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The Apostle Paul in the Popular Jewish Imagination: The Case Study of the British Jewish Chronicle

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The subject of Jewish views of the apostle Paul has not attracted great scholarly attention. Those few studies that have been written have tended to address the interests and concerns of theologians and New Testament scholars,¹ and have had nothing to say about popular Jewish attitudes. This seems reasonable enough since, at first sight at least, it seems that Paul barely registers on the popular Jewish cultural radar. If an individual's significance to a community is determined by his historical reception within that community as a *whole*, then one must admit that Paul's impact on the Jewish imagination has been a very minor one. And yet the influence of his life and teachings upon the history of Judaism and the Jewish people is arguably quite profound. Was he not, as one commentator provocatively put it, 'single-handedly responsible for two thousand years of anti-Semitism and Christian brutality towards Jews'?² If so, would one not expect some interest in the Apostle to the Gentiles to be reflected at a popular level? Our aim here, then, is to attempt to set out for the first time an outline of the ways in which Paul has featured in modern cultural Jewish discourse.

¹ For example, Daniel R. Langton, "Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul: Pauline Studies as an Intra-Jewish Ideological Battleground," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28.2 (2005), pp.217-258; Daniel R. Langton, "The Myth of the 'Traditional Jewish View of Paul' and the Role of the Apostle in Modern Jewish-Christian Polemics," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28.1 (2005), pp.69-104; Pamela Eisenbaum, "Following in the Footnotes of the Apostle Paul" in Jose Ignacio Cabezón & Sheila Greeve Davaney, eds, *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.77-97; Stefan Meissner, *Die Heimholung des Ketzers: Studien zur jüdischen Auseinandersetzung mit Paul* (Mohr: Tübingen, 1996); Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, "The Essential Heresy; Paul's View of the Law According to Jewish Writers, 1886-1986," PhD thesis, Temple University (May 1990); Donald A. Hagner, "Paul in Modern Jewish Thought" in Donald A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris, eds, *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980), pp.143-165; Halvor Ronning, "Some Jewish Views of Paul as Basis of a Consideration of Jewish-Christian Relations" in *Judaica* 24 (1968), pp.82-97.

² Pamela Eisenbaum, "Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?" in *Cross Currents* 50:4 (Winter 2000-01), 506.

A comprehensive survey of popular sources in Europe and the United States is beyond the scope of this paper and continues to await the scholarly attention it deserves. In the meantime, as the premier communal newspaper for the Anglo-Jewry since 1841 and as the oldest continuously published Jewish weekly in the world, it is suggested that *The Jewish Chronicle* can be regarded as a useful case study, indicative of Jewish thought and discourse in the public domain over a sustained period, at least in one corner of the English-speaking world. After all, it has been both reflective of popular Anglo-Jewish opinion and influential in terms of shaping it for around 160 years. As the author of its official history has observed, "By interpreting the world to the Jews in Britain and representing them to the majority society, *The Jewish Chronicle* played a fundamental role in shaping Anglo-Jewish identity. It defined the parameters of debate for communal and other issues...[and] it functioned as a forum for the discussion of Judaism."³ Debates initiated by learned articles and book-reviews gathered momentum within its letters pages, editors pontificated on the great concerns of the day, columnists explained what's what to a lay readership anxious to make sense of the often-confusing Christian culture that surrounds them, and, through a mysterious, interactive process, popular opinion was formed.

In the case of St. Paul, popular opinion occasionally needed to be reminded why the apostle was an appropriate topic for debate. As one columnist noted in 1922, the conversion of Paul has had such a tremendous influence upon Jewish history, it opens up so many questions in which Jews are vitally

³ *The Jewish Chronicle* has held a monopoly over Anglo-Jewish press for much of the last century and a half and has succeeded in maintaining a consensual position and thus a commanding authority. David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (New York: Cambridge University, 1994), ix.

interested, that some account of it may fitly form the subject of comment in a Jewish newspaper...⁴

Generally speaking, Paul frequently appears in the *Chronicle* when the origins of Christianity are discussed, when an attempt is made to account for its characteristic doctrines, or when someone seeks to define Judaism against the essence of Christianity. A few examples will suffice. As an editorial from 1857 makes clear, it is no longer Jesus who should be held accountable for the transformation of a small Jewish following to a world-shaping religion:

It is the fiery rabbi of Tarsus who is the real founder of Gentile Christianity as developed in process of time. It is Paul who gave the impetus to the small particle detached from Judaism which sent it down to remote ages, and which, as it rolled on, avalanche-like gathered and gathered until it overwhelmed the existing forms of religion.⁵

And in reaction to a public lecture by a Christian religious leader in 1861, the editor made the case more explicitly still.

