KARL BARTH, MISSIONS TO THE JEWS, AND THE AMERICAN RESPONSE

Stephanie Rebekah Gaskill

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
March 2010

Committee:
Dr. Beth Griech-Polelle, Advisor
Dr. Don Rowney
ABSTRACT

Dr. Beth Griech-Polelle, Advisor

The Christian mission to the Jews has always been one of the most contentious elements in Jewish-Christian relations, and remains so today. Though they differed greatly from coercive efforts to convert the Jews (such as those of knights during the First Crusade in 1095), modern missionary societies established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were still resented by many Jews. But while individual Christian thinkers voiced doubts about their validity long before, it was not until after the Holocaust, and especially after the Vatican II Council of 1965, that missions to the Jews came to be seriously questioned by a large number of Christian theologians. Most notably, such theologians began to reconsider supersessionism, or the long-held notion that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ and had thus been replaced as God’s people by the Christian church. While theologians from other nations were also involved in this process, the reevaluation of missions to the Jews took place primarily in Germany and America. Though there are many crucial points of contact between these two parallel efforts to reevaluation the relationship between Christians and Jews, one of the intriguing is the work of Karl Barth. Barth’s influence in regards to this reevaluation can be most effectively seen through an examination his impact on four American theologians often noted for their exceptional efforts to improve Jewish-Christian relations in the post-Holocaust world: Reinhold Niebuhr, A. Roy Eckardt, Franklin Littell, and Paul van Buren. The manner in which each theologian reacted to Barth’s position on missions to the Jews not only confirms existing paradigms about the way in which different generations of American theologians received Barth, but also provides opportunities for today’s pluralistic pioneers to effectively engage with the theology of both Barth and the theologians who reacted to him.
This thesis is dedicated to those thinkers who change our perspectives in life, whether we like it or not.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge and thank my thesis committee advisor, Dr. Beth Griech-Polelle, and my committee member, Dr. Don Rowney. Not only were they kind enough to read and comment extensively upon my rough draft, but numerous conversations and/or classes with both inspired this thesis and ensured its successful completion. Dr. Matthew Hockenos of Skidmore College in New York also provided valuable comments on my draft and suggestions for my thesis, for which I am very grateful. I would also like to thank my family. Their support throughout this process of writing a thesis, and throughout my entire life, has been overwhelming. I would especially like to thank my father, who taught me how to read (even though I hated it at the time) and how to think logically (even if the results are not always what he might like). My mother and my “second parents,” Erlin and Mary Moritz, have also been a great source of support, as have my two grandmothers, Millie and Joyce, and all of my “siblings” Christina, Katherine, Jen, Heather, Rachael, and Brad. For this, I thank them. My fellow graduate students also deserve mention. Tim Cable of the German department took time to help me with my translation work, translating an article himself and correcting my own translations. In the History department, Gary Cirelli read the first draft of my second chapter and convinced me to engage more extensively with Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, which experience has been extremely rewarding. Finally, writing this thesis has been challenging for me, both mentally and spiritually, and so I am thankful for those who have been willing to listen and provide friendship as I explore what the ideas I have discovered ultimately mean to me. These people include: my sisters, Christina and Katherine, and my friends/colleagues, Joe Faykosh, Gary Cirelli, Katie Brown, Michael Carver, Norma Flores, and Rob MacDonald. Thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: A BRIEF HISTORY OF MISSIONS TO THE JEWS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: KARL BARTH’S POSITION ON MISSIONS TO THE JEWS IN CONTEXT</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: KARL BARTH AND MISSIONS TO THE JEWS: THE AMERICAN RESPONSE</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In June of 1996, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) issued a “Resolution on Jewish Evangelism” in which it addressed the issue of Christian missions to the Jews in the context of the contemporary climate of Jewish-Christian relations. Acknowledging the “organized effort on the part of some either to deny that the Jewish people need…to be saved; or to claim…that Christians have neither right nor obligation to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish people,” the SBC respectfully disagreed. In its estimation, the good news was meant for all people, including the Jews. In fact, in light of Jesus’ command to preach the gospel “beginning at Jerusalem” and “to the Jew first,” the Jews should have a special place in the church’s missionary agenda. Therefore, given the “growing responsiveness of the Jewish people” and the fact that its own “evangelistic efforts have largely neglected the Jewish people, both at home and abroad,” the SBC resolved to “recommit” to the preaching of the gospel among the Jewish people.¹

This statement did not go unanswered, but rather provoked a swift response from a body of Lutheran, Anglican, and Roman Catholic bishops in New York. Recognizing the concerns raised by the SBC’s resolution among the Jewish community, these bishops sought to reassure their Jewish friends that they were “committed to the Christian-Jewish dialogue.” Establishing the basis for such dialogue, the bishops insisted that the Jews had not been “repudiated or cursed” by God. However, reaffirming the divinity of Christ, the New York bishops maintained that it was the church’s duty to “bear witness by word and deed among all peoples,” implicitly including the Jews. Still, because “the Christian witness toward Jews…has been distorted by coercive proselytism,” therefore, “an aggressive direct effort to convert the Jewish people would break the bond of trust” between Christians and Jews. Thus, the bishops’ commitment to

¹ Southern Baptist Convention, Resolution on Jewish Evangelism, 11-13 June 1996, New Orleans, Louisiana.
dialogue entailed a repudiation of overt Christian missions to the Jews, but still included the implicit duty of Christians to present the gospel to their Jewish dialogue partners.  

This relatively recent episode effectively represents several of the most prominent viewpoints on the spectrum of Protestant attitudes toward Christian missions to the Jews. By presenting and then vehemently rejecting the view that Jews need neither to be saved nor to be proselytized, the SBC’s statement demonstrates both extremes of the debate. Representing a “middle way” of sorts, the New York bishops’ statement maintains the traditional Christian missionary mindset while rejecting overt attempts to evangelize the Jews. These are the three main attitudes toward Jewish evangelism which have evolved since 1945. While the nature of Christians’ mission to the Jews had certainly been debated before this time, it was only after the Holocaust that Protestants, especially those in Europe and the United States, seriously reevaluated the nature of their relationship with the Jewish people. More specifically, though it was a product of the Catholic Church’s Vatican II Council in 1965, Nostra Aetate was particularly instrumental in provoking a Protestant rethinking of its efforts to evangelize the Jews. Since that time, many Protestant denominations have largely abandoned their missionary mindset toward the Jews in favor of a Jewish-Christian dialogue which recognizes the integrity of the Jewish faith apart from Christianity. However, as evidenced by the episode described above, this issue has by no means been resolved. Therefore, in light of the ongoing nature of this debate, it may be fruitful to return to its earliest stages in order to determine how the movement has evolved.

---

3 That this reevaluation has been the concern primarily of European and American Christians is not surprising, “for the history of the church’s relation with and to the Jewish people largely has been written in Europe and, more recently, North America.” See Allan Brockway, Paul van Buren, Rolf Rentorff, Simon Schoon, eds. The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the World Council of Churches and Its Member Churches. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988), viii.
4 Nostra Aetate was the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions formulated during the Second Vatican Council in 1965. Most notably, this statement rejected the traditional concept of deicide, or the idea that all Jews both past and present were collectively responsible for Christ’s death.
from mission to dialogue evolved and what insights might be helpful in addressing this issue today.

One interesting entry point into the earlier stages of this debate is the theology of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968). Consistently noted as perhaps the greatest Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, Barth profoundly influenced the generation of theologians after him. His ‘doctrine of Israel’ has been noted as having been especially influential on a number of notable theologians. As part of his doctrine of Israel, Barth expounded a complex position on the validity of Christian missions to the Jews. What was the exact nature of this position? Apart from the influence of his theology of Israel in general, what, if any, was the impact of Barth’s stance on Jewish missions in particular? More specifically, how did those Protestant theologians at the forefront of the movement from mission to dialogue view Barth’s position? Did his thinking closely parallel their own, or did they reject his viewpoint? For the purposes of this project, I have chosen to assess Barth’s impact on four American theologians who are considered to have been at the forefront of improving Jewish-Christian relations and are especially noted for their repudiation of missions to the Jews. These theologians are: Reinhold Niebuhr, A. Roy Eckardt, Franklin Littell, and Paul Van Buren. The choice of these four theologians not only affords one the opportunity to evaluate the place of Barth in the movement from mission to dialogue, but also lends this project the added dimension of addressing the trans-Atlantic interaction on the issue of missions to the Jews.

In order to address this topic in its fullest context, this thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will provide a brief historical outline of the development of Protestant missions to the Jews in Germany from their earliest stages until the reevaluation of missions in

---

the years after the Holocaust. The second will present Barth’s position on missions to the Jews in the context of his theology as a whole, and his doctrine of Israel in particular. Finally, the last chapter will briefly examine missions to the Jews in the American context before addressing Barth’s influence on the four aforementioned theologians.

---

6 In order to provide the fullest historical context for such missions, the pre-Protestant origins of Christian missions to the Jews will also be briefly explored.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF MISSIONS TO THE JEWS

Missions to the Jews: Early Christianity to the Reformation

Considering the fact that the message preached by Jesus and his disciples was originally intended for a Jewish audience, one could say that missions to the Jews are as old as Christianity itself. So long as one understands that “the term missionizing means merely the effort to attract members of the Jewish community to a particular understanding of the Jewish covenant,” such an assertion is technically accurate. However, it is highly debatable whether or not the New Testament authors would have approved of Jewish missions in their modern manifestation. It probably would have been inconceivable to them that Gentiles should seek to “remove Jews from their tradition and culture and transplant them into a new tradition of the church that has been detached from Israel.” In fact, the teachings of Jesus and his disciples originally constituted a Jewish sect, making the expansion of this message to the Gentiles a controversial move. Therefore, New Testament passages which address the possibility of Gentile Christian missions to the Jews are scarce. “With the exception of Romans 9-11,” asserts Eugene Fisher, “there is no real discussion in the New Testament over whether or not to go ‘to the Jews’ with the message of Christ.”

---

2 Erich Lubahn, ”Judenmission in Heilsgeschichtlicher Sicht,” in Mission an Israel in Heilsgeschichtlicher Sicht, ed. Heinz Kremers und Erich Lubahn (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 97. This version was translated by Tim Cable, for which the author is very grateful.
3 Ibid., 94-95.
4 Eugene J. Fisher, ”Historical Developments in the Theology of Christian Mission,” in Christian Mission-Jewish Mission, ed. Martin A. Cohen and Helga Croner (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 11. Romans 9-11 is the most frequently-cited (and most contested) biblical passage concerning missions to the Jews. While Paul acknowledges his fellow Jews’ refusal to accept the gospel, he nevertheless asserts that God has not rejected them and has a place for Israel in his plan of salvation.
may be against God’s will to try to convert the Jews at all,” such a view was not adopted by the early church. Rather, the early church fathers quickly formulated the “teaching of contempt,” which stated that because they had rejected Christ, the Jews were no longer God’s chosen people and were thus condemned to be scattered all over the world. However, despite the church fathers’ belief that the Jewish people had been rejected and were thus in need of salvation, the issue of proselytizing Jews “hardly seems to have been a predominant concern of [the] embattled but rapidly expanding Christian community.”

Even when Christianity was granted official protection under Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313 AD), missions to the Jews were not a high priority on the church’s agenda. In part, this state of affairs had to do with political considerations. Because of their fear that Jews would lead new Christians away from the faith, church leaders at this time convinced Constantine to make proselytizing on the part of Jews a capital offense. However, in the early post-Constantinian world, Judaism was protected as “a legitimate religious faith, misguided in its theology but sufficiently conversant with the truth to warrant toleration in a Christian commonwealth.” Partly in response to this political situation, Augustine (354-430 AD) developed a theological justification for the official toleration of Judaism. Reflecting the teaching of contempt, Augustine condemned the Jews for rejecting Christ. However, unlike other church fathers, such as John Chrysostom, who believed that the existence of the Jews as Jews should end, Augustine insisted that the Jews remained as an integral part of God’s plan of

---

5 Ibid., 15.
7 Chazan, Daggers of Faith, 10.
9 Chazan, Daggers of Faith, 10.
salvation. In part, their preservation of the Hebrew Scriptures provided a sound foundation for Christian proselytizing among the pagans. “A continuing Judaism would serve as a source of authentication for the prophecy-based claims of Christianity,” maintains Robert Chazan. “As long as Jews existed, with their ancient texts, the ancient—and therefore noble—character of Christianity was apparent, because those texts ‘foretold’ Christ.” More negatively, and more in keeping with the teaching of contempt, Augustine maintained that the Jews’ dispersal after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD was a sign of God’s judgment against them for refusing to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. In turn, “this purported punishment was traditionally seen as clear proof of the indisputable truth of those claims which the Jews had misguidedly spurned.” Finally, because the mass conversion of the Jews was considered to be a sign of the End Times, evangelism among the Jews was not considered to be an immediate priority. Therefore, because their continued existence was essential to Christian missions among the pagans and because their conversion was not expected until Christ’s Second Coming, Christian missions to the Jews were scarce during the early Middle Ages.

It is true that Christian theologians continued to vehemently condemn Jews’ unbelief in both written works and public disputations. And in some cases, Christian polemics resulted in persecution of the Jews, as evidenced by that fact that public disputations with Jews “were often a ceremonial prelude to expulsions and the destruction of Jewish life and property.” Nevertheless, compared to later manifestations of persecution, the Jews lived in relative ease

---

10 John Chrysostom has been noted as a particularly anti-Judaic early church father in light of his series of eight sermons entitled *Adversus Judaeos* (386-387 AD). Among other things, Chrysostom argued in these sermons that because they had refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Jews had been rejected by God and that their worship was no longer valid. For the idea that Chrysostom believed that the Jewish people as such should cease to exist, see James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2002), 218.
11 Ibid.
throughout the early Middle Ages. In some ways, this was especially true of Jews in the area that would become Germany. “For the first seven centuries of their stay in German lands,” maintains Ruth Gay, “Jews lived in peace and, indeed, often with enviable privileges.”

“In early medieval times, when the Catholic Church was still fighting strong residues of paganism in Europe, Judaism was tolerated in a continuation of Roman and Carolingian policy. Carolingian law sought only to prevent Jews from proselytizing among Christians or subjecting their Christian servants to Jewish customs. At the same time, Jewish law was recognized as binding within the Jewish community, thus preserving for Jews, with their highly developed legal system, a significant measure of autonomy…Although the church was careful to protect its newly won parishioners from any attempts to Judaize them, many centuries elapsed before Jews came to be treated as outcasts in a Christian world.”

Moreover, due to Augustine’s lasting influence, missionary impulses toward the Jews were limited to “an ongoing sense of religious responsibility for bringing individual Jews to a recognition of Christian verities and hence to salvation” rather than any concerted effort to convert the Jews. Thus, while scholars such as Rosemary Ruether and Uriel Tal were not wrong to see a strain of anti-Semitism present even in the earliest days of Christianity, the history of Jews in Christendom, and in Germany in particular, cannot be characterized as one of unvarying persecution and proselytization.

The Crusades marked a major turning point in Jewish-Christian relations, and especially in the Christian missionary stance toward Jews. In the religious fervor which marked the period of the First Crusade (1096 AD), “Jews had the dubious distinction of being the only representatives of a ‘non-Christian’ religion with which most Christians were likely to come into contact.”

---

14 Ibid., ix.
15 Ibid., 9.
16 Chazan, Daggers of Faith, 11.
17 Some have suggested that the roots of anti-Semitism can be found in the gospels themselves and that there is an unbroken line of persecution of the Jews. See especially Rosemary Ruether, Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), and Uriel Tal, Religious and Anti-Religious Roots of Modern Anti-Semitism (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1971).
personal contact." In part, the “large-scale massacres of Jews [which] took place throughout Europe” during this time were due to the fact that “the Crusaders…found it easier to force-convert and slaughter the ‘infidels’ in their midst than to undertake the arduous journey to Palestine.” From this point forward, conversion took on a more sinister nature than ever before. “Baptisms effected at sword’s point,” argues Elisheva Carlebach, “were accepted by the church…as valid and binding; the acceptance, after the fact, of forced conversion turned the meaning of baptism of Jews into an expression of hatred and contempt, the ultimate expression of Christian frustration with Jewish obduracy.” However, while the significance of the Crusades in this regard cannot be denied, it is important to recognize that the massacres and forced conversions during this time were isolated incidents. In fact, David Berger suggests that “eleventh- and twelfth-century Christian intellectuals had profound reservations about missions to the Jews.” It was not until the thirteenth century that persecution became the norm and the proselytizing of Jews began in earnest. “In [this] single century,” asserts Gay, “distinctive Jewish dress was introduced, the blood libel was invented, and Jews were first depicted as Satanic figures.”

This animosity toward the Jews and thus the drive to convert them stemmed from developments within the church itself. The church’s renewed commitment to a uniform Christendom highlighted Jewish difference and thus motivated efforts for their conversion. Therefore, missionaries sought to “develop new proselytizing argumentation by gaining better

---

19 Ibid., 24.
23 Gay, *The Jews of Germany a Historical Portrait*, 23. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 introduced the requirement that Jews dress distinctively; blood libel was the charge that Jews let the blood of Christian children in their rituals.
awareness of the Jewish psyche and its patterns of thought.”

These efforts resulted in a pattern of missionizing which was implemented largely unchanged until the end of the Middle Ages: “Resources were regularly allocated to the study of the language of a number of groups targeted for missionizing, among them the Jews. The device of compulsory attendance at missionizing sermons or at forced debates was a regular feature of late medieval life, one that affected the Jewish communities of western Christendom deeply.” Therefore, while not so violent as the forced conversions of the First Crusade, the missionizing efforts of the thirteenth century nevertheless maintained a compulsory element which was repugnant to the Jews. These missions continued throughout the Middle Ages, with the Jesuits carrying out “a reinforced campaign of conversion” during the fifteenth century. Missionary efforts became forceful once again during the Inquisition, when nearly 60 percent of the Jews of Spain converted to Christianity on pain of death.

The Reformation seemed at first to herald a change in proselytizing and Jewish-Christian relations in general. In some ways, the Protestant critique of the Catholic Church involved a return to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. “At the time of the Reformation,” claims Aarne Siirala, “the suppressed Jewish tradition raised its head.”

The Judaic inspiration was absorbed by the generation of the Reformation because of ‘its strong predilection for the Old Testament.’ The return of the original biblical texts and languages ‘opened the Protestant mind to the full impact of the Hebraic element in Christianity.’ The Protestant movement took on—especially in its fight against the magic elements of the Roman Catholic ritual—‘something of the air of a synagogue.’ The church, which was challenged by the Reformation, was well aware of the Jewish elements in the revolutionary movement from the very beginning. Luther and other leaders were branded as ‘Jews.’

---

24 Chazan, Daggers of Faith, 23.
25 Ibid., 160.
26 Lionel Kochan, The Making of Western Jewry, 1600-1819 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 120.
Given his initial affinity for the Jewish tradition, Jews themselves “showed a deep interest in Luther’s approach,” viewing the Reformation as a positive development in their relationship with the larger Christian world.\(^{28}\) However, while he drew upon Christianity’s Jewish origins, Luther nevertheless believed that the Jews had yet to come to the true religion, to faith in Christ. The reason they had not done so up to that point was that “the church had not proclaimed the real gospel to them” and had sought to convert the Jews through forcible means.\(^{29}\) But now that Protestants had recovered “the real gospel,” Luther believed that the Jews would convert en masse, “which he saw as the greatest testimonial for his project of Christian renewal and his rejection of the religious accretions of papistry.”\(^{30}\) Whether or not he associated their conversion with Christian eschatological hopes, “Luther’s deepest concern was always to bring the gospel to the Jews.” He believed that “God’s judgment on the Jews who have rejected Christ does not exclude the possibility of the salvation of a remnant. Every Jew is a possible future Christian.”\(^{31}\)

Luther’s favorable view of the Jews is reflected in his 1523 treatise, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*. But by 1543, Luther had written such works as *On the Jews and Their Lies* and *On the Shem Hamphoras*, both of which works characterized the Jews as vermin, enjoined Christians to burn Jewish synagogues, and called for the enslavement and even murder of the Jewish people.\(^{32}\) Two basic theories address this radical shift in Luther’s thought. One states that “the change was caused by the resistance Luther met from the Jews in his attempt to convert them.”\(^{33}\) For all its attractive aspects, the Jews simply could not accept the Reformation’s central

\(^{28}\) Siirala, “Luther and the Jews,” 128.
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 59.
\(^{31}\) Siirala, “Luther and the Jews,” 135.
\(^{33}\) Siirala, “Luther and the Jews,” 129.
tenet of the divinity of Christ, and thus few converted.34 Frustrated by their intransigence, Luther turned his ire against the Jews. The second, less well-known theory states that “that Luther was not able to cope with the Jewish elements in the Reformation and therefore turned against the Jewish influence.”35 But whatever the reason, “Luther eventually abandoned his hope for the massive conversion of Jews.”36 New measures against the Jews were enacted partly as a result of Luther’s new-found hostility toward them. Most notably, many Jews were expelled from major European cities or forced to live in ghettos, the first of which was established in Frankfurt in the fifteenth century.37 Furthermore, “[the Jews’] conversion remained a largely neglected element of the Protestant agenda.”38 In the end, “most medieval missionary encounters between Jews and Christians in Germany remained sporadic and disorganized.”39 Largely because of Luther’s vehement denunciation of the Jews, organized missions in Germany did not materialize until the mid to late seventeenth century.

The Advent of Modern Missions to the Jews

Several factors converged to motivate missions to the Jews at this time. After having been expelled by Joachim II, the elector of Brandenburg in 1571, the Jews were readmitted to Prussia after the Thirty Years’ War. In part, this was because “the Great Elector, Frederick William (1640-88), was something of a philosemit in the hope that this would facilitate the Jews’ conversion.”40 Apart from the personal proclivities of an individual ruler, missions to the

35 Siirala, “Luther and the Jews,” 129.
36 Carlebach, Divided Souls, 59.
37 Gay, The Jews of Germany a Historical Portrait, 84.
38 Carlebach, Divided Souls, 59.
39 Ibid., 47.
40 Kochan, The Making of Western Jewry, 128.
Jews were largely the domain of the pietists. The pietists were characterized by several major concerns which facilitated their interest in missions to the Jews. First, to varying degrees, the pietists were millennialistic, with some merely expressing “hope for better times” in the church while others probed the apocalyptic literature of the Bible for signs that the End Time was near. As we have seen before, Christian theologians had long associated the conversion of the Jews with Christ’s Second Coming; the pietists’ interest in missionizing the Jews can be partially attributed to this eschatological connection. However, at the same time, the pietists “craved a more emotional faith and deeper communitarian experiences.” Thus while it was their desire that every Jew come to know Christ, the pietists were concerned with each convert’s personal faith, and thus approached Jews on an individual as well as communal basis. In order to effectively witness to the Jews, missionaries studied their languages (Hebrew and Yiddish) and their sacred texts, especially the Talmud. In fact, “some of the pietist missionaries took Judaism very seriously” in marked contrast to the contempt with which the Jewish religion had long been regarded by Christian theologians. Finally, the pietists were “enthusiastic to do good” in society both by administering to the needs of the poor and by “integrat[ing]…ethnic minorities in the Brandenburg monarchy.” In this regard, the “vagabond Jewish peddlers” were “an obvious attraction” for pietist missionaries, who sought to train Jews in more respectable fields of work in

---

41 Because they were dissenters from both the Lutheran and Calvinist traditions, the Brandenburg monarchy supported the pietists as part of its efforts “eliminate confessional polemic [between Lutherans and Calvinists] and undermine the cultural authority of Lutheranism in Prussia.” See Christopher M. Clark, The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia, 1728-1941 (New York Oxford University Press, 1995), 38.


