Isaac Leeser and the Protestantization of American Judaism

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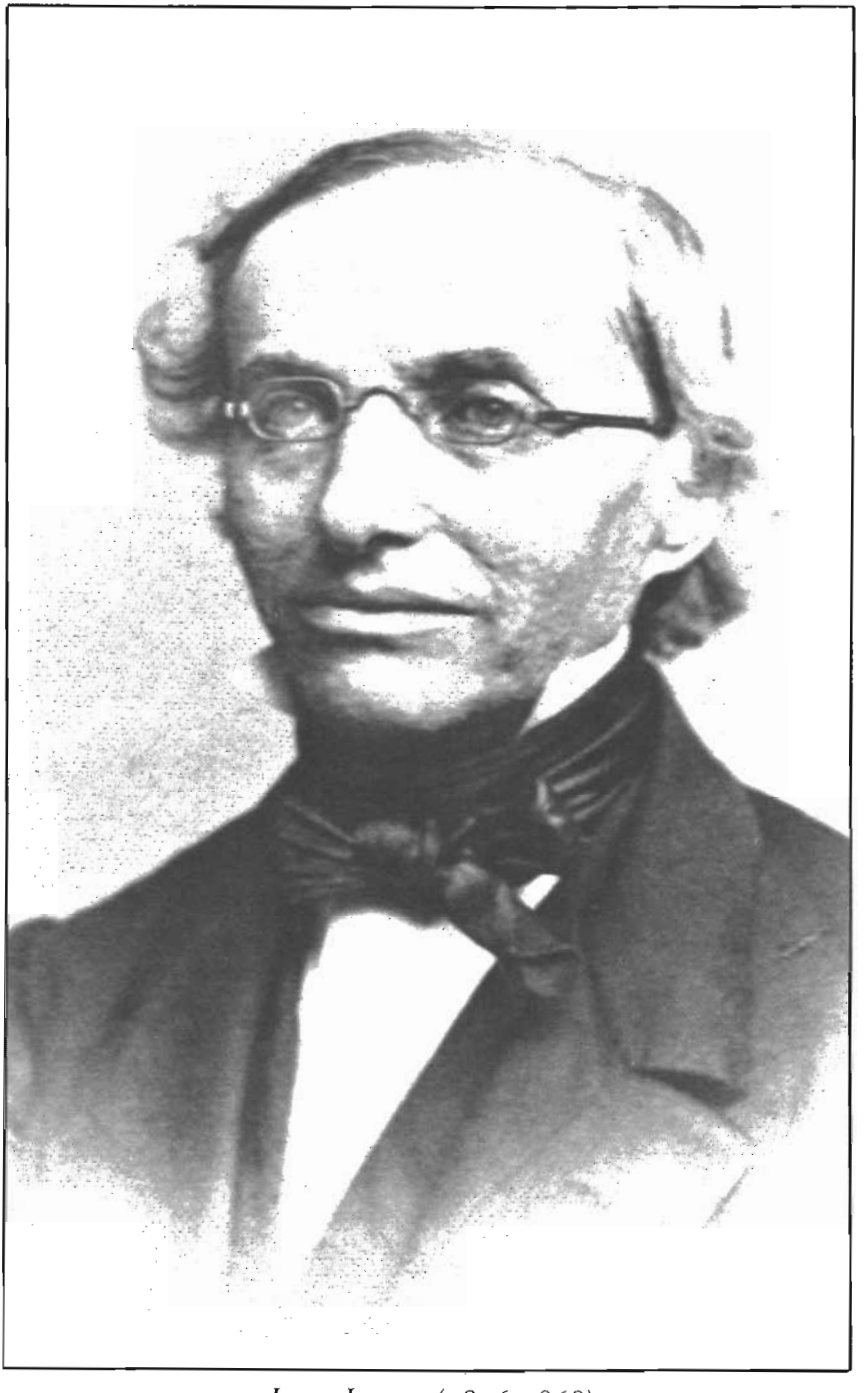
In attempting to understand Judaism in America during the nineteenth century, historians have largely focused on the development of the Reform movement and on the origins of Conservative Judaism. Significantly less attention has been paid to the history of traditional Judaism in America prior to 1880.[1]. Yet, one can argue that Orthodoxy dominated American Jewish religious life during most of the nineteenth century. In 1861, according to Leon Jick, whose own book, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820–1870*, emphasizes the centrality of the Reform movement in nineteenth-century American Judaism, there were more than two hundred Orthodox synagogues in the United States and only eight Reform congregations. "Among the eight," Jick added, "were a number that would be considered, by twentieth-century standards, Conservative."[2]

