism is perhaps the New Perspective on Paul with a kippah!”²⁰⁶ *The Weird Apostle* draws from scholars in several of these streams.

4. It is an easy and delightful read, incorporating imaginary conversations with Paul as well as utilizing many illustrations, frequently taken from the world of music (Bob Seger, U2, etc.). In other words, it has a light touch and an easy appeal.

5. Each chapter ends with how reconceptualizing Paul can “change the game” for Jews and Christians. That is, there are practical takeaways, not only for Christians to better understand Jewish people, but for Jews to better understand Paul as a Jew. If this indeed can change the game, then we have come a long way from the time when Paul was considered the man who left Judaism and invented a new religion that pagans could embrace. In general, we can note the sea change in the conversation: Jews and Christians now seek commonality, as compared with the old mode of emphasizing the differences, seen in such mid-twentieth century books as *Judaism and Christianity: The Differences* by Trude Weiss-Rosmarin (published 1943) and *Where Judaism Differed* by Abba Hillel Silver (1956).

6. It contains a substantial bibliography for further exploration, and we can assume some readers will want to go deeper into what scholars are now saying about Paul as a Jew.

7. *The Weird Apostle* can serve in a church book reading group or Sunday School/catechesis class, provided there is a knowledgeable leader to help navigate Lambert's material and the questions that will arise—some of which I will discuss in the next section.

And so *The Weird Apostle* also invites some pushback and further questions. Some of those include:

1. Judaism as a religion of legalism vs. a religion of grace. I have already mentioned the view, which primarily goes back to E. P. Sanders in the 1970s and 80s, that Judaism in the Second Temple period was a religion not of legalism but of grace. Jews did not earn salvation by doing works (that is, the mitzvot of the Torah), and Paul's message did not concern controverting that idea (which this view holds did not exist in Judaism), but rather maintained that Gentiles could come alongside Jews as equal members of God's family. Or as Sanders put it, Jews did not obey Torah to *get into* the

²⁰⁶ Michael Bird, “An Introduction to the Paul within Judaism Debate,” in *Paul within Judaism: Perspectives on Paul and Jewish Identity*, ed. Michael Bird, Ruben A. Bühner, Jörg Frey, and Brian Rosner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 1–28, here p. 7. Bird actually wrote “PwJ” and “NPP,” which I have expanded in my quote.

covenant, but to *maintain* their already-existing covenant relationship. In this conversation, much has been made of the idea that the church has been reading Paul through the eyes of Martin Luther rather than through Paul's own Second Temple context.

Yet as is often the case, the pendulum seems to have swung more to a middle position. Many would now maintain that some streams of Judaism were more grace-oriented, while others more works-oriented. In other words, Judaism was a mixed bag then (as it is now as well). For this, see for example, the two volumes of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, edited by D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Baker Academic).²⁰⁷ (Ironically, given that the New Perspective on Paul has often been seen as a reaction to Luther, it was the good doctor himself who noted that people first fall off a horse on one side, and then get back on only to fall off the other side!)

Varied positions on grace and works in Judaism are found even today. For example, this comes from a modern Jewish website offering an Orthodox Jewish perspective:

We perform the mitzvot because it is our privilege and our sacred obligation to do so. We perform them out of a sense of love and duty, not out of a desire to get something in return. In fact, one of the first bits of ethical advice in Pirkei Avot (a book of the Mishnah) is: "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward; instead, be like servants who serve their master not for the sake of receiving a reward, and let the awe of Heaven [meaning G-d, not the afterlife] be upon you.

Nevertheless, we definitely believe that your place in the Olam Ha-Ba is determined by a merit system based on your actions, not by who you are or what religion you profess. In addition, we definitely believe that humanity is capable of being considered righteous in G-d's eyes, or at least good enough to merit paradise after a suitable period of purification.²⁰⁸ (emphasis added)

Scholars such as Doug Moo (who has argued from a self-identified "modified Lutheran" position) would maintain that the traditional view—that Paul addresses salvation by works (in addition to whatever else his message entails)—still has validity. The jury is still out!