44 See Clark, The Politics of Conversion, 9-10. Churchmen feared that the intense study of Judaism might lead Christian scholars astray, and so called for the training of professional missionaries who could study and propagate the message of Christ without being drawn into the Jewish faith.


order that they might more readily assimilate into society.\textsuperscript{47} Reflecting this interest, Esdras Edzard’s home for Jewish converts in Hamburg (est. 1656) was centered on providing “modest occupational training” for Jewish traders.\textsuperscript{48}

Edzard’s emphasis on occupational training would continue in the \textit{Institutum Judaicum}, founded by pietist missionary Johann Callenberg (at the behest of notable pietists Philip Spener and August Francke) in 1728. Established in the city of Halle, the \textit{Institutum Judaicum}’s missionaries distributed Christian texts in Jewish settlements and performed missionary work in the field (which work included disputing rabbis in their synagogues on the Jewish Sabbath). Unlike previous efforts to missionize the Jews, “this movement progressed not through coercion, but instead predominantly through individual proclamation.”\textsuperscript{49} Missionaries were convinced of the rectitude of their own faith, but still “[sought] out dialogue with Jews on an equal social level.”\textsuperscript{50} In more practical terms, the \textit{Institutum} provided room and board for Jewish converts.\textsuperscript{51} Given the consequences of conversion, this last function of the \textit{Institutum} was especially important. Most converts were impoverished Jews who hoped that being baptized would help to improve their socio-economic status. But while conversion promised to effect “a dramatic change in one’s life circumstances,” converts often faced ostracism from the Jewish community upon their baptism.\textsuperscript{52} “Jewish communities could place no other interpretation on [conversion] than as an odium-laden, shameful desertion of the endangered faith,” contends Victor Karady.\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{thebibliography}{53}
\bibitem{47} Hertz, \textit{How Jews Became Germans}, 31.
\bibitem{48} Ibid., 32.
\bibitem{50} Ibid.
\bibitem{51} Clark, \textit{The Politics of Conversion}, 49.
\bibitem{52} Hertz, \textit{How Jews Became Germans}, 31.
\end{thebibliography}
Baptism signaled such a radical break with the Jewish community that converts’ families often conducted public mourning ceremonies for them.\(^{54}\)

In light of the rejection converts encountered from their own people, the missionaries of the *Institutum* sought to train converts in occupations which would facilitate their assimilation into Christian society. Moreover, both Francke and Spener believed that the small-scale trade in which most Jews engaged was “impossible without immoral practice” and “inherently morally damaging.”\(^{55}\) Therefore, the *Institutum* provided a safe environment in which converts were not only encouraged in their new-found faith, but also given instruction as to how to transition from a “mercantile profession to a manual craft or work on the land.”\(^{56}\) However, despite the missionaries’ best efforts, conversion and occupational training were often insufficient to afford Jewish Christians acceptance in Christian society. “The itinerant convert,” asserts Clark, “was a suspect figure whose motives were often distrusted.”\(^{57}\) Because Christians suspected them of being baptized because of possible material benefits they could gain rather than as the result of a true spiritual awakening, Jewish converts actually “suffered more precisely because of their change of formal religious identities.”\(^{58}\) Thus the appeal of conversion was actually less than it at first seems. It is true that missionaries initially appeared successful in their endeavors. During the heyday of the *Institutum* in the mid-eighteenth century, rabbis perceived there to be “a plague of conversions” among their people and thus forbid their congregations to interact with missionaries. But in actuality, by the late 1780s and 1790s, “the Berlin conversion rate was still

---

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 232.  
\(^{55}\) Clark, *The Politics of Conversion*, 43.  
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 55.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 60.  
well under ten baptisms a year.” 59 By this time (1792), the *Institutum* was forced to close its doors as financial and spiritual support for pietist missions rapidly declined. 60

**The Revival of Missions to the Jews: Eschatology and Emancipation**

However, the demise of the *Institutum* did not signal the end of missions to the Jews in Germany. Rather, Jewish missions experienced a revival in the early nineteenth century. In part, this revival was due to a renewed interest in traditional Christian eschatological hopes triggered by the momentous events of the French Revolution. 61 These hopes were given new form in British evangelist John Darby’s dispensationalism. Claiming that the conversion of the Jews and their return to their homeland in Palestine would signal the Second Coming of Christ, Darby’s dispensationalism provided an important impetus for the revival of Jewish missions. Dovetailing with the rising popularity of Christian voluntary societies in Britain, this renewed interest in the conversion of the Jews produced the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews (LSPCJ), the most prominent mission to the Jews in this period. 62 In turn, the LSPCJ inspired (and in some cases directly sponsored) similar missions in German-speaking lands, including those in Berlin (1822), Basel (1830), Cologne (1843), and Leipzig (1871). 63 In addition, Franz Delitzsch revived the scholarly activities of the *Institutum Judaicum* in 1886. 64 German missionaries modeled their organizations off of those in Britain, but also continued the work of their own predecessor, the *Institutum Judaicum*. Like their forbearers, missionaries at this time actively engaged the Jewish community by distributing copies of the New Testament, opening schools for Jewish children, and establishing hospitals and work programs for Jewish

59 Ibid., 49.
62 Ibid.
63 Baumann, "Judenmission."
Yet missions to the Jews in the nineteenth century differed from those in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in two important respects. First, while they still provided material aid for Jewish converts, missions in the nineteenth century sought to avoid the charge of insincere conversions by emphasizing spiritual instruction of potential Jewish Christians. But more importantly, nineteenth century missions differed from their predecessors in that they worked in much closer concert with the government than ever before. In large part, the close cooperation between missionary societies and the German government had to do with the issue of Jewish emancipation.

The reader will remember that centuries of anti-Jewish legislation during the Middle Ages had resulted in the isolation of Jews within European Christian society. Jews were forbidden freedom of movement, restricted to commercial trades, and in many cases, closed up in ghettos. But beginning in the late eighteenth century, “the secular and humanistic spirit of the Enlightenment began to undermine those spiritual walls.” As a result, some Christians and Jews began to call for emancipation, or the abolition of discriminatory measures against the Jews. With his 1781 book *Ueber die buergerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (“On the Civil Improvement of the Jews”), Christian von Dohm led the call for Jewish emancipation in Germany. Motivated by the need for unity during the Napoleonic wars, the Prussian government enacted partial emancipation in 1812, granting its Jews citizenship but nevertheless excluding them from a variety of occupations. Full emancipation did not occur until German unification, in 1871. In the meantime, baptism remained the primary means for Jews to gain “emancipation” on an individual level. Many German theologians and laymen alike believed that

---

69 Ibid., 3. Napoleon had initiated the process of Jewish emancipation in Germany.
“Christianization would lead to Germanization and would remove religious and cultural obstacles which blocked a rapprochement between Jews and Germans.”

70 Apart from those hostile to the Jews, “even well-meaning Christians, unconvinced that Judaism had much to offer Jews either politically or spiritually, encouraged their individual conversion” in order that they might be integrated into German society. 71 In turn, “many Jews [became] impatient and despondent about obtaining equality, were [thus] willing to embrace Christianity as the price for being accepted into the German state and German society.” 72

Unlike the impoverished converts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, those of the nineteenth century were largely Jews of means. Ruth Gay describes these converts as, “well-educated, and often prosperous people. It was those who lived on the edge between two worlds who were most tempted by conversion and had the most to gain from it.” They were those “who took an instrumental view of conversion, who saw no way to use their talents in the world without the baptismal certificate.” 73 And in contrast to the previous two centuries, the nineteenth century saw a high number of conversions, “the highest in Europe since the fifteenth century when some 60 percent of the Jews of Spain reportedly converted to Christianity.” 74 For the most part, “German Jews usually converted on their own initiative, not in response to proselytizers.” 75 According to Deborah Hertz, “both contemporary observers and scholars have been adamant” that missionary societies “did not recruit very many alienated Jews to become Lutherans.”

71 Ibid., 248.
72 Ibid., 173.
73 Gay, The Jews of Germany a Historical Portrait, 139.
75 Ibid., 82.
conversion rates…if they wanted to make a difference, they had to work through the state.  

By cooperating with the state, missions such as the Berlin Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews “were smashingly successful” in their goal of “mak[ing] conversion a condition of civic emancipation.” Fearing that Jews would use their own religious reform to gain emancipation instead of converting to Christianity, missions were able to influence Prussian state policy, which outlawed Reform Judaism in 1823. Together, missionaries and government officials agreed upon a policy which would “award only a partial emancipation and repress the reform of Judaism, leaving baptism as the only way to gain a kind of functional immediate emancipation.” Thus Jewish missions at this time did have an impact on the rate of Jewish conversions, albeit indirectly.

However, as was the case in earlier missionary endeavors, baptism did not always bring about the full measure of emancipation desired by either missionaries or Jewish converts. Like their seventeenth and eighteenth century counterparts, converts of the nineteenth century sometimes “found themselves rejected by both Jews and Christians.” To be sure, baptism did not entail the social separation from the Jewish community it had in previous centuries. “Nonetheless,” argues Amos Elon, “family and community disapproval caused some shame to be attached to the act,” causing many converts to hide or delay their conversions until their parents’ deaths, for example. More problematic was the attitude of the Christian community towards

---

76 Hertz, How Jews Became Germans, 195.
77 Ibid., 179.
80 Elon, The Pity of It All, 83.
81 See Hertz, How Jews Became Germans, 59. For example, the Jewish Society of Friends allowed Jews and Jewish Christians to associate with one another.
82 Elon, The Pity of It All, 84.
converts. While they had always been held in suspicion, converts succumbed to greater criticism at this time. Explaining the basis of this animosity, Hertz reveals that,

As the nineteenth century progressed, critiques of assimilated Jews precisely because they were assimilated would grow more frequent and more intense. This was new, because Jews had long been told to become Christians. Now the visibility and prominence of those converting stimulated those who did not like Jews to focus on new reasons for their animosity. If they had discarded traditional habits and even their formal Jewish identity, the problem became their ‘alien essence’ and their cultural style, rather than their religion.83

It was during this time (the late nineteenth century) when racially-based anti-Semitism was beginning to take root among the German people. Drawing upon the roots of Christian anti-Semitism, this new hatred toward the Jews “transformed the slander against the Jew as Christ-killer to the slander of the Jew as exploiter and subverter.”84 Called racial anti-Semitism, this form of bigotry emphasized the distinctive (and negative) ethnic and racial traits which supposedly characterized Jews instead of focusing upon religious differences between Jews and Christians. As a result, it was no longer possible that “conversion [could] secure one against racially based anti-Semitism.”85 As German philosopher Bruno Bauer stated in 1859, “in view of the racially determined traits of the Jew, conversion to Christianity no longer represented a solution to the Jewish problem.”86

Though these views were voiced as early as the mid-nineteenth century, racial anti-Semitism did not become a popular phenomenon until after WWI. Thereafter, this rise in anti-Semitism provoked a temporary rise in the number of baptisms between 1918 and 1933.87 But as mentioned earlier, racial anti-Semitism was grounded on the idea that baptism could not make a

---

83 Hertz, How Jews Became Germans, 60.
84 Gay, The Jews of Germany a Historical Portrait, ix.
86 Low, Jews in the Eyes of the Germans, 318.
87 Richarz, Jewish Life in Germany, 7.
Jew a German. As a result, missions to the Jews began to lose support from the Christian community at large. The relationship between the missions and the churches had always been tense. In part, this strained relationship was a result of sectarianism within the church. During the 1820s, neo-pietists (who were the leaders of Jewish missions) were considered separatists; thus both the United Church of Prussia and the government feared that missionaries to the Jews might appeal to Christians as well, leading them away from the official church. Moreover, the fact that “the Jewish missions in Berlin, Cologne, and Leipzig largely operated as free, autonomous organizations from the church executive committees” caused church officials to view them with a wary eye. However, many orthodox church officials did not share the pietists’ millenarian beliefs and “were also skeptical about the need for…specialized missions” to the Jews. By the mid-1850s, “the relationship between the state church and the missions to the Jews” had become more amicable, with the church agreeing to take up an offering for these missions on the tenth Sunday after Trinity. Nevertheless, the Jewish mission was “never especially popular” and remained “restricted to the lowest hierarchical level amongst various church activities.”

The position of the Jewish missions declined further as anti-Semitism became increasingly popular among church officials. Having been expressed by isolated individuals in earlier decades, anti-Semitism “which oriented itself more starkly around racist and economic resentments against the Jews” began to take hold among the German people during the 1870s. Despite the fact that the Reich Constitution of 1871 officially emancipated them, “the Jews were

---

91 Ibid., 237.
92 Kaiser, "Evangelische Judenmission Im Dritten Reich," 187.
93 Ibid.
regarded as ‘foreigners.’” Unfortunately, this newly-popularized anti-Semitism “also influenced the church’s actions and with it the work of the Jewish mission.” Some historians have suggested that anti-Semitism was so influential within the church because of its “unrelenting anti-Jewish Christian theological discourse” over the centuries. In fact, Uriel Tal has suggested that “Germany’s anti-Semitic, voelkisch movements that arose in the nineteenth century had to abandon their initial anti-Christian stances in order to win supporters for whom Christian anti-Jewish arguments held profound appeal.” The fact that the church began to embrace racial anti-Semitism made its attitude toward the Jewish missions more antagonistic than ever before.

### Jewish Missions during the Nazi Regime

Voiced primarily by the German Christians (Deutsche Christen, DC), this antagonism was evident especially in the years leading up to and during Hitler’s rule (1933-1945). Recapitulating a well-established argument against the missions, the Evangelical High Consistory (EOK) “called every Jewish mission ‘questionable’…because the baptism of Jews was frequently abused as an entry into European culture.” But German Christians also drew upon more recent voelkisch arguments as well. For instance, Jewish missions were rejected on the grounds that they did not provide charitable assistance for all German people, but only for the Jews. More pointedly, Jewish missions were considered to be a source of “racial degradation” within the church, making it the church’s duty to “guard themselves against bad

---

94 Ibid.
95 Ibid. Most notably, Adolf Stoecker and the Christian Social movement promoted economic anti-Semitism.
97 The German Christian movement was founded in 1930 and was concerned with merging Christianity and Nazism.
98 Kaiser, "Evangelische Judenmission Im Dritten Reich," 193.
99 Ibid., 205.
influences, which notoriously come from the Jews.”\textsuperscript{100} Denouncing such organizations in their official guidelines, the German Christians stated in 1932 that the Jewish missions were “a great danger for [the German] people in the sense that they constituted “the entryway of strange blood into the body of our people.” Thus, they had “no right to exist alongside foreign missions.”\textsuperscript{101}

Not restricting themselves to mere statements, the German Christians claimed for themselves the right to resist Jewish missions “not only defensively, but also offensively through legal means.”\textsuperscript{102} In fact, these legal measures were enacted by the church itself, without any prompting from the \textit{Fuehrer}. In 1930, the Prussian General Synod voted to end the traditional collection for Jewish missions, ostensibly because of the economic crisis, thereby depriving the missions of their chief source of income.\textsuperscript{103} After Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, further action was taken within the church against the Jews through the notorious ‘Aryan paragraph,’ in which the German Christians “welcomed [Hitler’s] April 1933 order of removing the Jews from the civil service by demanding that the church do likewise and remove any non-Aryans, that is, baptized Jews, from positions within the church.”\textsuperscript{104} In May of that year, the German Christians did confirm their “obligation” to conduct missions to the Jews, but insisted that “given the often-observed deep-rooted religious and moral deficiencies and errors in the Jewish nature, it is questionable whether the promotion of Jewish conversion by a special society is appropriate at present.” In their view, “the right solution to prevent racial degradation is the collection of baptized Jews into [separate] Jewish-Christian congregations.”\textsuperscript{105} However, throughout the 1930s, “complaints against converting Jews were filed with local churches” so that “when the

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Heschel, \textit{The Aryan Jesus}, 3.
\textsuperscript{105} Thierfelder, "Juden, Christen, Deutsche," 286.
Reich did not outlaw the practice, those regional churches controlled by the German Christians ultimately took their own action by firing non-Aryan employees, forbidding non-Aryan Christians from attending church services, and denying pastoral care to baptized Jews.”

With the combined pressure of the Nazis and the DC, all Jewish mission organizations had been forced to close by 1941.

Of course, the DC did not represent all Christians in Germany. Upon the institution of the Aryan paragraph in 1933, a number of church leaders voiced their dissent and formed the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche, BK) in opposition to the German Christians allied with Hitler. However, while their opposition to the Aryan paragraph makes it seem as though its members stood in principled solidarity with the Jews, the BK was primarily interested in safeguarding the church’s own autonomy from the Nazi regime, not defending the Jewish people. “They hardly practiced real solidarity with Jewish-Christian victims of the Nazi racial policy,” contends Kaiser, “much less with all ‘non-Aryans.’” In fact, as Susannah Heschel argues, both the Confessing Church and the German Christians shared the belief “that Jewishness represented a real threat to Christians.” While members of the Confessing Church opposed the German Christians on many issues, racial anti-Semitism was not one of them. “Instead of repudiating this line of argument outright,” argues Doris Bergen, “many neutrals and Confessing Church people tacitly accepted the German Christian assumptions about…race. They concentrated on trying to show that the church had in fact been a bulwark against the

---

106 Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 54. This occurred only in 1941, but in 1939, the DC had issued the Godesberg Declaration (which claimed that Christianity was “irreconcilable opposite of Judaism” and founded the aptly-named Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life.

107 See Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, trans. Victoria Barnett (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 80: “The church opposition had considered the Aryan paragraph to be a profound contradiction of the confession, but this recognition had faded in importance. It was no longer as important to protect the non-Aryan Christians from the Aryan paragraph as to defend the church and its proclamation, in light of the attacks on the Holy Scripture of both Testaments.”

108 Kaiser, "Evangelische Judenmission Im Dritten Reich,” 207.

Thus, in the early years of the Nazi regime, few non-Aryan Christians found help or refuge in the Confessing Church."\textsuperscript{111}

It is true that the Confessing Church eventually did recognize its obligation toward Jewish Christians. “During the last four years of the reign of terror (1941-1945),” asserts Wolfgang Gerlach, “the inaction of the church was replaced by direct, spontaneous deeds—liberated, in a sense, from theological reflection. The cellars and attics, closets and cabinets of pastors and lay Christians offered countless places of asylum for the persecuted.”\textsuperscript{112} Before this time, those Christians who worked to help persecuted Jewish Christians were rare indeed. But of those isolated individuals, missionaries to the Jews were among the first to come to the aid of not only Jewish Christians, but Jews as well.\textsuperscript{113} For example, missionary Gerhard Jasper of Bethel was vehement in his arguments against the racial exclusion of Jews from the Christian faith, while the Jerusalem Church in Hamburg was an early refuge for “many persecuted and ‘non-Aryan’ Christians.”\textsuperscript{114} Moreover, many missionaries actually died in defense of their calling, such as Moritz Weisenstein, who died in the Cologne-Muengersdorf concentration camp in October 1944.\textsuperscript{115} However, as was the case with the Confessing Church, missionaries’ attitudes toward their potential converts were not unproblematic. In fact, “Jewish missionaries themselves only narrowly avoided…the heritage of anti-Judaism and the influence of anti-Semitism” which plagued the church at large.\textsuperscript{116} Ambivalence had always marked the outlook of Jewish missionaries. In part, Erich Lubahn is right in saying that “the Jewish mission emerged on the

\textsuperscript{111} Gerlach, \textit{And the Witnesses Were Silent}, 83.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{113} See Ibid., 76.
\textsuperscript{114} Kaiser, "Evangelische Judenmission Im Dritten Reich," 196.; The Jewish Mission Organizations, 304.
\textsuperscript{115} Thierfelder, "Juden, Christen, Deutsche," 296.
\textsuperscript{116} Kaiser, "Evangelische Judenmission Im Dritten Reich," 187.
foundation of the love for Israel that was awoken in pietism."\textsuperscript{117} Similarly, Alan Levenson argues that “missionary Protestants upheld the physical and spiritual descent of Jesus from Judaism, rejected the anti-Semitic caricatures of Judaism found in both propagandistic and scholarly literature of the period and evinced a genuine affection for rabbinic literature.”\textsuperscript{118} For instance, while insisting that Jews must convert, Hans Kosmala (the director of the Leipzig Mission until it was closed down by the Nazis in 1934) wrote favorably of the Jewish religion, asserting that “Judaism, from its more orthodox adherents to its most outspoken apostates, has never abandoned the fundamental biblical conception of life.”\textsuperscript{119} But on the other hand, missionaries also “regarded Jewish (and Christian) scholarly speculation about the comparative truth-claims of Judaism and Christianity as offensive and were profoundly supersessionist in orientation.”\textsuperscript{120} For example, even while condemning anti-Semitism, I.R.D. Knak spoke of “[the Jewish missions’] spiritual battle with Judaism,” using “the gospel as its weapon.”\textsuperscript{121} Thus, while missionaries’ love for the Jews spurred them on to defend Jews during the Holocaust, in some respects, their thinking did not differ much from those Christians who turned their backs on the Jews.

