

Claude Montefiore in the Context of Jewish Approaches to Jesus and the Apostle Paul

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German and American Jews tend to be the focus of many of the standard treatments of Reform thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Anglo-Jewry is usually regarded as something of an intellectual backwater and any ripples of innovation have tended to be explained in terms of foreign influence. There are exceptions to this rule, however, and Claude Montefiore is one striking example of a radical English Jew. A co-founder of Anglo-Liberal Judaism, Montefiore was a scholar who specialized in New Testament studies to an extent unparalleled by his German or American contemporaries, and who arguably set the agenda for Jewish New Testament scholarship. This essay considers the ways in which Montefiore viewed the two central figures of Christian thought and the ways in which he utilized their teachings as a means to justify his own brand of Judaism. In particular, it considers in what sense he regarded Jesus' teachings as original and new and how he believed various aspects of Paul's thought could be used to inspire religious Jews. By placing Montefiore's views in the context of other Jewish writers, it is hoped that his innovative contributions to Jewish-Christian understanding and his unique place among Jewish religious leaders will be made clear.

Claude Joseph Goldsmid-Montefiore (1858–1938) was an Anglo-Jewish biblical scholar and philanthropist. Together with Lily Montagu, he is usually regarded as the founder of Liberal Judaism in Britain. He was also President of the Anglo-Jewish Association (an important communal representative body concerned with foreign affairs) from 1895–1921, that is, during a period of growing European anti-Semitism and the rise of Zionism. Although Montefiore was not a professional theologian or scholar, he produced twenty books and many other articles, lectures and pamphlets on biblical and rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Liberal Judaism, and was the first Jew to gain a Doctorate of Divinity in England (from the University of Manchester). In terms of scholarship he is perhaps best remembered for *The Synoptic Gospels*, a two volume translation and commentary, and for *A Rabbinic Anthology*,¹ a thematic selection of rabbinic ethical teaching.

¹ C.G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels* (2d ed.; 2 vol.; London: Macmillan, 1927), originally published in 1909. C.G. Montefiore and Herbert Loewe, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London: Macmillan, 1938).

Montefiore once observed with regard to English and American Jews that “five-sixths of their conception of life are Christian.”² He was one of many who recognized the effect of assimilation and the adoption of the values and practices of the dominant Christian culture. But in contrast to those who had condemned such developments from the mid-nineteenth-century onwards as “de-judaisation,” Montefiore saw it as a good thing.³ He believed that many English Jews felt spiritually akin to their Christian environment, remarking that he found “in middle-class Jews, when not corrupted by Zionism, curious resemblances and odd likenesses to middle-class Christians.”⁴ He did not find this surprising since they lived within a society that had been shaped by the forces of Christianity. It was only a matter of time, he felt, before a complete identification with the Gentile population in all matters except that of religious persuasion would be possible. It was even in their own interest for the Jews to embrace Christian culture since, he argued, this was the best way to deal with anti-Jewish feeling. The solution to anti-Semitism was to encourage the Jewish people to identify themselves completely with their host nation in all but religion and he thought of himself as an “Englishman of the Jewish faith.” While this assimilationist view was not exceptional among the Anglo-Jewish élite who enjoyed the privileges of Victorian (Christian) culture it was, as Todd Endelman has argued, exactly what the majority of British Jews did not want to do.⁵ In any case, Montefiore himself was prepared both to identify with such a cultural environment and label it as “Christian.” He wrote,

[For] the Jews of Europe and America who live in a *Christian environment* and amid a civilization which has been partially created by the New Testament, our right relation towards it must surely be of grave and peculiar importance. *For this civilisation is also ours.* The literature, which is soaked through and through with New Testament influences, is also *our* literature. The thought, which has been partially produced by the New Testament, is the thought amid which we are reared, which we absorb, to which we react . . . The very air we breathe, the moral, literary, artistic influences which we suck up from our childhood, are to a large extent, the same as those which surround and affect our Christian fellow citizens.⁶

2 C. G. Montefiore, “Judaism and Democracy,” *Papers for Jewish People* (vol. 16; London: Jewish Religious Union, 1917) 22.

3 This was the influential position of Abraham Benisch, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* from 1855–68, for example.

4 From a letter to Lucy Cohen, uncertain date. Lucy Cohen, *Some Recollections of Claude Goldsmid-Montefiore 1858–1938* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940) 105.

5 Todd M. Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History, 1656–1945* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990).

6 C. G. Montefiore, *Liberal Judaism and Hellenism and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1918) 78–79.

The relatively high assimilation of Anglo-Jewry in contrast to European Jewry, and their readiness to adopt so much of the surrounding Victorian culture meant that, increasingly, British Jews absorbed much of the Christian worldview. This was certainly true of Montefiore who could later recall that although his upbringing was very Jewish in teaching, observance, and atmosphere, very few Jews except their relations ever came to the house; their family friends were mainly Gentile: "Our childhood environment," he wrote, "was entirely uncosmopolitan and purely English."⁷ Several of his tutors had been Christian clerics, with whom he had often attended church services, and he regarded their influence positively throughout his life. His considerable humanitarian and philanthropic activities in London and elsewhere had placed him in constant contact with Evangelical Christian charities, while a close friend of his, Baron von Hügel, was a Catholic with mystical leanings. He had a special interest in the Unitarian theological training school, Manchester College, and regarded the Unitarian minister, Joseph Estlin Carpenter, as another close friend. Most of all, however, it was the British modernists and liberals to whom he had been most exposed and was most familiar. From his undergraduate days at Oxford University, where he had studied Classics under the renowned Church of England minister Benjamin Jowett, he had become intimately aware of what it meant to be an Anglican liberal. Generally speaking, this de-mystified, ethical, liberal Anglican theology came to represent for him Christianity *per se*. This unusual background, in which Montefiore was constantly exposed to Christian influence, undoubtedly influenced his own thought and there can be little doubt that both consciously and subconsciously he adopted many of their presuppositions and attitudes as his own. He himself expressed the consequences in a letter to the Anglican intellectual, Hastings Rashdall, writing,

I don't feel so far apart. You see, I have lived with and *loved*, Christians all my life. My dearest friends have been and are, passionate Roman Catholics, Anglicans (of all sorts) and so on . . . I can see with their eyes and feel with their feelings. It is a curious position which can only happen to those who belong to a wee minority and mix (thank God) very intimately with a big majority.⁸

In *Response to Modernity*, Michael Meyer observed that the Protestant environment had proved more conducive to Reform Judaism than had the Catholic, on a world-wide level.⁹ It had provided a greater impetus in terms of the theological model, the rejection of an old hierarchy, the vernacular liturgy, the central

⁷ Cohen, *Some Recollections*, 31.

⁸ From a letter to Hastings Rashdall (Nov. 7, year uncertain). Bodleian Library MS Eng. Lett. 351, fol. 97.

⁹ Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity; a History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1995).

importance of the sermon in services and the lessening of the importance of ritual.¹⁰ Montefiore was brought up in the Reform Synagogue (established 1841), which, with its cautious theological character, correlated to American Conservative Judaism. His Jewish Religious Union (1902), which incorporated members from across the religious spectrum, eventually evolved into his Liberal Jewish Synagogue (1910), which came to approximate the more progressive American Reform. Many of those who joined the new movement had grown up in Anglo-Reform synagogues in London, Manchester and Bradford.¹¹ (Montefiore himself remained a council member of the West London branch and preached there throughout his life). For such men and women, a more radical approach was deemed necessary if Judaism was to retain the masses of disenfranchised Jews, to fully take into account the findings of biblical criticism, and if its development as a truly universalist religion was ever to be realized. Montefiore's modernist theology was undoubtedly the main driving force behind the Anglo-Liberal movement, although certain aspects of his thought never achieved general support among its members. One example of this was his conviction that not only did Judaism and Christianity complement one another but that the future of Religion itself depended upon an amalgamation of what he regarded as the best of their teachings. As a result, an important part of Montefiore's Liberal Jewish program was a re-examination of the New Testament. This article will consider his attitude towards the originality of Jesus, and his attempt to redeem what he could of the apostle Paul for the Jewish people.