Orthodox Judaism in antebellum America was a relatively large and unquestionably complex phenomenon. A core of five Sephardic synagogues was established during the eighteenth century. Although they followed the Sephardic rite, by 1720, the majority of their members were of Central European descent. Beginning in 1802, with the founding of the Rodef Shalom congregation in Philadelphia, Ashkenazic Jews began organizing synagogues of their own. As immigration swelled their ranks, new synagogues, particularly in larger cities, were increasingly organized along subethnic lines. By the 1840's, highly Americanized Orthodox Ashkenazic congregations, such as New York's B'nai Jeshurun, successfully competed with the Sephardic synagogues for the leadership of the Jewish community.

Lay domination of the early American synagogue, widespread ignorance of Jewish law, the absence of ordained rabbis until 1840, and the need to conform to the mores of American society combined to make religious accommodationism a normative part of Orthodox Jewish life in America prior to the Civil War. Although this trend was most pronounced among reformers, it also broadly existed among tradi-



Isaac Leeser (1806-1868)

tionalists. In fact, many of the most important accommodative strategies of American Jews during the first half of the nineteenth century were first developed within the context of the native Orthodox community. The main thrust of the movement to accommodate traditional Judaism to American society involved the adaptation of select features of American Protestantism which brought Jews into the mainstream of religious life in nineteenth-century America but did not violate Jewish religious law.

The Protestantization of American Judaism actually began at the start of the nineteenth century with the break-up of the original *kehilloth* (synagogue-communities) and the rise of radical Jewish congregationalism. Subsequently, beginning in the 1830's, Orthodox Jews in America began to imitate specific practices and theological emphases of American Protestantism that did not violate either traditional Jewish law or doctrine. By the 1850's, a clear trend toward Jewish denominationalism also developed, which neither the accommodative traditionalists nor the moderate reformers could avert. Thus, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a profoundly transformed American Judaism had become, *sui generis*, a unique expression of the Jewish heritage.[3]

Isaac Leeser's Central Role

The most important spokesman of traditional Judaism in the United States who selectively advocated the Protestantization of American Judaism was Isaac Leeser (1806–68).[4] Four of his Protestantizing activities were eventually taken over by the American Jewish community as a whole. These included regular vernacular preaching, the transformation of the traditional office of *hazzan* into a Jewish ministry, the establishment of the Jewish Sunday school, and the widespread use of an English-language Jewish Bible translated by Leeser himself. Leeser also developed an eclectic theology that stressed the themes of man's sinfulness, the coming of a Messiah, and the restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. Although a full-scale treatment of his theology is beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting to note that a radical reformer, Samuel Hirsch, contemptously—but, in part, correctly—called Leeser's theology an *Abklatsch* ("poor imitation") of English-Christian Methodism.[5]

Leeser was a ubiquitous figure in American Jewish life from 1830 to 1868. "Practically every form of Jewish activity which supports American Jewish life today," wrote historian and Reform Rabbi Bertram W. Korn, "was established or envisaged by this one man," and "almost every kind of publication which is essential to Jewish survival was written, translated or fostered by him." Indeed, it is no exaggeration to call the antebellum period in American Jewish history, the "Age of Leeser."[6] Included among his firsts were the first volumes of sermons delivered and published by an American Jewish religious leader (1837–68); the first complete American translation of the Sephardic prayerbook (1837); the first Hebrew primer for children (1838); the first successful American Jewish magazine-newspaper, the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate* (1843–69); the first American Jewish publication society (1845); the first complete English translation of the Ashkenazic prayerbook (1848); the first Hebrew "high school" (1849); the first English translation of the entire Bible by an American Jew (1853); and the first American Jewish theological seminary—the short-lived Maimonides College (1867). He also served as a vice president of the first Jewish defense organization—the Board of Delegates of American Israelites (1859).