**Reevaluating Missions to the Jews in the Post-Holocaust Era**

Moreover, the sacrifices Jewish missionaries made on behalf of persecuted Jews did not preclude the validity of missions to the Jews from being called into question during the postwar era. Such scrutiny was part of a broader effort to reevaluate the relationship between Christians and Jews in light of the Holocaust. After World War II, Christians in both Europe and America

\textsuperscript{117} Lubahn, “Judenmission in Heilgeschichtlicher,” 97.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Thierfelder, "Juden, Christen, Deutsche," 283.
began to recognize that centuries of Christian anti-Semitism were at least in part responsible for the Final Solution.\footnote{Lubahn, "Judenmission in Heilgeschichtlicher," 98.} "Since the Holocaust did occur in what could be termed a nominal Christian culture," asserts Dietrich, \ldots the response of post-WWII Christian thinkers and institutions has initially been to \ldots critically analyze historical Jewish-Christian relations in order to understand the symbiosis that produced the hatred toward the Jewish people."\footnote{Donald J. Dietrich, \textit{God and Humanity in Auschwitz: Jewish-Christian Relations and Sanctioned Murder} (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 10.} Of course, this reevaluation did not occur overnight. Several factors, including deeply rooted anti-Semitism, Christian triumphalism, and the persistence of a missionary mindset, hindered an immediate and radical rethinking of the nature of Jewish-Christian relations.\footnote{Matthew D. Hockenos, "The German Protestant Church and Its \textit{Judenmission}, 1945-1950," in \textit{Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust}, ed. Kevin P. Spicer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 174.} Thus, while the World Council of Churches (WCC) denounced anti-Semitism as part of its founding statement in 1948, it nevertheless still "urged churches to continue their traditional mission to the Jews."\footnote{Dietrich, \textit{God and Humanity in Auschwitz}, 63.} In the same way, the Second Assembly of the WCC in August 1954 "viewed Jesus Christ as the Savior of all mankind and concluded that the Jews should become Christians."\footnote{Ibid., 162.} It was only after Vatican II (1965) that official church statements began to express doubts about the validity of missions and that a consensus began to form that "God’s revelation was not to be viewed so narrowly that missionary activities could be justified."\footnote{Ibid., 76.}

Germany followed the same trend on an individual, national level. In 1948, the Brethren Council’s "Message Concerning the Jewish Question" repudiated anti-Semitism but retained the doctrine of supersessionism, which stated "that since the crucifixion of Christ the Christian..."
church had superseded the Jews as God’s chosen people.”¹²⁸ The German Evangelical Church’s (Evangelische Kirche Deutschland, EKD) 1950 Berlin-Weissensee statement rejected supersessionism, but nevertheless maintained the idea “that the Jews would remain lost sheep until they joined the church.”¹²⁹ The EKD’s 1961 Berlin Kirchentag indicated that appreciable change was on the horizon in that participants began to come to “the realization that a radically new attitude by Christians toward Jews was called for, and that the traditional Christian superiority complex would no longer do.”¹³⁰ Subsequently, in 1975, an EKD study suggested that “missions and dialogue are two dimensions of Christian testimony.”¹³¹ This study was followed in 1980 by two statements by separate church bodies, “the Rhineland Synod of the Evangelical Church, which spoke out against the Jewish mission, and the Konferenz Bekennder Gemeinschaften in den evangelischen Kirchen Deutschlands (Conference of Confessing Congregations in the Evangelical Churches of Germany), which spoke out for the Jewish mission.”¹³² In light of its more favorable attitude toward dialogue, the former statement has generally received the more attention of the two. However, even the Rhineland statement has been criticized for its failure to recognize Jews’ right to self-definition and for the remaining vestiges of a missionary mindset which it contains.¹³³

Apart from such official statements, individual theologians and church leaders voiced a variety of opinions as to the validity and nature of missions to the Jews in the post-Holocaust world. Some remained unabashedly missionary-minded in their attitude toward the Jews. “For [J.G.] Mehl,” for example, “the only proper relationship of Christianity to Judaism [was] a purely

¹²⁸ Matthew D. Hockenos, A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 136.
¹²⁹ Ibid., 170.
¹³⁰ Fleischner, Judaism in German Christian Theology since 1945, 70-71.
¹³¹ Baumann, "Judenmission."
¹³² Lubahn, “Judenmission in Heilgeschichtlicher,” 93.
missionary one.” Slightly more conciliatory were theologians such as Guenther Harder, who rejected the idea that the Church had superseded Israel as God’s new covenant people, but still insisted that it was the Church’s responsibility to evangelize the Jews in order to bring them to faith in Christ. More staunchly rejecting supersessionism, “schism theologians” such as N. Oehmen and Heinrich Spaemann approached Judaism in an ecumenical fashion, asserting that Christians were not to conduct missions to the Jews in the sense of introducing them into a new faith, but rather presenting them the Gospel as the fulfillment of their own covenant. Still others maintained that in light of the horrors of the Holocaust, missions to the Jews should be temporarily postponed or be carried out in the form of dialogue. Espousing the former view, Otto von Harling and Karl-Heinrich Rengstorff reconstituted the Institutum Judaicum in 1945 strictly for the study of Judaism, maintaining that a missionary mindset toward the Jews was still valid, but missions themselves would be inappropriate so soon after the Holocaust. As for the latter view, Walter Holstein believed that “Christianity already exists in a dialogical mode with regard to Judaism, whereas other gentiles must yet be drawn into this dialogical relationship”; because they shared a common root (the “one true God”), Jews and Christians were already in dialogue with one another. But like most of the aforementioned Christian thinkers, “dialogue as mission” theologians still “look[ed] forward to the day when Israel [would] be converted, recognize Christ as its Savior, the Church [would be] be composed of Jews and gentiles.”

Only a few, such as Heinz Kremers and Hans-Joachim Kraus, took a more radical position. In their view, “only a total renouncing of Judenmission can open the way to true

134 Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology since 1945*, 73.
135 Ibid., 74-79.
136 Ibid., 82-92.
137 Hockenos, “The German Protestant Church and Its Judenmission,” 177.
138 Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology since 1945*, 100.
139 Ibid., 103.
dialogue...Dialogue must indeed replace mission, and great care be taken that it not become a new and covert form of Judenmission. Genuine dialogue involves the willingness to confront ultimate questions about one’s own faith.” 140 Similarly, Otto Fricke and Hans Iwand insisted in 1947 that “since the Jews put their trust and hope in the same God as Christians, the traditional missionary task of coaxing Jews to convert was inappropriate.” 141 Eva Fleischner argues that while more conservative evaluations of the place of Jewish missions “empty dialogue of its meaning,” this more radical interpretation “asks of [Christians] the willingness to let themselves be challenged to the very depths of their certitudes and convictions—to incur the risk of relativizing their own vision of the truth.” 142 Rather than representing a progression of Christian thought, these viewpoints were held simultaneously, and still exist side by side within the Church today. Thus, while “theological and institutional progress has been made,” nevertheless, “periodically residues of the past still bubble up.” 143

This then is the background from which Barth drew and the context in which he formulated his evaluation of the validity of missions to the Jews. It will be the purpose of the next chapter to contextualize Barth in terms of his broader theological goals and his theology of Israel in particular.

140 Ibid., 115.
141 Hockenos, “The German Protestant Church and Its Judenmission,” 185.
142 Fleischner, Judaism in German Christian Theology since 1945, 116.
143 Dietrich, God and Humanity in Auschwitz, 91.
CHAPTER 2
BARTH’S POSITION ON MISSIONS TO THE JEW IN CONTEXT

Introduction

In the introduction to his book *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley spoke about the danger of reading Barth selectively.¹ “Barth does not simply deal with an individual doctrine in its proper sequence and then move on to the next,” warns Bromiley. “For [Barth], God himself, not the doctrines, constitutes the theme of theology. Hence all the doctrines are closely interwoven. The individual teachings are constantly seen in new contexts and from different angles as the series continues.”² Therefore, according to Bromiley, “to read a given volume or a selection from different volumes in isolation from all the rest, is to run the risk of considerable misunderstanding, or at least misplacement of emphasis in relation to the theology as a whole.”³

Taking this assessment into account, one must be careful to avoid the pitfalls of which Bromiley warns. Thus I will present Barth’s stance on missions to the Jews in its proper context. In order to do so, I will first discuss Barth in relation to the theological movements for which he is best known (i.e. his break with liberal theology, founding of the neo-orthodox school, and rejection of natural theology). Having established his general theological significance, I will then proceed to examine Barth’s “theology of Israel” in particular. Finally, I will present Barth’s position on missions to the Jews as a part of this larger theology of Israel. Given the scope of this study, I could not possibly hope to place Barth’s assessment of missions to the Jews in as broad a

---

¹ Bromiley is most noted for translating *Church Dogmatics* from German into English.
³ Ibid., xi.
context as Bromiley might prescribe. But hopefully the contextualization I present will provide the reader with enough information to properly understand Barth’s position on this subject.

**Barth, Liberalism, Neoorthodoxy, and Natural Theology**

Karl Barth was born in 1886 in Basel, Switzerland. Having studied at the Universities of Bern (beginning in 1906) and Berlin (beginning in 1908), Barth became pastor of the Reformed Church in Geneva, Switzerland in 1909 before becoming the pastor of the Reformed congregation in the Swiss village of Safenwil in 1911. Because of his adherence to religious socialist ideas, and especially because of his activism on behalf of the village’s trade unions, Barth became known during this time as “the Red Pastor of Safenwil.”

Further cementing his status as a religious socialist, Barth joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Socialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) in 1915, “a thing quite unheard of for a minister in that day.” During World War I, Barth was dismayed by the decision of 93 of his fellow intellectuals to support the Kaiser’s decision to go to war. Similarly, as a professor at the University of Bonn, Barth came to denounce the Nazi regime. After drafting the dissenting Barmen Declaration in 1934 and refusing to take the oath of loyalty to Hitler, Barth was forced into exile in his native Switzerland in 1935. From Basel, Barth continued to advise the Confessing Church and assist in relief efforts for refugees. After the war, Barth was instrumental in encouraging German Protestants to confess their complicity in the Nazi reign of terror. At the same time, Barth became a controversial figure in light of his refusal to denounce Soviet communism during the Cold War. Later, with his visit to the United States in 1962 (at which time he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine), Barth became an even more notable public

---

figure in America. Though few read his complex works, Barth’s reputation as an important theologian and prolific writer was well-established upon his death in 1968.6

In theological circles, Barth is perhaps best known for his repudiation of both liberal and natural theology. Originating in late-eighteenth century Germany, theological liberalism quickly became the dominant theological system throughout the European continent, and later reached Britain and America as well. Liberalism originated in the ideas of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and G.W.F. Hegel and was characterized by a basic desire to reconcile Christianity with modern culture, science, and more broadly, the values of the Enlightenment. As a result of Hegel’s conception of the real as rational, and in the face of modern scientific and historical discoveries, the Bible was no longer perceived as infallible. Consequently, liberal theologians believed that the Bible should be subjected to historical criticism. They insisted that the Gospels should be studied objectively and scientifically in an effort to “desupernaturalize” Jesus’ miracles and distinguish between the “natural facts” of Jesus’ life and later myths about him. This “quest for the historical Jesus” reached its high point in Adolf Harnack’s 1901 work, *What is Christianity?*7

However, this emphasis on rationality did not preclude religious belief. Rather, Kant’s dichotomy between reason and religion allowed both to coexist: “What belongs to nature and history has its own criteria of assessment, but the greater affirmations of the moral life likewise have theirs, and no better grounds exist for denying the one than for questioning the other.”8 This dichotomy ultimately resulted in religion based on personal, subjective, emotional experience, as

---

6 No comprehensive biography of Barth has yet been written. The standard source of biographical information on Barth is Eberhard Busch’s *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).
advocated by Schleiermacher. Moreover, Hegel’s work promoted the idea of the immanence of God and the inevitability of human progress. Not only did he maintain that “all reality is the manifestation of the absolute idea or the divine mind,” but Hegel also held that “through a dialectical process of the ebb and flow of historical struggle, reason is gradually overcoming the irrational and good is triumphing over evil.” In a related manner, while he stressed personal religious experience, Schleiermacher also asserted that salvation is primarily social rather than individual in nature. Liberals thus emphasized the spiritual rather than the empirical facets of the Christian faith in order to maintain Christianity as a viable religion in the face of the challenges presented by the Enlightenment.

Having received his early theological education from such liberal heavyweights as Harnack, Barth began to question his training as early as 1909 when he wrote an article in which he expressed doubts about the “religious individualism” and “historical relativism” of liberal theology. However, Barth’s break with liberalism was only made complete with his first commentary on the biblical book of Romans (Der Roemerbrief) in 1919. In this work, Barth repudiated the liberal notion that God is immanently present in the world. Instead, appropriating Soren Kierkegaard’s concept of God as “wholly other,” Barth emphasized the sovereignty of God and the complete separation between God and man. This gulf could only be transcended by God (through Christ), making any human attempts to reach God or create his kingdom through their own religious efforts ultimately futile. Apart from these doctrinal issues, Barth also

---

9 Albrecht Ritschl later maintained the emphasis on the importance of religious experience, but insisted that such experience should be based on historical data rather than emotion.
10 Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, s.v. “Theological Liberalism” (by R.V. Pierard).
11 Reardon, Liberal Protestantism, 18.
12 See also A Dictionary of Christian Theology, s.v. “Liberal Protestantism” (by James Richmond).
13 Mueller, Karl Barth., 17.
14 Incidentally, Barth first became more cautious about identifying society with the kingdom of God after the horrors of World War I. More importantly, his liberal colleagues’ ready support for the German war effort demonstrated in his mind “how theology and the church could be colonized, and theologians become the pious spokesmen of the
abandoned the liberal historical-critical method of analyzing scripture. While he did not hold to the infallibility of scripture, Barth still returned in large part to the Reformers’ emphasis on biblical authority and careful exegesis. Given its break with the dominant liberal tradition at the time, it is no wonder that one of Barth’s contemporaries maintained that his *Roemerbrief*, “fell like a bombshell on the playground of theologians.”

Thus, with the publication of *Der Roemerbrief*, Barth became the unofficial founder of a new, post-WWI theological school known alternatively as “dialectical theology,” “neo-orthodoxy,” or “crisis theology.” This new trend was dialectical in that it drew from Kierkegaard’s notion that pairs of opposite beliefs were held together only by faith in God, which is gained only after mental and spiritual turmoil, or *crisis*.15 Therefore, Barth and his compatriots believed that theological liberals had taken a wrong turn by trying to resolve the tension between theological paradoxes by way of human reason. Again, Barth and his fellow dialectical theologians such as Emil Brunner also believed God to be “wholly other” rather than immanently present in the world. Emphasizing the chasm between God and man, Barth and company repudiated the idea of inevitable human progress and instead stressed the sinfulness of man; all human action was under God’s condemnation and could only be redeemed by God (one of the many paradoxes accepted within this theological trend). Finally, while Scripture was seen as pointing to the Word of God (Jesus Christ) rather than constituting the infallible Word of God in and of itself, dialectical theology fostered a return to the Reformation ideal of biblical exegesis rather than historical criticism of the Bible. (In part, this return is one reason Barth’s theology

---

15 Typically associated with Kant and Hegel, dialectics is “the philosophy of metaphysical contradictions and their solutions” or “the world process seen as a continuing unification of opposites.” In Hegel’s dialectic, two opposites, a thesis and its antithesis would exist in opposition with one another, but eventually reach unity, or synthesis. Barth’s dialectic differed from Hegel’s in that thesis and antithesis would only reach synthesis through faith, not reason. See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Dialectic.”
has been labeled ‘neo-orthodoxy’). While Barth did later seek to reconcile some of the extreme paradoxes of dialectical theology, his mature work (especially *Church Dogmatics*) was always based on these fundamental tenets.

Notwithstanding these initial points of unity, Barth eventually broke with his fellow dialectical theologians (especially Emil Brunner) over the issue of natural theology, with Barth insisting that God reveals himself (rather than being sought out by humans) and does so only in Christ, not through any other religion or process in nature. Though he had debated Brunner on this issue before Hitler’s rise to power, Barth became especially vocal in his repudiation of natural theology in response to the rise of the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*, or DC) during the Nazi era. Consisting of almost twenty percent of German pastors, the DC “ardently supported the Nazi doctrines of race and the leadership principle and wanted them applied to a Reich Church which would bring all Protestants into one all-embracing body.” Barth attributed the existence of the DC to be the logical consequence of natural theology. According to Barth,

The question (of natural theology) became a burning one at the moment when the Evangelical Church in Germany was unambiguously and consistently confronted by a definite and new form of natural theology, namely, by the demand to recognize in the political events of the year 1933, and especially in the form of the God-sent Adolf Hitler,

---

16 *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Natural Theology” (by R.V. Schnucker).
17 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936-1969). Hereafter, references will be referred to by the work’s initials (*CD*), then the volume number in Roman numerals separated from the section number by a backslash, followed by a comma and the specific page number. So, for example, a referenced to the first page of the first section of volume one of *Church Dogmatics* would read: *CD I*/1, 1. The preceding is the standard means of citing *Church Dogmatics*.
18 J. Van Engen defines natural theology as “Truths about God that can be learned from created things (nature, man, world) by reason alone.” Aquinas has been recognized as the most famous advocate of natural theology; he insisted that certain truths, such as God’s existence, could be discovered through reason, but then had to be supplemented by supernatural revelation. Drawing upon Aquinas, subsequent Catholic Christians continued to teach the validity of both natural theology and supernatural revelation. Conversely, the Reformers emphasized the idea that God cannot truly be known God except through His supernatural revelation. See *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Natural Theology” (by J. Van Engen). For Barth’s most thorough treatment of this subject, see *CD II*/1, 86-178. In essence, Barth maintains that while the natural world can point to God’s existence, it is only through Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures that man can truly know God. Therefore, any attempt by man to deduce God’s existence or His nature by any means which contradicts the revelation of Christ or the Scriptures is to be regarded by the Church as utterly false and inimical.
a source of specific new revelation of God, which demanded obedience and that it should be acknowledged by Christian proclamation and theology as equally binding and obligatory. When this demand was made, and a certain audience was given to it, there began, as is well known, the so-called German Church conflict. It has since become clear that behind this first demand stood quite another. According to this dynamic of the political movement, what was already intended, although only obscurely outlined, in 1933 was the proclamation of this new revelation as the only revelation, and therefore the transformation of the Christian Church into the temple of the German nature- and history-myth.²⁰

It was in response to these developments that Barth drafted the May 1934 Barmen Declaration for the Confessing Church. The first article of this declaration states that,

Jesus Christ, as He is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, whom we have to hear and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We condemn the false doctrine that the Church can and must recognize as God’s revelation other events and powers, forms and truths, apart from and alongside this one Word of God.²¹

Thus, the Barmen Declaration was intended as an unequivocal rejection of one particular manifestation of natural theology, namely Hitler’s claims to revelatory status for himself and the Nazis.

**Barth’s Theology of Israel**

Barth’s rejection of natural theology as manifested in his denunciation of the DC is but one instance of his opposition to Hitler and Nazi anti-Semitism. Refusing to take the loyalty oath to Hitler, Barth was forced to flee to Switzerland in 1934, where he denounced the government for refusing to ease its immigration restrictions to accommodate Jewish refugees.²² Moreover, Barth was also an ardent supporter of the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*, or BK), which “rejected Nazi racial theories and denounced the anti-Christian doctrines of...Nazi leaders.”²³ Given his opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism, one might expect Barth’s theology of Israel to be

---

²⁰ *CD* II/1, 173.
²¹ *CD* II/1, 172.
inherently pro-Jewish. However, some of the fundamental tenets of Barth’s theology as a whole could easily lead one to the opposite assumption. This is true especially in regard to the centrality of Christ in Barth’s thought.

It has been said that Barth’s theology, and especially the Church Dogmatics, resists any type of systematization. Timothy Gorringe contends that this was exactly Barth’s intention. In Barth’s mind, he maintains, “we always have...a humble theology which cannot form a system because God, the object of theological reflection, can alone provide system or synthesis.” Similarly, Barth found systems to be “unattractive” and “ultimately impossible” because “they impose too neat a structure on the untidiness and messiness of reality, not to mention the freedom of God.” Notwithstanding such claims, readers and critics of Barth have not only analyzed him as a systematic theologian, but have sought the key to his theological system. What is the unifying principle behind Barth’s theology? One of the most popular answers to this question is that the key to Barth’s system is Jesus Christ. According to Kenneth Kantzner, “this does not mean that the topics of theology are limited to a study of the person and work of Christ, but rather that all theology finds its focal center in Christ and that all knowledge of God is obtainable only through Jesus Christ.”

If Christ truly is the key to Barth’s theology (and the Church Dogmatics in particular), it is not difficult to see how some might view his thought as inherently anti-Judaic, if not necessarily anti-Semitic.

---

25 Gorringe, Karl Barth: Against Hegemony, 108.
26 Ibid, 282.
27 In fact, some have criticized Barth for systematizing his theology in this way. See, for example, Mueller, Karl Barth, 151: “Is Barth not guilty of allowing the person of Jesus Christ...to operate as a systematic principle in order that the entire system might be completely consistent and harmonious?”
If a cursory examination of Barth’s thought reveals conflicting tendencies in his theology, a more thorough analysis produces little different results. Stephen Haynes rightly characterizes Karl Barth’s theology of Israel as “radical traditionalism,” as it contains both radical and traditional elements.29 There are many aspects of Barth’s theology which are meant to subvert not only Christian anti-Semitism, but Christian supersessionism as well.30 Perhaps Barth’s most famous argument against Christian anti-Semitism was his insistence that Jesus was, in fact, a Jew. Barth emphatically emphasized this point in response to the Nazis’ efforts to prove that Jesus was not only of the Aryan race, but actually the ultimate anti-Semite.31 Against this Nazi heresy, Barth stressed Jesus’ “Jewish particularity.”32 Denouncing those Christians who sought to abandon the Old Testament, Barth insisted that “the Old Testament still remains from generation to generation to ensure…the simple truth that Jesus Christ was born a Jew, is never lost sight of, but constantly survives the eruption of all too generalized views of the man Jesus.”33 In terms of God’s plan for salvation, it was in fact necessary that Christ appear in the form of a Jewish man in order that His incarnation might be “in continuity with His grace as already demonstrated and revealed” through God’s dealings with the people of Israel.34 In Barth’s mind, God’s plan to reconcile humans to Himself “necessarily and emphatically…concerns an event which was prophesied in the testimonies and dealings of God

29 Haynes, Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology, 48.
30 The reader should remember that supersessionism is the notion that because they refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Jews as a people had been rejected by God and replaced as God’s people with Gentile Christians.
32 Against those who criticize Barth for failing to explicitly mention the Jews in the 1934 Barmen Declaration, Mark Lindsay contends that Barth’s commitment in this confessional statement to recognizing Christ alone as revelation from God was actually a sign of solidarity with the Jews. Because he believed Jesus was a Jew, Barth’s “affirmation of Christological revelation” in Barmen “was inseparable in his mind from Jewish-Christian unity” and proved to be a sound basis for his opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism. See Mark Lindsay, Covenanted Solidarity: The Theological Basis of Karl Barth’s Opposition to Nazi Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 177, 191.
33 CD IV/1, 167.
34 CD IV/1, 172.
with the people of Israel and fulfilled within the sphere of this people.” Therefore, salvation had to come through a member of the nation of Israel in order to be a fulfillment of Yahweh’s original covenant with the people of Israel. Thus, because Jesus was a Jew,

He is the King whose faithfulness to Israel has triumphed in the fact that He Himself has become flesh in the one Israelite. He is the King who in the person of the one Israelite has Himself achieved the faithfulness which His people owed Him. He is the King who judged the people in the crucifixion of the One who is His Son, but in so doing, Himself fulfilled the Law and justified His people.

Moreover, because Jesus was a Jew, no other people can be considered God’s chosen people as can the Jews. “Apart from Israel,” insists Barth, “no people as such is God’s people. For from no other people except Israel has the Son of God come forth as man.” One might note at this point that Barth refers to Israel as God’s people in the present tense. This is because unlike many of his Christian contemporaries, he believed that Israel was still the elect people of God, that God’s covenant with Israel remained intact even after the crucifixion. Constituting one of the most important and innovative elements of his theology, Barth’s doctrine of election is set forth in volume II/2 of *Church Dogmatics* and consists of three parts: the election of Jesus Christ, the election of the community, and the election of the individual. Unlike the Reformer

35 *CD* IV/1, 167.
36 *CD* III/1, 180.
37 *CD* II/2, 296.
38 As established by Augustine, the traditional doctrine of election (or predestination) posits that before the creation of the world, God divided all people into two groups. One group consists of those individuals who have been elected to accept Christ as Savior and therefore receive eternal salvation; the other consists of those individuals who would reject Him and therefore be rejected by God. Given their inherent sinfulness, neither group is deserving of God’s grace in this manner. Thus predestination is a matter of the election of certain individuals, and God’s choice to elect certain individuals to mercy while others suffer judgment remains a mystery. With some variation, these basic tenets were reiterated by all subsequent theologians dealing with the doctrine of election until Karl Barth.

Augustine did not teach what has been termed “double predestination.” In his mind, one is elected only to eternal life. Rejection and punishment are totally separate from God’s predestination and are the result of His “passing over” of the non-elect. It was the Reformer John Calvin who formulated “double predestination” when he asserted that the non-elect were also *pre-determined* to reject Christ rather than simply being “passed over” by God in the process of election.

In regard to Christ’s election, Augustine maintained that He was predestined by God to come to earth as its Savior and to become the head of the Church. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas argued the election of Christ brings about the election of human beings, but only in the sense that their salvation (the end of election) has been effected through His death on the cross; Christ is not the one who elects people. In the same way, though he referred to
John Calvin, Barth viewed election not as God the Father’s choice apart from the Son, nor as a matter of individual salvation. Rather Barth saw election as a matter of Christ’s decision and action. In eternity, the Son determined that he would not only reveal himself to humankind in human form, but that as a man he would become “the true object of wrath and grace, the sole determination of divine reprobation and election.”39 In other words, Jesus Christ chose to bear the brunt of God’s wrath in order to spare humankind. Thus Christ is not only the elector, but also the primary object of election, instead of individual believers as the traditional Reformed doctrine holds. Moreover, when the Son does elect humans, he elects individuals as part of a community. The people of Israel constitute this first chosen community, set aside by God to be a “light to the nations,” to be a sign of God’s work in the world to all other peoples.