2. Paul and time. I am not convinced that Paul necessarily believed himself to be living on the cusp of the return of Jesus in his own lifetime. Unfortunately, we cannot interview Paul to find out exactly what he believed about the time he was living in; it was C. S. Lewis who once said that "the men who know the facts are dead and can't blow the gaff." Lambert makes much of 1 Thess 4:15: "For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that **we who are alive**, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep" (emphasis in Lambert).

Yet when he discusses verses such as Rom 7:6 ("we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code"), Lambert has this to say:

Another big issue here—which I plan to explore more in my next book—is that Paul frequently used collective pronouns such as "we" and "us" rhetorically to make points for his Gentile audience that didn't necessarily apply to him and his fellow Jews in the same way. This is comparable to when I say to my kids, "We've got a lot of homework to get done before we watch the Braves game tonight." It's not my homework that needs to be done. Instead, I am speaking collectively and rhetorically to make a point that doesn't directly apply to me personally.

But if so, then why couldn't Paul's "we" in "we who are alive at the coming of the Lord" not be read as "those who are alive, whoever and whenever they may be"? Reflecting back on how I read 1

²⁰⁷ Volume 1 is subtitled *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*; volume 2 is *The Paradoxes of Paul*.

²⁰⁸ <https://www.jewfaq.org/afterlife>.

Thess 4:15 as a new believer (as far as memory can be accurate), I saw it as a generic “we,” not as reflecting Paul’s immediate expectations.

More problematic is the statement that Jesus’s own timeline did not come to pass in, for example, Matt 24:30, 33–34. Although verse 34’s “this generation” has come in for much discussion, no hint of that conversation is given by Lambert. Rather, he appeals to the idea that prophetic fulfillment can be conditioned on human behavior, citing 2 Pet 3:11–12’s “hastening” the return of the Lord and pointing to similar ideas in traditional Judaism.²⁰⁹ I am not so certain.

First, while there are indeed verses in the NT that suggest human behavior can impact the Lord’s return (for example, by allowing God’s full time for people to repent as we evangelize), the prophetic idea that repentance can alter a prophecy that was of (conditional) judgment does not really apply in the case of Paul and his belief that he would be alive to see the Lord’s return. This seems to be a case of apples and oranges. The statement “we who are alive” is not parallel to God’s saying, “I will judge (unless you repent).”

Second, and apropos to Jesus’s statements as well, Jesus’s parables often imply a delay, for example, in the return of a householder who goes away for an extended period and then returns later to check up on his servants. The idea of delay is built right into Jesus’s own teaching, and the relevant point here is that scholars are increasingly connecting Paul to Jesus’s teaching. In other words, Paul knew more of what Jesus taught than has been often thought, and that could include the idea of a delay in the parousia.²¹⁰

Furthermore, the apparent imminency of 1 Thessalonian seems counterbalanced by 2 Thessalonians (assuming here common authorship of both by Paul—see various New Testament introductions for arguments). So D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo can write:

Many critics are sure that Paul could not have taught the eschatology of 2 Thessalonians because it would interfere with the popular scenario according to which Paul and other early Christians held to a strong doctrine of immediacy—Christ would come back within a few years—while only in the second generation did that hope wane, bringing with it the “early Catholic” notion of indefinite postponement of the parousia. But without pursuing the matter here, there are very good reasons to question this neat developmental scenario.²¹¹

Finally, Leon Morris has observed that “it is nevertheless true that St. Paul has a habit of classing himself with his readers. Accordingly, if we are to claim from one passage that he expects the parousia during his lifetime, it is equally possible to claim from another (e.g., I Cor 6 14) that he expects it after his death.”²¹² This bears both on Paul’s rhetoric of imminence and also on his usage of “we” in 1 Thess 4:15.

3. Torah observance and imminence. A potential discussion point here is that *if* Paul believed he was about to see the return of Jesus, did that interface at all with his views on Torah? We have some

²⁰⁹ Cf. Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*: “Rabbis disagreed among themselves as to whether the end of the age was at a time fixed by God or whether it could be hastened by Israel’s repentance and obedience. In this context, Christians hasten the coming of the end by missions and evangelism (cf. Mt 24:14), thereby enabling the conversion of those for whose sake God has delayed the end (2 Pet 3:9, 15).”

