

In Light of the Holocaust:
Evangelicals, Jews and the Historical Record

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In the very first issue of the *Journal of Holocaust and Genocide Studies* in 1986, the historical record of evangelical interactions with the European Jewry before the Holocaust was held up for criticism. John Conway, an historian who has written widely on the church under Hitler, castigated the record of nineteenth century British evangelicals whom he argued were concerned with the evangelization of the Jews, but unconcerned about their civil rights or their protection from discrimination. He maintained the view that such evangelistic missions should be subsumed "under the heading of nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon cultural imperialism" and singled out the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (LSJ) for abstaining "from any direct political involvement on behalf of its intended beneficiaries, in this case to encourage the achievement of political or civil rights for the Jews, or to censure publicly the policies of those Christian nations where Jews were still being persecuted or oppressed."¹ (The LSJ was by far the largest society focused on the evangelism of Jews in the nineteenth century.) Further, he accused the evangelical missionaries to the Jews (many of whom were themselves Jewish) as having done "little or nothing to combat the poison of anti-Judaism, even when they professed their concern for the individual Jew. Their firm conviction that the Church had superseded the Jews as the chosen people of God left no room for a pluralistic view of salvation, or a recognition of Judaism's continuing election." Because of this, these evangelicals "never developed any arsenal of argumentation against the more virulent forms of Jew-hatred which became current in the later nineteenth century, and which led to the still more terrible persecutions and genocide of the Holocaust in our own time." Further the same writer suggests that this sort of Christian "anti-Judaism" is "a precursor to the pseudo-scientific racism based on anthropological or social premises which flourished so widely at the beginning of this century.... the continuity and overlapping [of the two] cannot be denied."²

These broad and sweeping accusations, coming from the pen of a leading Gentile Christian historian are important and a considered response is in order. If my long-time friend Professor Conway is correct, then the post-Holocaust witness of evangelicals is seriously compromised. If evangelicals were either hostile to Jews or stood by and said nothing

when they were persecuted, how can Jews today take an evangelical Christian profession of friendship seriously? If, however, Professor Conway's views are open to dispute, then there may be a significant basis for Jewish-Christian dialogue about the historical record. It is the contention of this paper that Dr. Conway's views are open to challenge and they are quite evidently so when one looks at the record of British evangelicals in the nineteenth century. It is my argument that evangelicals were the most supportive group in British society to argue for the protection of Jews against discrimination – both in Britain and abroad -- and it was evangelicals who were at the forefront of efforts to protect and defend Jews and were acknowledged as such by the Jewish community in England in the nineteenth century.

This is a complex and largely unexplored topic but in the scope of this paper I will attempt to outline in broad brush strokes some themes that I have developed elsewhere.³ Christian concern with the evangelization of the Jews can be traced to the writings of Philip Jacob Spener, the person responsible for the emergence of a movement of renewal in the Lutheran state churches of the German lands. In his work *Pia Desideria* (1675) Spener insisted that the fortunes of the Christian church rose and fell on its fulfilling its responsibility of taking seriously the Pauline injunction that the Christian Gospel should be preached “to the Jew first.” Spener's hopes a comprehensive and systematic plan for the evangelization of Jews was taken up by August Hermann Francke, his successor as leader of the movement and all of the accoutrements of Jewish evangelism were developed and refined at Halle, the organizational centre of the movement: printing presses to produce evangelistic literature for Jews, an institute for the study of Judaism, a home for converts, etc.

In the 18th century British evangelicals had virtually no concern with the matter of Jewish evangelism, but in the period between 1790 and the 1840s, British evangelicals became preoccupied with Jewish evangelism. The influence in these matters clearly came from German Pietists. The founder of the LSJ in 1809 was a German Jewish convert, Joseph Frey, who initially had gone to London to prepare to serve as a missionary in South Africa, but soon discovered that there were a number of German-speaking Jews in London whom he could evangelize. Changes in British social and political life did much to bring about a new interest in Jewish evangelism, and the claims of evangelicals to be true “apostolic” Christians were validated by the conversion of high-profile Jews to evangelical forms of Christianity. Shifts in Christian eschatology also played a role, as did the strong anti-Catholicism that characterized many British evangelicals. By the 1830s the LSJ was emerging as one of the best funded evangelistic societies in the United Kingdom attracting about one-third of the missionary giving of Anglican evangelicals. In other words, by mid-century, evangelicals in the state church

were giving about one-third of their missionary giving to the conversion of the Jews, about two-thirds to the conversion of the rest of humanity.