JEWISH VIEWS ON THE ORIGINALITY OF JESUS' TEACHING

It is noteworthy that, generally speaking, modern Jews have not denied the existence of Jesus. One might have imagined that such a stance would have been tempting for anti-Christian polemicists; after all, there were certainly nineteenth- and twentieth-century Christian scholars who argued so. No doubt this was partly due to their fear for the general well-being of the Jewish community. Jewish writers such as Geiger or Graetz might not have wanted to attract unnecessarily a Christian backlash, or to be seen to side with radical Christian scholars such as the nineteenth-century German Bruno Bauer (who believed that Jesus was an invention of the Gospel evangelists) because of Bauer's open anti-Jewishness.¹² Perhaps there was a certain pride, even then, in the fact that Jesus had been a Jew, and therefore a reluctance to distance themselves entirely from one of the world's greatest religious thinkers, especially one so highly

¹⁰ Ibid., 143.

¹¹ Reform congregations were established in West London (1840), Manchester (1856), Bradford (1873). Reform services were also held in Hull in the 1850s and in Clapham from 1875-77.

¹² S. Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965) 65.

esteemed by their Christian neighbors. An insightful explanation was offered by Sandmel, who observed that

A Jew versed in Scripture and in Talmud who enters into the pages of the Synoptic Gospels finds himself in familiar territory. He can be irked, annoyed, or aghast at the ferocity of the anti-Jewish sentiments, but he is nonetheless in a geography which does not seem strange to him . . . Such a Jewish person, for all that he would agree with Strauss that the Gospels are replete with legends and contradictions, would nevertheless hold to the opinion that Gospels and Talmud are similar weavings of similar threads, and such a person would say to a Bauer that no imagination could out of thin air create so authentically the religious scene and the flavour of Palestinian Judaism.¹³

Sandmel's sense of *déjà vu* was undoubtedly shared by other Jewish writers familiar with rabbinic writings; the Gospel evidence for the life and teaching of Jesus, however flawed, presented too Jewish a picture to be wholly rejected. In fact, the significance of rabbinic literature for New Testament studies had long been recognized by Jewish scholars. Geiger had viewed it as more relevant than the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha or Hellenistic writings, and Abrahams had explained that by its use "The real Jesus emerges to the clearer light of day."¹⁴ Montefiore, like Abrahams, was concerned to demonstrate the proximity of rabbinic thought to Jesus' own. His *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings* was a supplement to the *Synoptic Gospels* and aimed to correct some of the distortion contained in the extensive and influential *Kommentar* by the German-Christian scholars Strack and Billerbeck.¹⁵

Rabbinic knowledge was undoubtedly useful to Jewish scholars in gaining understanding of the Gospels. Nevertheless, there was a danger that the sense of familiarity that it encouraged could lead to over-confidence in the notoriously complex world of New Testament studies. Many Jewish scholars well-versed in rabbinic thought apparently believed that they could automatically assess

13 Ibid.

14 Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus; an Analysis and Critique of the Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984) 68. I. Abrahams, "Rabbinic Aids to Exegesis," in H. Swete, ed., *Cambridge Biblical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1905) 192.

15 C. G. Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings* (London: Macmillan, 1930). Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: Beck, 1922–61). Vol. 1 dealt with Matthais (1922) and vol. 2 with Markus, Lucas, etc. (1924). While in the *The Synoptic Gospels* Montefiore had concentrated upon Mark primarily, followed by Matthew and Luke, in *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings* the longest treatment was reserved for Matthew. Montefiore held Mark to be more historical than Matthew and Luke, and Matthew to be more akin to the Talmudic literature.

the Gospels without reference to mainstream scholarship, with the result that their research, as Montefiore complained, was fractional and atomistic,¹⁶ and that they often naïvely attributed to the Gospels a historical reliability that Christian scholars did not. One might have expected Graetz, for example, to have assimilated Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, which had questioned the historical reliability of the Gospel texts, or Klausner to have taken seriously the scepticism of contemporary Christian researchers, especially Bultmann's Form-criticism.¹⁷ But this was not the case, due to over-confidence in their own specialized knowledge and a suspicion of Christian bias in mainstream research.¹⁸ Until after the Second World War, Montefiore was the clearest exception to this general rule and was entirely conversant with the burgeoning literature on the subject.¹⁹ In terms of his own position within the international biblical-critical fraternity, he was a rationalist, consciously locating himself between German radicalism and British conservatism, and regarding the Gospel texts as reliable enough to make the reconstruction of the life of Jesus feasible. In response to Jewish criticism, he admitted to a certain reliance upon Christian scholarship but he always reserved the right to disagree with them and to correct them when he felt it necessary.²⁰

The vast majority of Jews drawn to the study of Jesus have been Reform or Liberal, and there are doubtless many reasons for this. The tendency among reform minded Jews to move away from the idea of Judaism as a nation, and to view it rather as a religious fellowship, was very much related to the new emphasis on ethics as central to their religious message. In this context, Jesus and his ethical teaching appeared interesting and relevant. Also, for those who were critical of Orthodox Jewish ritual, Jesus represented the struggle of free spirituality against ceremonialism in an earlier era. Yet Jewish reclamations of Jesus were driven by more than simply the intellectual concern to recover an earlier Jewish

16 Cited in Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 90.

17 David F. Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu* (Tübingen: C.F. Osiander, 1835). According to Sandmel, Klausner's approach to the Gospels exhibited "a unique capacity to have reviewed much of the Gospel scholarship and to have remained immune from reflecting it." He dismissed Klausner as an "amateur Talmudist" who applied "dilettantism rather whimsically to the Gospel passages." Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 92, 93.

18 For instance, Gerald Friedlander accused Montefiore of an inordinate reliance on Christian scholars. Gerald Friedlander, *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount* (London: Routledge, 1911) 52. Ahad Ha-Am was also suspicious. He wrote, "What is needed is not the 'scientific accuracy' of the Christian commentators . . . who set out with the preconceived idea that the teaching of the Gospels is superior to that of Judaism and use their 'science' merely to find details in support of their general belief." Ahad Ha-Am, "Judaism and the Gospels," reprinted in *American Hebrew Journal* 87 (1910) 513-15 from *The Jewish Review*.

19 Sandmel suggests that "a student wishing to get a good summary of Gospel scholarship in the early 1900's can quite possibly get this better from Montefiore than from anywhere else." Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 89.