Though they may have agreed that Israel was once elect, Barth’s contemporaries would most likely have insisted that the Jews’ election had been revoked upon the crucifixion of Christ.

According to most Christians of Barth’s day,

The Jews crucified Jesus Christ. Therefore this people has ceased to be the chosen, the holy people of God. Into its place there has now stepped the people of Christians from among Jews and Gentiles. The Church is the historical successor of Israel. With the foundation and existence of the Church Israel as such has become a thing of the past. As for those rebellious ones who in past and present make up the majority of Israel, of them it remains only to be said that they are outside, that they are forsaken by God.40

“It is true,” admits Barth, “that the rejection of Israel was determined when it stubbornly resisted the Gospel. Yet in face and in spite of that rejection, the fundamental blessing, the election, is still confirmed.”41 Therefore, the Church must proclaim Israel’s election “in defiance of all

---

39 Katherine Sonderegger, That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew: Karl Barth’s ‘Doctrine of Israel’ (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1992), 50.
40 CD II/2, 290.
41 CD II/2, 15.
Gentile arrogance.” Christians should never have a superior attitude towards the Jews, because they as Gentiles are only “grafted in” to the original covenant between God and Israel. In coming to Christ for salvation, Gentiles are “only grasping and apprehending the promises given to Israel.” Thus, to deny the validity of God’s covenant with the Jews would be to undermine the basis of salvation for the Gentiles. “Precisely in its Gentile Christian members,” maintains Barth, “it must perceive that it would itself be forsaken by God if God had really forsaken Israel.” Consequently, Israel and the Church are inextricably linked and together constitute God’s people. “The community,” insists Barth, “is as Israel and as the Church indissolubly one…It is as the church indeed that it is Israel and as Israel that it is the Church.” If the Church denies this unity, “it ceases to be the Church.” Compared to the traditional Christian notion of supersessionism, which assumes that God has rejected the Jews as His chosen people in favor of the Church, Barth’s reaffirmation of Israel’s election does seem quite radical.

However, while he saw Israel and the Church as “indissolubly one,” Barth also saw these two bodies as distinct entities with different functions in God’s eternal plan. In Barth’s formulation, God’s ultimate plan for the Jews is that they should accept Christ as their Messiah. Though this acceptance would entail that Israel would become a part of the Church, Jews would still have a unique function within the body of believers.

The specific service which within the whole of the elected community is Israel’s determination is the praise of the mercy of God in the passing, the death, the setting aside of the old man, of the man who resists his election and therefore God. When Israel becomes obedient to its election by being awakened to faith through the promise of God fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, its special contribution to the work of the whole community then consists in the critical reminder that the man who resists God is in the process of passing, that he must pass in order to receive the incorruptible life in peace
with God, and that for his salvation he will not be spared this passing—in and with the passing to which God has subjected Himself in His Son.\(^{47}\)

Thus the Jews will truly fulfill God’s purpose for them only when they accept Christ as Lord. Israel is ultimately meant to disappear as it becomes part of the Church; God makes Israel “pass” in order that it “may acquire a real future.”\(^{48}\)

But the Jews continually resist their election in disobedience to God. “From the outset,” asserts Barth, “this people of Israel is at every point a chastised, suppressed, suffering and lost people, a dying and perishing people.”\(^{49}\) Addressing Israel’s disobedience from perspective of the Old Testament prophets, Barth depicts the Jews as perpetually rebellious. “As Yahweh’s partner had been unworthy from the outset,” he argues, “she now proved herself to be unworthy.”

She forgot the ‘days of her youth,’ and the condition in which Yahweh had found her and loved her. She never really occupied the position at His side for which He had raised her. She at once became an adulteress with the idols of the nations, a public prostitute. She was never anything but unfaithful to her husband. She never brought Him anything but shame. And so He rejected and abandoned her.\(^{50}\)

Within Israel’s history of disobedience to God, its ultimate act of rebellion is seen in the Jews’ participation in the death of Christ. “The whole history of Israel,” Barth asserts, “was repeated in concentrated form, in a single instant…It was inevitable that Jesus should be met by this typical repudiation and resistance on the part of Israel.”\(^{51}\) Moreover, the Jews are primarily responsible for Christ’s death. “It is not the case,” argues Barth, “…that Israel and the Gentiles, Church and state, cooperated equally in accusing and condemning Jesus and destroying Him as a criminal. It is not for nothing that the one who initiates this action is the apostle Judas, and in his

\(^{47}\) CD II/2, 260.
\(^{48}\) CD II/2, 259.
\(^{49}\) CD III/1, 274.
\(^{50}\) CD III/1, 316.
\(^{51}\) CD IV/2, 261.
person the elect tribe of Judah to which Christ Himself also belonged, and in Judah (the Jews, as they are summarily described in John) the chosen and called people of Israel.”

In Barth’s mind, Judas “obviously represents the Jews.” In fact, Sonderegger maintains that it is only in the figure of Judas “that Judaism takes on a sturdy reality” in Barth’s work. In handing Jesus over to be crucified, Judas “does only what the elect people of Israel had always done toward its God, thus finally showing itself in totality to be the nation rejected by God.” But Judas represents all Jews not only in his betrayal and rejection of Christ, but in the “reward” he receives for these actions. In a scathing denunciation of Judas and the Jews, Barth declares:

This is what he (Judas) got for Him (Jesus), what he really wanted from it—thirty pieces of silver! Judas and Israel, Judas and in and with him the Jews as such! Like Esau, the rejected of God, they sold their birthright for a mess of pottage. They did not do so with closed but open eyes. Yet these were obviously blind. And now...they are left intact to the consumption of this mess of pottage. They can now live and die in their Judaism, their Yahweh religion without Yahweh. They can make the best of it. They can call it a gain—and enjoy it as such—that they are the people of God, and yet do not have to believe in God or obey Him.

Thus, in return for their rejection of Christ, the Jews are condemned to hold to an empty, lifeless religion which has no ultimate meaning apart from Christ. For Barth, this “Synagogue religion” represents the “highest human achievement” of rebellion against God through religion. In this way, Barth perpetuates the medieval stereotype of the Jew as rejecting Christ and thus being rejected by God.

However, even while they resist their election and continue to constitute a separate people, God still uses the Jews to carry out His will, to glorify Himself, and to bring Gentiles to faith in Christ. In fact, He uses their very disobedience to accomplish these ends. While their

---

52 CD IV/2, 260.
53 CD II/2, 464.
54 Sonderegger, That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew, 85.
55 CD II/2, 505.
56 CD II/2, 465.
57 Sonderegger, That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew, 92.
58 Ibid, 94.
rejection of Christ is an act of rebellion, it is not out of keeping with God’s plan. God willed that Christ should be crucified, so “in his handing-over and rejection Judas,” was actually “actively in the execution of the divinely determined handing-over of Jesus.”  

59 In regard to their contribution to God’s glory, Barth maintains that “The meaning of [Israel’s] election is that in the very act of becoming guilty towards God, it must genuinely magnify His faithfulness.”  

60 Moreover, the Jews’ disobedience is the means by which God brings all other peoples to Himself through Christ. Analyzing Romans 11:11, Barth maintains that according to the Apostle Paul, “it is through [the Jews’] transgression…that there comes salvation to the Gentiles.”  

61 In fact, Christians “would not be what they are if salvation had not come to them from the Jews, and indeed through the transgression of the Jews, through the very thing which now makes the Jews the hated of God.”  

62 Thus, in the end, God intends for the Jews to be disobedient. In regard to God’s work in history through Christ, “Israel neither can nor is it meant to see this gracious presence.”  

63 Succinctly summarizing God’s plan for Israel and the Church, respectively, Barth states that

“This one community of God in its form as Israel has to serve the representation of the divine judgment, in its form as the Church the representation of the divine mercy. In its form as Israel it is determined for hearing, and in its form as the Church for believing the promise sent forth to man. To the one elected community of God is given in the one case its passing, and in the other its coming form.”  

64

Thus, Barth asserts that in its present state, Israel is elected for rejection so that the Gentiles might gain salvation. While this does mean that Israel is still elect and part of God’s plan to bring

59 CD II/2, 505.
60 CD II/2, 259.
61 CD II/2, 275.
62 CD II/2, 304.
63 CD II/2, 203. Emphasis added.
64 CD II/2, 195.
salvation to the world, the fact that the Jews must suffer to do so can be little consolation to them.

It is true that Barth does not see Israel as eternally rejected by God. At the outset of his exegesis of Romans 9-11, Barth alerts his readers that this passage contains “many apparent hesitations and contradictions…and yet we cannot overlook the fact that the final word is one testimony to the divine Yes to Israel (to the Israel which has crucified Christ). Only when [these chapters] are understood in the light of this final word can they be understood aright.” In his mind, “it is clear that even the judgments and punishments of God, the whole severity of His conduct towards Israel, do not contradict the truth that He actually wills to maintain and not destroy His creature.

They are all temporary and as such symbolic judgments and punishments. They are not the outbreak of the genuine wrath and judgment of God. They are not the eternal death, the abandonment and precipitation into nothingness…

Ultimately, the Jews are not subject to eternal judgment and rejection because Jesus Christ is the only truly Rejected One. Barth argues that “the real judgment of God is alone the crucifixion of Christ, and the terror of this event is that it is the reality which all other judgments upon Israel…can only foreshadow or reflect.” Therefore, though the Jews “may indeed conduct themselves as rejected,” nevertheless, “even if they deserved it a thousand times they have no power to bring down on themselves a second time the sword of God’s wrath now that it has fallen.” Thus in the end, the Jews’ will enjoy God’s mercy in eternity.

In fact, God’s judgment against the Jews in the temporal realm is actually a sign that His mercy is their ultimate destiny. In the process of electing the Jews to rejection, God “wills [Israel

---

65 CD II/2, 15.
66 CD II/1, 419-420.
67 CD II/1, 396.
68 CD II/2, 349.
to be]...a sign of His wrath and freedom which is also the abiding sign of God’s mercy.”

In the words of the author of Hebrews, “the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children.” Similarly, God’s judgment upon the Jews is a sign that He patiently awaits their acceptance of Christ. According to Barth, “God’s mercy and judgment” both mean “that God always, and continually, has time for Israel. That Israel has time to hear God’s Word, and therefore time to live for the sake of God’s Word and by its power, is shown—only symbolically and provisionally but nevertheless truly—in the very stumbling block of the alternation of penitence and impenitence in which Israel receives this instruction.”

But this fluctuation between mercy and judgment is not just the fate of Israel, but rather the common experience of all human beings. Addressing the roles of the elected and the rejected, Barth argues that these two groups can actually “exchange their functions.” Therefore, the Church elected to God’s mercy can experience God’s judgment while Israel elected to God’s rejection and judgment can experience God’s mercy. This is because Israel and the Church are united by what Mark Lindsay calls a “solidarity of sinfulness.”

More specifically, though, all people are responsible for Christ’s death on the cross. Despite his emphasis on Israel’s guilt in this regard, Barth insists that “in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ the world was shown a co-partner in guilt with Israel...Jews and Gentiles were in the same guilt of disobedience.” In the same way, though he repeatedly portrays him as the representative of all Jews, Barth also sees Judas as the symbol of the Church’s sinfulness.

---

69 CD II/2, 226.
70 Hebrews 12:6.
71 CD II/2, 417.
72 CD II/2, 57.
73 Lindsay, Covenanted Solidarity, 282.
74 CD IV/1, 174.
75 CD II/2, 57.
Barth’s mind, Judas’ betrayal of Christ “exposed an uncleanness which was the uncleanness of all the apostles and needed a special cleansing.” As Lindsay argues, because he was one of the apostles (the forefathers of the Christian Church), Judas is considered by Barth to be a representative of the Church as well. In fact, in speaking of Judas’s betrayal, Barth says that “Jesus was handed over... from within the Church.” Thus, by emphasizing Judas’ role in Christ’s death, Barth is placing blame for the crucifixion on both Jews and Gentile Christians. Barth imputes the other apostles’ guilt to their successors as well.

But “solidarity of sinfulness” is not the final characterization of the relationship between Israel and the Church. Rather, just as Israel’s disobedience and rejection is meant to bring about the salvation of the Gentiles, so the obedience and blessing of the Gentile Church is meant finally to bring the Jews to Christ. Barth states very simply that “the existence of Gentiles as recipients of salvation has the meaning and purpose of a summons to these hardened Jews and therefore of a confirmation of their eternal election.” Israel will be brought to salvation in this way in that the blessings Gentile Christians receive will make the Jews “jealous.” In Barth’s mind, having been “provoked and allured by seeing the Gentiles in possession of this gift, Israel is summoned anew to the conversion previously refused, recognizing the value of what is most properly its own possession in the very moment that it passes into the hands of others.” Therefore, though Gentile Christians have been grafted into God’s covenant with Israel, the Jews will be grafted back in to this covenant through Christ. In the end, “the calling and conversion of the Gentiles, will ultimately serve the purpose of announcing and preparing the restoration of the

---

76 CD II/2, 465.
77 Lindsay, Covenanted Solidarity, 291.
78 CD II/2, 279.
79 CD II/2, 281.
natural order with regard to Israel.” Thus, as is the case with Israel, the Church is in some ways merely an instrument in God’s hand meant to bring about the salvation of others.

### Barth on Missions to the Jews

Reiterated several times throughout the course of *Church Dogmatics II/2*, this theme of the Church’s obedience as a means of provoking the Jews to jealousy in order to effect their conversion is obviously closely related to Barth’s position on missions to the Jews. Because one of its primary purposes is to make the Jews jealous, the Church is supposed to take a special interest in the fate of the Jews. The Church cannot have any other attitude toward the Jews than a “supreme and most intent interest in [their] future”; Christians must never respond to Jews’ rejection of Christ with “acquiescence in the absence and aloofness of these unbelievers.” In some instances, Barth’s injunction against the Church’s apathy toward the Jews is coupled with a straightforward call to conduct missions to them. For instance, Barth argues that “The word of Moses itself alone is obviously not sufficient to summon its readers effectively to faith and confession…Mission is necessary in order that beyond the written character and reading of the witness the culminating point of encounter with the attested revelation may be reached.” In this mission, the Church is to look to Paul as its predecessor and model. In his exegesis of Romans 9:1-5, Barth repeatedly emphasizes Paul’s mission to the Jews. In fact, Paul’s efforts to convert his fellow Jews are cast by Barth as “the innermost core of his mission.” In Barth’s formulation of Paul’s mindset, “it is constitutive for [Paul’s] work as an apostle, and necessary to him personally for his own salvation, always as a missionary to approach the Jews first, in the manner

---

80 *CD II/2*, 279.
81 *CD II/2*, 281.
82 *CD II/2*, 289, 205.
83 *CD II/2*, 251.
84 *CD II/2*, 202.
described in the Acts of the Apostles.”

In fact, for Paul, “Faith is only possible…as he holds fast to [his fellow Jews], only as he reaches out to them again and again, only as he prays for them.” He is so concerned with the salvation of his own people that he is willing to renounce his own election that they might be saved. Barth views Paul’s willingness to surrender his own salvation for the Jews as evidence that “his apostolic office [is] a ministry in the name and on behalf of Israel” and that “the standing and falling of the Church [is] bound up with its brotherhood and solidarity in relation to unbelieving Israel.”

Given his emphasis on the interest the Church is to take in the Jews’ conversion, the necessity of missions to bring Jews to Christ, and the example of Paul’s efforts to convert his fellow Jews, Barth seems to be a prime advocate for missions to the Jews.

However, in this same volume (written between the summer of 1939 and the winter of 1941-42), Barth calls into question specific missions to the Jews. Reflecting on past efforts to convert the Jews in his exegesis of Romans 11:12-15, Barth asserts that,

It is not the case…that the…Church can extort or force through anything in relation to the Synagogue, that they can ‘do’ or ‘achieve’ anything at all in a direct sense. The fanaticism with which the Jewish mission was occasionally carried on at a later date has no support in our passage. Indeed, at this point at any rate there is no express mention of a special Jewish mission at all. On the contrary…we can only say that the Gentile mission and the existence of the Church of Jews and Gentiles is, as such, the true Jewish mission…It is not the Church but God Himself in the act of that admission and introduction, Jesus Christ in the glory of His second coming, who will convert the Synagogue, as it is He alone who will awaken the dead. In this respect, too, all that the Church can do is simply to be the Church, and in that very way to effect [the salvation] of the Jews…Let the Church accept its responsibility for the Jews by being true and more and more true to itself!...Let the Church see to it that it really is and remains the Church!”

Thus, Barth asserts that the Church is not to engage in concentrated efforts to proselytize the Jews, for Christ alone can bring Israel to Himself. In fact, the conversion of the Jews as a whole

---

85 CD II/2, 202. Emphasis added.
86 CD II/2, 202.
87 CD II/2, 284.
“is quite impossible...as an expectation within history.”

Consequently, while it “waits for Israel’s conversion,” the Church’s obligation to the Jews in this regard is simply to ensure that it is following Christ in order to make the Jews “jealous” that they too might accept Jesus as Lord.

Reiterating many of his earlier arguments, Barth more explicitly and comprehensively repudiates missions to the Jews in volume IV/3.2 (written between 1958 and 1959). Within a larger section dealing with missions to non-Christian peoples in general, Barth argues that the question of missions to the Jews “requires separate treatment” because of the special relationship between Israel and the Church. It is true that the Church is bound to bear witness to Christ to the Jews as it is to all peoples on earth. However, Barth insists that “mission is not the witness which [the Church] owes to Israel.”

Barth rejects the idea of missions to the Jews for two main reasons. First, unlike adherents of other non-Christian religions, the Jews already worship the true God. The Jews “are the people of God loved by Him in free grace, elected and called to His service, and originally sent into the world as His witnesses.” Furthermore, Barth reminds the Church that it has been “grafted in” to God’s original covenant with Israel:

The Gentile Christian community of every age and land is a guest in the house of Israel. It assumes the election and calling of Israel. It lives in fellowship with the King of Israel. How, then, can we try to hold missions to Israel? It is not the Swiss or the German or the Indian or the Japanese awakened to faith in Jesus Christ, but the Jew, even the unbelieving Jew, so miraculously preserved, as we must say, through the many calamities of his history, who as such is the natural historical monument to the love and faithfulness of God, who in concrete form is the epitome of the man freely chosen and blessed by God, who as a living commentary on the Old Testament is the only convincing proof of God outside the Bible. What have we to teach him that he does not already know, that we have not rather to learn from him?

---

88 CD II/2, 283.
89 CD IV/3.2, 876.
90 CD IV/3.2, 877.
91 Ibid.
Because the Church owes the source of its salvation and its very existence to Israel, it should not presume to hold missions to the Jews, but should rather humbly return to its roots in the wisdom of the Old Testament.

But though Barth’s argument seems to be based on an attitude of humility and respect for the Jewish religion, his second reason for repudiating missions to the Jews demonstrates that such is not the case. Reiterating his earlier characterizations of Jews and Judaism, Barth maintains that because they have rejected their Messiah, the Jews face a future which is “dreadfully empty of grace and blessing.” Moreover, given their continual refusal to recognize Christ as the Savior, missions to the Jews are ultimately futile. In the case of the Jews’ unbelief, “there is no prospect of revision from the human standpoint.” Rather, if the Jew is to go back on the rejection of his Messiah and become a disciple, is there not needed a radical change in which he comes to know the salvation of the whole world which is offered to him first as a Jew and in which he thus comes to read quite differently his own Holy Book? Is there not needed the direct intervention of God Himself as in the case of the most obstinate of Jews, Paul himself? Can there ever be a true conversion of the Jews, therefore, except as a highly extraordinary event?

Thus, Christian missions are insufficient to bring the Jews to Christ; divine intervention is necessary for the conversion of Israel.

As he asserted in II/2, Barth again argues that in light of Israel’s rebellion, the only obligation of the Church toward to the Jews is to “make the Synagogue jealous.” Describing the Church’s task in relation to the Synagogue, Barth maintains that the Church,

…must make dear and desirable and illuminating to [the Synagogue] Him whom it has rejected. It must be able to set Him clearly before it as the Messiah it has rejected. It must be able to set Him clearly before it as the Messiah already come. It must call it by joining with It as His people, and therefore with Him. No particular function can be this call, but only the life of the community as a whole authentically lived before the Jews.

---

92 Ibid.  
93 CD IV/3.2, 878.  
94 Ibid.
But according to Barth, the Church has shamefully failed to live up to its obligation toward Israel. Though the Church “has seriously sought the conversion of individuals,” it “has not done for the Jews the only real thing which it can do, attesting the manifested King of Israel and Savior of the world, the imminent kingdom, in the form of the convincing witness of its own existence.”\(^{95}\) Furthermore, the Church commits folly by treating Judaism as a separate religion rather than “as…the root from which it has itself sprung.” Consequently, the Jews remained absent from Christian ecumenical discussions, which in Barth’s mind was a greater tragedy than the absence of either Protestants from communist nations or Catholics. Therefore, concluded Barth, the “Jewish question…stands as an unresolved problem, and therefore as the shadow behind and above all its activity in foreign missions.”\(^{96}\)

In her book *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945*, Eva Fleischner demonstrates the evolution of Barth’s attitude toward the state of Israel from its establishment in 1948 until the Six Day War of 1967, the year before Barth’s death. While he was reluctant to attach any divine significance to its creation in 1948, by 1950, Barth had come to regard the founding of the state of Israel as evidence of God’s continuing election of and love toward Israel. By 1967, Barth had even come to regard Israel as an “eschatological sign” and characterized “the events in Israel since 1948 as a repetition of the Biblical account of Israel’s entrance into the promised land.”\(^{97}\) Given this evolution in his attitude toward the state of Israel, did Barth’s position on missions to the Jews undergo a similar evolution? There are at least some indications that this may be the case. One of the most notable examples of this possible evolution is to be found in Barth’s participation in a panel discussion with a rabbi and a Catholic priest upon his visit to Chicago in 1962. Previously Barth had dismissed the possibility of dialogue in light of

\(^{95}\) Ibid.  
\(^{96}\) Ibid.  
\(^{97}\) Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology since 1945*, 28.
the fact that he did not consider Jews and Christians to belong to two distinct religions. But in the course of this discussion, Barth spoke of the possibility of dialogue between Christians and Jews in light of the fact that they shared some of the same scriptures. In a letter to his student Friedrich Marquardt written years later, Barth himself cited his statements made during this panel discussion as evidence of the change which his mindset toward Israel and the Jews had undergone. Similarly, though he had repeatedly emphasized the unity between Israel and the Church, Barth insisted in a 1961 letter that Israel as Israel had to be taken seriously. These statements indicate that Barth may have been on his way toward respecting Judaism as a valid religion distinct from Christianity. However, his criticism of the Vatican II Council for classifying Judaism as a “non-Christian religion” suggests that his thinking about the Jews had not been fundamentally altered. As Stephen Haynes argues, “Barth never abandoned or repudiated the fundamental aspects of his doctrine of Israel developed in Church Dogmatics II:2 and III:3.”