[W]e cannot admit that it was the teacher of Nazareth [Jesus] that produced the greatest change ever wrought on the face of the earth. This honour is due to rabbi Saul of Tarsus, commonly called St. Paul, and not rabbi Joshua of Nazareth. Had the fiery spirit of the rabbi of Tarsus not boldly broken down the barrier, that separated the Gentile from the Jewish world, and which Jesus left intact, the latter might have passed as the founder of some obscure Jewish sect...The true founder of Christianity, such as it necessarily

⁴ Theologian, "Paul and Paulinism," *The Jewish Chronicle* (27 January 1922), iii.

⁵ Editorial (Abraham Benisch), *The Jewish Chronicle* (17 July 1857), 1076. This is a response to a recent Christian enquiry as to why a Hebrew should not embrace Christianity.

must have shaped itself the moment the flood-gates of the Gentile world was opened, and the original Jewish nucleus swept away, is St. Paul, the man who was everything to everybody; among the Jews a Jew, and a Gentile among the Gentiles; who united the simplicity of the dove with the cunning of the serpent, and who, by his cunning, effected between Judaism and paganism that compromise which in process of time was enlarged and developed into historical Christianity such as prevails now in the civilized world. The pope of Rome ought to style himself the successor of St. Paul, the real founder of the Gentile Church, which absorbed the primitive Jewish churches, just as the rod of Aaron swallowed up the rods of the rival magicians.⁶

Although references to Paul are by no means numerous, this way of making sense of him is characteristic of the coverage of *The Jewish Chronicle*. General remarks to the effect that "Christianity is to a far greater extent the religion of Paul than that of Jesus"⁷ represent the most frequent type of discourse in which the apostle appears. Key characteristics of Christian thought, and certainly those which can be regarded as hostile to Judaism, are also often understood to be derived from Paul, rather than from the Jewish Jesus. The report of a public lecture by a Reform minister in 1908 is typical in this respect.

As impartial readers of the New Testament, we [Reform Jews] are able to see clearly to what a great extent that part of Christianity which is opposed to Judaism, which abrogates it, and places it aside, is distinctly apart from the

⁶ Editorial (Abraham Benisch) on a lecture given by the Archbishop of Dublin in *The Jewish Chronicle* (5 April 1861), 7.

⁷ Mentor, "Jews and Jesus" in *The Jewish Chronicle* (2 April 1923), 9.

teachings of Jesus and is as distinctly traceable to the effect of the teaching of the Apostle Paul.⁸

A reader who regularly perused the pages of the *Chronicle* would be exposed to book reviews of Protestant New Testament scholarship in which he would be reminded that many of the Christian teachings regarded as “absolutely repugnant to the Jewish mind...[such] as those of the supernatural character of Jesus, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement, were the product of Paul’s imagination.”⁹ Paul’s theological creativity was to be held responsible for the parting of the ways, or, as another book reviewer put it,

A Jew [i.e. Paul] who speaks of the ‘curse of the Law’ and believes in a pre-existent Christ, who is the only Son of God, who needs an incarnation and resurrection to effect the salvation of the elect, such a believer has denied his ancestral religion and stands outside the camp of Israel.¹⁰

It would be difficult to find an alternative to the ubiquitous presentation of Paul’s invention of Christianity as a pagan-influenced theological system against which the superiority of Judaism could be defined. As such, it represented a useful foil against which to contrast the Jewish religion. As one contributor explained in 1978,

St. Paul it was, and not Jesus, who originated Christianity in the name of Jesus, a Jesus long dead and in no position to protest. Pauline Christianity—there is no other variety extant—is a continuation of Greek saviour cults plus some confusion with and accommodation to Judaism...It presents little difficulty to show on theological and religious grounds, that Paul was profoundly mistaken, that Judaism and Christianity have divergent world views, that the Hebrew Bible and Greek New Testament are antithetical in just about every consideration...¹¹

But in attempting to do justice to the popular Jewish view of Paul, one cannot leave the reader with the impression that it begins and ends with his reputation as the founder of Christianity who synthesized Jewish and non-Jewish elements to create a new faith and who attacked the Law. To anyone even remotely familiar with his place within the Jewish imagination, it is apparent that the general attitude towards the Apostle to the Gentiles is overwhelmingly hostile, even pathologically so. In scholarly and popular sources alike, one will often find references to the apostle couched in vitriolic and hyperbolic language. Abandoning the pages of *The Jewish Chronicle* for a moment, one can readily locate descriptions of Paul as “Pharisaism’s greatest enemy”¹² and “a bitter and violent enemy of the Law”¹³ who called for the “dissolution of Judaism.”¹⁴ He was someone who exhibited “Jew-hatred”¹⁵ and

⁸ Rev A.A. Green, lecture to the Cambridge University Nonconformist Union (26 January 1908) in *The Jewish Chronicle* (31 January 1908), 7.