²¹⁰ Although the delay in the parousia does not form much of the argument, on the whole topic of the relationship between Jesus’s teaching and that of Paul, see, e.g., David Wenham, *Paul and Jesus: The True Story* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2002) and his earlier and more extended treatment in David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

²¹¹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2005), 541. A helpful article also is Simon Gathercole, “The ‘Delay of the Parousia,’” *Early Christianity* 9:1 (Mar 2018): 1–7.

²¹² Stephen S. Smalley, “The Delay of the Parousia,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83:1 (March 1964): 51, n. 49.

fascinating later Jewish views that contravene Maimonides's belief that the Torah, written and oral, will never be abrogated, not even in the Age to Come. Yet a not insignificant number of other writings from Talmudic and later times view Torah as completely or in part abolished in the messianic age. Did any of these views extend back to Second Temple times and *if* they did, how did Paul's (supposed) imminent expectation cohere with those ideas? Or conversely, if Paul was indeed Torah-observant, as many scholars increasingly hold, would that have militated *against* an imminent expectation on his part? In other words, is it possible that there is an *inverse relationship* between, on the one hand, the strength of belief that we are about to experience the Lord's return (i.e., the World to Come is upon us) and, on the other hand, ideas of the abolishment of the Torah in whole or in part in the World to Come? I am not sure I have seen this question discussed, but it opens up a fascinating window onto Paul's possible view on the Torah.²¹³

4. Gentile Christians and the Tanakh (Old Testament). I agree with Lambert that non-Jewish Christians need to become more familiar with the Torah and the rest of the Tanakh and learn to make it meaningful for their own Christian lives. Here, two practical points are helpful.

One, in spite of Paul's teaching, there are Christians who are confused and believe they need to keep the 613 commandments of the Torah since (they would point out) it's God's Word. They need clear teaching on expectations for non-Jews vis-à-vis Jews and a clear understanding of what is often called "redemptive history." And if they are *not* expected to observe the laws of the Torah, they need to know how then they are meant to incorporate the Tanakh into their spiritual lives.

Two, we need to learn from the early church fathers whose background was in paganism. For in trying to figure out how to deal with the Tanakh, it was common to turn to allegorizing or "spiritualizing" interpretations and in the process to denigrate Jews whose understanding was said to be "carnal" and not "spiritual." We will want to know how to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of irrelevance and spiritualizing the meaning away!

In this connection, however, note that Jewish exegesis into medieval times could also take an allegorical turn, such as in understanding the meaning of Deut 22:10, "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together."²¹⁴ Allegorical explanation is not normally encouraged in modern times either by Jews or Christians as a way of understanding the text.²¹⁵ Historical-grammatical exegesis has ruled the day for some time; yet some voices are arguing in favor of the value of precritical exegesis. This also needs discussion, both for theory and for praxis.

5. Faithfulness to "the covenant." Discussions of Jewish obligations—including in *The Weird Apostle* and much post-supersessionist writing, and covering those obligations for both mainstream Jews and Jewish followers of Jesus—generally use the phrase, "the covenant." This of course refers to the covenant made with Israel at Sinai. I do not, however, recall seeing a discussion as to whether the covenant with Abraham and the covenant with Moses (and other covenants such as the one with David) are distinct, the latter being time- and/or situation-bound. Nor can such a distinction be written off as something that only dispensationalists adhere to. See for instance, Jewish author Noa Tisby's (very informal) presentation of, first, the covenant with Abraham and, second, the Sinai covenant.²¹⁶ This topic, about which I cannot take space for further comment here, is due for a critical discussion.

²¹³ For statements on the abolishment of Torah in the World to Come, see for instance Marc B. Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), ch. 8, "Eternity of the Torah."

²¹⁴ See, e.g., Elaine Goodfriend, "Do Not Plow an Ox with a Donkey—Reasons, Metaphors, and Sexual Undertones," TheTorah.com, www.thetorah.com/article/do-not-plow-an-ox-with-a-donkey-reasons-metaphors-and-sexual-undertones.