20 Montefiore, *Synoptic Gospels*, 1:xxii.

ethical tradition, or the satisfaction of discovering an ancient champion of an ethically centered Judaism. Since the nineteenth-century onwards, a stock argument among Jewish writers including Luzzatto, Salvador, Graetz, and Geiger had been that Jesus' ethical teaching had been wholly Jewish, of one sort or another, and had included nothing new or original. Such treatments provided a platform from which to launch attacks on Christianity, in that they stressed the Jewishness and therefore the humanity of Jesus in contradiction to the traditional Christological view of Jesus. They were also a reminder that the Christian morality championed by Western civilization could arguably be regarded as imitative and derivative of Jewish religious thought. Geiger, in particular, spent considerable time and effort to this end, as Susannah Heschel has recently shown in *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*. The traditional Christian view of the Church as the fulfilment of a handicapped Judaism was a myth Geiger was determined to overthrow. Instead, he suggested that Christianity should be regarded as a tangential off-shoot from Judaism, and that the current search for the faith of Jesus by Protestant scholars would only confirm that this ideal faith was essentially Jewish in nature.²¹ In England, Gerald Friedlander's *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount* was a polemical work that emphasized the Jewishness of much of Jesus' teaching.²² Despite the fact that it was "of little practical value for everyday life," Friedlander was quick to point out that "all the teaching in the Sermon [on the Mount] . . . is in harmony with the spirit of Judaism."²³ And in his anti-Christian apology, *Wesen des Judentums*, Baeck claimed that a full appreciation of the greatness of Jesus was only possible for a Jew, since "a man like him could have grown only in the soil of Judaism, only there and nowhere else."²⁴ This way of confronting Christian claims (regarding Jesus and Judaism) by describing him as essentially Jewish, rather than essentially alien and heretical, was new. It can at least be partially explained by the reaction to Christian critique and the underlying psychological need to justify Judaism in the eyes of the Western Christian world. If, as the Orthodox Paul Goodman put it, Jesus had "added no important original element to the religious and moral assets which had been accumulated by the Jewish prophets and sages,"²⁵ then what justification had Christians for condemning Jewish teaching as inferior to

21 Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 14.

22 Gerald Friedlander, *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount* (London: Routledge, 1911).

23 Friedlander, *Jewish Sources*, 262–63. Friedlander believed that practically all the genuine teaching of Jesus had been apocalyptic in character. Despite the fact that it must have been *Jewish* apocalypticism, he maintained that it was opposed to the best of Jewish thought and sentiment. *Ibid.*, 3.

24 Leo Baeck, *Wesen des Judentums* (Berlin: Nathansen und Lamm, 1905). Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism*, trans. Victor Grubwieser and Leonard Pearl (London: Macmillan, 1936) cited in Schalom Ben-Chorin, "The Image of Jesus in Modern Judaism," *JES* 11(1974) 408.

25 Paul Goodman, *The Synagogue and the Church* (New York: Routledge, 1908) 233.

Jesus' teaching? Maintaining Jesus' Jewishness had become a way of justifying Judaism to Christians. Such a view is supported by Schwartz's observation that no non-western Jew has written extensively on Jesus, since the concern to justify Judaism was of no importance, relatively speaking, to Jews outside the West.²⁶

Nevertheless, for Jews interested in studying Jesus — even for those who wanted to use Jesus in this particular way — it was difficult to ignore those aspects of his teaching and behavior which had traditionally been regarded as “un-Jewish.” There was therefore something of a tension between the desire to hold up Jesus to justify Judaism to a surrounding Christian world, and the often acutely felt obligation to distance Judaism from certain elements of his thought.²⁷ For example, almost in spite of himself Paul Goodman had picked up on the idea of non-resistance as something that had no obvious parallel to “the teaching of the Jewish schools.”²⁸ Israel Abrahams had been keen to draw attention to the similarities between Jesus' style of teaching and that of the Pharisees, including the use of parables and style of prayer, yet he was also sensitive to certain nuanced differences, such as the greater inclination of Jesus to seek out sinners and the idea of forgiveness as presented in the Lord's Prayer.²⁹ More recently, the differences noted by Geza Vermes, while also differences of emphasis rather than of content, included Jesus' tendency to overemphasize the ethical as compared to the ritual and to underestimate those needs of society that are met by organized religion.³⁰ The tension was exacerbated by the very real risk of being perceived as overly sympathetic towards “that man” and thereby provoking a backlash from traditionalists who regarded anyone who was even faintly interested in Jesus as traitors to Judaism, be they Liberal or Orthodox. It comes as no surprise to discover that Montefiore's positive assessment of Jesus was denounced for demonstrating “an anti-Jewish tendency” and led to accusations implying his being a crypto-Christian.³¹ But other less positive works were

26 G. David Schwartz, “Explorations and Responses: Is There a Jewish Reclamation of Jesus?” *JES* 24 (1987) 107. Of course, anti-Semitism in the East was an important factor and also helps explain the relative silence.

27 Jacob Agus has observed, “Jewish historians are generally torn between the desire to prove the Jewishness of Jesus and the opposing wish to “justify” the rejection of his person and message.” Jacob Agus, “Claude Montefiore and Liberal Judaism,” *CJud* 13 (1959) 21.

28 Goodman, *Synagogue and Church*, 271–2.

29 Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (2d ed., 2 vol.; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1923) 58–59, 90, 91, 97–98.

30 Geza Vermes, “Jesus the Jew,” in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus' Jewishness; Exploring the Place of Jesus in Early Judaism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991) 118.

31 Michael Friedlander, “Notes in Reply to My Critic,” *JQR* 3 (1892) 437. In his critique of Montefiore's *Synoptic Gospels* (1909), Ahad Ha-Am criticized Montefiore's Liberal Jewish aim “to change the *spirit* of Judaism . . . and to bring it as closely as possible into accord with the Christian ideas of the non-Jewish community.” He also commented, “No true Jew will be able to feel any fondness for the doctrine of the Gospels [in contrast to Montefiore].” Ahad Ha-Am, “Judaism and the Gospels,” 513, 515.

also regarded as betrayals of Judaism. The Zionist Orthodox Jew and disciple of Ahad Ha-Am, Joseph Klausner, saw his *Jesus of Nazareth* attacked as “a trucking and kow-towing to the Christian religion, and an assertion of great affection for the foggy figure of its founder, a denial of the healthy sense of our saintly forefathers.”³²

In distancing themselves from Jesus’ distinctive thought, Jewish writers rarely, if ever, contemplated the idea that Jesus’ distinctive or allegedly non-Jewish teachings might be beneficial contributions. Rather, they were viewed as mistakes which could be used as foils to demonstrate the superiority of the writer’s own view of Judaism. In this sense, it is true to say, as Jacob Agus does, that for many Jewish scholars, Jesus was made to stand for whatever it was that the particular scholar repudiated and excoriated.³³ Very few Jews have focussed upon those elements of Jesus and his teachings which distinguished him from his contemporaries unless, for polemical reasons, they intended to criticize him and thus, by association, Christianity. Klausner, whose *Jesus of Nazareth* illustrates the background dynamics well, provides an interesting example. He certainly wrote admiringly of Jesus and, from a cursory reading, appeared to hold Jesus’ originality in high regard in sharp contrast with the majority of Jewish writers.

In [Jesus’] ethical code there is a sublimity, a distinctiveness and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code; neither is there any parallel to the remarkable art of his parables. The shrewdness and sharpness of his proverbs and his forceful epigrams serve, in an exceptional degree, to make ethical ideas a popular possession. If ever the day should come and this ethical code be stripped of its wrappings of miracles and mysticism, the Book of the Ethics of Jesus will be one of the choicest treasures in the literature of Israel for all time.³⁴

Nevertheless, Klausner’s response to Jesus’ originality was more complex than this passage indicates and must be weighed against his belief that although Jesus

32 Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth; His Life, Times, and Teaching* (New York: Macmillan, 1929). Aaron Kaminka in Ha-Toren (New York: May 1922), cited in Herbert Danby, *The Jew and Christianity; Some Phases, Ancient and Modern, of the Jewish Attitude Towards Christianity* (London: Sheldon Press, 1927)102–3. The fact that Klausner was a fervent Zionist and a disciple of Ahad Ha-Am made no difference to those who condemned him.