⁹ A book review of the Hibbert Lectures by Prof. Pfliegerer of Berlin 1885 on “The Origin of Paulinism and its Influence on Christianity.” The claim is also made that “It was Paul who widened the breach beyond the possibility of repair.” *The Jewish Chronicle* (17 April 1885), 5. Elsewhere, in a report on a lecture by M. Frank at the Société des Etudes Juives, Paul was also blamed for the doctrine of “original sin”. *The Jewish Chronicle* (1 January 1886), 9-10.

¹⁰ A book review by ‘G.F.’ of Schweizer’s *Paul and His Interpreters* in *The Jewish Chronicle* (15 November 1912), 24.

¹¹ S. Levin, “Children and the Greek Malady” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (22 December 1978), vii.

¹² Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), I, 221.

¹³ Abba Hillel Silver, *Where Judaism Differed; An Inquiry into the Distinctiveness of Judaism* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 113.

¹⁴ Paul Goodman, *History of the Jews*, revised by Israel Cohen (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1951), 38.

¹⁵ Kaufmann Kohler, “Saul of Tarsus.” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, XI, 85. “Antisemitism within Christianity originated with Paul.” Ralf Biermann, “The False Apostle Paul” in *The Jewish Times*, 27 April 2004.

whose “turn-coat theology” created a movement that “would become the primary source of anti-Semitism in history.”¹⁶ As one polemicist saw it, Paul was

the first enemy of the Jews among the Christians, the first Jewish informer among the gentiles, the first falsifier of Judaism to the gentile world, the foe of Israel, and the foe of the Torah. When among Christians everywhere in the world one hears or reads that Jews are a materialistic people devoid of spirit, a practical people devoid of soul, the source is Paul. When in evil times Christians drag forth our Scrolls of the Law, dishonour them, rend them and burn them, it is owing to Paul, who taught them that the Torah is the quintessence of sin, its apotheosis.¹⁷

Such sentiments are by no means limited to the marginal. Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, writing in 1993, even appeared to identify a genocidal ring to the apostle’s teachings, observing that he was

the architect of a Christian theology which deemed that the covenant between God and his people was now broken... Pauline theology demonstrates to the full how remote from and catastrophic to Judaism is the doctrine of a second choice, a new election...*No doctrine has cost more Jewish lives.*¹⁸ [Italics added]

These charges, it should be obvious, go further than simply acknowledging Paul as the individual who marked the dividing line between Judaism and Christianity, or the one with whom

¹⁶ Tibor Krausz, review of Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Saul* (2004) in *The Jerusalem Report* (7 March 2005), 41.

¹⁷ Chaim Lieberman, *The Christianity of Sholem Asch: An Appraisal from the Jewish Viewpoint* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 87-88.

¹⁸ Jonathan Sacks, *One People? Tradition, Modernity, and Jewish Unity* (London: Littman Library, 1993), 206-207.

the Christian Church began. It has been suggested that the animus of the popular view can be explained as resentment for the way in which later Christians used Paul to justify ideas such as Jewish culpability for Jesus’ death,¹⁹ or for the denigration of Judaism explicit in the traditional Western Christian reading of Paul.²⁰ But such explanations assume a more informed, rational basis for Jewish popular feeling than is perhaps warranted. Listening carefully to such emotive allegations, it seems that the raw power of the negative view of Paul is better explained by reference to the wider cultural landscape and, in particular, a complex array of ideas and attitudes that possess profoundly negative historical, sociological, and psychological

¹⁹ Having observed that “generally Paul has been something of a lightning rod for Jewish anger and criticism of Christianity,” the Conservative Jewish professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College, Claudia Setzer, goes on, “Where did all this animus come from? In part, it comes from the way Paul has been used against the Jews. For example, his first letter to the Thessalonians contains the earliest example of the charge that the Jews killed Jesus (2:14-16).” Claudia Setzer, “Understanding Paul,” unpublished paper given at the twelfth *Nostra Aetate* Dialogue, Fordham University (October 2004), 2. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 reads “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”

²⁰ In discussing “the standard view [of Paul] held by Jews up to at least 1950” Eisenbaum asks the question: “Why was Paul the bad guy? The reason lies with the traditional reading of Paul which has prevailed through most of Western Christian history, one that was given unparalleled, paradigmatic credibility by Luther, Reformation theology, and the rise of modern biblical scholarship... Paul is understood to have rejected his Judaism, which was a legalistic religion in which one achieved salvation through the accumulation of meritorious acts...Judaism is seen to be exclusivist and elitist, ethnically peculiar, and requiring of its members a plethora of arcane rituals.” Pamela Eisenbaum, “Following in the Footnotes of the Apostle Paul” in Jose Ignacio Cabezon & Sheila Greeve Davaney, eds., *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 83-84.