Protestant Influences on American Jewry

Isaac Leeser's role as the leading Protestantizer of American Judaism in the first half of the nineteenth century is best understood against the background of the general history of religion in America during that period.[7] Following the "Second Great Awakening," resurgent Protestant churches sought to make America a godly nation. Missionary activity was increased at home and abroad with impressive results. Between 1800 and 1830, church membership in the United States nearly doubled. Various Protestant denominations supported the American Bible Society (1816) and the American Tract Society (1825), which succeeded in broadly disseminating religious literature in all sectors of American society. Finally, Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others established numerous theological seminaries as well as secular colleges, thereby fortifying Protestantism's intellectual foundations. By the beginning of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, the role of Protestantism

in American society had become so great that Alexis de Tocqueville observed upon his arrival in the United States in 1831 that "there is no country in which the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America."[8]

As a tiny minority in a vast land, Jews were faced with the classic dilemma of wanting to derive the benefits of assimilation while simultaneously preserving their separate identity as an ethno-religious community.[9] Fortunately, Protestants were generally inclined to look benevolently on the Jews. First, they were the children of Abraham, living representatives of the Israelites of the Bible. As such, even the foreignness of Jewish immigrants was forgivable. Moreover, Jews played an important role in God's ultimate plan for humanity. The presence of a remnant of the House of Israel in America was perceived as proof that the Almighty had not forgotten His promise of redemption. On the other hand, Catholics, not Jews, received the brunt of religious animus during the antebellum period as a result of nativist suspicions about the purposes of the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy and fear that the growing Catholic population would eventually achieve a majority in the American electorate.[10]

Moreover, a high degree of social contact existed between antebellum Jews and their Gentile neighbors. Jews frequently attended church as guests or curious onlookers and became familiar with many Christian practices. Likewise, Christians occasionally attended synagogues, creating a need among Jews to showcase Judaism in the best possible light.[11]

Finally, American Judaism during the Early National period was both institutionally and intellectually weak. American Jewry, whose population was only three thousand as late as 1815, suffered from an "orthodoxy of salutary neglect" that had prevailed in American Jewish religious life since the seventeenth century. A high rate of intermarriage, apostasy, and indigenous calls for reform all testified to the precarious condition of the religious life of American Jewry. Innovators and traditionalists alike agreed that if Judaism was to survive in America, a new vision of Judaism would be needed to inspire its adherents, redefine its goals, and, ultimately, provide it with a viable institutional infrastructure.

It is possible that Leeser was more deeply influenced by the Episcopalian Church than by other Protestant denominations. In both Rich-

mond, Virginia, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—the two cities where Leeser lived—the Protestant Episcopal Church was particularly strong, especially among the social and intellectual elite.[12] Leeser shared their "High Church" liturgical sensibilities and probably looked favorably on their form of church government. The problem among Episcopalians of reestablishing a bishopric in America after the Revolution is even analogous to Leeser's lifelong concern with organizing a national ecclesiastical structure, including a *Bet Din* (Jewish religious court), among Jews. In his own life, he had good personal relations with several Episcopalian clergymen, especially Dr. Joseph Jacquett, a scholarly Episcopalian minister in Philadelphia, with whom Leeser co-edited a *Biblia Hebraica* (1848).[13] Lastly, there is little question that Leeser was an anglophile and corresponded regularly with such notable English Jews as Grace Aguilar and Sir Moses Montefiore, as well as with British rabbis.[14]

From the very beginning of his public career as a Jewish religious leader, Isaac Leeser clearly understood that to save American Judaism from extinction it would be necessary to adapt it more completely to the American scene. Enthusiastic about the industriousness of his age and devoted to the religion of his ancestors, Leeser systematically attempted to lay the foundations for a new, vital Judaism in America during the antebellum period. Leeser believed, according to one historian, "that there should be a conscious and selective acceptance of American cultural elements into Jewish life, lest the unconscious, unthinking and unselective espousal of Americanism go too far."[15]