33 Agus, “Claude Montefiore and Liberal Judaism,” 7. Agus is too simplistic in his analysis of the Jewish treatment of Jesus, however, when he writes, “As it was the tendency of Christian historians and philosophers to see in Jesus an ideal representation of their own ideals, so it became the practice among Jewish scholars to represent Jesus as the protagonist of the forces that they opposed.” He neglects to take into account the Jewish desire to justify Judaism in the face of Christian criticism and the utilization of Jesus for that purpose.

34 Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 414.

had obviously not been a Christian during his lifetime, he had become one (or should be regarded as one), for his history and his teaching had severed him from Judaism.³⁵ When it came to concrete examples of Jesus' distinctive teaching, Klausner could not help viewing them as, ultimately, impractical. Thus Jesus' instruction to "Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's" effectively undermined the authority of the civil authorities; his commands to "resist not evil," to "swear not at all" and to share all one's possessions with the poor, were simply not practical in society; by forbidding divorce he did not solve family difficulties; and in his recommendation to be like "the lilies of the field which toil not" he revealed his lack of interest in economic and political achievements.³⁶ Klausner went on to explain Jesus' failure in the eyes of Judaism in terms of his being *too* Jewish. But more to the point, he criticized the teachings as "un-Jewish" in the light of his own Zionist, nationalistic view of Judaism.

In all this Jesus is the most Jewish of Jews, more Jewish than Simeon ben Shetah, more Jewish even than Hillel. Yet nothing is more dangerous to national Judaism than this *exaggerated* Judaism; it is the ruin of national culture, the national state, and national life . . . This teaching Jesus had imbibed from the breast of Prophetic and, to a certain extent, Pharisaic Judaism; yet it became, on one hand, the negation of everything that had vitalised Judaism; and, on the other hand, it brought Judaism to such an extreme that it became, in a sense, *non-Judaism*.³⁷

In other words, Klausner's criticism of Jesus' distinctive teachings was rooted in his own deeply felt, essentially nationalistic view of Judaism. While for other writers, especially reform minded Jews, the nationalistic element was not as important, their criticisms, too, were shaped by their own particular views of Judaism.

Since the early nineteenth-century, then, it has not been uncommon for Jews (mainly among Reform and Liberal circles) to point to Jesus as exemplifying many of the best aspects of an ideal Judaism, so as to demonstrate that so-called Christian virtues were not foreign to modern Judaism. At the same time, while Jesus' alleged differences with Judaism ceased to be as fiercely condemned as they had been in older treatments, such differences continued to be used as foils

35 Cited in Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 91. Such a view, of course, helps explain Klausner's popularity with Christian scholars, for his criticism effectively acknowledged the usual Christian interpretation of Jesus' life and teachings. As Montefiore pointed out, this was in contrast to scholars such as Eisler, whose view of Jesus as a political rebel directly disputed the facts as Christians saw them. C.G. Montefiore, "Dr. Robert Eisler on the Beginnings of Christianity," *HibJ* 30(1931-32)300.

36 Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 373-74.

37 *Ibid.*, 374, 376.

by which to demonstrate the superiority of the writer's own view of Judaism. One result of the enormous pressure upon Jewish writers to find the teachings of Jesus inferior to those of Judaism was that all too often, even when they agreed with Jesus' teaching, the discussion degenerated into an apologetic argument of mere chronological priority (the implication being that whoever said it first was superior). Sandmel warned that the question of originality was all too often a "misguided one" for this very reason.³⁸

MONTEFIORE'S VIEW OF JESUS' ORIGINALITY

Montefiore, too, pointed to those teachings that Jesus shared with Judaism as illustrative of its high development and sophistication. But when it came to questions of Jesus' priority, he readily admitted that in many instances Jesus' teachings had chronological priority over those of the Rabbis. The issue was of little interest to him, though, as he explained in "The Originality of Jesus,"³⁹

For if the later rabbinic parallels are native developments . . . then the originality of Jesus, though not to be neglected, is yet, to my mind, a secondary, and comparatively unimportant, originality. A good deal, moreover, depends upon the question whether a doctrine is central and essential for Jesus, but unusual or exceptional for the Rabbis or in the Old Testament. If the latter, then a high degree of originality belongs to Jesus, even though one or two good parallels can be adduced.⁴⁰

It was this higher kind of difference between Jesus' teaching and that of Jewish tradition which interested him most. In contrast to most of his fellow Jewish scholars, who used Jesus' perceived differences as foils for their own ideas of Judaism, Montefiore approached such differences in an extremely innovative way and with a distinct set of assumptions. He was not only prepared to accept the originality of some of Jesus' thought but often praised it, and even suggested that Judaism could learn from it. In this context, it is important to understand that "originality" meant more to him than merely "fresh expression of universal truths" (that is, *Jewish* universal truths) as some have suggested.⁴¹ In "The Originality of Jesus," Montefiore defined his use of the term "original" as *relative*, that is, original in comparison with the ideals and the teaching of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries. He readily admitted that he did not mean absolute originality,

38 Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 109.

39 C.G. Montefiore, "The Originality of Jesus," *HibJ* 28(1929)98–111.

40 Montefiore, "The Originality of Jesus," 99.

41 Edward Kessler, *An English Jew; The Life and Writings of Claude Montefiore* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co Ltd, 1989) 167.

and he also denied that by “originality” he automatically implied excellence.⁴² Even so, Jesus’ teachings were often for Montefiore, “off the main Jewish line of development.” Pursuing as he was a radical reform of Judaism, he could not help but hold Jesus in high regard when he saw many of his own anti-Orthodox concerns mirrored in the Gospel narratives. Almost unconsciously he used Jesus — and Jesus’ “un-Jewish” idiosyncrasies — as a vehicle for expressing his own vision of Judaism. This was possible for Montefiore in a way that it did not seem to be for other Jewish thinkers, even other reformers, primarily because of his particular background which had freed him of the traditional anti-Christian bias and the related fear of betraying Judaism by studying Jesus.⁴³

In emphasizing Jesus’ uniqueness, Montefiore felt that part of “the distinction and the original greatness of the teacher of Nazareth” had been his active desire to redeem and convert marginalized groups in society, including women and “sinners.”⁴⁴ Jesus had been not only “a collective prophet” but also “the individualist prophet — the seeker of souls.” This seeking out of the sinner with Jesus’ methods and intensity was, in Montefiore’s opinion, something new in the religious history of Israel, especially when it was connected to the idea of redemption.⁴⁵ One of the reasons why he was attracted to this aspect of Jesus’ ministry was that it echoed his own strong desire to reach out and rescue the Jewish masses disenchanted by traditional Judaism — one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Liberal Jewish movement. It also paralleled his own social concerns, as reflected in the types of charitable work with which he was associated, including the Jewish Association for the Protection of Women and Children and Basil Henriques’ social-educational program for Jewish boys in the East End of London.

In line with the Liberal trend to “spiritualize” Judaism, Montefiore had worked hard to distance Judaism from the ritualized, legalistic religion of Christian critique. Unconcerned about questions of priority, he identified with those aspects of Jesus’ teaching which helped to accomplish this. With regard to God’s grace and the concept of His rewards as gifts, he was inclined to view Jesus’ attitude that man has no claim upon God as “comparatively new and original,” in spite of the parallels that existed in the rabbinic literature. Similarly, although teachings

42 Montefiore, “The Originality of Jesus,” 98–99, 107. Once again distancing himself from “current Jewish criticism,” he nevertheless recognized “a degree of originality . . . [and] of excellence” in the paradoxes of the Sermon on the Mount.