A Teaching of Esteem

This evangelistic concern was accompanied by a vigorous effort by British evangelicals to promote what I have characterized as a “Teaching of Esteem” toward the Jews in this period. Historically the medieval Catholic attitude toward the Jews has been called a ‘Teaching of Contempt’ and held that the Jews collectively were to be regarded as “Christ killers” and held responsible for the death of Christ. This view does not fit the British Evangelicals; an attitude of “contempt” was diametrically opposite to what was being promoted at a popular level by many Protestants, beginning with the English Puritans of the seventeenth century, the German-speaking Lutheran Pietists in the eighteenth century and then, beginning in the early nineteenth century among Protestants in Britain (and subsequently in America) who were located within the evangelical tradition. In fact, these evangelical Protestants developed and aggressively promoted what can be characterized as a new ‘Teaching of Esteem’ toward the Jews. In countless sermons, tracts and popular publications the Jews were being re-constructed not as ‘Christ killers’ but as those who are (in the words of the King James Version of Romans 11:28) “beloved for the fathers’ sakes.” Christian esteem for the Jews was to replace the older attitude of contempt which these Protestants came to associate with Roman Catholicism. God’s “Chosen People” now became synonymous with “The Jews” for countless Protestants in the globally-expanding evangelical world. The countering of any mistreatment of Jews became a major concern of these people although this has been studiously ignored by much of the scholarship on these matters.

The protection of international Jewry and advocacy on their behalf was characteristic of the most prominent evangelical lay person in Victorian Britain: Anthony Ashley Cooper, the seventh earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury is best remembered as Victorian England’s leading social reformer but he was also a strong promoter of the LSJ, and for many years its most prominent patron and at the same time a tireless advocate of the responsibility of Britain to protect the Jews. These facts, however, seem to have been entirely overlooked or ignored by historians, who, in the light of the Holocaust, have argued that the very notion of Christian evangelization of Jews is rooted in antisemitism. Three examples will have to suffice to demonstrate this point.

1. Evangelical concern for the Jews of Palestine

This concern for the protection of the Jews can be seen in the work of the LSJ in Palestine. In the early 1820s some of its earliest missionaries made their way to Jerusalem where they reported that the local Jews were suffering under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. William Lewis, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, was the representative of the LSJ; in December 1823 he arrived in Jerusalem with clear orders to establish a permanent mission station in the city. For a time he was the sole Protestant missionary but because he was unable to speak Hebrew and was not himself a Jewish “apostate” whom the Jerusalem rabbis might hope to win back to Judaism, William Lewis was unable to engage the Jewish community as had his predecessor, the itinerant Jewish-Christian missionary, “Rabbi” Joseph Wolff. Lewis was looked to, however, for help by the Jews in dealing with the insufferable Ottoman officials. William Lewis soon took on an active political role on their behalf, serving as an informal British consul. He intervened with the Ottoman governor to protest unlawful confiscation of Jewish property and the frequent maltreatment and beatings of Jews. When Rabbi Menahem Mendel’s home was attacked by a group of Ottoman soldiers, the rabbi was charged with the offense of leaving a door open which faced the street. For this he was imprisoned and tortured and only released on payment of a huge fine. William Lewis appealed the case to the consuls of Aleppo and Acre and they secured from the pasha an order that the molesting and extortion of European Jews should cease.⁴ It was therefore, not only in Europe that evangelicals proved to be the defenders of Jewish civil rights; Lewis was a pioneer seeking the protection of Palestinian Jews and the LSJ continued to play this role throughout the century.

William Lewis’s significance does not only lie in the fact that he acted as the protector of Jerusalem’s Jews. In the long-run, his publicizing of their treatment at the hands of the Muslim population and of the Ottoman authorities did much to promote interest in the plight of Jerusalem’s Jews and the cause of the LSJ. The mistreatment of Jews in Palestine was a recurring theme in the reports of the LSJ in the 1820s and William Lewis provided his British religious public with numerous examples of the daily harassment, beatings and extortions that Palestinian Jews endured. Lewis reported on the “daily insults” they received, and the tyranny of their Ottoman oppressors. Jews, he noted, were often taken hostage, imprisoned and even tortured, almost always in order to extract money from them. Following the Greek uprising against the Ottomans in 1821, for a time similar treatment had been meted out to Greek Christians but the Ottoman rulers in

Constantinople brought the reign of terror under control, fearing a European response to the indiscriminate slaughter of Christians. The Jews of Palestine could hope for no similar curbing of mistreatment without their story being told in Europe by people like William Lewis and without a major European power taking up their cause with the Porte. At that time there was no Jewish periodical being published in England; the efforts of the LSJ were therefore all the more important.

While Lewis did what he could, he quickly became aware that the Jews would benefit enormously if a resident foreign consul undertook their protection. He thus proposed the establishment of a British consul as a means of protecting Jews in the city who were not citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Writing for the LSJ's *Jewish Expositor* in 1824, Lewis reported that these Jews were in a desperate condition that could only be remedied by a resident consul: "I am persuaded that an European flag hoisted in Jerusalem (as in other places of the Turkish empire, for the protection of foreigners), will ever have the effect of securing travellers and strangers from their wanton insults, exactions, and barbarities. Alluding to Jewish sufferings and miseries, one of the Rabbis of Jerusalem exclaimed with much feeling, 'Oh, when will the king of England come and deliver us?'"⁵ His appeal for a British consular presence was thus published by the LSJ as early as 1824 and repeated again in 1825.⁶ William Lewis was the earliest and most effective advocate of a British consular presence in Jerusalem; the missionaries felt that this was an important precondition for any long-term mission station in Jerusalem. In May 1825 Dr. George Dalton reported to the LSJ on his initial observations regarding the Jerusalem mission, also highlighting the need for a British consul in Jerusalem.⁷