connotations for many Jews, and which populate modern Jewish literature and public discourse. These include attitudes towards apostasy, towards conversion and Christian missionary work, towards those who abandon or subordinate Torah, and towards those who would blur the boundaries of Jew and Christian, to say nothing of threat of Jewish self-hatred. It is the conscious or unconscious association of these categories with Paul, a kind of conceptual projection or displacement that accounts for the strong emotion, the widespread acceptance and the longevity of the negative Jewish view of Paul in modern times. While it is by no means easy to demonstrate the veracity of such a claim, it will prove useful to return to *The Jewish Chronicle* for establishing the kinds of popular discourse in which Paul appears.

In addition to presenting Paul as the creator of Christianity, then, the columns of the *Chronicle* also portray the apostle as an apostate and frequently associate him with conversion. He is described as a renegade, where “the meaning of renegade is to be understood as an apostate, one who has abandoned his religious faith.”²¹ Moreover, he had been a disloyal opportunist who ‘cannot escape the reproach of tergiversation and of a turn-coat, who, when it suited him, was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.’²² In the context of more general discussions on conversion, or in the condemnation of particular examples in modern times, Paul’s name frequently appears. The typical convert is described as having “quitted the law of Moses for the precepts of St. Paul,”²³ or having chosen “to obey the dictates

of St. Paul,”²⁴ or being, “according to Paul, an apostate from Moses.”²⁵ The account of one Jew who converted to Christianity, an allegedly gluttonous Jew who apostatized to avoid the dietary laws, ends with a condemnation of his claims to have been persecuted by Jews and that, “like another St. Paul,” he had been converted by a miracle.²⁶ There is often disgust expressed at the high estimation in which converts were held in the eyes of Christians, one commentator noting caustically that, in the mould of Paul, “a Jew when converted becomes a blessing chiefly to the gentiles.”²⁷ In this context, one may also note the bitter resentment felt by the Jewish community at Christian efforts to convert its members. Unsurprisingly, Paul is seen as the archetypal missionary, whose methods were strongly suspect. His work among the pagans revealed him to be “an adept opportunist...[who] saw that to be ‘accepted’ he must inject into the doctrines of Jesus some of the pagan beliefs which the Heathens held.”²⁸ Nevertheless, his approach, which preferred expediency to principle,²⁹ had had little effect on the Jews of his own day. And it was thought that this point was worth emphasizing in denunciations of modern evangelical missionizing efforts.

Can these deluded persons [i.e. those who support a Christian mission to the Jews]...really believe that the

²¹ Letter from ‘I.R.P.’ to the editor in *The Jewish Chronicle* (20 February 1852), 158-159.

²² Editorial (Abraham Benisch), “An Analysis of Religious Belief” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (23 June 1876), 187.

²³ James Picciotto, “Sketches in Anglo-Jewish History: Hebrew Capitalists” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (3 October 1873), 447.

²⁴ James Picciotto, “Sketches in Anglo-Jewish History: Isaac D’Israeli” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (14 August 1874), 314. This appears in the context of a discussion of Portuguese converts to Christianity.

²⁵ Editorial (Marcus Bresslau), “Clerical Defamation of Jewish Character” in *The Voice of Jacob / The Jewish Chronicle* (14 March 1845), 121.

²⁶ An Old Traveller, “Christian Prejudice Fostered by Jewish Converts” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (2 August 1850), 340.

²⁷ Editorial (Leopold Greenberg), *The Jewish Chronicle* (2 May 1930), viii.

²⁸ Editorial (Leopold Greenberg), *The Jewish Chronicle* (20 December 1929), 10.

²⁹ Letter to Editor by G. Friedlander in *The Jewish Chronicle* (24 June 1910), 24.

unhallowed words of some salaried missionary will produce a deeper impression on the mind of the modern Jew than the potent preaching of St. Paul to his Hebrew contemporaries?³⁰