Conclusion

Barth’s theology of Israel in general contains conflicting tendencies which make it difficult to evaluate. Barth’s affirmation of the validity of God’s covenant with the Jews can be seen as a positive basis for Jewish-Christian dialogue. However, the fact that Barth most often speaks of the Jews as “elected for rejection” lessens the positive impact of his reaffirmation of their election. It is true that Barth sees Israel and the Church as being bound together by a “solidarity of sinfulness.” Yet Barth more consistently emphasizes the Jews’ disobedience and consequent subjection to judgment and the Church’s obedience to God and the mercy it enjoys as a result. The fact that Barth repeatedly stresses the unity of Israel and the Church can be viewed

98 Haynes, Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology, 79.
99 Ibid, 75.
as the foundation for a cooperative relationship between Christians and Jews. But as Katherine Sonderegger notes, by regarding Israel and the Church as one, Barth implicitly denies the validity of Judaism as its own separate religion. In fact, Barth explicitly denigrates Judaism as an empty and meaningless religion. In the end, the whole of Barth’s theology of Israel tends to support the idea that his conception of Israel and Jews were largely in line with traditional Church teaching.

As for his position on missions to the Jews, even Barth’s critics recognize that he explicitly repudiated such missions. However, there is disagreement as to the nature of this repudiation. In his assessment of Barth’s stance, Lindsay emphasizes the fact that Barth is more concerned that the Church focus on properly fulfilling its own role as Christ’s representative rather than seeking to convert individual Jews. Moreover, Lindsay notes that Barth faults the Church for failing to exemplify the love of Christ as it should, and thereby failing to make the Jews jealous. And though the Jews find their final fulfillment only in the Church, Barth insists that the Church must return to its root in Israel to find true completion. Thus, in Lindsay’s mind, Barth’s repudiation of missions to the Jews both deemphasizes proselytization while criticizing the Church for its shortcomings.

However, in the end, Barth rejected missions while still insisting upon the Jews’ need for Christ. Barth rejected missions to the Jews because he believed that such missions implied a rejection of the Jewish foundations of the Christian faith and because he saw the conversion of the Jews as a matter of God’s divine providence rather than the efforts of men. But he maintained the fundamental belief that motivates Jewish missions: that the Jews cannot find salvation through their own religious practices but through Jesus Christ alone. Even Lindsay has to admit

---

100 Mark Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 104-105.
that Barth “sees Israel as finally progressing to faith in Jesus Christ…and to that extent, [advocates] a future for Israel that in post-Holocaust theological dialogue has fallen into disrepute.”

This is the complaint of most of Barth’s critics; Barth perpetuates the integrationist model, whereby Israel must eventually be absorbed by the Church. Barth’s most recent critics on this subject, Katherine Sonderegger and Stephen Haynes, both recognize Barth’s rejection of missions to the Jews as radical for his time. But both also maintain that Barth’s underlying Christological focus undermines any fundamental change in attitude toward the Jews. As Haynes argues,

> Barth’s radicalism is evident in the fact that he is one of the first Christian theologians to call for the abandonment of Jewish missions in the post-Holocaust religious environment. And yet his alternative to Jewish missions—‘making Israel jealous’—is still a traditional response based on the New Testament.

“Ultimately,” contends Haynes, “[it is doubtful] whether Barth’s approach significantly departs from traditional understandings of Israel as integrated into, or substituted by, the Church.”

Barth did not support the idea of specific missions to the Jews, but he still was of a mindset which was conducive to such missions.

Thus, it seems that the arguments portraying Barth as a traditionalist in regard to missions to the Jews hold the most weight. However, as evidenced by the arguments of Mark Lindsay there remains enough ambivalence to make a sound argument that Barth may have been

---

101 Lindsay, Covenanted Solidarity, 222.
103 Haynes, Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology, 74.
104 Ibid, 54.
105 As we saw in the conclusion of Chapter 1, Barth was not unique in his stance either. For example, like Barth, Oehmen and Spaemann rejected supersessionism and insisted that Christians should not conduct missions to the Jews because the Jews already worshipped the true God.
perceived a pioneer in improving Jewish-Christian relations and, more specifically, in ending missions to the Jews. So it is not inevitable that American Protestant theologians such as Niebuhr, Eckardt, Littell, and Van Buren would have been critical of Barth in this respect. In the next chapter, we will examine each of these theologians in turn to ascertain the individual responses they had to Barth’s position on missions to the Jews.
CHAPTER 3

KARL BARTH AND MISSIONS TO THE JEWS: THE AMERICAN RESPONSE

Finding Barth’s influence in the United States “surprising,” Stephen Haynes evaluates the initial American response to Barth’s doctrine of Israel through two individual theologians: Maria F. Sulzbach and Alan T. Davies. According to Haynes, Sulzbach wrote in 1952 that Barth’s theology discredited the traditional notion of supersessionism and thus opened the way for a new Christian understanding of the Jews. On the other hand, Haynes presents Davies as a critic of Barth’s theology. Because Barth believed that God has designated the Jews as a witness to His judgment, Davies contended that Barth “incorporated anti-Semitism into salvation history, making it the other side of election.” Thus, through Sulzbach and Davies, Haynes effectively presents both ends of the spectrum in terms of the earliest American reactions to Barth’s doctrine of Israel.

However, Haynes’ work can be built upon in a number of ways. First, the subject of his research can be focused on a specific aspect of Barth’s doctrine of Israel. At the same time, the scope of Haynes’ work can be expanded to include other American theologians apart from Sulzbach and Davies in order to determine if their assessments of Barth are actually representative of the whole of Protestant thinkers in the U.S. Finally, Haynes’ analysis can be deepened by providing an explanation as to why these theologians reacted to Barth in the way that they did. This chapter will do all three. Narrowing Haynes’ subject, this study will now

---

1 See Maria F. Sulzbach, “Karl Barth and the Jews,” Religion in Life 21, no. 4 (1952): 585-593. Supersessionism is the traditional notion that the Christian Church has replaced the Jews as God’s “chosen people.” See chapter I, page 5, note 12 and chapter II page 9.
3 Haynes, Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology, 88.
focus in particular on American reactions to Barth’s position on missions to the Jews to see if the reception of his opinion on this particular issue was different than the reaction to his theology of Israel as a whole. But Haynes’ scope will also be broadened to focus on the responses of theologians besides Sulzbach and Davies. For this study, four American Protestant theologians repeatedly recognized as being at the forefront of improving Jewish-Christian relations have been chosen: Reinhold Niebuhr, A. Roy Eckardt, Franklin Littell, and Paul van Buren. Finally, after presenting both theologians’ stances on missions to the Jews and their respective responses to Barth’s position on this issue, this study will seek to explain why each theologian reacted to Barth in the way that he did. In this way, this work will contribute to a fuller understanding of Barth’s place as a global figure in the discourse concerning missions to the Jews. Analyzing his impact upon those American theologians at the forefront of improving Jewish-Christian relations can bring to light Barth’s possible influence at the cutting edge of this manifestation of interfaith dialogue.

**Responses to Barth: Niebuhr, Eckardt, Littell, and van Buren**

Reinhold Niebuhr, A. Roy Eckardt, Franklin Littell, and Paul M. van Buren were chosen for this study because they were exceptional among American Protestants both for rejecting missions to the Jews and for seeking to improve Jewish-Christian relations in general. To understand why Niebuhr, Eckardt, Littell, and van Buren were exceptional, one must first understand the context in which they both lived and wrote.

**Missions to the Jews and Jewish-Protestant Relations: The American Context**

---

4 I recognize that Haynes has already addressed van Buren’s stance on Barth in relation to the validity of Jewish missions in *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology*. However, since he has traditionally been grouped with the other three theologians mentioned as a pioneer in improving Jewish-Christian relations in America, his position will be included in this study by way of Haynes’ analysis as an important point of comparison for the other theologians examined.
One of the most contentious scholarly debates within the field of Jewish history in the United States concerns the nature of the American Jewish experience in relation to their Christian environment in comparison with that of European Jews in a similar situation. While historians have traditionally stressed the unique (and generally more positive) relationship between Jews and non-Jews in America, revisionists have emphasized the continuity between Gentile European and American attitudes toward their Jewish minorities, especially highlighting the anti-Semitism prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic. Historians Reena Friedman and Michael Dobkowski assert that “the degree of Jewish acceptance in America has been exaggerated.”

Gulie Arad concurs, asserting that the medieval European conception of the Jew as a “Christ-killer” and perpetual outsider followed Jewish immigrants to America. Conversely, Jonathan Sarna claims that revisionists such as Friedman and Dobkowski “vastly exaggerate the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism [in the United States].” Still others recognize both continuities and discontinuities between Jewish-Gentile relations in Europe and America, respectively. Acknowledging that Jews were not immune from anti-Semitism in the United States, Benny Kraut nevertheless maintains that “America has proven [a] viable center for historic Jewish survival.” Similarly, though he fully recognizes the history of anti-Semitism in the United States, David Gerber still asserts that the pluralistic character of America created an environment for Jews much different than the one they would have faced in Europe. “Modern American-Jewish life,” Gerber maintains, “has not evolved within a framework of oscillations between grudging toleration and violent, government-sanctioned, and broadly institutionalized anti-

---

7 Gerber, Antisemitism and Jewish-Gentile Relations, 12.
Semitism, as in Eastern Europe.” Laurence Moore echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the fact that “America’s first Jews stepped onto North American shores…almost fully emancipated.” Moreover, voicing the conclusions of most historians of the Jewish experience in the United States, Moore insists that “American Jews were among the strongest subscribers to the view that America was different.” Thus, in the end, it seems that while revisionists are right in stressing the continuities between Old and New World anti-Semitism, the Jews’ experience in America has differed significantly (and positively) from that of their European counterparts.

Some suggest American Jews’ unique experience is due in large part to the early institution of religious pluralism in the United States. Most notably, Feldman maintains that in the “religiously fragmented environment” of early colonial America, the earliest Jewish immigrants found “a measure of security generally unknown in the world that they had left behind.” In an environment in which widely divergent Protestant denominations were allowed to flourish, Jews too were afforded a certain amount of toleration, “although [they] were neither a dissenting sect nor a denomination.” Similarly, America’s first Jews also benefited from the Old Testament moorings of the earliest Protestant settlers. These early circumstances substantially shaped Jewish-Protestant relations in subsequent generations as well, creating an inter-religious relationship which significantly differed from that of Europe.

But this special relationship did not preclude a missionary attitude toward the Jews on the part of American Protestants. While Protestants had been seeking to convert the Jews since colonial times, specific institutional missions to the Jews began in earnest only in the late

---

9 Gerber, Antisemitism and Jewish-Gentile Relations, 15.
Missions began at this time for two primary reasons: the increasing popularity of premillennial dispensationalism among American Protestants after the Civil War and the massive influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe from the 1880s until the mid-1920s. Believing the conversion of the Jews to be an essential precursor to Christ’s Second Coming, American Protestants who held to premillennial dispensationalism began missions to the Jews in order to fulfill their own eschatological hopes. Such missions were also at least in part a response to the arrival in the U.S. of hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews in need of assimilation into American society. While their primary motives may have been the spiritual conversion of Jews, missionaries were also often eager to help Jewish immigrants adapt to American culture.

On the other hand, because they tended to deemphasize the authority of Scripture, liberal Christians emphasized social reform rather than individual conversions, and thus were willing to engage in interfaith dialogue with non-Protestants, especially Catholics and Jews. In fact, Jewish-Christian dialogue was driven in part by cooperation between these two religious groups on social issues. The movement toward dialogue was also partially motivated by the rampant anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recognizing the Protestant trappings of many anti-Semitic groups (especially the Ku Klux Klan and Charles Winrod’s Defenders of the Christian Faith), liberal Protestants initiated efforts to eliminate the Christian

---

12 Important early American Protestant figures like Increase and Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards were convinced that “as the end of the present age approached large numbers of Jews would be converted to Christianity and returned to their ancestral homeland.” Similarly, Charles Finney stressed the importance of converting the Jews “as a precondition for the arrival of the Kingdom of God” during the Second Great Awakening. Feldman, *Dual Destinies*, 20, 62-63.

13 Premillennial dispensationalism is the idea that Christ will return and reign in peace for 1000 years before the Great Tribulation and the final rapture of the saints. The Jews are seen to have a special role in this narrative in that their return to the Holy Land and acceptance of Christ as the Messiah are seen as precursors of Christ’s imminent return. Thus the conversion of the Jews and the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine are both seen as vital steps in hastening the Second Coming of Christ. See Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 10.
roots of anti-Semitism. Thus, the Federal Council of Churches (founded in 1908) established the Commission on International Justice and Goodwill in order “to reduce anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic and racial prejudice.”\footnote{“Jewish-Christian dialogue and interfaith work before 1933,” Speaking Out about Antisemitism and the Holocaust, \url{http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/presentations/features/details/2006-04-27/} (accessed November 16, 2008).} The work of this commission led to the creation of the National Council of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) in 1928, institutionalizing previous attempts at interfaith cooperation. Initially, liberal Protestants “missionized the Jews and attempted to open dialogue with them at the same time.”\footnote{Ariel, \textit{Evangelizing the Chosen People}, 180.} For instance, a mainline liberal Protestant denomination, the Presbyterian Church was heavily involved in proselytizing Jews between the 1920s and 1950s. But by the late 1960s, and especially after the Vatican II Council of 1965, liberal Protestants began to embrace dialogue with other religions more fully than ever before. As a result, missionary efforts were largely left by the wayside. In regard to the Jews in particular, liberals came to “recognize the right of the Jewish people to coexist alongside Christianity” and thus abandoned their attempts to convert the Jews. In part this decision was a response to the objections to missions voiced by Jewish leaders, but it was also a result of the fact that liberals did not hold to premillennial dispensationalism, which was one of the primary motivations behind Protestant attempts to convert the Jews. Furthermore, this growing indifference toward missions may have been the result of the unique impact of pluralism on American religious life. But whatever the reasons, “by the 1960s the liberal impetus triumphed over the agenda of many of the churches, the missionary impetus in those churches declined, and it would be up to conservative churches to promote missionary work among the Jews.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, 183-184.}
Unfortunately, the movement from missions to dialogue was not free of prejudiced attitudes towards the Jews on the part of liberal Protestants. Feldman encapsulates the mainline mindset about Jews well when he says that “the liberal stress upon the need to universalize the modern outlook saw in the Jewish religious and ethnic existence an obstacle to modernity.”\textsuperscript{17}

Even as they argued that missions to the Jews were offensive and unnecessary, liberal Protestant authors attributed anti-Semitism at least in part to the separateness of the Jewish people and called for the Jews to more fully assimilate into American Protestant culture. Furthermore, apart from cultural and religious insensitivity, liberals did not react to the persecution of Jews during World War II as one might have hoped. For instance, the \textit{Christian Century}, one of the foremost mainline Protestant periodicals of the twentieth century, remained skeptical about the Holocaust until the end of the war.\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, liberals did little to help Jews during the Holocaust. In fact, it was American missionaries to the Jews who most actively sought to rescue European Jews from persecution and certain death. Even after the Holocaust, most Protestants remained unaffected by the near-successful extermination of European Jewry, demonstrating indifference to the plight of Jewish refugees and even encouraging forgiveness for the Nazis.\textsuperscript{19} It took Vatican II to compel most American Protestants to recognize their complicity in the Holocaust and to reevaluate their relationship with Jews; before this time, signs of contrition were few.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Niebuhr’s Exceptional Support of European and American Jews}

\textsuperscript{17} Feldman, \textit{Dual Destinies}, 148.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 202.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 203. For more on American Protestants’ inaction in regard to the plight of European Jews during the Holocaust, see Robert W. Ross, \textit{So It Was True: The American Protestant Press and the Nazi Persecution of the Jews} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980). For more on the notion that American Protestants were initially indifferent to the Holocaust and its victims in the immediate post-World War II years, see Leonard Dinnerstein, \textit{Antisemitism in America} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 160-161.
Reinhold Niebuhr was one of the most notable exceptions to this rule. As mentioned earlier, leading scholars in the field of American Jewish history have consistently recognized Reinhold Niebuhr as a pioneer in advancing Jewish-Christian relations in the United States. “In the movement to improve Christian attitudes toward Jews,” asserts Feldman, “Niebuhr’s was the most prominent Protestant voice of his generation.”

In fact, historians such as Ariel and Eyal Naveh maintain that Niebuhr’s attitude toward Jews and Judaism made him “quite atypical” and “a rare voice among leading Protestant thinkers between the 1930s and the 1950s.” Several elements of Niebuhr’s thought made his assessment of Judaism unique among the works of his contemporaries. First, “Niebuhr was among the first of the leading Protestants to direct attention to the rising wave of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany.” While his fellow contributors at The Christian Century minimized reports of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, Niebuhr quickly recognized that Hitler was bent on the annihilation of European Jewry. At least in part, Niebuhr’s concern for the Jews motivated his support for America’s entry into World War II.

Similarly, while he had begun to sympathize with the Zionist cause as early as the 1920s, Niebuhr became an even more ardent supporter of efforts to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine after the near-extinction of Jews during the Holocaust. As Naveh notes, Niebuhr “supported Zionism…as a survival device which could give the Jewish people socio-political security.” He believed that the Holocaust had shown that mere tolerance for the Jews within Western democracies was insufficient, and that the Jews thus needed a nation of their own in

23 Ariel, Evangelizing the Chosen People, 183.
25 See for example, “Germany Must Be Told!” The Christian Century 50 (August, 9, 1933), p.1014-1015.
order to ensure their safety and freedom. In religious-moral terms, he viewed “the thrilling emergence of the state of Israel, as a kind of penance of the world for the awful atrocities committed against the Jews.” While he had initially hoped that a solution fair to both Jews and Arabs might be found, Niebuhr continued to support the Zionist cause even after Israeli extremists committed acts of violence against Palestinians. In light of the horrors of the Holocaust, argued Niebuhr, “It would be surprising if some had not been driven to the point of psychopathic desperation.” Thus Niebuhr evidenced an ardent support for international Jewry both during the Holocaust and after.

What was the fundamental basis for such support? As referenced earlier, just as it inspired his theology as a whole, Niebuhr’s keen sense of social justice was one of the primary motivations behind his advocacy of the Jews. One of the most prominent reasons Niebuhr was so supportive of the Jews was that he greatly appreciated the social ethic which emerged from the Jewish religion. Accounting for Niebuhr’s affinity for Judaism, Naveh explains that, “As a pastor in a Detroit working-class congregation, he was impressed by Jewish sensitivities to social problems, and as a social activist he appreciated what he perceived to be a Jewish tendency to prefer the concrete ideal of a saved society over the abstract ideal of spiritual redemption.” In his mind, traditional Christian thought was too much focused on the world to come. By emphasizing belief in Christ’s death on the cross as the means of eternal salvation, Christian theologians had neglected the need to strive for social justice in the present. Conversely, Niebuhr praised “the peculiar genius of Jewish religious thought” for conceiving of the kingdom

of God “in this-worldly terms.”

Criticizing Christians’ tendency to focus on humans’ spiritual rather than physical needs, Niebuhr asserted that “only in terms of Judaism is it possible to comprehend the unity of a person.” Similarly, in contrast to earlier Eastern religions’ cyclical conception of time, the Jews’ linear view of history “made it possible to understand historical progress” while the Hebrew prophets’ emphasis on both God’s judgment and his mercy “made it possible to appreciate that growing human freedom involves both creative and destructive possibilities.”

Explaining the appeal of such a notion to Niebuhr, Naveh states that, “Because Judaism lets God enter history but refuses to identify Him with history, it could be regarded as a viable foundation for a Christian existentialist like Reinhold Niebuhr.”

Throughout his career, Niebuhr continued to praise “the Hebraic prophetic passion for social justice,” believing that the prophets’ legacy was continued by contemporary Jews as well. Comparing Judaism and Christianity, Niebuhr suggested that “if we measure the two faiths by their moral fruits, the Jewish faith does not fall short, particularly in collective moral achievement.” Moreover, he argued that when Protestants did begin to more actively pursue social justice in the present, their efforts were ultimately inspired by the Jewish social ethic. In Niebuhr’s mind, adherents of the Social Gospel actually “sought to correct the bourgeois individualism of the reformed churches by the simple expedient of rediscovering the radical social ethics of the Hebrew prophets.” Thus, Niebuhr greatly admired Judaism for its social awareness and activity, contending that Christians owed much to Jews in this regard.

---

36 Niebuhr, “Jews after the War,” 253.
37 Niebuhr, Pious and Secular America, 107.
Apart from his admiration for the Jewish social ethic, the social context in which Niebuhr lived (as described above) fundamentally shaped his view of the Jews. Rejecting the traditional notion of America as a melting pot, Niebuhr “believed that the impulse for collective survival was as legitimate as was the desire for individual freedom.” Against his fellow Protestants who insisted that Jews must assimilate more fully into American society, Niebuhr championed Jews’ right to remain a distinct people. In fact, Niebuhr linked the Jews’ continued “collective survival” to their unique social ethic. “The superiority of the Jew’s sense of justice,” he maintained, “may be derived from the fact that his norms were elaborated in a communal situation while the Christian norms transcend all communities.”

If they had fully assimilated into American society, the Jews would not have been able to make such a positive impact on it as they had. “With their peculiar relation to the modern world,” argued Niebuhr, “and the peculiar contributions which they have made to every aspect of modern culture and civilization, any relaxation of democratic standards would also mean robbing our civilization of the special gifts which they have developed as a nation among the nations.” Therefore, since it was Jews’ communal existence which had allowed them to make their vital contribution to Western democracy, they should be afforded the right to collective survival and not forced to assimilate into the American mainstream.

**Niebuhr’s Position on Missions to the Jews**

Both his disdain for assimilation and his respect for the Jewish social ethic were key elements of Niebuhr’s argument against missions to the Jews. As late as 1923, Niebuhr still supported efforts to convert the Jews. But as evidenced by his 1926 essay, “The Rapprochement

---

40 Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America*, 94.
41 Niebuhr, “Jews after the War,” 254.
between Christians and Jews,” Niebuhr soon rejected the validity of missions to the Jews.\(^{42}\) In this essay, Niebuhr maintained that Christian missions in general, and missions to the Jews in particular, constituted “a kind of sublimated expression of western imperialism.”\(^{43}\) As is true with “any majority dealing with any minority,” missionaries were seeking to make Jews conform to their own Protestant societal norms.\(^{44}\) However, instead of seeking to make Jews assimilate into American society, Niebuhr believed that Christians should approach Jews with an attitude of humility, recognizing the great debt they owed to the Jews. Once again emphasizing Jews’ superior sense of social justice, Niebuhr argued that “since the ethical impulses of the Christian faith are inherited from the Jewish faith…it is not our business to convert Jews to Christianity.”\(^{45}\) But Niebuhr also rejected missions because of the common ground shared by Christians and Jews apart from their common commitment to social justice. In fact, while he was pleased that a growing appreciation for the Jewish social ethic had “softened prejudices” against the Jews, Niebuhr insisted that Jewish-Christian cooperation on social issues was not enough.\(^{46}\) Rather, he maintained, Christians must also cease seeking to convert Jews because Judaism and Protestant Christianity are actually “two of three versions of a religious tradition (the third being Roman Catholicism).”\(^{47}\) According to Niebuhr, Christian missions to the Jews are invalid because “the two faiths share not only a common monotheism but a common attitude toward history, toward historic responsibilities and toward our relation to the creator God as a sovereign of history.”\(^{48}\) In light of such important similarities, Niebuhr viewed the differences between Christianity and

---


\(^{44}\) Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America*, 86.

\(^{45}\) Niebuhr, “The Son of Man Must Suffer,” 87.