The first British consul was appointed to Jerusalem in 1838, due in part to pressure from the LSJ. Lord Palmerston clearly had his own reasons for the appointment – the improvement of British trade in the area, and building up British presence in an area where Russian influence was growing, but the imploring of his second wife's son-in-law, Lord Shaftesbury, appears to have been influential. The new consul, William Young, was a member of the board of the LSJ in London; early in his time in office the British government made it clear that it regarded the protection of the civil rights of Ottoman Jews to be among its top priorities. The second consul who was appointed in 1845 was a prominent evangelical who worked tirelessly on behalf of the Jewish community in Palestine over a number of years.

2. The Damascus 'Blood Libel' of 1840

A second instance of evangelical influence in protecting the Jews came in the famous “Blood Libel” case of 1840. In February 1840 some Jewish residents of Damascus were accused of the “ritual murder” of Father Thomas, a Capuchin monk and his Arab Christian servant and of having used the friar’s blood to make *Matzot*, unleavened bread for Passover. The absurd charges were given credence by the French consul, who under Ottoman law was the protector of all Roman Catholic clergy. The consul, fully supported in his actions by the French government, was personally responsible for the ensuing trial which found several Jews guilty of the friar’s murder and pronounced that the blood of Christians was essential in the preparing of *matzot* for the Jewish Passover.⁸ The incident needs to be set in the context of intense intercommunal strife between the Ottoman Christian and Jewish communities that for generations had been rivals for positions in commerce and government service but the ‘blood libel’ was an old weapon and its use constituted a revival of a centuries-old calumny against the Jewish community. The first “ritual murder” charge made against Jews occurred in England in 1144 when it was rumoured that a young apprentice had been crucified by Jews in mockery of Christ’s crucifixion. Similar charges caused untold misery for European Jews throughout the Middle Ages.⁹ The revival of the charge in 1840 resulted in outrages against Syrian Jews and became known as the “Damascus Affair” as bitter hatred of Jews spilled over into riots, sacking, imprisonment and torture. A few Jews died in prison, others were killed during the sacking of Damascus’ Jewish quarter. Rumours of a similar case on the island of Rhodes caused some to fear a Jewish bloodbath throughout the Near East.

As reports of the Damascus Affair began to circulate in the Western press in the spring of 1840, the plight of Jews in the Ottoman Empire came to occupy the attention of the British public. *The Times* of London reported extensively on the events in Damascus, attacking the allegations of ritual murder made against the Jewish community there. Religious periodicals picked up the issue, particularly the evangelical periodicals, *The Christian Observer*, *The Protestant Magazine*, the mouthpiece of the Protestant Association and *The Christian Lady’s Magazine*. Alexander McCaul of the LSJ took up his pen to defend the Jews of Damascus in his *Reasons for Believing that the Charge lately Revived against the Jewish People is a baseless Falsehood* (London, 1840). Many leading figures in London society -- both Christian and Jewish -- gathered in a large public meeting at the Mansion House in London on 3 July 1840 to protest against the incident.¹⁰ Notable among the Jewish community was Sir Moses Montefiore, the prominent Jewish philanthropist, who was soon to travel to Alexandria and Constantinople to plead for redress. Montefiore, who had close business ties with leading

evangelicals, such as Samuel Gurney and Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, also had since the early 1830s shared a common interest in the antislavery campaign in which these evangelicals had been prominent.¹¹ Cooperating with evangelicals in combating anti-Jewish outbursts came naturally to these co-conspirators in human rights work.

The historians William and Hilary Rubenstein in their recent work *Philosemitism: Admiration and Support in the English-Speaking World for Jews, 1840-1939* have done an excellent job of chronicling the history of public demonstrations of support by Gentiles for Jews in this period, but it is important to appreciate the evangelical Protestant impulse behind so much of what they identify. In the wave of protest concerning the Damascus affair the LSJ played a central role. Nadia Valman has observed that "... the demand for justice [in the Damascus Affair] was adopted with particular fervour by the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews. In campaigning for support for the cause of their co-religionists, Jews were faced with the paradox that their most vocal advocates were Evangelical missionaries."¹² The Society had been urged to become involved by Jews in Jerusalem who when the first reports of the incident appeared, approached G. W. Pieritz, a recently-arrived LSJ missionary from England. Pieritz -- yet another Jewish convert to Christianity --recalled that "a regular deputation of Jews waited on me one day, requesting me to go, together with one of their number, to Damascus, and give my evidence, that the Jewish religion does not require the use of human blood."¹³ Interest in the events in Damascus was heightened by their timing: many of Jerusalem's Perushim linked them in their apocalyptic understanding to the passage in the mystical book of Zohar, discussed above, as a portent that indeed in the year 5600 (September 1839-September 1840) the time of Israel's redemption was at hand: "The Jewish community of Jerusalem showed a great 'fervor' of interest in the blood libel and some Jews believed that such tragic news was God's final test for his Chosen People before the coming of the Messiah. For these Jews, adamantly convinced of the imminent arrival of the Messiah in the Jewish year 5600 . . . the slander about a ritual murder signalled that Redemption must be near."¹⁴