To label Paul an apostate and to associate him with conversion and missionary activities was to invoke the history and communal memory of painful treatment of the Jewish people at the hands of its most bitter enemies. From a social perspective, the apostate had been traditionally treated as an outcast, totally ostracized from the community. Despised for moral weakness, for succumbing to threats or persecution, for switching sides, the apostate had become a figure of hate. Baptism into Christianity was especially reviled since many of its doctrines (for example, the trinity and the incarnation), not to speak of its practices (for example, sacramentalism and veneration of the saints), were regarded as idolatrous. In the medieval and ancient periods, attempts to convert Jews to Christianity were generally unsuccessful (with the exception of Spain and Portugal, where there were forced conversions). Nevertheless, a number of high profile apostates went on to become notorious persecutors of the Jews such as the thirteenth-century disputants Nicholas Donin (Paris 1240) and Paul Christian (Barcelona 1263).³¹ Furthermore, baptism of Jews in the modern period most commonly occurred as a means by which socially ambitious Jews believed they could partake of a wider non-Jewish society which attracted them but

which refused to accept them as Jews.³² Such assimilates were roundly condemned by those within the Jewish community for selling their Jewish identity so cheaply, exchanging their nominal Jewish beliefs for nominal Christian beliefs. A number of these also turned their back on their origins and expressed their own contempt of the primitive tribe from which they had found relief in the superior, cultured world of Christian society. A well-known example was Karl Marx, whose parents had had him baptized as an infant, and who was capable of regarding Judaism as the chief representative of Mammon. Others, for complex reasons we shall shortly explore, were obsessively antagonistic towards Jews and became known as self-haters. The implications for modern perceptions of Paul are obvious. In so far as he is regarded as a convert, he has been construed as a traitor to his people and as someone who not only sold his Judaism cheap, but went on to sell it on cheaply to the Gentiles. The Apostle to the Gentiles can also be thought of as the Great Apostate, the prototype of all Jewish converts to Christianity to come, whose theological writings would provide the foundations for fractious debate for millennia to come and who could be held responsible for Christian mission, that perennial thorn in the flesh of the Jewish community.

Whether Paul was regarded primarily as the inventor of Christianity, an apostate, a convert or as a missionary, all who contributed to *The Jewish Chronicle* agreed that his attitude to the Law was lamentable. Writers often complained about charges of legalism and “St. Paul’s indictment of Judaism as a religion of the dead, a bondage to an obsolete law.”³³ Liberating his followers from the Law was regarded as being integral to his

³⁰ Editorial (Abraham Benisch), *The Jewish Chronicle* (8 May 1863), 4.

³¹ For a useful introduction to the subject, see the translations of and commentaries on the disputations in Hyam Maccoby’s *Judaism on Trial* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993).

³² For a comprehensive and varied treatment of the subject of cultural assimilation, see the edited collection of essays, Todd M. Endelman, ed., *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987).

³³ Rev. Dr. Abelson, “A Medieval Theologian” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (24 June 1921), vii. Abelson’s focus is that of the eleventh-century philosopher Bahya ben Joseph.

program of gentilization.³⁴ As a result of his innovations, Gentile Christianity discarded many requirements of the law, such as the keeping of the Sabbath,³⁵ while spiritualizing others, for example, converting dietary impurities into moral ones.³⁶ In contrast to the Jewish law, the apostle even undermined the position of women.³⁷ “No wonder,” observed one regular columnist, that Paul was regarded in his day as “an apostate from the Law”. For, he goes on:

Paul was not only opposed to Jewish Law and its ceremonial observances, but to all law, whether moral or legal. His attitude is thoroughly antinomian...Emancipation from Law is one of the foundation principles of the Pauline system... Paul's teachings, with their opposition to the Law and their pessimistic view of the world, were in direct antagonism to nine-tenths of the teaching of the [Judaism of the] Old Testament.³⁸

³⁴ Regarding “Paul’s contest about the Law (Torah)...He succeeded in gaining the greatest object that lay closest to his heart—the freedom of his Gentile Christians from the Torah.” Letter from ‘Yehudi’ to editor in *The Jewish Chronicle* (4 May 1923), 13.

³⁵ “The gentile Christians—and it is they who have formed Orthodox Christianity as it now is—did not keep the Sabbath since the days of St Paul. In conformity with his teaching, who classified it among the beggarly elements from which Christ had freed his followers, they scorned and even opposed the Sabbath.” Editorial (Abraham Benisch), “The Sunday Opening of Museums” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (24 March 1876), 828.

³⁶ Editorial (Abraham Benisch), *The Jewish Chronicle and Hebrew Observer* (18 October 1861), 8.

³⁷ In a passionate piece about the place of women in religion, it is asserted, “[T]here is no doubt that the Apostle’s writings do betray the utmost contempt for the gentler sex...These reactionary teachings of the Christian Apostle certainly had the effect of causing women to occupy a lower and more restricted position, during the early centuries of the Christian Church than she had held among the Israelites.” Editorial (Asher Myers?), *The Jewish Chronicle* (6 October 1893), 6.