43 Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. N.P. Goldhawk (London: Routledge, 1951) presented Jesus’ faith as the highest and most classic expression of Jewish *emunah*. Thus, Buber, too, used Jesus as a vehicle to express his own vision of Judaism. The essential difference was that Montefiore utilized various elements in Jesus’ teaching that he readily admitted were original or non-Jewish.

44 Montefiore, “The Originality of Jesus,” 38, 44.

45 *Ibid.*, 55, 57–58. This had also been one of Israel Abrahams’ observations.

on self-denial had not been unknown before Jesus' time, Montefiore felt that the vivid expression of the ideal in the Gospels, together with its teaching regarding the renunciation and abandonment of the earthly for the heavenly, of this world for the next, were "surely new and original contributions to the history of religion and morality." Regarding what he described as "the heroic element in the paradoxes of the sermon on the mount," Montefiore freely admitted that they could never be the laws of a state. Nevertheless, they remained "the principles of the hero, which heroes every now and then can put in practice, and which, as ideals and as spirit, are still fresh and valid and true."⁴⁶ It was exactly this sort of comment that provoked men like Ahad Ha-Am to question the authenticity of Montefiore's Jewishness. And in fact, Montefiore's championing of such stoic ideals as renouncement and self-denial had been more due to the influence of nineteenth-century hellenized or anglicanized Christianity than they had been due to the influence of Jewish thought or even that of the first-century Gospel texts.⁴⁷ Moreover, it was his adoption of apparently non-Jewish value-judgements and attitudes that explains his readiness (in contrast to many of his co-religionists) to attribute such teachings to Jesus as "new and original" and to regard them as worthy of emulation rather than of disparagement. In some cases he went even further and used such perceived differences in defending his own Liberal Jewish theology, for instance, with regard to Jesus' view of the Law.

A common argument since modern Jews first became involved in what has been described as the reclamation of Jesus, is that he had been an observant Jew and that he had not challenged Torah. Montefiore, however, suggested that Jesus *had* abrogated the Law in principle without intending to do so. (On this matter he was prepared to accept Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees as historical fact). Strictly speaking, he was not alone in this. Joseph Klausner also argued that while Jesus had not actually set aside the ceremonial laws, he had nevertheless so devalued them that it was later possible for Paul, the originator of Christianity, to break away from Judaism in Jesus' name.⁴⁸ Where Montefiore differed from Klausner was that, firstly, he could not help projecting onto Jesus some of his own liberal musings and thus a sense of principle and intention; and secondly, that he regarded this development as a good thing. Thus, while Jesus had never disputed theoretically the belief that the Law was "divine," there had been

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97–98, 105, 107.

⁴⁷ Jesus' declaration that true rule is true service was, in Montefiore's mind, the most original feature of his conception of the messiah, and yet this idea of kingship echoed Platonic rather than Jewish thought. *Ibid.*, 131, 136. "His [Jesus'] idea of kingship was that of Plato; he only is the king whose life is given for his people. Kingship is service." *Ibid.*, 106–7.

⁴⁸ Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 369. E.P. Sanders points out that this theory did not explain why James and Peter had failed to reach the same conclusions when looking at Jesus' words and deeds. E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1985) 53.

for the teacher of Nazareth a higher authority, which Montefiore described as “the inspiration of his thoughts and words as the Divine Spirit seemed to suggest them to his mind.” He found evidence for this in several of Jesus’ confrontations with the Pharisees. For example, on the question of rabbinic regulations regarding the washing of hands Montefiore understood Jesus to have argued that “things” could not defile “persons” and that one’s spiritual personality could only be spiritually defiled. “Logically and consistently, the right was on the side of the Rabbis,” he wrote, “[but] universally, ultimately, and religiously, the right was on the side of Jesus.”⁴⁹ It goes without saying that such an assessment was not common among Jewish writers. Here we see that what he regarded as a difference between Jesus’ thought and that of his contemporaries, could be utilized as an opportunity to expound his own Liberal Jewish views.

Overall, it is not difficult to see what drew Montefiore to Jesus. Walter Jacob was not too far off the mark when he suggested that the Jesus portrayed in *The Synoptic Gospels* and in *The Religious Teaching of Jesus* was “an idealized Montefiore in miniature.”⁵⁰ For Montefiore, as for many of the other Jewish writers, most of Jesus’ teaching appeared to be rooted well within the confines of first-century Jewish thought.⁵¹ But when Jesus’ teachings appeared to stray outside these perimeters Montefiore was often sympathetic, openly expressing his support, because he felt a sort of kinship and like-mindedness. It was easy for him to eulogize the “heroic element,” the “largeness of views,” and the “grand simplicity” which he felt characterized Jesus’ ministry,⁵² because, not to put too fine a point upon it, he saw these very same attributes as characteristic of his own Liberal Jewish struggle. Somewhat paradoxically, praising Jesus’ allegedly “un-Jewish” teachings thus gave him the opportunity to justify similar actions and beliefs of his own to his Jewish critics. Montefiore explicitly argued for adopting teachings which he himself regarded as “un-Jewish” but which he believed were necessary for the improvement and development of Judaism. In this Montefiore appears unique among Jewish thinkers for whom the identification of Jesus’ teachings as “un-Jewish” was only ever a negative thing. Montefiore’s unusual utilization of Jesus is paralleled to a lesser extent in his approach to the apostle Paul.

49 C.G. Montefiore, *Some Elements in the Religious Teaching of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1910) 46–47, 49–50.

50 C.G. Montefiore, *Some Elements in the Religious Teaching of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1910). Walter Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes; The Quest for Common Ground* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974) 103.

51 For example, Montefiore agreed with many other Jewish writers that the concept of the Kingdom and the coming Judgement, while central to Jesus’ world-view and emphasized in his teachings, was essentially a Jewish doctrine. He held that it was not created by Jesus or even considerably changed by him. Montefiore, *The Religious Teaching of Jesus*, 60.

52 Montefiore, *Liberal Judaism and Hellenism*, 103.

THE SILENCE OF JEWS WITH REGARD TO PAUL

Until relatively recent times Jews have very rarely written about Paul. There are a few possible exceptions in the rabbinic literature. The Christian scholar Kittel suggested that it was Paul who was described in 'Abot 3:12 as one who

profanes the Hallowed Things and despises the set feasts and puts his fellow to shame publicly and makes void the covenant of Abraham our father, and discloses meanings in the Law which are not according to the Halakhah.⁵³

Later Klausner argued that it was Paul who was referred to in Shabbath 30b, which speaks of a pupil of Gamaliel who "went wrong" and who "interpreted the Torah in a perverse manner."⁵⁴ And Baeck accepted the alleged reference to Paul in Ruth Rabbah, Petikha 3, "This man . . . made himself strange to the circumcision and the commandments."⁵⁵ But even allowing for these few tenuous possibilities, the silence of ancient Jewish writers on this subject is striking. In an essay entitled "Paul in Modern Jewish Thought," Donald Hagner has argued that there were two main reasons for this. Firstly, Paul's missionary success made him a dangerous opponent for the Rabbis; while his theology was patently wrong, they felt that the best way to deal with his threat was to ignore him and give him as little publicity as possible. Secondly, and more importantly, Jews had lived within Christendom from the fourth century until the nineteenth-century Emancipation, under oppression; their silence was simply a reflection of their awareness of the political danger of engaging with Jesus, Paul or Christianity. For Hagner, "the new climate of freedom produced by the gradual acceptance of Jews into European society" brought to an end the centuries of silence.⁵⁶

Of course Hagner is right in his observation that more Jews have written about Paul and engaged his teaching since Emancipation than before, and that a very important factor in this was the diminished threat of recrimination from their Christian neighbors. With the general increase in their familiarity with the surrounding Christian world, the fear of contamination from the heretical Apostle would also have diminished, and a greater number of Jews would have read his writings. It seems logical to conclude that with the dissolution of the two main fears or causes for the Jewish silence came an end to the silence. One

53 G. Kittel, "Paulus im Talmud" in *Rabbinica, Arbeiten zur Religionsgeschichte des Urchristentums* 1, 3 (Leipzig: 1920) cited in Donald A. Hagner, "Paul in Modern Thought," in Donald A. Hagner and M. J. Harris, eds., *Pauline Studies; Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980) 160.