John Nicolayson, the head of the LSJ's Jerusalem mission, was invited by Jerusalem's Jewish leaders to a meeting to discuss together ways of dealing with the situation. Nicolayson acted immediately and dispatched Pieritz to Damascus with letters to Muslim authorities there;¹⁵ Pieritz arrived there on 30 March 1840, about eight weeks after the friar and his servant went missing.¹⁶ Pieritz undertook a full and painstaking examination of all the evidence, noting that Monsieur Beaudin, the French consular agent played a key role in the arrest of many Jews and threatened four Jewish suspects "with

immediate death if they did not confess.” Pieritz detailed the nine forms of torture used against the Jewish victims and asserted that “About seventy Jews (besides the sixty-three children), had been arrested, and most of them tortured.” At the request of Damascus’ Jews (who were prohibited from leaving the city), Pieritz proceeded from Damascus via Beirut to Alexandria in order to “to present their case to the Viceroy of Egypt [Muhammad Ali], and be the bearer of a petition from them, and also to move the [British] Consul-General at Alexandria to espouse their cause.” Once in Egypt he found “the most favourable reception” from the British, Austrian, Prussian and Russian representatives. Pieritz reported that the French Consul-General declined to meet with him “as he said my object tacitly charged his Consul at Damascus with cruelty, &c.”¹⁷

Through the efforts of Colonel Hodges, the British consul, Pieritz obtained an audience with Muhammad Ali himself on the 16th of May and presented the petition from Damascus’ Jews. Muhammad Ali undertook to re-open the investigation into the events, ordered his Pasha of Damascus “to desist from tortures, and suspend all harsh proceedings for the present.”¹⁸ From Alexandria, Pieritz went on to England where he published his full account of the incident under the title *The Persecution of the Jews at Damascus*. His reports were printed in *The Times* of London and subsequently republished both by the LSJ and by Sir David Salomons, the Jewish financier and politician. Jonathan Frankel, the historian of the Damascus Affair has termed Pieritz’s report “a remarkable document ... [which] would prove a most effective weapon in the battles of words raging in Europe over the ritual-murder issue. It effectively combined a sober, even dry, assessment of the events with flashes of bitter anger and contempt. Its accuracy can be confirmed today by comparison with the diplomatic reports to which Pieritz did not have access.”¹⁹ While Pieritz was making representations to Muhammad Ali in Alexandria, the LSJ sent a delegation to represent their concerns to Palmerston, Shaftesbury being amongst the notables. In these ways the LSJ played a key role in rousing British support for the Jews in Damascus. Moses Solomon of Liverpool had earlier been sharply critical of efforts to induce Jews “to apostacize” through the efforts of the LSJ, but in 1845 acknowledged the following: “When the awful Damascus affair took place three years since, I must acknowledge that these mistaken and unfortunate apostates [the LSJ workers] thundered forth a declaration against the base persecution; and, prompted by a Jewish feeling – not extinct through baptism – with might and zeal, tore to pieces every vestige of the accusation against their former brethren. See the “Jewish Expositor” of that period.”²⁰

These events did much to stimulate the growth amongst Jews in different parts of Europe of an awareness of the

plight of their fellow co-religionists in the Middle East and the desire to establish a refuge for persecuted Jews. The situation also alerted British Protestants to the situation of Jews in the Ottoman Empire, stimulated support for British intervention on their behalf and promoted Gentile (and especially evangelical) interest in the Jewish cause. This can be clearly seen in the remarks of Edward Bickersteth in 1841 in regard to these events: “. . . [It is] only within the last two or three years that more marked and special attention has been given to them. The distressing tortures and persecutions of the Jews at Damascus and at Rhodes, have wonderfully spread and increased an interest in their behalf, and real sympathy in their sufferings. It has not only called forth the love of Christians, but also the benevolent interference of Christian governments in their behalf. And this has been so decided as may in all human probability help to prepare the way for their quiet, gradual, and safe return to their own country, and their protracted residence there.”²¹

The Evangelical Watch On Behalf of the Jews

This concern to combat any mistreatment of Jews is thus clearly seen among the early supporters of the LSJ. In fact the society was so well-known for this agenda that one of its early detractors quipped that it should be renamed "The Society for Promoting Judaism among Christians."²² Lewis Way, the key figure in the reorganization of the LSJ in 1815 served as a roving ambassador for the society throughout Europe and the Near East, helping to establish the LSJ in Holland, Prussia, Poland, the Crimea, France, Italy and Syria. He even met Czar Alexander I of Russia and urged on him the protection of Jews. Further, he lobbied the European heads of state at the Congress of Aix-La-Chapelle in 1818, coming away with a protocol promising consideration of their plight.²³