³⁸ Theologian, “Paul and Paulinism” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (27 January 1922), iii. The article is complementary of the work of Claude Montefiore, who

This view of Paul as the iconic abrogator of the Law means that he frequently appears in the context of inter-Jewish ideological debate, where his name is employed as a term of abuse to fling at one’s opponents. In particular, the Orthodox authorities are often reported as condemning progressive Jews with unflattering references to Paul. Thus in the years following the establishment of Reform Judaism in England in the mid nineteenth-century, one could find such pointed criticisms as:

God Almighty did not require either the correction of St. Paul or any other mortal. The assertion that a commandment may be broken in word and yet observed in spirit is one of the most dangerous doctrines that was ever brought forward.³⁹

And after the establishment of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue a few generations later, Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz reportedly warned his flock that Anglo-Liberal Jewish attitudes to the Bible and to “the bondage to the Law” are nothing “but an echo of Paul, the Christian apostle to the Gentiles.”⁴⁰ The significance of this link between Paul and liberal attitudes towards the Torah cannot be over-stated. For nineteenth- and twentieth-century progressive Jews, the Law was viewed as the source of Judaism’s ethical teaching, but was also regarded as having evolved over time and in accordance with the development of mankind. Biblical criticism, which assumed the human authorship of the scriptures and emphasized a rational, analytical approach to understanding the word of God, alarmed the traditionalists, who believed that it devalued the Law and contributed to the continued decline of Torah observance that had begun with the

wrote *Judaism and St. Paul: Two Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1914), but is more critical of Paul.

³⁹ Editorial (Abraham Benisch), “The Seven Words Against the Lord Jesus” in *The Jewish Chronicle and Hebrew Observer* (20 September 1863), 3.

⁴⁰ Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz, “The New Paths: Whither do they Lead?” in *The Jewish Chronicle* (25 December 1925), 14.

Enlightenment. Such progressive forms of Judaism exhibited a relaxed attitude towards *halakhic* observance. While some Reform leaders adopted an openly hostile stance towards rabbinic authority and interpretation of the Law, others came to see the ethical teachings of the Hebrew Bible and the developments of the rabbis as part of the wider revelation that included non-Jewish religious thought. The suspicion of many within the Orthodox camp that the reformers had been unduly influenced by Christian thought and practice, made the association with Paul all the more appropriate. The schism regarding the status of the Law and its binding nature upon the Jew became a gaping chasm, an unchanging post-Enlightenment landmark around which intra-Jewish religious debates continue to rage. The same holds true for the highly fraught context of the secular-religious divide within the modern state of Israel, where the practice of likening Paul to one's enemies remains alive and well. When, for example, the Israeli political party Shas gained in 1999 a concession that obligated senior cabinet members to avoid public desecration of the Sabbath, the *Chronicle* suggested "they have probably done more damage to the purity of Judaism than any misguided believer since Saul of Tarsus."⁴¹ In controversies over the meaning of the Law in modern Jewish life, the Apostle to the Gentiles has come to be so closely implicated that it is by no means obvious where antagonism towards

one's ideological opponent ends and hostility towards Paul begins.

⁴¹ The reason given was that the law actually undermined the sanctity of the Sabbath. "For when, in return for recognizing the government, a group, with rabbinical authority, outlaws public Sabbath breaches by senior ministers, it is, by implication, allowing junior ministers to do what they like on the seventh day (and senior ones to break Sabbath in private)." Norman Lebrecht, "When ministers get their hands on the ministries" in *The Jewish Chronicle* (9 July 1999), 25.

In more recent times, it is possible to find allusions to Paul in the context of criticism of the Messianic Jewish movement within the pages of the *Chronicle*. The controversial claimants of this hybrid religious identity, whose Jewish authenticity is uniformly denied by the Jewish community as a whole, have been likened to the apostle for, amongst other things, their missionary activities.⁴² The biting dismissal of one well-known sub-group, the evangelical "Jews for Jesus," is representative: "Ever since the days of Paul, there has been a technical name for Jews for Jesus: Christians."⁴³ The association is by no means a coincidence. The Messianic Jew or Hebrew Christian represents for the vast majority of Jews a deceptive and misleading confusion of the Jewish and Christian traditions. Such messianic groups are resented for the misappropriation of religious language, symbols, institutions, and objects. Similarly, it is easy to see how Paul can be viewed as someone who confuses the categories of Jewish and Christian, who in fact deliberately set out to blend ideas and teaching from Jewish and non-Jewish sources, not least with his emphasis on the Messiah as the Son of God and his allegorical reading of the Bible. Paul was also, of course, a seasoned missionary to both Jew and Gentile, whose attitudes and activities towards the dissemination of the gospel have provided the inspiration and model for centuries of Christian—and by association Messianic Jewish—missionary practice to follow. The fact that Messianic Judaism, in the forms with which we are familiar, emerged largely in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries,⁴⁴ does not in any way negate the displacement of the intense Jewish

⁴² A critique of Messianic Judaism by Arye Forta begins by referring to Paul. "In the first century...Paul roamed the Graeco-Roman world trying to convince Jews that their religion was a temporary thing, to be abolished as soon as Jesus came along." Rabbi Arye Forta, "Misguided Missions" in *The Jewish Chronicle* (9 June 1989), 31.