\(^{48}\) Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America*, 96.
Judaism as a matter primarily of “emphasis rather than simple contrast.” While Judaism has traditionally been regarded as a religion of law and ritual and Christianity as a religion of grace, Niebuhr contended that grace is as present in the Old Testament as much as in the New, and law in the New Testament as much as in the Old. The fundamental difference between Christianity and Judaism in his opinion is their divergent views of the Messiah. Explaining this difference, Niebuhr stated,

The real difference in Messianism in the two faiths is the idea in the New Testament that the meaning of life in history and the relation of history to its divine ground have been fully revealed in Christ, though the meaning will not be fulfilled till the end of history. From the Christian standpoint, this means a radical rejection of utopianism, and with it the hope of the Kingdom of God on earth. From the Jewish standpoint, it may mean a relaxation of the ethical tension in history.

However, though he made this distinction, Niebuhr noted that while they do not expect perfect justice until the return of Christ, Christians still work for proximate justice in the present. And though Jews are more focused on social justice in this world, they nevertheless reject utopianism. Thus, Niebuhr concluded that “the difference is one of emphasis and there is no radical contrast.” In light of this close relationship, he believed that it was time to “renounce entirely the ambition of converting the Jew” and to instead share the insights of the Christian faith while acknowledging the contributions of the Jewish faith. While Christians could share with Jews the “personal redemptive experience” they enjoyed in Christ, Jews could help Christians “to return to the Hebraic ethical uniqueness of the original gospel.”

Nevertheless, Niebuhr recognized irreconcilable differences between Christianity and Judaism. “There are,” maintained Niebuhr, “Pauline and Johannine interpretations of Christianity

---

which we cannot afford to sacrifice and which Jews are not likely to accept.”

Most notably, Christians cannot renounce Christ as the center of their religion, and Jews cannot accept him as the Messiah. To the Jews, it is impossible to believe in Jesus as the promised Redeemer when the world has so clearly not yet been redeemed. Moreover, given the history of Christian persecution of the Jews, it is unrealistic and unfair to expect the Jews to convert to Christianity. In Niebuhr’s formulation, missions to the Jews “are wrong because the two faiths despite differences are sufficiently alike for the Jew to find God more easily in terms of his own religious heritage than by subjecting himself to the hazards of the guilt feeling involved in a conversion to a faith which, whatever its excellencies, must appear to him as a symbol of an oppressive majority culture.”

In the end, despite their similarities, Jews and Christians should not be expected to form one uniform body. Rather, Niebuhr suggested an “entente cordiale which stops short of a complete union” in which Jews and Christians can learn to appreciate each other’s religions without one subsuming the other.” As Ariel contends, this view constituted, “a revolution in Christian Protestant thinking toward Jews and Judaism.”

Niebuhr “did not view the Jews as destined to play a role in any eschatological era. Instead, he pioneered an approach that accepted the legitimacy of a separate Jewish existence outside the church and the idea that Jews, holding a valid religious tradition of their own, did not have to convert.” In this way “he opened a door for mutual respect and understanding between the two biblical faiths,” laying a foundation upon which later generations of Jews and Christians have successfully built.

Barth’s Influence on Niebuhr’s Position on Missions to the Jews

53 Ibid, 11.
54 Niebuhr, Pious and Secular America, 108.
56 Ariel, Evangelizing the Chosen People, 183.
What influence, if any, did Barth’s theology have on Niebuhr’s revolutionary ideas about Jews and Judaism? In general, Barth and Niebuhr had a very contentious intellectual relationship. Though his contemporaries often considered him to be a neo-orthodox theologian in the Barthian vein, Niebuhr was scandalized by such a notion. “I think when it comes to the crux,” asserted Niebuhr, “I belong to the liberal tradition more than to theirs.”\(^{58}\) While Niebuhr was critical of liberalism, he believed the dangers of Barth’s neo-orthodox theology to be greater. Niebuhr “had little patience with a theology based squarely on biblical revelation,” a system of thought which left little room for “historical, rational, or experiential validation.”\(^{59}\) Though he did appreciate Barth’s criticism of liberal theology for its tendency to equate God’s kingdom with human social activity, Niebuhr believed that Barth overemphasized God’s transcendence, his “infinite otherness.” Because they based their theology on this basic tenet, Barthians separated God from this world, almost entirely postponing social justice until the life to come. In Niebuhr’s mind, Barth’s theology worked “to separate completely the realms of nature and grace” and “produced an ethical quietism typical of Lutheran tradition.”\(^{60}\) But while Barthianism engendered social inaction, Niebuhr wanted to preserve the Enlightenment notion “that faith and redemption were intimately connected to actual social and moral experience in this life.”\(^{61}\) Warning against naïve utopianism, Niebuhr “stressed that the kingdom of God stood neither beyond nor within the realm of human history.”\(^{62}\) Yet because God was not so wholly separate from the world as he seemed in Barth’s theology, Niebuhr believed he could more effectively advocate for Christian social action in the present.

\(^{58}\) Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 214.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 117.

\(^{60}\) Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 123.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

After World War II, Niebuhr’s charge of political quietism against Barth arose primarily in relation to Barth’s neutrality in the Cold War. However, while it was most notable during the Cold War, Niebuhr’s criticism of Barth’s supposed political quietism actually began in the early 1930s, shortly after Barth’s works were introduced in America. Furthermore, it was at this point that Niebuhr employed his early appreciation of Judaism’s social ethic to criticize Barth’s theology. Addressing this issue, Naveh contends that the Jewish conception of God as both transcendent yet still immanent was “the essence of Niebuhr’s position in his long dispute with Karl Barth and other advocates of an other-worldly theology.” More specifically, Niebuhr examined Barth in relation to the Jewish social ethic in his 1934 *Christian Century* article, “Marx, Barth, and Israel’s Prophets.” In this article, Niebuhr linked Barth to reactionary forces. Maintaining that Barth’s theology “simply promises doom for man and all his works,” Niebuhr further asserted that such a religion “destroys all criteria for the religious evaluation of political movements” and will inevitably become “an instrument of the classes which are afraid of social change.” Holding them up as the ideal models for contemporary social actors, Niebuhr asserted that unlike Barth, the Old Testament prophets demonstrated both God’s transcendence and His actions to ensure justice in human history. Moreover, Niebuhr argued that Marx was actually closer to the prophets than was Barth. Not only is his “idea…that unjust civilizations will destroy themselves…a secularized version of the prophecies of doom in which the Old Testament abounds,” but Marx’s ideas in general are ultimately religious in nature because they assume the existence of moral standards of justice and injustice. Ultimately, Niebuhr sought a middle ground between Barth and Marx, recognizing that though human fallibility will always produce

---

“something less than perfect justice,” it was nevertheless the Christian’s duty to strive for such justice.\(^{65}\) This middle ground is represented by Israel’s prophets.

But despite the fact that he used Jewish prophets as a standard by which to judge Barth’s theology as a whole, one is hard-pressed to find an instance in which Niebuhr addressed Barth’s theology of Israel specifically, much less his stance on missions to the Jews. Out of all his writings on the subject of these missions, Barth’s position is never once directly mentioned. The only evidence of any engagement with Barth on this subject comes in Niebuhr’s 1949 *Christian Century* article, “An Answer to Karl Barth.” The article as a whole focused on Barth’s claim that Anglo-Saxon theologians (like Niebuhr) do not “take the authority of the Bible seriously enough.”\(^{66}\) But Niebuhr spent a few paragraphs addressing Barth’s theology in relation to the “the Jewish question.” This passage is so obscure in the literature that it bears quoting here:

> Barth uses one other example of Anglo-Saxon indifference toward Scripture. He thinks we try to solve the Jewish question without having recourse to the wisdom of Romans 9-11, where St. Paul yearns over his own people and hopes ‘that they might be saved.’ He does not say just what light these chapters shed on some of the vexatious issues of our day. Among biblical literalists I know there is a division of opinion between those who support Zionism on the ground that the Jewish state will hasten the culmination of the whole of human history and those who oppose it as a nationalistic corruption of the messianic hope.

Niebuhr then proceeded to commend Barth for his efforts to put Romans 13:1 (“Let every soul be subject to the higher powers…powers that be are ordained of God”) in its proper context. Barth showed that this passage alone should not dictate Christians’ relation to the state, indicating that resistance is sometimes necessary. Niebuhr concluded that,

> There are very good reasons for preferring some texts of Scripture to others and for judging them all from the standpoint of ‘the mind of Christ.’ We do that at our hazard, of course; but the hazards of biblical literalism are certainly greater.


\(^{66}\) Niebuhr, “An Answer to Karl Barth,” 234.
This is a very oblique passage. Neither Barth’s views on the subject nor Niebuhr’s
evaluation of those views are ever stated explicitly. Niebuhr insisted that Barth never specified
what particular relevance this passage bears for contemporary events concerning the Jews. And
the “vexatious issues” to which Niebuhr referred at first appear to pertain only to Zionism, not to
missionary endeavors. However, an indirect assessment of Barth’s position on missions to the
Jews can be teased from these quotes. In this passage, Niebuhr highlighted the fact that Barth
emphasized Romans 9-11 as a key passage in addressing “the Jewish question.” More
importantly, Niebuhr was careful to note that this is the passage in which Paul hopes that the
Jews “might be saved,” or, in modern terms, converted to Christianity. Considering the emphasis
he lays upon this particular element of Romans 9-11, it is safe to assume Niebuhr saw Barth as a
supporter of the conversion of the Jews, if not of specific missions to those people. Combined
with his final injunction to deemphasize more problematic passages in Scripture, one can infer
that Niebuhr saw Barth’s biblical literalism as an insufficient basis for the conversion of the Jews
and also as an impediment to the coexistence of Judaism and Christianity. One would certainly
not want to base an argument that Niebuhr engaged with Barth on the topic of missions to the
Jews on this passage alone, but it does suggest some awareness of Barth in relation to the topic at
hand on Niebuhr’s part.

Though this passage gives some insight into Niebuhr’s assessment of Barth’s position on
missions to the Jews, it is hardly the sustained debate one might have expected to exist between
these two theologians on this issue. After all, the issue of missions to the Jews was of
considerable concern to Niebuhr from the mid-1920s until his death in 1974. And given his
repeated engagement with Barth on the issue of Soviet communism, it is not unreasonable to
expect that Niebuhr would interact with Barth much more extensively on an issue that was at
least of equal importance to him. Why was it that Barth’s position on missions to the Jews did not provoke the kind of heated response from Niebuhr that Barth’s neutralism did? This question can best be answered after considering a theologian who did extensively engage with Barth’s position: A. Roy Eckardt.

**A. Roy Eckardt and His Position on Missions to the Jews**

When he died in 1998, the title of Roy Eckardt’s obituary in the New York Times read: “Roy Eckardt, 79, A Pioneer in Christian-Jewish Relations.” This appellation was certainly no exaggeration. “More boldly than most Protestant theologians,” says Egal Feldman, “A. Roy Eckardt has pushed forward the theological frontiers of the post-Holocaust generation.” Not only was he more adamant in his repudiation of supersessionism than Reinhold Niebuhr, but Eckardt was also one of the first Christian theologians to recognize anti-Semitic strains in the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John. Furthermore, he believed that the Holocaust was the inevitable consequence of Christian teachings about the Jews, and despaired of any meaningful relationship between Jews and Christians until Christians fully recognized and truly repented of their complicity in the murder of six million Jews. Criticizing *Nostra Aetate* for failing to admit Christian guilt towards the Jews, Eckardt suggested one means by which Christians could demonstrate their contrition was to support the state of Israel. Denouncing those Christians who refused to support Israel on the basis of its militaristic nature, Eckardt also condemned those Christians who only supported Zionism because of its theological implications.

---

68 Feldman, *Dual Destinies*, 220.
69 The reader should remember that *Nostra Aetate* was the Catholic Church’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions formulated during the Vatican II Council in 1965. For the purposes of this thesis, *Nostra Aetate* is significant in that it was one of the first official church statements absolving the Jews of responsibility for Christ’s death. See chapter 1, page 2, note 4.
for Christian eschatology. In his mind, such support was actually anti-Semitic, as it was based on a failure to respect Judaism as its own autonomous religious system.⁷⁰

**Eckardt’s Evolving Assessment of Missions to the Jews**

Eckardt saw this same failure in Christians’ continuing attempts to convert Jews. Even his earliest works evidenced his “emphatic rejection of Christian missionary activity among Jews.”⁷¹ However, Eckardt himself admitted that the issue of Christian missions was one with which he had struggled for years. Thus, the fact that he seems to have been somewhat ambivalent about the subject at first and became a more staunch opponent of missions only over time is not surprising. In *Christianity and the Children of Israel* (1948), one of his earliest works on the subject of Jewish-Christian relations, Eckardt set forth a strong argument against Christian missions to the Jews. As even many missionaries themselves at the time admitted, Eckardt maintained that attempting to convert Jews while the suffering and tragedy they had endured was still so fresh in their minds would be too offensive and psychologically damaging to them.⁷² But apart from acknowledging the contingencies of the immediate post-Holocaust era, Eckardt also rejected missions on more fundamental theological grounds. He asserted that efforts to convert the Jews would only be valid if God’s covenant with Christians had truly superseded his covenant with Israel. Such, Eckardt insisted, was not the case. In fact, Eckardt argued that Christians who believed that Jews had to convert to Christianity were actually betraying Christ by “putting [him] into competition” with the God of Israel.⁷³ Moreover, to those who protested that excluding Jews from the Christian missionary endeavor was in itself anti-Semitic, Eckardt retorted that refusing to proselytize Jews could actually be viewed as a sign that Christians

---

⁷¹ Feldman, *Dual Destinies*, 221.
⁷³ Ibid, 145.
simply recognized the validity of Judaism apart from Christianity.\textsuperscript{74} Thus, in the end, Eckardt concluded that “a rethinking of the whole missionary point of view” is necessary.\textsuperscript{75}

However, despite this emphatic denunciation of Jewish missions, Eckardt made several statements within this same work which make him seem somewhat ambivalent about the issue at this point in light of his later writings on the subject. For instance, differentiating himself from more radical opponents of missions (and his own later viewpoint), Eckardt insisted that “the conversion of individual Jews to the Christian faith is to be distinguished from the destruction of Judaism.”\textsuperscript{76} Demonstrating even more ambivalence, Eckardt assured his readers in the conclusion of his chapter on missions that, “These comments have not been made in order to finally deny the validity of the Christian missions to the Jews but instead to show that the problem is not as simple as often imagined. It is difficult to deal with this question in terms of a simple either-or and say that missions either are or not fully justified.”\textsuperscript{77} Clearly, Eckardt’s emphatic anti-missionary stance was not fully formed at this point.

In his next major work on the subject of Jewish-Christian relations, \textit{Elder and Younger Brother} (1967), Eckardt presented a more consistent repudiation of missions to the Jews marked by much less ambivalence about the issue. This more emphatic denunciation of missions to the Jews was at least partially inspired by the larger theological developments of the 1960s. In keeping with the ethos of this era, Protestant thinkers developed new theological perspectives which represented a radical rethinking of Christianity, and indeed religion in general. One of the most prominent of these new theological trends was the appearance of the “death of God” theologies formulated by such thinkers as Thomas J.J. Alitzer, William Hamilton, and Paul van

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid}, 148.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid}, 151.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid}, 148.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid}, 150-151.
Buren. Inspired by Nietzsche’s famous declaration that “God is dead,” death of God theologians held in common the idea that the concept of a transcendent God was no longer relevant in light of developments in contemporary society. Several Jewish theologians were also influenced by this development, most notably Richard Rubenstein. In *Approaches to Auschwitz*, Rubenstein argued that the Holocaust proved that “the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources.”® Rubenstein’s disillusionment represents the broader development of post-Holocaust theology during the 1960s. At this time, both Jewish and Christian theologians began to reevaluate their own individual religions and their relationships with one another in light of the Holocaust. Along with Rosemary Ruether and his own wife, Alice, A. Roy Eckardt was one of the most prominent Protestant theologians involved in this effort to reexamine Christian thought after Auschwitz.

Though he had been writing about Jewish-Christian relations for years before this, it was in the context of the 1960s that Eckardt’s more complete post-Holocaust reevaluation of this relationship took place. *Elder and Younger Brother* is one of the earliest manifestations of this more mature reevaluation. Addressing the idea that Jews should be included within the Christian ecumenical movement, Eckardt insisted that while Jews and Christians are inextricably linked, their bond is “covenantal” rather than “ecumenical.” Whereas the former term indicated the recognition on the part of Christians that Judaism and Christianity are two autonomous religions, the latter term suggested that Judaism could be considered just another Christian denomination, an offensive idea to most Jews. Furthermore, Eckardt pointed out that most Jews suspect that by inviting them to take part in the ecumenical movement, Christians are just creating another

---

opportunity to evangelize Jews. Thus, while perhaps well-intentioned, attempts to include Jews in the Christian ecumenical movement were misguided in Eckardt’s opinion.

Perhaps more significantly, in Elder and Younger Brother, Eckardt more fully outlined the fundamental reasons behind his opposition to Jewish missions. Critiquing Reinhold Niebuhr’s stance on missions, Eckardt asserted that “Because anti-Christian forces within and without the church act to debase Christian symbols, it hardly follows that the evangelical endeavor linked to these symbols is on that account annulled.” In other words, just because Christ and the cross have become symbols of Christians’ centuries-long persecution of Jews does not necessarily mean that the message behind these symbols is not valid for Jews. “If opposition to Christian missions to Jews is to be vindicated in Christian terms,” contended Eckardt, “this will have to be done in a manner different from that proposed by Niebuhr.” Therefore, Eckardt sought to ground his position in the theological rather than the moral-historical realm. Making his argument in Christianity and the Children of Israel more explicit, Eckardt based his repudiation of missions to the Jews in his rejection of supersessionism and insistence that the Jews are still God’s people. Adopting J. Coert Rylaarsdam’s position as his own, Eckardt maintained that “If God’s covenant with Israel is indeed an enduring one, all attempts to put it out of business by missions, however well-intentioned, contradict God’s purpose.”79 Because God never abandoned his covenant with Israel, the Jews are already with God, and therefore do not need to come to Him through Christ, as missionaries would hold. More controversially, perhaps, Eckardt believed that missions to the Jews ultimately undermine the Christian faith itself. “For,” says Eckardt,

if the Jewish people are not already members of the family of God, we who are gentiles remain lost and without hope. The Covenant into which Jesus the Jew ostensibly leads us

---

would be revealed as a delusion. This is why it must be said, with many heartaches and in all charity toward the ‘missionaries to the Jews,’ that in principle the conversionist program is another veiled, although (hopefully) unknowing, attack upon the essence of the Christian faith itself.\(^{80}\)

Thus, Eckardt effectively grounded his opposition to Jewish missions in “a strictly Christian confessional-theological affirmation” rather than relying on Christians’ shifting moral responsibilities to preclude a missionary mindset as a viable attitude toward Jews.

Despite this firm denunciation of missions to the Jews, Eckardt did claim that Christians nevertheless still have a ministry to the Jews. In fact, he asserted, “To seek to put wholly aside the Christian ministry to Israel is as wrong as the attempt to try to make Christians out of the Jewish people. The people of God, on both sides, stand in need of renewal.”\(^{81}\) It is Christians’ duty to proclaim to the Jews the universality of God’s covenant, that in Christ, God has extended his covenant with Israel to the Gentiles. On the other hand, Jews must continue to insist that Christ is not the Messiah who would bring permanent peace on earth, to remind Christians that the world is not yet redeemed. Indeed, the Jews are to be praised for their refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah, as this refusal indicates their faithfulness to the covenant God originally established with them. Therefore, it can be said of Eckardt that he technically retained the idea that Christians have a mission to fulfill toward the Jews. However, this mission is radically different than traditional conceptions and is reciprocal, with both Jews and Christians correcting one another.\(^{82}\)

From the publication of Elder and Younger Brother to the end of his life, Eckardt continued to reiterate these basic positions more and more adamantly. Maintaining his “strictly Christian confessional-theological” opposition to Jewish missions, Eckardt articulated this

\(^{80}\) Eckardt, Elder and Younger Brother, 157-158.  
\(^{81}\) Ibid, 153.  
position in ever starker terms. For example, in *Your People, My People* (1974), Eckardt argued that as missions to the Jews deny the validity of God’s covenant with Israel, Christians have, in effect, “practiced a form of deicide” in continuing such endeavors. Similarly, whereas he had once been unsure as to whether or not missions were valid, Eckardt later had no doubt, unequivocally denouncing “the travesty and even the blasphemy of seeking to make Christians out of Jews.”

In addition to his use of ever more harsh terminology to denounce Christian missions to the Jews, Eckardt also later adopted a more sinister portrayal of these missions. Continuing to cast missions as an attack on both God and the Christian faith, Eckardt proceeded in his later works to depict missions to the Jews as “a spiritual Final Solution.” For example, in *Long Night’s Journey into Day* (1982), Eckardt asked, “For in the last resort, what is the moral and practical difference between stuffing Jews into gas chambers and mass graves and striking at the heart of their religious and human integrity through seeking to convert them?” Similarly, in *Jews and Christians* (1986), Eckardt held that “ultimately considered, there is no difference between murdering Jews in death camps and destroying their laic and spiritual identity through turning them into Christians.” Therefore, though Eckardt always denounced Jewish missions, the nature of this denunciation changed significantly throughout his career, as he himself recognized.

**Barth’s Influence on Eckardt’s Position on Missions to the Jews**

Given Eckardt’s position as it evolved throughout his career, how did he evaluate Barth’s stance on missions to the Jews? In *Christianity and the Children of Israel*, Eckardt’s assessment

---

of Barth’s theology of Israel was mixed. He gave Barth credit for his theological opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism. Eckardt praised Barth for recognizing that, given Hitler’s claims to revelatory status for himself and for the German people, the Nazis’ rise to power was a distinctly religious crisis. Acknowledging the fact that Barth was careful to repeatedly emphasize Romans 11 (which passage emphasizes God’s continuing covenant with Israel) during the Nazi regime, Eckardt also applauded Barth for having argued that Jesus was, in fact, a Jew and therefore that “wherever the Jews are rejected Jesus Christ is likewise rejected.” Similarly, Eckardt recognized Barth for asserting that because Christians are grafted in to God’s original covenant with the Jews, anti-Semitism actually “strikes ‘a mortal blow into the roots of the Church.’” Thus, in his early work, Eckardt seemed to see much in Barth’s theology of Israel that could be used to combat anti-Semitism.

It is true that in this same work, Eckardt did recognize some anti-Semitic overtones in Barth’s work. “In one place,” Eckardt revealed, “Barth actually says that ‘antisemitism is right.’” He quickly qualified this statement by noting that in the passage in question, “it is plain that [Barth is] affirming that not only the Jews but the Church and Christians merit God’s judgment.” However, despite this caveat, Eckardt still saw in Barth teachings which could be used to denigrate the Jews. Such teachings, he claimed, “flow not out of anti-Judaism [on Barth’s part], but only from the fact that ostensibly the Jews reject the Christ of faith.” Given the fact that he believed Barth’s ambivalence concerning the Jews to rest on their refusal to accept Christ, it is not surprising that Eckardt conceived of Barth as supporting missions to the Jews. “Although Barthian theology has been very critical of the method and approach of Christian missions in the

---

87 Eckardt, *Christianity and the Children of Israel*, 38.
91 *Ibid*.
past,” maintained Eckardt, “it [nevertheless] certainly accepts the validity of the missionary enterprise.”

In fact, he argued, “Barthianism represents the only side of neo-Reformation thought which explicitly affirms and stresses an organized missionary approach to the Jews.”

As evidence of this claim, Eckardt offered quotes from G.L.B. Sloan which praised Barth’s theology for fostering the success of Jewish missions and passages from the work of Barth’s student Hendrik Kraemer which claimed that missions to the Jews are of the utmost importance in light of the fact that, as Barth demonstrated, Judaism is inextricably linked to Christianity.