Leeser's Education and Early Life

Isaac Leeser arrived in the United States in the spring of 1824 at the age of eighteen. He was born in the little village of Neuenkirchen in Prussian Westphalia on December 12, 1806, and moved to nearby Duelmen in 1814 after the death of his mother. In Duelmen, Leeser received a traditional but limited formal Jewish education in a local *heder*. In 1820, after his father's death, Leeser resettled in the provincial capital, Muenster, and enrolled at a local Catholic academy to begin his secular education. The Muenster Academy, which had attained full university status in 1717, had been reduced to a gymnasium after Prussia's reabsorption of the Kingdom of Westphalia in 1818.[16]

Nevertheless, Leeser was able to pursue a broad course of studies, including mathematics and Latin.[17]

While studying at the academy, Leeser also attended the Jewish Institute of Muenster, where he came under the influence of the *Landrabbiner*, Abraham Sutro (1784–1869). "Sutro," according to a biographer, "was part of the first generation of German rabbis who combined strict traditionalism with certain innovations. . . . He wore an old-fashioned beard and was one of the earliest rabbis to deliver German sermons."[18] However, Leeser's education in Germany did not include advanced halachic training. Later in life, he frequently pointed out to friends and foes alike that he had never prepared for rabbinic ordination and always deferred in matters of Jewish law to those of greater learning.

Leeser's Bibliocentrism

In 1824, orphaned, penniless, and with few prospects for improving his situation, Leeser accepted the invitation of his prosperous maternal uncle, Zalma Rehine, to resettle in Richmond, Virginia. Association with the Jews of Richmond and the cultural environment of tidewater Virginia had a decisive impact on Leeser. In just five years, he not only mastered English but was also able to synthesize his traditional Jewish upbringing in Germany with his new life in America. When Leeser left Richmond in 1829 to become the *hazzan* of Congregation Mickveh Israel in Philadelphia, he had already formulated a Protestantized bibliocentric approach to Judaism, which became the backbone of his program for American Jewry.[19]

In a manuscript written in Richmond but not published until 1834, Leeser outlined his belief in a historical revelation at Sinai and concluded that the only source of religious truth was the Bible. Faith in the veracity of the biblical account and in the truth of biblical doctrines was, according to Leeser, the exclusive basis of Judaism. He further maintained that neither human reason nor intuition could ever discover eternal truth without the benefit of historical revelation. Moreover, in his opinion, no later Jewish teaching could possibly contradict the Bible. He maintained that Judaism was fully developed prior to the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C.E. and that the rabbis correctly applied biblical teachings in postbiblical times.[20]

Leeser developed his bibliocentric approach to Judaism in the hundreds of sermons and lectures he delivered from 1830 to 1867.[21] Of all his accomplishments, his role as the pioneer Jewish preacher in the United States was closest to his heart. On being honored by friends in March 1861, Leeser responded to the tribute by saying, "You have spoken of my sermons; and indeed, if I have any merit, it is to these that I point."[22] Yet up till 1830, when he gave his first sermon, Leeser had heard but a dozen addresses, either from the pulpit or elsewhere.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, formal preaching in the synagogue in both Europe and America was generally limited to two Sabbaths per year and at special events that were often connected to official government requests for public demonstrations of religious concern. In Germany, reformers were the first to preach in the vernacular on a regular basis. They consciously modeled their sermons on the pattern of Christian homiletics and even used Christian guides to the art of preaching.[23] In England, on the other hand, a Committee of Elders at the Orthodox Bevis Marks Sephardic Synagogue in London recommended in 1818 that "approved" sermons be given on a scriptural text every Saturday afternoon.[24]