⁴³ John Diamond, "Right envelope but with the wrong message" in *The Jewish Chronicle* (12 November 1999), 31.

⁴⁴ For a useful overview of the history of Messianic Judaism, see Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (London: Continuum, 2001).

resentment of such groups onto the Messianic Jew from Tarsus.

If one were to attempt to generate an artificial, composite image of Paul from the pages of *The Jewish Chronicle*, the figure produced would have few redeeming features. To speak of the ways in which the Apostle to the Gentiles appears in popular discourse is to speak of a patchwork quilt of suspicion and hostility that regarded him both as the creator of Christianity and as a convert to it, as an embittered apostate from Judaism and as the translator of Jewish teachings for the Gentiles. In the mind of the modern Jew, the unfamiliar yet threatening figure of Paul was to be associated with progressive theological trends which undermined the authority of the Law, resented as the exemplar for opportunistic Christian missionary activities, and despised as a forerunner of the Messianic Jews who blurred the boundaries between Jew and Christian. He was the very personification of all the pain and destruction that the Christian Church had wrought upon the Jew in nineteen hundred years.

Finally, in the context of exploring the ways in which the popular Jewish view of Paul maps onto existing social categories with negative connotations, one might also point to the shadow cast by the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred. After all, Paul's story appears to echo the familiar story of the modern Jewish self-hater, as some have pointed out. Kaufmann Kohler is perhaps the most influential scholar to have so described the apostle, but other commentators who have addressed the question of Pauline self-hatred or Jew-hatred, include Lapide, Fuchs-Kreimer, and Brumberg-Kraus.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, here it is necessary to abandon the firm

⁴⁵ Kohler's scholarship emphasizes "Pauline Jew-hatred" and the apostle's "hatred of Judaism and the Jew." Kaufmann Kohler, "Saul of Tarsus," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, XI, 85, and *The Origins of the Synagogue and the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 266. Lapide suggests that his own view is

ground of *The Jewish Chronicle* and enter the realm of speculation, for evidence is not easy to come by, not least because "Jewish self-hatred" lies in the eye of the beholder. Theodore Lessing first coined the term in his book *Jewish Selfhatred* (1930)⁴⁶ in which he utilized clinical reports on Jews who regarded the Jewish people with utter disgust, as vermin and as a stain upon mankind, who urged Aryans to exterminate them, and who themselves deliberately remained childless or committed suicide. Such self-haters believed that ultimate responsibility for his ill-treatment lay with the Jew himself. In its extreme form Lessing regarded the phenomenon as an acute pathology of psychosis. In *Jewish Self-Hatred* (1986), Sander Gilman articulated the phenomenon as an internalization of non-Jewish constructions of Jewish identity, and expanded Jewish self-hatred to include Jewish anti-Judaism and Jewish anti-Semitism.⁴⁷ Todd Endelmann in an essay entitled "Jewish Self-hatred in Britain and Germany" (1999) criticized the tendency among some in the Jewish community to use the term as a means by which to undermine and express contempt of another's view, citing the debates around declining religious observance, intermarriage, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

unlike that of other Jews who, having read Christian accounts of Paul, have asked "Is he the father of that enmity towards Jews which claims to be Christian? Or might he not even have contracted the malady of Jewish self-hatred?" Pinchas Lapide and Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul: Rabbi and Apostle* (trans. Lawrence W. Deneff; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984 [1981], 32-33. Fuchs-Kreimer admits that "in the symbolic world of modern Judaism, Paul became the arch self-hating Jew who left his people for convenience." Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, "The Essential Heresy; Paul's View of the Law According to Jewish Writers, 1886-1986," Doctor of Philosophy, Temple University (May 1990), 79-80. Brumberg-Kraus also accepts that Jewish scholars have labelled Paul as an "alienated or as a self-hating Jew." Jonathan D. Brumberg-Kraus, "A Jewish Ideological Perspective on the Study of Christian Scripture," *Jewish Social Studies* 4/1 (1997), 124.

⁴⁶ Theodore Lessing, *Der Jüdische Selbsthass* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1930).

⁴⁷ Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986).