54 Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, trans. W.F. Stinespring (London: Allen & Unwin, 1943) 310–11.

55 A commentary on Proverbs 21:8, which refers to the "man" whose "way is forward and strange." Leo Baeck, "The Faith of Paul," *JJS* 3(1952)109.

56 Donald A. Hagner, "Paul in Modern Thought," 143–65.

might also have expected that for those who were coming to regard Jesus as faithful to Judaism, Paul would have drawn increasing attention as the man responsible for the movement of early Christianity away from its Jewish roots. In fact, one is struck by the very small number of Jewish writers who have produced a dedicated study on Paul, in comparison with those who have written about Jesus. It is possible to count about sixteen.⁵⁷ When the fact that a number of the authors produced only essays or articles rather than full-length works is taken into account, the implication that the tide has turned and the claim that in modern times Jewish scholars have “no small fascination for Saul of Tarsus” seems less convincing.⁵⁸ It appears that for the vast majority of them, the Apostle to the Gentiles was of little or no interest.

Of the few Jewish writers who did consider the Apostle to the Gentiles, each had his own agenda. For many of them, especially the earlier ones, their concern was to compare and contrast Pauline with Jewish thought for polemical purposes. Examples of those whose treatment was colored by a negative appraisal of Paul include Kaufmann Kohler, Martin Buber, Leo Baeck and Hyam Maccoby. Later, others were determined to present a non-partisan historical study that sought simply to comprehend Paul and not to comment on his merit one way or the other. Examples include Joseph Klausner, Samuel Sandmel, Hugh Schonfield, Hans Joachim Schoeps, David Flusser, Alan Segal and Daniel Boyarin. Of the remainder, Heinrich Graetz’s treatment of Paul in his *History* was not overtly polemical, although the anti-Christian undercurrent of the work should not be forgotten. The same could be said of Isaac Meyer Wise, who seemed to admire Paul for the mark he left upon the world in spite of viewing him ultimately as a mystical, heretical Jew. Claude Montefiore found himself torn in two directions and genuinely attempted both a fair-handed New Testament analysis of Paul and a (generally negative) evaluation of his religious teachings. Richard L. Rubinstein, who approached Paul primarily from the perspective of Freudian psychology in attempting to demonstrate that Pauline insights had anticipated Freud, lies somewhat outside this analysis.⁵⁹

The small number of Jewish writers on Paul demands an explanation. It is

57 Hagner’s list includes Heinrich Graetz, C. G. Montefiore, Kaufmann Kohler, Joseph Klausner, Martin Buber, Leo Baeck, Samuel Sandmel, Hans Joachim Schoeps, Shalom Ben-Chorin and Richard L. Rubinstein. *Ibid.*, 144, 145. Others include Isaac M. Wise, Hyam Maccoby, Hugh Schonfield, David Flusser, Alan Segal and Daniel Boyarin.

58 *Ibid.*, 144.

59 Kaufmann Kohler, “Saul of Tarsus,” in Isadore Singer, ed., *Jewish Encyclopaedia* 11 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1901–16) 79–87. Martin Buber, *Zwei Glaubensweisen* (Zürich: Manesse Verlag, 1950). English version: Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. N. P. Goldhawk (London: Routledge, 1951). Leo Baeck, “The Faith of Paul,” *JJS* 3 (1952) 93–110. Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker; Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986). Joseph Klausner, *Mi-Yeshu ’ad Paulus* (Tel Aviv: Mada’, 1939). English version: Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, trans. W. F.

not a satisfactory answer to say that Jewish writers simply regarded Paul as less relevant than Jesus for Judaism and that their relatively small written output reflected their lack of interest. Pauline thought and Christian interpretations of it have significantly shaped the Church, especially the Protestant Church, with which Judaism has struggled. An understanding of Paul is thus essential in understanding Christianity and one would expect a good deal more Jewish study of Paul, especially from those concerned with Jewish-Christian relations. One possible reason for the Jewish silence was that, as far as the vast majority were concerned, the Jewish position regarding the apostate Paul was quite clear — what need was there for a re-examination? For centuries the Jewish understanding of Paul had been hindered by the same clumsy reading of the apostle of which Christians were similarly guilty, which over-emphasized his apparent anti-Jewishness and his contrast of faith versus works. To a certain extent this traditional presupposition lies behind the works of several of the Jewish writers, especially Buber and Kohler. Another reason for the continued silence was the Christo-centricism of the apostle's writings. Unlike Jesus whose teachings could, in the main, be easily reconciled with Judaism, Paul's fixation upon a supernatural messiah could not easily be overlooked in favor of his more "Jewish" teachings.⁶⁰ As a consequence, there was very little reason to try to reclaim Paul in the way that modern Jews had attempted to reclaim Jesus. Overall, there was little or no incentive for Jews to study Paul, other than to refute Christian views of Judaism derived from Paul's misrepresentation of the Jewish Law.

Stinespring (London: Allen & Unwin, 1943). Samuel Sandmel, *The Genius of Paul; a Study in History* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1958). Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Jew of Tarsus; an Unorthodox Portrait of Paul* (London: MacDonal & Co., 1946). Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Paulus; die Theologie des Apostels im Lichte der jüdischen Religionsgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959). English version: Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Paul; the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961). David Flusser, "Paul of Tarsus," in Cecil Roth, ed., *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971) 190–91. Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert; the Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew; Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994). Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews; From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. and trans. by Bella Lowy (vol. 2; London: Jewish Chronicle, 1901). Isaac Meyer Wise, "Paul and the Mystics," in Isaac Meyer Wise, *Three Lectures on the Origin of Christianity* (Cincinnati: Bloch & Co, 1883). C. G. Montefiore wrote two articles and one book: C. G. Montefiore, "First Impressions of St. Paul," *JQR* 6 (1894) 428–74; C. G. Montefiore, "Rabbinic Judaism and the Epistles of St. Paul," *JQR* 13 (1901) 161–217; and C. G. Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul; Two Essays* (London: Max Goschen Ltd, 1914). Richard L. Rubinstein, *My Brother Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

60 Leo Baeck expresses this well. "The first thing we see is that there is a centre about which everything turns. The point on which everything depends, round which everything revolved in Paul's life, and the point at which his faith became his life was the vision which overpowered him when one day he saw the Messiah and heard his voice. This vision immediately became, and remained, the central fact of Paul's life . . . One must start from it in order to understand Paul, his personality and his confession." Baeck, "The Faith of Paul," 94.

MONTEFIORE'S APPROACH TO PAUL

Montefiore was interested in Paul because: a. his Liberal Jewish philosophy primed him to attempt to salvage what he could from any religious writing, and especially from writings whose author he had described on record as a religious genius; and b. because he was fascinated by the question of how to explain Paul's view of Judaism if one was to start from the assumption that Paul was sincere in his critique. Neither of these concerns could be described as characteristic of previous Jewish approaches.