Dr. Louis Gaussen, a Swiss Protestant minister well-known to British evangelicals through his writing and speaking tours in Britain, gave a lecture in Geneva in 1843 in which he dealt with the issue of Jewish civil rights and applauded the impact of the LSJ in contributing to a favourable climate of opinion among legislators. He recalled that “Not long since, in Germany, there were toll-bars on the bridges for animals and Jews.” However, civil rights had been conferred on Jews by the Duke of Baden in 1809, the Prussian King in 1812, the King of Bavaria in 1813 and the King of Wurttemberg in 1829 “notwithstanding great resistance from their people.” More freedom was yet to be hoped for.²⁴

Mel Scult in his book *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties* acknowledges that in the early years of the LSJ there were concrete expressions of concern for the political and civil rights of Jews, but maintains that “as the years passed

there were fewer and fewer” such expressions.²⁵ Scult is mistaken in his assessment. Lobbying of the British government on behalf of the Jews became a major concern of Shaftesbury in the 1830s and 1840s, as it was of the LSJ and other similar Christian groups. The first task was to create an awareness of instances of the mistreatment of Jews. The LSJ and similar evangelical groups concerned with Jewish evangelism regularly drew the attention of the readers of their publications to cases of mistreatment of Jews with articles entitled "Intolerance in Austria"²⁶ and "Outrage in Bucharest"²⁷ or "Current Events Affecting the Jewish People"²⁸ even before there was a Jewish periodical press in England to bring such mistreatment to public attention. And these are not isolated examples; the literature of these societies and popular publications such as *The Christian Lady's Magazine* abound with such intelligence, the history of which deserves its own in-depth study. Specific instances of evangelicals acting to protect Jews and promoting international efforts to defend their rights are easily cited.

Sir Moses Montefiore was aware that evangelicals such as Charlotte Elizabeth, Norman MacLeod and Sir Culling Eardley, MP (with whom he worked closely)²⁹ were important in creating a climate of opinion in Britain sympathetic to protests concerning violations of Jewish civil rights. An example of this can be seen in the response to the Edgardo Mortara case in 1858. Mortara was a boy of six years old who was taken by Roman Catholics from his Jewish parents' home in Bologna on the pretext of having been secretly baptized. English evangelicals were at the forefront of the public protests of these violations of Jewish civil liberties and the English Jewish Board of Deputies publicly thanked the Evangelical Alliance and other Protestant societies for their support in this case.³⁰ Sir Moses Montefiore was also alert to the persecutions of Christians; in 1860 during the Syrian civil war, he wrote to *The Times* to protest the massacre of Christians in Syria, called for the establishing of a society to respond to their distress and gave £200 to the cause.³¹

3. Russian Pogroms

The third major event that roused British evangelicals on behalf of the Jews was the outbreak of pogroms in Russia in the 1880s. A major watershed was reached in Jewish history as in 1881-1882 the magnitude of Russian Jewry's problem became evident to all. The assassination in 1881 of Czar Alexander II brought to an end a period of relative peace and prosperity for Russian Jews. Alexander, who came to the throne in 1855 in the midst of the Crimean War, had begun the emancipation of the serfs and overseen significant steps forward in education and literacy. For the Jews his

reign had inaugurated a period of rising expectations and the relaxation of many of the oppressive measures associated with Nicholas I's administration.³² The rise of Slavophile nationalism in the 1870s was an ominous sign for Russian Jews, and following Alexander II's death in 1881, the situation deteriorated rapidly. In the context of social unrest, the Jews were an easy target for the regime especially as one of the seven conspirators involved in Alexander's assassination was a young Jewish woman. A wave of pogroms spread throughout southwestern Russia, some 200 occurring in 1881 alone. In Warsaw and in the large cities of the Ukraine, as well as in small towns of Belorussia, mobs attacked Jews, looted their stores and homes, smashed furniture and generally terrorized the Jewish community, often with the police looking on passively. Several hundred people lost their lives and much damage was done to property, but the psychological impact on Russian Jewry was more significant than the physical. By early 1882 'temporary laws' were enacted which legitimized the severe persecution that followed.

These events began a massive migration of (mostly working-class) Jews out of Russia. At the beginning of the troubles, the Russian Empire contained the largest Jewish community in the world, with about 5,000,000 Jews. It has been estimated that about 750,000 left Russia for the West between 1881 and 1905. Another 250,000 left areas of Eastern Europe for the West during the same period. About eighty per cent of these emigrants went to the United States (thereby profoundly affecting the character of American Jewry), while about 100,000 settled in Britain.³³ It was thus that Jewish nationalism emerged as an important political force and a postliberal pattern in modern Jewish life; rather than follow the assimilationist strategies of Western Jews, some Russian Jews sought new solutions: for some emigration, for some a worldwide socialist revolution, and for others, a territorialist solution to the Jewish dilemma -- Zionism.