Nevertheless, he argued that the term was useful in a historical context, if one focused upon actions and motivations. His preferred definition distinguished self-haters from converts, assimilationists, and other Jews who had severed their ties to Jews and Judaism for a wide variety of reasons and by drawing attention to the inability of the self-haters to move on and their obsession with articulating anti-Jewish views, disparaging, belittling and cursing their origins and fate.⁴⁸ He maintained that self-hatred should not be confused with either Jewish self-criticism, which he viewed as a hallmark of the modern Jewish world, or some kind of disease or mental-illness, since Jewish internalization of non-Jewish values and perspectives was widespread throughout the modern Western world, and since the strength of feeling did not always lead to self-hating behavior.

So what has the concept of Jewish self-hatred got to do with Paul? Conceivably, Paul could be categorized as a self-hater in so far as he is perceived to be a Jewish opponent of Jews and Judaism, or because his views are regarded as antagonistic to Judaism. But there is more to it than that. The very concept of a self-hating Jew, which is strictly speaking a modern phenomenon, provides yet another means, another social category, by which to make sense of this first-century Jew. Arguably, Paul can be viewed as a Diaspora Jew who ceased to regard the Jewish way of life as superior to that of the Gentile. Crucially, he appears obsessed with a common Christian criticism relating to the burden of the law, and with defining Jewish observance in terms of this burden. The all-consuming nature of Paul's apparent critique of Judaism suggests the ultimate self-hater, one who could not simply move on and leave the Jews alone. Here, the point is not whether the wider Jewish community has been conscious of their displacement of

the concept of the "self-hating Jew" onto Paul—they are not, or, at least, there is no hint of this in a source such as *The Jewish Chronicle*. Rather, it is simply to suggest that such a displacement, such a conceptual spillage, might have played *some* part in the development of the modern appreciation of the Jewish Saul of Tarsus who became Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles.

Conclusion

As it happens, *The Occident*, a Jewish monthly national newspaper that ran from 1843 until 1869, reveals similar emphases to those we have been discussing among North American Jewry on the rare occasions it mentioned Paul. Once, after the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* had rather uncharacteristically criticized *The Occident* for its cynicism in regarding all converts as insincere and had gone so far as to defend the sincerity of the conversion of the great apostate himself, a biting response had been offered by Isaac Leeser, the renowned Sephardic rabbi, preacher, and founder of the Jewish press of America:

We do not esteem Paul greatly...Of course Saul or Paul was a Jew; but he taught in opposition to Judaism...The apostles themselves had surely no great sympathy with Paul; he went to the gentiles, while they adhered to the Jews, and kept the law...Indeed, we hold him to have been a man of consummate skill; he wanted to spread Judaism among the gentiles; but of *ceremonial* Judaism this was impossible, so he divested it of ceremony, and added the plurality in the Deity, as a doctrine better suited to the heathen world than the pure unity of the Jews. We would respectfully ask the editor of the *Chronicle*, whether he discovers not many inconsistencies in the character of Saul of Tarsus? At times with the Jews, then with the gentiles; at times entering the Synagogues, and then saying, he quits his brethren; at times living as a Jew, and then neglecting the ceremonies totally.

⁴⁸ Todd Endelmann, "Jewish Self-hatred in Britain and Germany" in M. Brenner, ed., *Two Nations: British and German Jews in Comparative Perspective* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 335.

We cannot reconcile all this; hence we do not esteem his character, even assuming all that is said about him in the Acts as literally true.⁴⁹

And on another occasion, responding to Christian missionary efforts, Leeser asserted forcefully that “the Jew wars against the very ideas Paul puts forth, and to enforce which oceans of blood have been shed; and that...we will resist them as we have done hitherto.”⁵⁰ It seems fair to conclude, then, however tentatively, that the intensity of negative feeling towards the

wider cultural attitudes towards apostates and converts, those who would abrogate the Torah, those who would confuse the distinction between Jew and Christian, missionary activities, and, arguably, the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred. It is useful to remember that such articulations of Paul, and of the antagonism that the wider Jewish community has felt towards this shadowy, disturbing first-century figure, do not simply reflect popular Jewish attitudes towards Christianity and Christian culture in the modern world, but undoubtedly also act as a powerful influence upon them.

Apostle within the popular Jewish imagination—insofar as it is reflected in a communal newspapers like *The Jewish Chronicle* and *The Occident*—is best explained in terms of an association, conscious and unconscious, of the Apostle to the Gentiles with

⁴⁹ Isaac Leeser, “The Jewish Chronicle and the Occident,” *The Occident* III:1 (April 1845), 44.

⁵⁰ Editorial (Isaac Leeser), “The Presbyterian Synod of New York and the Jews,” *The Occident* VII:10 (January 1850), 483.