Montefiore dedicated one book and two long articles to dealing with Paul. The book *Judaism and St Paul* incorporated the previous articles; the first half contained his contribution to Pauline scholarship, while the second half outlined those elements of Paul's thought which, from a Liberal Jewish point of view, were of lasting religious value.⁶¹ In considering first his scholarship, it is worth noting that Montefiore has had a considerable impact upon Pauline studies — two of the most important post-war works on Pauline thought, by W. D. Davies and E. P. Sanders, have treated the questions raised by Montefiore at considerable length.⁶²

The Jewish dilemma had been articulated by Solomon Schechter in 1909, when he wrote,

Either the theology of the Rabbis must be wrong, its conception of God debasing, its leading motives materialistic and coarse, and its teachings lacking in enthusiasm and spirituality, or the Apostle to the Gentiles is quite unintelligible.⁶³

In common with Jewish writers before him, Montefiore had difficulty in accepting that a rabbinic Jew could have produced the theory of the Law found in Romans, have emphasized mysticism and pessimism to such a degree, or have ignored the rabbinic teachings on repentance and God's forgiveness. If Paul had known Rabbinic Judaism, then, as Montefiore put it,

many of the salient doctrines of the great Epistles could never have evolved.

61 C. G. Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul; Two Essays* (London: Max Goschen Ltd, 1914).

62 E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1977) and W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: S. P. C. K., 1955). In particular, Sanders has dominated Pauline studies over the last two decades. His understanding of Judaism in terms of "covenantal nominalism" came about largely as a response to the critique of Montefiore (and others) of the Lutheran-Protestant view of Judaism, as he explains in his introduction. It is worth noting that Sanders' new perspective, namely, that the rabbinic discussions presupposed the covenant and were largely directed toward the question of how to fulfil the covenantal obligations rather than how to ensure salvation, is not disputed by even his fiercest critic, Jacob Neusner (who takes exception only to his methodology).

63 Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (London: A. & C. Black, 1909) 18.

They would have been so very unnecessary, and, because unnecessary, they could not have been thought out.⁶⁴

But in contrast to those Jews who had written before him, Montefiore accepted Paul's criticisms as accurately representing *the Judaism with which the apostle was familiar*. He had therefore come to believe that the only fair and reasonable explanation of Paul's apparent ignorance was that Paul had not known Rabbinic Judaism, and that he had been influenced by non-Jewish religious conceptions and practices. By piecing together what Paul had to say about his pre-conversion religion, Montefiore concluded that the apostle's experience had been of a poorer, inferior strand of Judaism, which he described as Hellenistic or Diaspora Judaism. In his opinion, it had been

more systematic, and perhaps a little more philosophic and less child-like, but possibly for those very reasons it was less intimate, warm, joyous and comforting. Its God was more distant and less loving . . . The early religion of Paul was more sombre and gloomy than Rabbinic Judaism; the world was a more miserable and God-forsaken place; there were fewer simple joys and happinesses . . . The outlook was darker: man could be, and was, less good . . . God was not constantly helping and forgiving.⁶⁵

Thus Montefiore evaded Schechter's dilemma that Paul's criticisms of Rabbinic Judaism had to be either essentially accurate, or totally misrepresentative, by arguing that the pseudo-Judaism attacked by Paul had probably been a transcendental, philosophic form of Judaism brought about from exposure to Hellenism.

For the purposes of this article, it is irrelevant whether or not Montefiore was correct regarding the nature of Paul's religious background, although in point of fact it was an overly simplistic analysis.⁶⁶ What is significant is that he did not attempt a straightforward defense of Judaism against Pauline criticism but rather sought to move Rabbinic Judaism out of the line of fire. His solution broke with custom by implying that Jews need no longer regard the Epistles as malicious or anti-Jewish, at least in the traditional sense. As Montefiore saw it, Paul had not been talking about Rabbinic Judaism in the first place.

⁶⁴ Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul*, 82.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 81–82.

⁶⁶ Montefiore's work was in essay format and supplied no references to sources. He set to one side the crucial question as to what extent the Judaism practiced in 50 C.E. had differed from that practiced in 300–500 C.E.; he assumed that there had been little difference between the two and ignored the evidence of Josephus and Philo. Most significantly, he distinguished too sharply between Hellenistic and Rabbinic/Palestinian Jewish religious thought. The argument that Paul is better understood in terms of a Hellenistic Judaism in contrast to quite distinct Rabbinic/Palestinian Judaism has not influenced subsequent mainstream Pauline research.

The other factor mentioned earlier in accounting for the general Jewish disinterest in Paul was the centrality of a divine Christ in his epistles. Montefiore fully recognized the central importance of Christ in Paul's message; for the apostle, "Christianity is not the Law plus Christ. It is Jesus Christ alone."⁶⁷ But he based his final assessment of Paul upon a limited number of letters, and one effect of this was to reject as Pauline the more developed Christology of other epistles. As a result, he imagined Paul's authentic view to have been that Christ, although pre-existent before his human birth, had originally been created by God, and suggested that the apostle had not sought to "imply the co-eternity or co-equality of Christ with God."⁶⁸ Since he was seeking to introduce the apostle to a Jewish audience in as positive a light as possible, it was in Montefiore's interest to play down Paul's conception of the divinity of Christ where he could. Nevertheless, this was a remarkable statement and set Montefiore apart from his Jewish contemporaries. Rightly or wrongly he had attempted to rescue Paul, to re-interpret the traditional reading of him, when all other Jews had been content to reject him *in toto*. Both as a Jew and as a liberal, Montefiore had opposed any claim of divinity for Jesus. The superimposition of this belief onto the author of the epistles was an example of something we see happening with innumerable interpretations of *Jesus* suggested by Jews and Christians alike in support of their own particular beliefs. What was remarkable was that Montefiore, as a Jew, should have wanted to treat Paul, the Great Apostate, in such a way.

Montefiore wrote repeatedly of abandoning the well trodden paths of religious polemicism, and believed he had found for himself a better place from which to judge the Apostle to the Gentiles. A Liberal Jew, he argued, could truly appreciate both the short-comings, which had been the traditional diet of Jewish apologists down through the ages, and the achievements, which he preferred to dwell upon. Having in these ways defused Paul, so to speak, and with a self-consciously English sense of fair play, he then set himself the task of seeing what, if anything, could be gleaned from the epistles for the benefit of Judaism.

The second half of his book *Judaism and St Paul* could not have been written by any other Jewish writer. One of the most important assumptions driving Montefiore's Liberal Jewish theology was his belief that "All the light has not shone through Jewish windows."⁶⁹ If Paul's letters contained universal truths, then as far as the founder of Anglo-Liberal Judaism was concerned, these fragments were worth incorporating into its teachings, albeit in a modified form.

67 Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul*, 129.

68 These were 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, and Philippians. Montefiore, "First Impressions of St. Paul," 428, 430.

69 C.G. Montefiore cited in Norman Bentwich, "Claude Montefiore and his Tutor in Rabbinics: Founders of Liberal and Conservative Judaism," *The Montefiore Lectures* (Southampton: Univ. of Southampton, 1966)15.