The London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (LSJ) was quick to express its sympathy with the fate of the Russian Jews, and from February 1882 articles in its *Jewish Intelligence* began providing the public with details of the events.³⁴ In the March 1882 issue of its journal the LSJ expressed its "deep sympathy" with the persecuted Jews and prayed that "a speedy end may be put to these persecutions." The vastness of the persecution and the resultant exodus of Jews were seen as a sign from God, presaging "... the beginning of a fulfilment of the prophetic Scriptures foretelling the return of the Jews to their own land. ... The missionaries of the Society rejoice at the protests which Christians everywhere are making against these outbursts, as being not only abhorrent to our common humanity, but also alien to the true spirit of Christianity...."³⁵ The LSJ did much more than protest; it set up a fund to assist Jews desiring to

leave Russia. “The appeal by many Jews to receive protection in mission stations in Europe,” Yaron Perry has written, “strengthened the sense of missionary zeal among the London Society members.”³⁶

The events of 1881 deeply disturbed Shaftesbury who had long regarded Russia as intolerant, oppressive and antisemitic. Thus in the twilight of his life the prosperity of the Jews again became an ardent concern. In January of 1882 as reports began to appear in the British press concerning the persecution of Russian Jews, a group of British Jews issued a public appeal in the *The Times* addressed to Lord Shaftesbury, asking why “no Christian had come forward to assert the principle and practice of true Christianity.”³⁷ On the 16th of January a letter from Shaftesbury to the editor of *The Times* was published which praised the paper for its reports on the situation in Russia in that:

They record an outbreak of brutality, connived at by the Government officials, and executed by the multitude (Poles included, to their everlasting shame), such as, perhaps, has never been known since the destruction of Jerusalem.

To use the language of violence, or menace, would be injudicious and useless – possibly we may not interfere even diplomatically. But in the moral and religious protests of a great and free people on behalf of justice and humanity there is a real and effective force that will reach, no doubt, the ears of even the Emperor himself and his responsible Ministers.

At any rate, it will be a relief and a comfort to show to the whole world that the Christianity of this kingdom is a very different thing from the so-called Christianity of Russia, and (I regret to add) from that in some parts of Germany also.³⁸

A petition signed by a list of British notables, headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Shaftesbury calling for a public meeting was published a week later in *The Times*.³⁹ It took place at the Mansion House in London on 1 February 1882, although Shaftesbury worried in his diary that no speakers would be found -- “certainly none of weight, to support the Jewish cause on the cause of justice and humanity” and that there would be “scarcely an audience.” He was profoundly pleased when it turned out to be “a grand meeting, full, hearty, and enthusiastic.”⁴⁰ His own speech was vintage Shaftesbury. As the Bishop of London (who followed Shaftesbury in the order of speakers) acknowledged: “The case has been stated to you by the noble earl with a vigour which shows that age has not diminished his powers of speech (cheers), any more than it has extinguished or ever can extinguish his sympathy with suffering and his sense of indignation

at injustice and wrong. (Renewed cheers).”⁴¹ Shaftesbury clearly doubted that the British government had much leverage in dealing with Russia, but was convinced that British public opinion could be influential as it had been with Nicholas I: “Was the powerful Emperor Nicholas indifferent to public opinion, and especially to the opinion of England?” Shaftesbury asked. “I know, from conversations held with him by one of my most intimate friends, that the Emperor Nicholas felt deeply and acutely the opinion of England, and shall we not hope and believe that he who now sits upon the throne of All the Russias will feel the influence of the public voice as much as his predecessor?”⁴²

Shaftesbury denied that the protest was being mounted solely because the targets of persecution were Jewish, and linked the movement with a broader concern for religious liberty, human rights and British values: “It is not simply because those who are persecuted are Jews that we are met here; Englishmen would feel the same sympathy equally for Buddhists, Mahomedans, or Pagans. I know that many have a deep and special feeling toward the Hebrew race; I have it myself; but we are met here upon one grand, universal principle. If there is one thing on earth an Englishman loves better than another it is freedom; he desires that everyone should be as free and happy as he is himself. (Cheers).”⁴³

At the same time, however, he couched his appeal to the Russian emperor in distinctly religious language: “And, after all, if we approach the present Emperor, what are we asking for? Are we asking anything to abate his dignity or to lower his power? Nay, on the contrary, are we not asking him to do that which will conduce very much to his honour? Are we not asking him to do justice to a large body of his loyal and suffering people? Are we only asking him to restrain violence, murder, outrage, and spoliation? Are we not asking him to be a Cyrus to the Jews and not an Antiochus Epiphanes? Are we not asking him to enter upon the greatest and noblest exercise of power – [] to undo the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free? []”⁴⁴ The specific allusions to Biblical texts would not have been lost on his audience, both Jewish and Christian: the Russian emperor is compared to Cyrus, the Babylonian king who had authorized the return of the Jews to Palestine and had encouraged them to rebuild the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.⁴⁵ Shaftesbury’s final appeal quotes Isaiah 58: 6 which reads “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”

A week later on 9 February 1882 Shaftesbury raised the matter in the House of Lords, urging the government to use its influence with the Russian government on behalf of the Jews, asserting: “... I may say that it is the feeling of the whole world – you have it in what has reached us from America and from all parts of the United Kingdom – that the