Clearly, in Eckardt’s mind, Barth was an unequivocal supporter of Christian missions to the Jews.

One may attribute this early evaluation to the fact that Barth first made explicit his repudiation of missions to the Jews only in the early 1950s, several years after Eckardt had written *Christianity and the Children of Israel*. However, an even more critical assessment of Barth in this regard appears in *Elder and Younger Brother*, which was published nearly a decade after Barth made his clearest statement against the validity of such missions in the final volume of *Church Dogmatics*. Eckardt again voiced appreciation for Barth’s insistence that God’s covenant with the Jews is still valid and therefore that Christians are “mere guests in the house of Israel.”

And highlighting another facet of Barth’s theological assessment of anti-Semitism, Eckardt agreed that “in rejecting the Jew, the non-Jew rejects God” and does so primarily because the Jews’ status as the “chosen people” makes Gentiles feel as though they are “robbed of all [their] own assurances.” Therefore, because anti-Semitism is first and foremost a

---

92 Ibid, 85.
93 Ibid, 86.
94 Ibid.
96 Ibid, 34.
theological matter, it must have a theological remedy, which conviction both Barth and Eckardt shared.\footnote{Ibid.}

However, despite his continued appreciation for certain aspects of Barth’s theology, Eckardt found it even more lacking in *Elder and Younger Brother* than he did in his earlier work. In some ways, he saw Barth’s view of the Jewish people as a trifle naïve. For example, while Barth maintained that the Jews can never be completely destroyed because of God’s covenant faithfulness to them, Eckardt countered such a notion with the idea that “men can hardly dictate the future to a God” who, as Barth himself claimed, is completely free to act as he pleases.\footnote{Ibid.} Moreover, Eckardt still recognized persistent strains of a deep ambivalence towards the Jews in Barth’s work. Because the Jews exist as a people only by God’s providence, Barth deemed their existence to be a “mystery.” Eckardt argued that viewing the Jews in this way would not only offend their sensibilities, but could actually foster anti-Semitism.\footnote{Ibid.} And while he acknowledged that Barth often reaffirmed the impossibility of Israel’s destruction, Eckardt also showed that Barth regarded “the history of Israel [as having] come to an end.” Highlighting the self-contradictory nature of such a notion, Eckardt asserted that “If the Jewish people do not positively and uniquely represent God now, anti-Semitism can hardly be the objective revolt against God, through them, that Barth tries to claim for it.”\footnote{Ibid.} Thus, concluded Eckardt, though Barth speaks of the two as one entity, “any seeming continuity between the church and Israel [in Barth’s thought] remains predominantly a relation between a positive and a negative entity.”\footnote{Ibid.}

In addition to this much more critical evaluation of his theology of Israel as a whole, Eckardt again criticized Barth’s stance on Jewish missions in *Elder and Younger Brother*. 

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}
Acknowledging Barth’s contention that the Jews already worship the one true God, Eckardt admitted that at least on the surface, it seems as though Barth outright rejected missions to the Jews. However, Eckardt revealed that Barth believed that because they have rejected Christ, Jews’ lives are “dreadfully empty of grace and blessing.” Therefore, he held that the Jews must eventually accept Christ, thereby upholding the traditional motivation behind missions. And while he insisted that ultimately only God can bring about the Jews’ conversion, Barth still contended that it is the church’s duty to be a witness to Israel, to make the Jews jealous by demonstrating the impact Christ has made in its life. Making his opinion of this stance very clear, Eckardt declared, “If [these arguments] are not meant to support a missionary point of view, Barth must be intending to place the church in a state of talking simply in order to hear itself talk.” Thus, even after Barth explicitly repudiated Jewish missions in *Church Dogmatics*, Eckardt still saw Barth’s theology as supportive of such missions, criticizing Barth’s stance even more ardently than in his earlier works.

Because Barth was merely the most recent representative of the traditional Christian attitude toward Jews in his eyes, Eckardt used Barth as a foil with which to negatively frame his arguments against missions to the Jews in his earlier works, but discarded Barth’s position once his own had become more radical and fully formed. However, one could say that Barth’s influence remained implicit in Eckardt’s work throughout Eckardt’s career, especially in his idea that missions to the Jews are impossible. Just as Barth said that anti-Semitism is a revolt against God, so Eckardt maintained that missions to the Jews were a similar rebellion against God’s will, as such missions implied that God’s covenant with the Jews was not still valid. This connection is never drawn out by Eckardt, but given the fact that he repeatedly stated Barth’s formulation of

---

102 Ibid, 62.
103 Ibid, 63.
anti-Semitism, it seems that Barth did influence him in this way. Thus, Barth can be seen to have a lasting influence on Eckardt’s rejection of missions to the Jews, both positively and negatively.

**Evaluation of Niebuhr and Eckardt**

Thus, in the end, Niebuhr and Eckardt differed significantly in their reactions to Barth’s position on missions to the Jews. While Niebuhr largely neglected Barth’s stance on this issue, Eckardt repeatedly referred to Barth in his own arguments. In fact, though he ultimately rejected Barth’s arguments, Eckardt’s position evidences Barth’s influence, if only negatively. Two interrelated factors can be seen to account for this difference between these two theologians. First, Niebuhr and Eckardt themselves differed in their individual positions against missions to the Jews. On the surface, both made similar arguments against missions. For example, both deemed missions offensive in light of the long history of Christian persecution associated with efforts to convert the Jews. However, Niebuhr and Eckardt differed significantly in the fundamental basis of their arguments. Niebuhr’s arguments against Jewish missions sprang primarily from his social consciousness rather than deep theological reflection. In general, Niebuhr was often reluctant to deal with more abstract theological principles, preferring to focus on the more concrete issues of social and political life. After World War II, Niebuhr largely refused to study Barth’s ideas. Rather, “in his intellectual defensiveness he tended to shift the debate with [Barth]…to the areas of his own strength: ethics and politics.”\(^\text{104}\) Niebuhr continued to engage with Barth’s publicly stated political positions, but refused to address the ideas expressed in Barth’s complex theological works. Thus, because Barth’s stance on missions to the Jews appeared largely in the pages of *Church Dogmatics*, Niebuhr may simply have refused to address this position on the basis of its more abstract theological foundation. Conversely, Eckardt was critical of Niebuhr’s primarily social/moral argument against missions to the Jews.

\(^{104}\) Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 258.
and was more interested in unearthing the underlying theological roots of the motivation behind these missions. While he ultimately disagreed with Barth’s stance, this position did give him the theological starting point on which to base his own arguments. Therefore, the difference in Niebuhr and Eckardt’s respective reactions can be found in their individual theological preferences.

However, this difference can be seen to transcend Niebuhr and Eckardt’s personal motivations. Rather, their divergence in this regard can be identified as a generational difference. Addressing the reception of Barth in America, both Stephen Sykes and Richardt Roberts agree that the initial reaction to Barth in the United States was largely negative. When his work was introduced to Americans with the 1928 translation of *The Word of God and Theology*, Barth was repeatedly condemned for stressing the transcendence of God to the extent that the world of God and the world of men were completely separated, thereby completely removing the Christian motivation for social reform. “This…indictment,” maintains Stephen Sykes, “becomes a virtual habit in the theology of the 1930s.”105 By 1939, “the term ‘Barthianism’ had become the code-word, even among the neoorthodox for ‘an unacceptable transcendentalism, anti-intellectualism, and ignoring of social responsibility.’”106 Because they pigeonholed Barth in this way, the first generation of his American audience largely neglected serious study of his theology. It is to this generation that Niebuhr belonged, thus partly accounting for his refusal to more rigorously investigate Barth’s theology, specifically his repudiation of missions to the Jews.

However, Roberts notes that as he shifted away from the more radical elements of his original dialectical thought (especially the idea of the *absolute* transcendence of God), Barth’s thought became “normalized” in American theological circles, resulting in a wider variety of

---

both positive and negative responses to the Swiss theologian. Then, with the publication of T.F. Torrance’s *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* in 1962, a new era of appreciation for Barth was initiated. It was during this period that it began to be recognized that “a number of the most radical of the younger theologians had done doctoral work on the theology of Karl Barth as students, and had even published a first book of a markedly ‘Barthian’ character.” Developing his mature theological positions in this era, Eckardt was more apt to address Barth’s unique position on missions to the Jews, even though he was ultimately critical of Barth’s stance.

But what of the other two American pioneers in improving post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian relations? How did they engage with Barth’s stance on missions to the Jews? Did their reaction to Barth confirm or contradict the pattern established by Eckardt? We will begin with Franklin Littell.

**Franklin Littell’s Position on Missions to the Jews**

Franklin Littell’s record as one of the most influential post-Holocaust theologians is impressive indeed. Having been a firsthand witness of a Nazi rally in Nuremberg in 1939, Littell was driven in the aftermath of the Holocaust to answer “the question of how baptized Christians in the heart of Christian Europe could have either killed or ignored the killing of six million Jews.” In order to promote the study of this question, Littell established the first graduate seminar on the Holocaust in 1959, and in 1970, he also initiated “one of the first annual scholarly conferences on the Holocaust.” Subsequently, in 1976, he founded the first doctoral program in Holocaust studies at Temple University. Inspiring the establishment of similar programs across

---


the country, Littell came to be recognized as “a father of Holocaust studies.” Littell’s own scholarly works, especially his 1975 book *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, reflected his concern with the implications of the Holocaust and were highly influential among those with similar concerns. In such works, Littell concluded that the Holocaust called into question the very nature of Christianity.

In large part, Littell believed the Holocaust to have been an outgrowth of liberal Christianity. Emerging from the Enlightenment, liberal theologians were less concerned with the conversion of the Jews than with their assimilation into Christendom, or Christian culture. Yet in the end, the goal was to rid Europe of Jewish influences and of Jews as Jews, making liberalism a fertile ground for anti-Semitism. In Germany, liberal theologians provided the fodder for the German Christian movement during the Nazi era. For instance, Littell noted that “Friedrich Murawski, a prominent spokesman for the German Christians, drew the logical conclusions from the liberal scholars’ rejection of the Jewish Old Testament.” Grounding themselves in this theological foundation, the German Christians were then free to participate in the persecution and murder of Jews. Thus, in light of the history of Christians in Nazi Germany, Littell concluded “that behind the façade of official religion and state-churches there is a baptized heathenism proved capable of the most wicked rebellion against God and most murderous action against those whose very existence reminds the rebellious gentiles of him.”

However, Littell did not believe this trend to be limited to Germany. Rather, he saw the same phenomenon occurring in America. In fact, Littell asserted that “the problem of liberal anti-

---

Semitism is far more dangerous in America…, for we have here the last major sector of Christendom which still lives relatively undisturbed in the balmy days of nineteenth century culture-religion.”\textsuperscript{113} In other words, liberal Christians in America were still committed to preserving the dominance of Christian culture in the United States, to “resist[ing] the process of secularization and the pattern of pluralism which modernity has thrust upon it.”\textsuperscript{114} While Protestant Americans could boast of “the Constitutional achievement of religious liberty and voluntarism,” they had failed to recognize “the fact that the situation of composite loyalties within which Christians here preach and work is utterly different from the entire Constantinian settlement.”\textsuperscript{115} Given this belief in the close relationship between religion and culture, liberal Protestants were therefore insistent that even if the Jews did not convert, they must nevertheless abandon their distinctive ways in order to assimilate into Christian America. Recognizing the continuity between the U.S. and Nazi-era Germany in this regard, Littell argued that “American Liberal Protestantism is sick, and the theological form of its sickness can be summarized by saying that it stands solidly on the ground but lately vacated by the \textit{Deutsche Christen} (German Christians).”\textsuperscript{116} He saw “little evidence that American Protestantism has learned the lessons of the Holocaust.”\textsuperscript{117} Littell was thus insistent that American Protestants become aware of their prejudices in order to prevent the horrors of Nazi Germany from manifesting themselves in America as well. They had to eliminate the inherently anti-Semitic Protestant culture-religion

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.: 224.
\textsuperscript{115} Franklin Littell, foreword to \textit{The Reformers and Their Stepchildren} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1964), 5.
\textsuperscript{116} Littell, “Kirchenkampf and Holocaust,” 221.
\textsuperscript{117} Littell, "Have Jews and Christians a Common Future?", 212.
prevailing in the United States in order to truly live up to the principles of religious voluntarism and pluralism written into the Constitution.\textsuperscript{118}

Littell’s critique of culture religion and his defense of religious pluralism and voluntarism led him to oppose missions to the Jews on a socio-cultural basis. Like Niebuhr, Littell was impressed by Jews’ social outlook, asserting that “Jewish Americans have contributed far more in recent years to social and cultural progress than have the major Protestant bodies.”\textsuperscript{119} In light of these contributions, and in light of the Jews’ recent “cultural, spiritual, intellectual, economical, and political” renewal, Littell asserted that “Jewry in America can no longer be addressed in the patronizing tone of voice and triumphalism of the Princes of the Church from Nicaea (325 CE) to Vatican II (1961-65.)”\textsuperscript{120} Missions were therefore out of the question because they implied Jewish inferiority to Christianity in the social and cultural realms.

But Littell’s critique of Jewish missions was not based solely on their offensiveness to his pluralistic sensibilities. Rather, his repudiation of such missions was also motivated by a fundamental rethinking of Christian theology, especially the notion of supersessionism. In Littell’s mind, the “superseding theory” had been “most deadly for the Jewish people.” This theory, asserted Littell, “already carries the genocidal undertone, that the Jewish people is finished—and their refusal to wither away and disappear became an offense to Christian

\textsuperscript{118} Franklin Littell, \textit{From State Church to Pluralism: A Protestant Interpretation of Religion in American History}, Second ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 210. See also Franklin Littell, “Early Warning,” in \textit{Remembering for the Future: Working Papers and Addenda, Volume II: The Impact of the Holocaust on the Contemporary World}, ed. Alice Eckardt Yehuda Bauer, Franklin Littell, Elisabeth Maxwell, Robert Maxwell, and David Patterson (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 2131. As part of his “early warning system” to detect the beginnings of a genocidal movement, Littell asserted that one sign of such a movement was “A decline of mainline religious communities into \textit{Kultur-religion}, either through reversion to a former state-church alliance or through social accommodation and assimilation, marked by a failure to maintain standards of membership.”

\textsuperscript{119} Littell, \textit{From State Church to Pluralism}, 163.

Littell was convinced that this teaching had not been the original intention of the New Testament authors. “Theological Antisemitism,” claimed Littell, “begins [only] with the transfer of the base of the early church from Jewish membership to a large gentile majority.”\(^{122}\) Resenting the priority granted to the Jews in Scripture, early church fathers claimed that the Jews had been rejected by God, but that “given enough suffering and wandering…the Jews would finally convert.”\(^{123}\) In this way, the early church fathers prepared the way for later tragedy.\(^{124}\) In time, Christian supersessionism produced other supersessionist theories, such as those of Islam and the German Christian movement. Insisting that the Nazis were in no way anti-religious, Littell contended that “the Nazi ‘final solution’ was a logical extension of the thought of those church fathers and councils who declared God was finished with the Jewish people.”\(^{125}\) Even those members of the Confessing Church who were involved in efforts to rescue Europe’s persecuted Jews were not immune to Christian anti-Semitism. Most notably, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who has traditionally been regarded as one of the greatest heroes of the Church during the Nazi era, upheld Christian supersessionism. “The sad truth,” lamented Littell, “is that Bonhoeffer was much better than his theology…The man whose humanity and decency led him to run risks for Jews and to oppose practical Antisemitism was better than the bad theology which laid the foundations for Christian Antisemitism.”\(^{126}\) Thus Christian anti-Semitism was not an isolated phenomenon confined to a fanatical fringe of the faith, but rather an all-pervasive myth which marred even the best Christian leaders.


\(^{123}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{124}\) Littell, "Have Jews and Christians a Common Future?,” 305.

\(^{125}\) Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 69, 30.

\(^{126}\) Ibid., 51.
In light of the fact that traditional Christian doctrine had been largely responsible for the Holocaust, Littell questioned whether the Church could in good conscience conduct missions to the Jews in the aftermath of perhaps the greatest tragedy in Jewish history. The Church had to ask itself “whether Hebrew missions can carry credibility after the action and inaction of Christians in the Holocaust.”\(^\text{127}\) Littell himself regarded it as absurd that Christian missionaries “continue to direct attention to the traditional crisis put by Christianity to the Jewish people, whereas the central issue today is the crisis put to Christianity by a crucified and resurrected Jewry.”\(^\text{128}\) Explaining the nature of this “crisis,” Littell argued that,

> The truth about the murder of European Jewry by baptized Christians is this: it raises in a most fundamental way the question of the credibility of Christianity. Was Jesus a false messiah? No one can be a true messiah whose followers feel compelled to torture and destroy other human persons who think differently. Is the Jewish people, after all and in spite of two millennia of Christian culture, the true Suffering Servant promised in Isaiah?\(^\text{129}\)

Therefore, argued Littell, in light of the fact “that most of the martyrs for Christ in the twentieth century were Jews,”\(^\text{130}\) the church must end its “triumphantalist missions” and “go back to school” at the feet of the Jews.\(^\text{131}\)

Apart from his belief that the Holocaust called into question Christians’ credibility as missionaries to the Jews, Littell also questioned whether Jewish missions were ever sanctioned by the New Testament authors. Referring to the special significance afforded to Jewish evangelism in “Key 73,”\(^\text{132}\) Littell believed that the statement’s drafters had,

> ignored the too serious question whether there is any biblical basis for the assumption that individual Jews must convert in order to satisfy the New Testament vision of the end and fulfillment of holy history. There is in fact no passage that can be cited to justify the

\(^\text{127}\) Ibid., 88.
\(^\text{128}\) Ibid., 92.
\(^\text{129}\) Ibid., 17.
\(^\text{130}\) Littell, “Kirchenkampf and Holocaust,” 214.
\(^\text{131}\) Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 41.
\(^\text{132}\) “Key 73” was an interdenominational statement concerning Christian evangelism produced by Evangelical leaders Billy Graham and Carl Henry in 1973.
notion that baptized gentiles must convert Jews for the latter to be saved. In the Bible, the
plan of salvation expands outward from a Jewish base; it does not contract away from
that center, nor does the Bible present a brand new center. The displacement theory was a
gentile invention, post biblical.\textsuperscript{133}

Littell doubted “whether…individual soul-trapping of Jews can be justified at all according to
the New Testament.”\textsuperscript{134} Instead, Christians should repudiate missions to the Jews and learn to
fulfill their true mission: to work alongside Jews to bring “greater justice, greater value of
persons in the fight against oppression and exploitation” and “to bring all [Gentiles] eventually to
worship of a service to the One True God.”\textsuperscript{135} This had been the original intention of the New
Testament authors, and should be the goal of the Church in the present as well.

On a certain level, Littell sympathized with those Christians who maintained a
missionary mindset toward Jews, namely Evangelicals. Recognizing their efforts to aid
persecuted Jews during the Holocaust, Littell also appreciated Evangelicals’ support for the state
of Israel. Moreover, he acknowledged Evangelicals’ “strong effort to recover and reaffirm the
essential Jewishness of Christianity.”\textsuperscript{136} In this respect, Littell held Evangelical Christians in
higher regard than their liberal brethren. But in the end, he could not regard Evangelicals’ efforts
to convert the Jews as anything other than a “retarded approach” to Jewish-Christian relations.\textsuperscript{137}
Not only were missions inappropriate in light of the horrors perpetrated by Christians against
Jews during the Holocaust, but they also ran contrary to the principles of religious pluralism, and
even to the dictates of the New Testament itself.

\textbf{Littell on Barth’s View of Missions to the Jews}

\textsuperscript{133} Littell, \textit{The Crucifixion of the Jews}, 88.
\textsuperscript{134} Littell, “Christendom, Holocaust, and Israel,” 489.
\textsuperscript{135} Littell, "Have Jews and Christians a Common Future?," 314.; Littell, "Christendom, Holocaust, and Israel," 487.
\textsuperscript{136} Littell, \textit{The Crucifixion of the Jews}, 97.
\textsuperscript{137} Richard Harries, \textit{After the Evil: Christianity and Judaism in the Shadow of the Holocaust} (Oxford, New York:
Oxford University Press, 2003), 136.
Littell’s engagement with Karl Barth was largely limited to his analysis of the latter’s role in the Church Struggle (*Kirchenkampf*). His assessment of Barth’s leadership of the Confessing Church during this time was both laudatory and critical. On the one hand, Littell praised Barth for being “the leading theologian of the Protestant resistance”\(^\text{138}\) and for being quick to recognize the true nature of the threat posed by Nazism. Littell regarded as honorable Barth’s effort to “challenge those to who Nazi racism and murder were…‘merely political’ issues.”\(^\text{139}\) Instead, Barth saw that National Socialism, “according to its own revelation of what it is…is as well without any doubt something quite different from a political experiment. It is, namely, a religious institution of salvation. It is impossible to understand National Socialism unless we see it in fact as a new Islam.”\(^\text{140}\) The fact that Littell repeated this quote in several of his other works is not surprising.\(^\text{141}\) As we saw earlier, Littell himself grouped National Socialism and Islam together as separate examples of anti-Semitic supersession theory. Thus Barth can be seen to have been a significant influence on one of the most important elements of Littell’s post-Holocaust critique of Christianity: the rejection of supersessionism.

But Littell was also critical of Barth’s record during the *Kirchenkampf*. He offered Barth as a primary example of the fact that “even among the churchmen who saw the spiritual treason and murderous direction of Nazi totalitarianism most clearly, there was little enough awareness that the heart of the matter was ‘the Jewish question.’”\(^\text{142}\) Despite his leading role in the Confessing Church, noted Littell, Barth was still regretful that he had not done more for the Jews.

\(^\text{139}\) Littell, “Have Jews and Christians a Common Future?,” 309.
\(^\text{141}\) See also Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, 103.; Littell, "Christendom, Holocaust, and Israel," 495.; Littell, "Kirchenkampf and Holocaust," 211.
during the Holocaust. Emphasizing this point in *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, Littell quotes Barth’s letter to Eberhard Bethge (Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s biographer):

New to me (in your biography) was the fact that Bonhoeffer in 1933 viewed the Jewish question as the first and decisive question, even as the only one, and took it in hand so energetically. I have long felt guilty myself that I did not make this problem central, in any case not in public, for instance in the two Barmen declarations of 1934—neither in the Reformed Synod of January, 1934; nor in the General Synod of May at Barmen. But there is no excuse that I did not fight properly for this cause, just because I was caught up in my affairs somewhere else.143

Thus, concluded Littell, as Barth himself admitted, he had failed to adequately recognize the persecution of Jews as a central issue within the Church Struggle.

However, even in the midst of this criticism, Littell had praise to offer Barth. While recognizing Barth’s failures, Littell included Barth among “men of…stature, men who have worked tirelessly in the Church Struggle” and called upon all Christians to follow Barth’s example by “look[ing] the churches’ failure in the eye and confess[ing] their own shortcomings.”144 Moreover, despite Barth’s own self-criticism, Littell did credit him with a significant measure of concern for “the Jewish question.” According to Littell, Barth,

was quite right in criticizing the Confessing Church in 1936 for speaking out always on her own behalf. The theologian who condemned the church’s seeking to gain her own soul also sensed and defined, though not as strongly as he later wished, the fatal error: ‘The question of the Jews is the questions of Christ.’ ‘Antisemitism is sin against the Holy Ghost.’ Right! For Christians, Antisemitism is not just a peculiarly nasty form of race prejudice; Antisemitism is blasphemy—a much more serious matter!’145

In Littell’s mind, in light of this repudiation of anti-Semitism on a Christian basis, Barth still possessed the moral rectitude to criticize others for their failure to recognize the danger of anti-Semitism for the Church.