Although Leeser was aware of developments in Germany and England, he was more directly influenced by the strong American Protestant tradition of preaching, which extended back to the Puritans. "Sermons," he wrote in 1845, could "exercise an influence over the mind of society, which we now can hardly have any idea of. What does any one think would be the fate of Protestant Christianity without the constant appeal to the fear and reason of its professors from the ten thousand pulpits which scatter information and admonition many times during every week?"[25] Similarly, he believed that the fate of Judaism greatly depended on the establishment of the sermon as a permanent part of synagogue life in the United States.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the American pulpit was filled with many fine preachers, including Henry Ward Beecher (Congregationalist), Peter Cartwright (Methodist), and Charles G. Finney (Revivalist).[26] In Philadelphia, Leeser and many of his congregants had direct contact with William Henry Furness (1802–1896), a Unitarian minister who was a popular speaker with Christians and

Jews alike.[27] Moreover, between 1826 and 1834, more than three thousand lyceums were established in the United States as forums for adult education.[28] Thus, it is not surprising that a group of women from Mickveh Israel approached Leeser and asked him to give "popular discourses" on the Jewish religion.[29]

The influence of Protestantism on Leeser's religious thinking was particularly strong during his early years as a preacher. For example, during the course of 1830—the first year he preached—Leeser's sermon titles included "Confidence in God," "Want of Faith," and "Pious Reflections."[30] In his sermons, Leeser frequently talked about the truth and permanence of biblical teachings, discussing man's battle with sin and irreligion and, most of all, emphasizing Judaism's eschatological doctrines, including the belief in a Messiah, Restoration, and the promise of eternal life. Later in his career, Leeser continued to discuss the same topics. However, during the 1840's and 1850's, he not only differentiated between his religious views and Christian theology but also polemicized against the non-Orthodox beliefs espoused by Jewish reformers in America.

Although Leeser did not experience any resistance to introducing the sermon into the synagogue, and his preaching eventually received official sanction from the board of Mickveh Israel (1843), neither did he receive much encouragement beyond the close circle of friends who had originally prevailed upon him to assume the role of a Jewish preacher.[31] He probably did not become a popular preacher because of the staidness of his public presentations. According to the fashion of the day, each of his discourses lasted approximately forty-five minutes. He began with an original prayer and then developed a single theological theme around a biblical verse selected from the weekly Torah portion. He rarely told stories or used other illustrative materials and consciously chose not to appeal to his congregants' emotions. Most often, his only illustrations were additional biblical references.

Despite the literary shortcomings of his own work, Leeser made the sermon an integral part of the Jewish worship service in the United States. He published a ten-volume collection of his sermons, traveled around the country as a guest preacher, and reproduced a broad sampling of American and European sermons in his monthly journal, the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*. Almost singlehandedly, Leeser made sermons a form of devotional literature widely read by

American Jews during his time. Most importantly, he viewed preaching as the central activity of the Jewish religious leader in America and advocated the transformation of the office of *hazzan* into a Jewish ministry based on the Protestant model.

The Hazzanate in America

In the absence of ordained rabbis in America until the 1840's, the *hazzan*, a semitrained religious officiant, had already become the principal Jewish religious specialist in the American synagogue prior to the Revolution.[32] However, in the Colonial synagogue, the *hazzan* served as a religious functionary under the direct control and strict supervision of the congregational board of trustees. In addition to chanting the service, his duties included teaching the children Hebrew along with the rudiments of the Jewish religion. In small congregations and remote locations, the *hazzan* also served as the *shochet*, *mohel*, and *shammas*. Salaries were very low, and the individual *hazzan* was not held in high esteem by the congregation.

To some extent, however, the eighteenth-century American *hazzan* was already considered as a "minister." Several factors contributed to this early evolution of the American Jewish ministry. First, Jews frequently had to be represented to the general public by a minister, and the *hazzan* was the only official who could serve in that role. The second factor was that early American Jews had very little Jewish knowledge, and their *hazzanim*, however poorly trained, were still the only available resident experts in Jewish law. Third, already by 1654, New York had authorized only two classes of officials, ministers of religion and justices of the peace, to perform the marriage ceremony. Likewise, state laws of incorporation for religious societies often specified particular ministerial functions.[33]

Gershom M. Seixas (1746–1816), by virtue of his exceptional personality, was the first to demonstrate the full potential of the office of *hazzan* in America.[34] He was respected by the two congregations he served, Shearith Israel (New York, 1768–1776 and 1784–1816) and Mickveh Israel (Philadelphia, 1780–1784), was considered a colleague by many Christian clergymen, and also served as a trustee of Columbia College. However, Seixas was an exception. Most of the early American *hazzanim* were intellectually and socially unable to

match his achievements and simply performed their limited tasks without distinction.