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Comment [1]:

events which have occurred in Russia have brought lasting shame on the Christianity and the civilization of the 19th century.”⁴⁶ In a letter to his friend Alexander Haldane he noted “We had a very short, but very satisfactory, flare up on the Jews in the House of Lords. The Hebrews were in ecstasies.”⁴⁷ In one of his last public speeches related to the Jews, delivered at the LSJ’s annual meeting in 1882, Shaftesbury rehearsed some familiar themes: a strong denunciation of Russian persecution, and an emphasis on the Jews as the ‘apple of God’s eye,’ quoting his friend Alexander McCaul “... no nation ever injured the Jews without smarting from it.” Shaftesbury seemed almost more concerned about the power of anti-Semitism in Germany, which he feared far more than he did Russian anti-Semitism and warned that “There is, in fact, a great jealousy of that wonderful people [the Jews] who are coming to the front.”⁴⁸

On 24 February 1882 a distinctly Protestant meeting in support of the Russian Jews was held at the National Club in London (the headquarters of the Protestant Association). The Dean of Ripon, in a speech made the point that “this question was pre-eminently a Protestant one. There had been times when the Jews had been harshly treated even by the Christian Church, but happily since the Reformation it had been the aim of the Church to bring them to value the truths which were dear to Christians.”⁴⁹ According to *The Times*, in addition to passing a resolution similar to one adopted at the Mansion House meeting, specific concern was also expressed for a group of about 220 Jewish refugees “who were desirous of emigrating to Palestine as agriculturalists. It was their wish to go to Gilead, as this was deemed the best spot for such work.”⁵⁰ A resolution in support of this group appears to have been moved by the Rev. Mr. William Hechler⁵¹ and when a relief committee was formed, Shaftesbury was the President and Hechler the key activist. Shaftesbury assumed the presidency of the resultant Syrian Colonisation Fund; a central figure in the movement was Elizabeth Finn, the Hebrew-speaking widow of Consul James Finn, who was the daughter of Shaftesbury’s old friend, the Rev. Alexander McCaul, a chief figure in the LSJ.

In Palestine, the LSJ quickly found itself overwhelmed by the flood of desperate Russian immigrants who were facing starvation and begging for its assistance. The LSJ sheltered many Russian Jewish immigrants at its centre in Jaffa, at the nearby home of Baron Ustinov and at its Sanitorium in Jerusalem.⁵² The LSJ missionaries in Jerusalem were soon faced with hundreds of desperate Jewish immigrants and by some local Jews who felt that the influx of Jewish immigrants seeking help from Christian sources had broken down cultural barriers so that they now felt free to approach the missionaries for assistance. The LSJ workers responded so generously that the Jerusalem mission station was soon near

financial collapse and had to be bailed out by the London committee.⁵³ In England, the LSJ established a “Committee on the Persecution of the Jews in Russia” and issued a public statement that expressed the hope that “the God of Israel may overrule these trials for the spiritual good of the nation still beloved for the fathers’ sake.”⁵⁴

Conclusion

Evangelicals like Shaftesbury did not embrace a pluralistic view of salvation, but did hold that the Jews as a people remained a special concern to God; their election as a people had not been set aside and they would yet play a role in the unfolding of history. Because of this, Shaftesbury and his fellow evangelicals concerned with the evangelization of the Jews in the nineteenth century were among the chief Gentile opponents of any mistreatment of Jews and were acknowledged by British Jews as such, at the time. Shaftesbury and his associates were thus markedly different from earlier Christian polemicists and regarded themselves as philosemites and firmly rejected the anti-Judaic traditions of both the medieval Catholic Church and of Luther. If nineteenth century evangelical philosemitism is to be regarded as a covert form of anti-Semitism, it had a strange way of manifesting its hostility by working to advance the protection of the Jews throughout Europe and in the Ottoman Empire.

In the light of this strong philosemitic tradition in evangelicalism, it would seem that historically evangelical forms of Protestantism have worked to protect the Jews from persecution and to champion their cause in the name of humanity. This work has been consistent with the British evangelical tradition of anti-slavery and concerns for universal human rights arising out of deep Christian conviction about the dignity of humanity made in the image of God, and redeemed by the self-sacrifice of Christ the Son, and reinforced by British traditions of common law, shaped by historic assumptions of Christendom.

Endnotes:

¹ John Conway, “Protestant Missions to the Jews 1810-1980: Ecclesiastical Imperialism or theological aberration?”

Holocaust and Genocide Studies Vol 1, No. 1 (1986): 128-29.

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- ² Ibid.
- ³ Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Philosemitism and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- ⁴ Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries*, 175.
- ⁵ *Jewish Expositor* (1824): 382 quoted in Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries*, 176. A. M. Hyamson has confirmed this view: "British protection was prized by the Jews above the protection afforded by any other state, certainly above that given by the Government of the Ottoman Empire...." Hyamson, ed., *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, xxxiv.
- ⁶ *Jewish Expositor* (1825), x. 100; xi. 25.
- ⁷ Perry, *British Mission to the Jews*, p. 27.
- ⁸ Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries*, p. 371.