As he put it, "There may be a good deal to adapt, although comparably little to adopt."⁷⁰

At the top of this list was, of course, Paul's introduction of a practical (although imperfect) universalism and the inclusion of Gentiles. Again, he admired the apostle's teaching in not giving needless offense for the benefit of those who were "weaker" in faith. This was a policy which he attempted to practice in the context of the Anglo-Jewish response to his own Liberal teachings, especially with regard to the lax liberal observation of the dietary laws. Similarly, Montefiore felt that the controversial use of the vernacular in synagogue services could be justified along the lines of argument that Paul had offered so many centuries before.⁷¹ There was even one element of moral worth in Paul's objection to justification by works that was worth salvaging. According to Montefiore, the apostle had taught that one failed to win righteousness by fulfilling the Law because one could never fulfil it; worse still, one failed to win righteousness even if one did fulfil the Law. In spite of his recognition that "no Jew ever looked at the Law from this point of view," Montefiore admitted that he felt there was, indeed, a danger that "works righteousness" could lead to self-righteousness and self-delusion.⁷² Interestingly, he also admired Paul's mysticism, "its solemnity, its power and its beauty" even as a "double outsider . . . that is, a Jew who is not a mystic."⁷³ He especially appreciated Paul's teaching regarding the reproduction of the death and the risen life of the messiah in the experience of each individual believer, seeing in it a parallel to the rabbinic teaching that a proselyte, brought to the knowledge of the One God, was made new and recreated.⁷⁴ Paul's attitude towards suffering was also instructive. He observed,

Paul not only rises superior to his sufferings, but he rejoices in them. And perhaps in this exultation and rejoicing lies the most peculiar and instructive feature of his career, the feature, moreover, in which he was, though perhaps unconsciously, in fullest accordance with the teaching of his Master and Lord.⁷⁵

Far more than any of his Jewish contemporaries, Montefiore had approached Paul as a source of inspiration and religious insight, someone whom modern

70 Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul*, 142.

71 *Ibid.*, 183, 192–94. He quoted Paul's comments, "If I know not the meaning of the language, the speaker is unintelligible to me" and "How shall the unlearned say Amen to your thanksgiving, if he does not understand what you say?"

72 Montefiore, "First Impressions of St. Paul," 443–44.

73 Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul*, 194. In a letter to Lucy Cohen, he remarked, "I am no good at mysticism, only respectful." Cohen, *Some Recollections*, 113.

74 Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul*, 193–94, 200.

75 *Ibid.*, 201.

Jews would do well to study. In sharp contrast to previous Jewish practice, he openly praised what he felt the epistles had to offer Judaism and quietly rejected all that he believed was unserviceable. It would be wrong, however, to give the impression that Montefiore was anywhere near as positive about Paul as he was about Jesus. The vast mass of Paul's theology had to be rejected, he explained, because of a fundamental tenet of his own Liberal Jewish teaching.

If [he explained] all men are "saved" whether they believe in Christ or reject him, whether they are idolaters or monotheists, [then] the basis of Pauline theology collapses. The whole scheme and fabric tumble like a pack of cards to the ground.⁷⁶

Paul's theology failed not so much because Montefiore was a Jew but because he was a Liberal, and could not accept that God would ultimately condemn anyone to perdition. Nevertheless, the fact that he found most of Paul unacceptable only makes his effort to repackage him for a Jewish audience, for whom the traditional image was repulsive, even more striking.

CONCLUSION

Having considered Montefiore in the context of Jewish approaches to the New Testament, it should be apparent that there is a qualitative difference in Montefiore's treatment of Jesus. Certainly, he was drawn to Jesus as someone who had struggled with the authorities of his own day and as a Prophet in the age of Law. The spirit of Jesus' teachings seemed to represent for Montefiore the essence of true Jewish religion. But he did not simply admire him *more* than other Jewish writers — part of the attraction lay in what he regarded as Jesus' originalities and "un-Jewish" developments. As for Paul, despite the fact that Montefiore's interest was essentially limited to what he saw as fresh expressions of Jewish ethical teaching, the fact that he used Paul as a sort of devotional aid in the first place, sets him well and truly apart. This is even truer of his attempt to defuse the traditional Jewish view of the apostle by offering alternative theories for his religious background and for his view of Christ. In contrast to other Jewish commentators Montefiore engaged the teachings of Jesus and Paul (as recorded in the New Testament) in a sympathetic, constructive manner, rather than as an opportunity for voicing anti-Christian grievances. Furthermore, he argued passionately that modern Jews should reclaim rather than disown two of Israel's most influential sons, despite their failings.

In any analysis of Montefiore's approach to the central figures of Christianity, and especially his utilization of Jesus, there is a danger that he can be misrep-

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

resented as unconcerned with the vital issue of addressing the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity. Even in his own day there was some puzzlement as to why he had not converted, despite the many published utterances by which he sought to distance Liberal Judaism from Christianity.⁷⁷ “What Jews think about Jesus,” written three years before his death, was Montefiore’s last formal attempt to re-clarify and defend his own Liberal Jewish position regarding the central figure of Christianity and to distance it from the opinions of Christian orthodoxy and Unitarianism.⁷⁸ From a historical perspective, he insisted,

I infer a fine, a very fine, character, unlike the teachers of his own age, a sort of eighth-century prophet born out of season, a combination of Amos and Hosea. Jesus is for me *one* of the greatest and most original of our Jewish prophets and teachers, but I should hesitate to say that he was *more* original than any of them.⁷⁹

From a philosophical perspective, and even more to the point, Montefiore maintained that he could not follow those liberal Christians for whom “the real life and ideal life [of Jesus] had become fused into one.” This idealization which included within it all perfection was no more possible for Jesus, he wrote, than it was for Moses or Jeremiah or Rabbi Akiba.⁸⁰ Despite such disavowals of Christian teaching or belief, Montefiore’s generally conciliatory tone when writing about the New Testament, and his tendency to focus upon those Christian teachings which he regarded positively, left him open to misinterpretation.

Although he apparently never contemplated conversion, Montefiore regarded the best of the contemporary Christian thought as superior to much of what Judaism generally stood for at the time. While he became intensely concerned to forward the cause of Judaism, he could not quite leave behind the admiration and appreciation he had developed for Christianity. He regarded himself as a better man, a better Jew, for the cosmopolitan up-bringing and education he had enjoyed, and he felt keenly the intellectual debt his owed his tutor at Oxford, Benjamin Jowett, and many other Christian thinkers. His high regard for the New Testament teachings and his liberal conviction that religious truth can be found outside one’s own particular system, can be seen as an indication of the respect with which he held the world-view and value-judgements of such

77 For example, C.G. Montefiore, *Outlines of Liberal Judaism* (London: Macmillan, 1912) and C.G. Montefiore, *The Old Testament and After* (London: Macmillan, 1923) both consider in some detail what aspects of Christian thought he believed should be adopted, adapted or rejected in the context of the development of Judaism.

78 C.G. Montefiore, “What a Jew Thinks About Jesus,” *HibJ* 33(1934–35) 511–20.

79 *Ibid.*, 516.

80 *Ibid.*, 520.

men. Ultimately, an understanding of the nature of Montefiore's Liberal Jewish theological agenda helps explain his interest in re-introducing Jesus and Paul to Jews. As has been argued elsewhere,⁸¹ Montefiore's own personal conception of Liberal Judaism should be regarded as more than simply a progressive Jewish denomination, and rather as an attempt to re-mould Reform Judaism in terms of, or with special reference to, contemporary liberal Christianity. He himself explicitly wrote of translating liberal Christian thought into a Jewish context.⁸² In a very real sense, his Liberal Judaism represented an attempt to reconcile his regard for Christianity with his loyalty to his Jewish roots. His unique approach to Jesus and Paul was therefore an integral element in his construction of a coherent Jewish world-view that could incorporate Christianity in a positive way.

81 D.R. Langton, "Claude Montefiore and Christianity; Did the Founder of Liberal Judaism Lean too far?" *JJS* 50 (1999) 98–119.

82 "The main tenor of [Jowett's] teaching was in harmony and agreement with a progressive and enlightened Judaism. It can be translated, and it needs to be translated, into Jewish [sic]. Very imperfectly and stumblingly I have sought to do this from time to time." C.G. Montefiore, "The Religious Teaching of Jowett," *JQR* 12 (1899–1900) 374.