²¹⁵ Midrashic interpretation is another matter and cannot be discussed here, but it is different than allegory.

²¹⁶ Emmanuel Aho and Noa Tisby, *Uncomfortable Conversation with a Jew* (New York: Simon Element, 2024), 15.

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Enough for now. The several issues that Jewish followers of Jesus face vis-à-vis lifestyle, covenant fidelity, and ecclesial situations remain hot on the burner. *The Weird Apostle* is a useful introduction to many of these in the context of Paul's theology. Some of the book's conclusions are now mainstream in scholarship and in the Messianic Jewish community; others invite further conversation. Meanwhile, Ryan Lambert's contribution can be used with profit in a church setting, if guided by a knowledgeable leader.

From the Israeli Scene Play and Pray

Joshua Teitelbaum Munan

Israel had one day to mourn the devastating loss of family and friends in the aftermath of the greatest atrocity perpetuated on the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Then on October 8th the vilification started—chants of “from the River to the Sea”; calls to “globalize the intifada”; Jewish students bullied on university campuses across North America. As I witnessed the rising antisemitism metastasizing uncontrollably across western culture my heart grieved at the irrational hatred foisted on the Jewish people. In the ensuing days, the Lord stirred up my spirit to consider seeking their welfare (cf., Hag 1:14; Neh 2:10). I put together a team of Christians who attend the church I pastor in Alberta, Canada, to do several visits at a nearby synagogue for Shabbat services as an expression of our support and solidarity with the Jewish people in their time of crisis. But was there more I could do? It was then the Lord prompted me to request a three-month sabbatical from my role as pastor so I could visit Israel and minister to Israelis in some small way. One congregant took me out for coffee hoping to dissuade me from pursuing this “*reckless venture*.” My sabbatical was not about visiting biblical sites; it was not about walking where Jesus walked; it was not about taking time away from ministry to enjoy the warm mediterranean climate. This trip was about seeking the welfare of the Jewish people while the world demonized and delegitimized Israel. I sent out emails to various Christian ministries inquiring about volunteer possibilities. Elisabeth Levy, CEO of Caspari Center, replied and presented me with an opportunity to serve with Caspari Center and assist pastor Eyvind Volle of Immanuel Church in Tel Aviv—both ministries of NCMI.²¹⁷

As I was planning to leave, a member of the congregation offered to cover my entire flight costs with his air miles, further confirming the Lord was blessing this venture. After a long plane ride, at 4 AM on September 12th, I finally arrived at the guest house I would be staying at in Tel Aviv. As I entered the foyer, the first thing I saw was a sign saying, “*Bomb Shelter This Way*.” Living in Israel comes with risk. Turns out I did visit this shelter about six times over my three-month stay.



While having coffee with a rabbi discussing differences between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, he mentioned “*you play in Tel Aviv, and pray in Jerusalem*.” How true that is! As I travelled to various places in Jerusalem, I marveled at people’s zeal for God. I noticed religious Jews of all ages praying with their prayer books in hand on their way to their destination. I even noticed buses in Jerusalem with *the Shema* advertised on the side. There would be protests in my hometown of Spruce Grove, Alberta, if a public bus had John 3:16 written on its side. Not in Jerusalem!

I also witnessed spiritual hunger. The church building is an impressive architectural structure, with stained glass windows scattered across the sanctuary, depicting biblical events that occurred in Jaffa, such as Jonah running from God and Peter raising Tabitha from the dead. Sometimes people would walk through the doors of Immanuel and be guided through the sanctuary.

²¹⁷ Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel.

As I write this article I am now sitting in my office in Spruce Grove, Alberta, ten thousand km away. I thank the Lord for giving me such an incredible and memorable experience, for new friendships I have made and memories to cherish. And while many nations have turned against Israel and the Jewish people, as believers in Yeshua we must stand apart and love the Jewish people. Even though events in Israel get messy, which is true of all nations, nevertheless, in the plan and purposes of God, the people living in the small strip of land called Israel will one day know the salvation of the Lord. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Am Yisrael Chai.