⁹The charge re-surfaced again late in the 19th century with the posthumous publication of a book by Sir Richard Burton (d. 1890) who was British consul in Damascus between 1867 and 1871. (Burton strongly opposed Christian mission work while in Damascus and in his writings denounced what he regarded as the cruel teachings of Judaism; on the other hand he made clear his sympathy with Islam.) His work, *The Jew, the Gypsy and El Islam* (1898) was in fact an edited version of what Burton wrote, with a section detailing all of Burton's allegations being omitted. Originally the intent was to title the work *Human Sacrifice amongst the Sephardim or Eastern Jew*. Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, pp. 7 and 50-60.

¹⁰Catholics, Protestants and Jews were represented, as were people of all political stripes. The best known evangelical Anglican present was the Honorable and Reverend Baptist W. Noel.

¹¹ Green, "Rethinking Sir Moses Montefiore," 636.

¹² Valman, *The Jewess*, p. 88.

¹³Letter of G. W. Pieritz from Alexandria dated 19 May 1840 quoted in G.W. Pieritz, Introduction, *Persecution of the Jews at Damascus. Statement of Mr. G. W. Pieritz, a Jewish convert and assistant missionary at Jerusalem, the Result of Personal Inquiry on the Spot* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1840).

¹⁴ Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries*, p. 371.

¹⁵ Nicolayson's assistance in this matter was deeply appreciated by Jerusalem's Jews. The chief Sephardi rabbi, Jonah Navon, praised Nicolayson in a letter that was signed by many community leaders. See: Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries*, p. 304-05.

¹⁶Pieritz, *Persecution of the Jews at Damascus*, p. 15.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 20, 21.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹ Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: 'Ritual Murder,' Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 167.

²⁰ Moses Solomon, "Address on the position of the Jews in Britain, with reference to their literary, political, civil, and religious condition" quoted in *Jewish Intelligence* (May 1845): 134.

²¹Bickersteth, *The Restoration of the Jews*, p. 68.

²²W. F. Wilkinson, *Rector in Search of a Curate* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1843), 280 quoted in E. Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 95.

²³*Jewish Intelligence, and Monthly Accounts of the Proceedings of the LSPCJ* Vol. 6 (1840): p. 152. This work was well-known among nineteenth century evangelicals but is not mentioned in any of the standard histories of Zionism. Cf. B. Halpern, *The Idea of the Jewish State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); B. Martin, *A History of Judaism* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); and N. Sokolow, *History of Zionism* (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1919).

²⁴Railton, *No North Sea*, 224.

²⁵ Scult, *Millennial Expectations*, p. 129.

²⁶*Jewish Intelligence, and Monthly Accounts of the Proceedings of the LSPCJ* (July 1866): 187.

²⁷*Jewish Intelligence* (October 1866): 261.

²⁸*The Friend of Israel* Vol 3 (October 1855): 124. This journal was produced by the Scottish Society for the Conversion of Israel, which was sponsored by the Urskine Presbyterian Church in Scotland. Other societies

working in Jewish missions were The British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews, an interdenominational group which published the *Jewish Herald* beginning in 1846. None of these societies approached the LSJ in size or influence.

²⁹On Eardley see: Lewis, *DEB*. Eardley, a Whig/Liberal M.P. had the ear of Palmerston and facilitated a number of interviews with the Prime Minister for Montefiore. On Montefiore's relationship with Eardley see: *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, Vol. II, chapters 13-15.

³⁰*Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, II: 85.

³¹*Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, II: 85.

³²It should be noted that the Polish uprising of 1863 was a significant setback to Jewish hopes as it weakened the situation of all minorities under Russian control.

³³Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, p. 3.

³⁴See: "A Few Facts relating to the Jewish Troubles in Russia," *Jewish Intelligence* (Feb. 1882): 33-37.

³⁵*Jewish Intelligence* (March 1882), p. 53.

³⁶Perry, *British Mission to the Jews*, 127.

³⁷Hodder, *Life of Shaftesbury*, 3: 443.

³⁸Letter from the Earl of Shaftesbury to the editor, dated 14 January 1882. *The Times*, 16 January 1882, p. 8, c.

³⁹*The Times*, 23 January 1882, p. 8 a.

⁴⁰Hodder, *Life of Shaftesbury*, 3: 444.

⁴¹Speech of the Bishop of London, *The Times*, 2 February 1882, p. 4 c.

⁴²*Times*, 2 Feb. 1882, p. 4 c

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Compare 2 Chronicles 36: 22-23; Ezra, chapters 1 through 6; Daniel, chapters 1, 6 and 10; and Isaiah, chapters 44 and 45.

⁴⁶ *House of Lords Debates*, 9 February 1882, p. 230.

⁴⁷ Hodder, *Life of Shaftesbury*, 3: 444.

⁴⁸ *Jewish Intelligence* (June 1882): 150-51.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 25 February, 1882, p. 9 e.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 25 February 1882, p. 9 e.

⁵¹ The report in *The Times* cites him as “the Rev. Mr. Heckler” (!).

⁵² *Record*, 8 September 1882.

⁵³ Perry, *British Mission to the Jews*, p. 128.