143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., 65.
Littell never directly commented upon Barth’s position on missions to the Jews. But judging from his own opinion on the issue, it seems safe to conclude that Littell would have rejected Barth’s stance as a whole. Having concluded that the New Testament itself does not call for the Jews to convert to Christianity, Littell would have almost certainly rejected Barth’s insistence that the Jews would eventually come to accept Christ as the Messiah. He did recognize Barth as “the leading theologian of the ecumenical movement which came out of the Church Struggle,”¹⁴⁶ but it does not seem that he saw Barth’s ecumenical outlook as extending toward the Jews. However, Littell did see Barth as having rejected anti-Semitism and supersessionism. And in fact, Barth’s characterization of Nazism as “the new Islam” does seem to have influenced his own criticism of the superseding theory. Focusing on Islam as a superseding religion himself, Littell’s work does evidence interaction with Barth’s repudiation of supersessionism. In turn, Littell’s rejection of supersessionism led him to repudiate Christian missions to the Jews. Thus, Littell can be seen as having indirectly engaged with Barth on this specific issue. To be sure, Eckardt’s reaction to Barth in this regard is much more pronounced and easy to identify. However, like Eckardt, Littell seems to have recognized and appropriated some of the more radical elements of Barth’s theology (namely his rejection of supersessionism), but then transcended the limits of Barth’s analysis to create a sounder basis for improved Jewish-Christian relations.

Paul van Buren’s Stance on Missions to the Jews

Having been labeled as a “death of God” theologian with the publication of his The Secular Meaning of the Gospel in 1963, Paul van Buren later came to be recognized as a champion of improving Jewish-Christian relations after the Holocaust as well. Reflecting upon the traditional Christian attitude toward the Jews, especially the notion of supersessionism, van

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 46.
Buren seriously questioned whether or not “it [is] defensible morally to belong to a community which tells [its] story this way… in light of the Shoah.” 147 In his view, a major reevaluation of the relationship between Jews and Christians was necessary. He believed that some of his fellow Christians also recognized this need, but were ill-equipped to do so if they were armed only with early Christian doctrinal formulations. 148 Instead, van Buren called for an even more fundamental rethinking of the Christian faith based on two related components. First, Christians were to return to the Jewish roots of their faith. According to van Buren, Christians “stand in a unique historical relationship with Israel, claiming that they are heirs to the promises of Israel’s God, children of Abraham by adoption, and that their Lord is Israel’s messiah.” 149 But as evidenced by sects such as the German Christian movement, many Christians had either forgotten or rejected the Jewish core of their faith. Therefore, he believed, Christians must be reminded that Jesus and his disciples were Jews, and thus that Christianity had originally sprung from Jewish origins.

However, because some Christians might acknowledge their Jewish roots while still maintaining that the Jews had been rejected by God upon Christ’s death, van Buren believed that more was needed for a proper reevaluation of Christianity. Thus, contrary to the formulations of most orthodox theologians, van Buren stipulated that instead of being invited to partake in a new covenant between God and the Church, Gentile Christians had been “grafted in” to the original covenant between God and Israel. 150 Therefore, van Buren believed that recognizing the ongoing nature of this covenant was essential to Christian survival. Because they had been integrated into

---

147 Paul van Buren, *The Change in the Church's Understanding of the Jewish People* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Westminster College of Salt Lake City, 1990), 15.
148 See Ibid., 18: “Given where and what the Church was in the fourth and fifth centuries, Nicaea and Chalcedon represent perhaps the best choices among those seen as possible at the time. For a Church that means to affirm the Jewish people in the Sinai covenant with God however, they are simply inadequate.”
150 See, for example, Ibid. Christians are “those Gentiles who understand themselves to have become adopted children of Israel, grafted into that tree.”
God’s original covenant with the Jews, Christians’ salvation depended on its continuing validity. “If God is not faithful to His people,” posited van Buren, “if He does not stand by His covenant with Israel, why should we think that He will be any more faithful to His Gentile church?”151 In the end, van Buren argued, “there would be no church were not the covenant between Israel and God alive and effective in the world.”152 Beyond simply recognizing their Jewish origins, Christians thus had to acknowledge that God had never rejected the Jews but rather continued to view them as his elect people.

Of course, this reaffirmation of the Sinai covenant did not mean that Jesus had to become wholly irrelevant for Christians. On the contrary, Jesus represented the way in which Gentiles could join Jews in the worship of the God of Israel. “What we Gentiles who worship the God of the Jews must say,” asserted van Buren, “…is that Jesus is the way which God has used to bring us to Himself. So we have been speaking directly from our own historical experience when we have insisted that Jesus the man appeared on the human scene for the sake of what God was about to accomplish through him. And we are right to insist that the God so made known to us is the true God, the One God of Israel.”153 However, in contrast to traditional Christian doctrine, van Buren insisted that Jesus himself was not God, but rather a Jewish man whom God used to bring the Gentiles to himself.154 Similarly, Christians could no longer maintain that Jesus was the Jewish messiah. Simply put, van Buren argued that because “[Jesus] has not redeemed Israel…He cannot therefore be Israel’s Messiah.”155 In Jewish thought, the appearance of the messiah was to be immediately followed by the messianic age of peace. Accordingly, van Buren

---

contended that “since I don’t recall in the past nor see in the present that the nations are exactly lining up to beat their swords into plowshares or their spears into pruning hooks, I think I can safely and honestly conclude that the Messianic age has not arrived and so that the Messiah is yet to appear.” Moreover, asserted van Buren, “There is no scriptural support for the idea that the Messiah would die, on behalf of our sins or otherwise, and it takes some twisting to make any biblical text about being raised up fit the idea of resurrection.” He was also convinced that Jesus did not consider himself to be the Messiah. Thus while Jesus provided the means by which Gentiles could come to worship God, he holds no such significance for the Jews. Instead, what unites Jews and Christians “is not Jesus Christ…but the fact that they worship the one God, the Lord.”

But while united by the God they worship, Jews and Christians had been called to walk in separate, if parallel, ways. “Both the church and the Jewish people,” argued van Buren, “…have made parallel claims which both have mistaken as mutually exclusive.” Deeming this claim to exclusivity to have been the result of a misunderstanding on both sides, van Buren insisted that “when Jews engage in Torah and when Christians follow Christ, they are practicing, here in this incomplete creation, their baby steps for walking in the age of creation’s completion, in the age of the Messiah.” And because walking along their respective paths was a sign of their faithfulness to God, neither Jews nor Christians were to attempt to convert one another. This injunction was addressed to both religious groups, but was intended especially for Christians, in whose history missions had played a more prominent role than in that of the Jews. Van Buren

---

160 Ibid., 32.  
actually commended early Christian missionary endeavors, given that they were directed toward the Gentiles while leaving the Jewish community faith intact.\textsuperscript{162} In fact, Paul, the first and perhaps greatest Christian missionary, “was a Jew and knew full well that his calling and sending was directly connected with and confirmatory of God’s promises to his people.”\textsuperscript{163}

However, Christianity was soon skewed by pagan influences so that its Jewish roots were forgotten; eventually, this failure to acknowledge their Jewish origins led Christians to conduct missions toward Jews.\textsuperscript{164} Van Buren repeatedly emphasized the absurdity of such a development. In his own novel interpretation of Paul’s analogy of the olive tree in Romans 11, van Buren argued that,

If the Jews, in their rejection of what God had done in Jesus could be compared to branches being broken off the trunk, then, Paul said, it was to be expected that these natural branches would be grafted back onto their own olive tree. Onto their own olive tree, he said, as natural branches. He did not even hint at the idea that they would have to be converted into wild branches first.\textsuperscript{165}

“To whom or what should the Jew convert?” van Buren asked. “Did not he or she already know the one God, the God of Israel?”\textsuperscript{166} Further elaborating on this point, van Buren stipulated that,

It would be a total denial of our own Way if we even pretended to try to show it to the Jews, for they already have their ways of being in the Way and, indeed, our way of being in that Way presupposes the validity of the Way in which their ancestors were traveling before we came along and in which they continue to walk. All we can show them is how some Gentiles have come to a manner of walking in the Way in which they already walk. To ask them to come walk as we do would be a denial that, along with Israel’s way, there is also a way for the Gentiles. The only ‘call to faith’ that is proper for us to give to a Jew

\textsuperscript{162} Van Buren, \textit{A Christian Theology of the People of Israel}, 321. Incidentally, van Buren also seems to have questioned the validity of Christian missions in general. See \textit{Discerning the Way}, 49: “Our concern for the world is not that it become like us, which is what would happen if the rest of the Gentiles were to become Christians…The requirement to convert everyone to Christianity could make sense only on the assumption that the church was itself the Kingdom of God or God’s ultimate purpose for His creation…Our responsibility, in the hope of this coming completion and self-realization, is to do our assigned task of walking faithfully in the way.”

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 322.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 326.

\textsuperscript{165} Van Buren, \textit{The Burden of Freedom}, 80.

\textsuperscript{166} Van Buren, \textit{A Christian Theology of the People of Israel}, 327.
would be the call to a fully secularized Jew asking him or her to be faithful to the walking of his or her own people.\textsuperscript{167}

In the end, van Buren viewed Christian missions to the Jews as one of the surest signs that the Church had forgotten its Jewish roots, which loss ultimately resulted in the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{168} Therefore, missions to the Jews after the Holocaust were to be considered “in effect an attempt to rid the world of Jews,” thereby depriving the Church of its spiritual base.\textsuperscript{169} Nevertheless, the Church still had a mission toward the Jewish people. In effect, the Church should become the Anti-Defamation League for the Jewish people, protecting them from persecution and supporting the state of Israel. Thus, rather than seeking to convert the Jews, Christians should now “serve Israel as Israel.”

Of course, van Buren did not bar any Jew from converting to Christianity. For some Jews, asserted van Buren, “the church, Gentile though it may be, has offered them a more compelling way in which to walk in God’s way and so have become Christians.” Van Buren believed that Jewish converts “may remind the church that it would not be had there not been Jews who heard the gospel gladly.”\textsuperscript{170} But while acknowledging that Jews could become Christians, van Buren was careful to stipulate that the Church must not claim that that conversion was the only way that Jews could rightly serve God. “The special circumstances of particular individuals,” insisted van Buren, “must not blind us to the larger historical fact of God’s dealing with His creation up to this moment: He has provided two ways for walking in His Way, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles.”\textsuperscript{171} Rather, Jews and Christians were to share with each other their respective ways of walking with God so that they might coexist in “cooperative competition

\textsuperscript{167} Van Buren, \textit{The Burden of Freedom}, 53.
\textsuperscript{168} Van Buren, \textit{A Christian Theology of the People of Israel}, 326.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 327.
\textsuperscript{170} Van Buren, \textit{The Burden of Freedom}, 64.
\textsuperscript{171} Van Buren, \textit{Discerning the Way}, 64.
in the more faithful service of God’s purpose for His whole creation.”172 Van Buren did hope for a final state of unity between Jews and Christians, but not in the traditional supersessionist sense. If Jews and Christians were to achieve unity, it would not be achieved “by Jews giving up their way of being in the Way to join the Christians in theirs, nor the opposite.” Instead, “the Jewish people and the church” might eventually “see indeed that both were walking in the same direction [so] that the conversation of each should be understandable and seem right to the other.”173

Van Buren’s Evaluation of Barth’s Stance on Missions to the Jews

Of all the theologians examined in this study, van Buren probably had the closest personal relationship with Karl Barth. Van Buren had been Barth’s student at the University of Basel, receiving his PhD in 1957. However, student and professor had a falling out after the publication of van Buren’s *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* in 1963. Barth was disturbed by the implications of van Buren’s work, especially his former student’s association with the “death of God” movement. In time, van Buren distanced himself from some of the more radical positions he espoused in *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*.174 Yet given the tense progression of his relationship with Barth, it is not surprising that van Buren disagreed with his former professor on several key issues. Most notably, van Buren repeatedly criticized what he called Barth’s “biblical theology,” or his strict adherence to the Christian scriptures as the basis of theology. In van Buren’s formulation of Barth’s theology, the Bible was God’s self-revelation

---

172 Ibid. Despite his opposition to Jewish missions, van Buren has been criticized for the fact that his theology still leaves open the possibility of such missions for more missionary-minded Christians. See Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology*, 243: “it is important to observe that van Buren’s premises, as useful as they are for bringing the church back into contact with Israel, do not necessarily lead all Christians to the conclusions which he has reached. Many evangelical Christians, for instance, are discovering the Jewishness of Jesus, etc. All the while, however, they retain their conviction that Jewish evangelism is acceptable and necessary.”

173 Ibid., 66.

and the source of the Church’s message for the world.\textsuperscript{175} But what this conception of theology failed to account for, asserted van Buren, was “the fact that language functions in a historical context, that a man in the twentieth century America may repeat the words of a man in first century Greece and yet use them in a different way for a different purpose.”\textsuperscript{176} Therefore, because it was prone to a literal interpretation of the Bible, van Buren believed that Barth’s theology “has been a damper which has hindered us from moving with the times and finding new ways in which to conceive the task of theology.”\textsuperscript{177} For van Buren, the purpose of theology was not to duplicate the thoughts of early church fathers, but to determine “how it could have any place in the present and future, how it might be developed, interpreted or adapted to the present in such a way that religious thought might in some manner serve a constructive role in the further shaping of life.”\textsuperscript{178} In van Buren’s view, then, Barth’s theology lacked the proper basis to make Christian theology relevant in contemporary society.

But van Buren did not dismiss Barth entirely. While he questioned Barth’s strict adherence to the Bible as the basis of theology, van Buren did agree with his former professor “that theology is done by the church, takes place within the church, and is for the church.”\textsuperscript{179} Moreover, it seems that the issue on which van Buren was most critical of Barth was also the element of his theology which he appreciated the most. Addressing those who questioned the Church’s continued reliance on Scripture, van Buren rhetorically asked,

Why is it just this book and not some other that we carry? The alternatives are endless. And why do we still carry it? Karl Barth’s answer to this question should not be dismissed: It is precisely from the reading of this book that those before us and we too have heard the voice of the One God as we Gentiles are able to apprehend Him, as the

\textsuperscript{175} VanBuren, \textit{A Christian Theology of the People of Israel}, 4.
\textsuperscript{177} Paul van Buren, \textit{Theological Explorations} (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 23.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{179} Van Buren, \textit{The Secular Meaning of the Gospel}, 192.
One God of Israel who, as His own self-expressing act, ever true to Himself, has reached out and drawn us to Himself, thru His Son the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. Where else could we even begin to expect to hear the voice of that God?\(^{180}\)

Of course, as seen earlier, van Buren believed that there was more to theology than replicating the biblical witness. Nevertheless, it is clear that van Buren respected Barth’s preservation of the place of Scripture in Christian thinking, even if he could not mirror the extent of Barth’s adherence to the Bible.

Van Buren was also ambivalent about Barth’s theology of Israel in particular. In many ways, van Buren recognized “Barth’s theology as an important source for his theology of Israel.”\(^{181}\) Insisting that the Old Testament is vital to the Christian faith, van Buren credited Barth for similarly rejecting the Marcionite heresy.\(^{182}\) Moreover, like Barth, van Buren based his own theology of Israel on the notion that Jesus was a Jew and Israel remains the elect people of God upon whom the Church is dependent.\(^{183}\) However, van Buren was also quite critical of Barth’s theology of Israel on some points. While he acknowledged that Barth did not strictly adhere to the traditional supersessionist model, van Buren nevertheless characterized Barth’s theology of Israel as a mere variation on that model in that it still implied that the Christ represents the fulfillment (and thus the subordination) of the “Old Testament” covenant. What Barth failed to realize, argued van Buren, was “the extent to which the Apostolic Writings recollect what was not expected by the authors of the Scriptures.”\(^{184}\) As mentioned earlier, van Buren believed that one could not convincingly argue that Jesus was the Messiah described by the Old Testament prophets. Furthermore, van Buren faulted Barth for his inability to take into account “the reality of postbiblical Israel, and especially Israel today in its land and in the

\(^{180}\) Paul van Buren, *Discerning the Way*, 129.
\(^{183}\) Haynes, *Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology*, 243, 46, 47.
Diaspora.” Consequently, van Buren believed that formulating a proper theology of Israel required “more departures from Barth’s thought than a revision of his understanding.”

However, apart from these criticisms, van Buren could not completely disregard his mentor. Despite Barth’s shortcomings, van Buren believed,

> We shall do well to keep on listening to and arguing with Karl Barth. He still has questions to put to us that the church would do well to answer… We shall let this later history have a word in our reflection on the way in which the apostolic authors interpreted the Scriptures, and we shall listen to Israel’s reading of those Scriptures alongside that of the church, because we see so clearly what Barth saw but dimly: living Israel as a reality which witnesses to God and the divine purpose for creation. We can only be glad in departing from him that we have had Barth in our midst and have him still in his books. He reminds us of the risks we are running in widening the norm of criterion for the self-critical task of God’s Gentile church.

Explaining the exact nature of van Buren’s ambivalence in appropriating Barth’s theology of Israel, Haynes suggests that van Buren “build[s] on the foundations laid by Barth when these foundations are solid, and…look[s] elsewhere when it is apparent the edifice of Barth’s theology has been erected on the sands of Christian anti-Judaism.” Thus, for example, while Barth regarded the Jews’ continued adherence to the law as evidence of “the blindness of Israel,” van Buren insisted that “the Jewish ‘No’ to Christianity…is not open to reconciliation, since it is based on Torah-faithfulness.” Similarly, van Buren “reverses Barth’s integration model paradigm (so that instead of Israel being integrated into the church, the church is included in Israel).” Thus, van Buren seems to appropriate Barth’s theology of Israel primarily by standing taking his former professor’s arguments and standing them on their heads.

---

185 Ibid., 8.
186 Ibid.
187 Ibid., 8-9.
188 Haynes, Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology, 253.
189 Ibid., 249.
190 Ibid., 246.
191 One could argue that van Buren directly reflected some of the more negative aspects of his professor’s theology of Israel, however. For instance, Eckardt criticized van Buren for stripping Jews of their humanity by insisting that they are free only to be God’s people, nothing else. See Eckardt, Long Night’s Journey into Day, 145.
It can be argued that van Buren’s evaluation of Barth’s stance on missions to the Jews is an exception to this general rule. Haynes, for one, seems to suggest that van Buren’s appropriation of Barth in this regard may be more reflective and appreciative rather than critical in nature. Referring to his stance on Jewish evangelism, Haynes argues that “van Buren strikes a Barthian chord in his contention that the Christian mission to the Jews is a ‘strange modern idea,’ an incoherent notion, and a ‘striking sign that…the church had forgotten where it came from.’”\(^{192}\) Haynes again claims an affinity between Barth and van Buren’s views by highlighting a passage from the latter’s *A Christian Theology of the People of Israel*:

> It would be a total denial of our own Way if we even pretended to try to show it to the Jews, for they already have their way of being in the Way…The only ‘call to faith’ that is proper for us to give to a Jew would be the call to a fully secularized Jew asking him or her to be faithful to the walking of his or her own people.\(^{193}\)

In this passage, Haynes asserts, “the text brings to mind Barth’s treatment of the issue in *CD IV.3.2.*”\(^{194}\) But is this a sign that van Buren fully approved of Barth’s position on missions to the Jews? Making such an assessment is difficult given the fact that van Buren never wrote a definite, systematic evaluation of Barth’s theology of Israel, much less his stance on Jewish missions. However, some tentative conclusions can be made on this subject. For example, van Buren mentioned Barth in the conclusion to *A Christian Theology of the People of Israel*, just after his prolonged discussion of Jewish missions:

> It is fitting, having begun this volume with a criticism of Karl Barth’s definition of theology, that we come at the end to recall some words of his which still need to be heard, addressed in 1966 to the members of the Vatican’s Secretariat for Christian Unity: ‘There exist today many good relations between the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant Churches, between the Secretariat for Christian Unity and the WCC; the number of ecumenical study groups and working groups is growing rapidly. The ecumenical movement is clearly driven by the Spirit of the Lord. But we should not

---


\(^{193}\) Ibid., 247.

\(^{194}\) Ibid.
forget that there is finally only one genuinely ecumenical question: our relations with the Jewish people.\footnote{195}{Van Buren, \textit{A Christian Theology of the People of Israel}, 351.}

Based on this passage, it seems as though van Buren viewed Barth’s position as a progressive repudiation of missions. However, as Haynes notes, despite his favorable comments concerning Barth’s view on this subject, van Buren could not accept “Barth’s alternative to Jewish mission, the church’s attempt to make the synagogue jealous.”\footnote{196}{Haynes, \textit{Prospects for Post-Holocaust Theology}, 267.} In the end, van Buren could appreciate certain elements of Barth’s analysis, but ultimately, he could not view Barth’s theology as a positive basis for speaking about the Jews or developing a proper post-Holocaust relationship (i.e. one free of missions) with them.
CONCLUSION

In the end, as was the case with Eckardt, Barth can be seen to have had a significant impact on van Buren’s arguments against missions to the Jews. To a lesser extent, Barth influenced Littell’s foundation for rejecting such missions. Like Eckardt, both Littell and van Buren came from the later generation of American theologians who had been exposed to Barth’s work, thus accounting for their engagement with him (albeit in varying degrees) on this issue. Thus, this study confirms existing paradigms about the reception of Barth in America. Yet it also enriches the understanding of Barth’s theology of Israel (specifically his position on missions to the Jews) in the United States. While Niebuhr’s writings are virtually devoid of any engagement with Barth’s position on this issue, Eckardt repeatedly referenced Barth in his arguments against missions to the Jews. Though he did not agree with Barth’s stated position, Barth’s influence is indirectly evident in Eckardt’s own stance on these missions. The same can be said of both van Buren and, to a lesser extent, Littell. Thus, the reception of Barth’s theology of Israel in America is much more complex than it at first may seem. At least among later generations of American theologians, Barth’s theology played a role in the arguments of those who were united in their exceptional opposition to missions to the Jews. Therefore, as seen in his impact on Eckardt, Littell, and van Buren’s writings, Barth can be seen to have had an influence on some of the earliest and most innovative American reevaluations of Christian missions to the Jews. Recognizing Barth’s influence in this regard provides a fuller, more nuanced understanding of his place as a pivotal figure in the transatlantic discourse about the fate of missions to the Jews.

Apart from the general conclusion that Barth influenced these theologians, the specific manner in which he did so can be seen as instructive for those seeking to improve Jewish-

---

1 See the arguments of Sykes and Roberts cited earlier in this chapter.
Christian relations and foster pluralism in general. Eckardt, Littell, and van Buren reacted to Barth in a similar way; they appropriated the most radical elements of his theology while discarding more traditionalist characteristics in order to formulate a Christian mindset toward the Jews which was free of missionary impulses. Contemporary theologians and scholars interested in Barth in relation to Jewish-Christian dialogue would do well to adopt such an approach when reading Barth’s texts today. But these same theologians and scholars might do well to follow a similar course when reading Eckardt, Littell, and van Buren. In their attempts to mend the broken relationship between Jews and Christians, each theologian made questionable assessments of other religions, as in Littell’s condemnation of Islam. Thus, as each of these men did with Barth, today’s pluralistic pioneers might find it useful to isolate those positive aspects of Eckardt, Littell, and van Buren’s works while leaving behind those elements which may hinder religious toleration in contemporary society.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


———. “Jews after the War.” *Nation*, February 28, 1942.


———. *The Change in the Church's Understanding of the Jewish People*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Westminster College of Salt Lake City, 1990.


Secondary Sources


Sonderegger, Katherine. *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew: Karl Barth’s ‘Doctrine of Israel.’* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1992.