Upgrading America's Jewish Clergy

The board of Mickveh Israel certainly did not expect the twenty-two-year-old Isaac Leeser to promote actively the professionalization of the office of *hazzan* when they hired him in the fall of 1829. However, a series of degrading incidents early in Leeser's career quickly led him to the conclusion that only a trained, adequately paid, contractually secure, native American Jewish ministry could properly serve the religious needs of Jews in the United States. In an editorial article in the *Occident* in 1846, he wrote:

> Let it then be a first step in the reformation of the *personnel* of our ministry to place its members above want, and then demand that every incumbent should be fit to grace the station which he fills.[35]

Leeser clearly viewed the Protestant clergy as a model for the American Jewish ministry. In an article, "The Demands of the Times," published in October 1844, Leeser noted that "there is hardly any Christian society which does not strain every nerve to have an intelligent and virtuous ministry, composed of men who would honour any calling by their acquisition and general good conduct."[36] "Jews," he wrote subsequently, "have hitherto been neglectful in the greatest duty they owe themselves, to rear up from among themselves persons to fill the important office of minister of religion."[37]

Unfortunately, few members of Mickveh Israel liked Leeser as a person or fully understood his efforts on behalf of Judaism. They simply expected him to behave as a paid functionary and be obedient to the officers of the congregation. After twenty-one stormy years as *hazzan* at Mickveh Israel, Leeser left the post in anger and disappointment.[38] However, in numerous editorials in the *Occident*, Leeser continued to make the question of the role of the Jewish ministry in the United States an important issue of the day.[39] Equally important is that, through his vast personal contacts as well as in the Advertising Supplement to the *Occident*, Leeser played a crucial role in the placement of scores of *hazzanim* in the country for more than a quarter of a century.[40]

For more than twenty-five years, Leeser also urged the establishment of a "College for the Education of Youth for the Ministry" to create an American Jewish ministry.[41] Again, he used Christian theological schools as his model and appealed to affluent Jews for material support.

> We ask those whom God has blessed with plenty, with superabundance, with more than they or their families can conveniently consume, whether they will not do that for Judaism which so many Christians do for Christianity? In every direction colleges and schools are rising up, even in far off Wisconsin . . . supported by the munificence of churches or individual endowments. Jews alone stand aloof. . . . They seem to feel no shame at the humiliating spectacle of their spiritual dependence.[42]

Unfortunately, Maimonides College (1867–1873), the fruit of his labors, only attracted four full-time students and closed before any of them completed their studies. However, as the first American Jewish theological seminary, Maimonides College helped establish Leeser's vision of a Jewish ministry as the norm for Jewish religious leadership in the United States.

Leeser was fully aware that what he termed a "Jewish minister" was not a rabbi in the traditional sense of the word. In an editorial entitled "The Ministry," in August 1866, he openly acknowledged the novelty of his views.

> Perhaps it will be urged as making against us that by our present plans we shall be able to raise *Rabbins* in this country for . . . there will be no time for extensive Talmudical study. We confess that it is so. But for the present and years to come, we need ministers and teachers more than those thoroughly versed in all the casuistry of Judaism, and for this purpose we are perfectly willing to depend on Europe, or Asia, or Africa for some considerable time, till the period when Jewish literature and learning shall have pitched their tent on the western Hemisphere.[43]

The First Jewish Sunday School

Not only did Leeser seek to Protestantize Jewish religious leadership in America in its institutional (although not its theological) aspects, but he also hoped to create a new type of Jewish congregant whose piety and religious education would be modeled after those of his Christian neighbors. "We want ministers," Leeser wrote in the *Occident*, "so also do we want an enlightened community."[44]

Jewish education, Leeser believed, was the way to attain this goal. After several unsuccessful attempts at creating a Jewish day school, Leeser, along with Rebecca Gratz, opened a Jewish Sunday school in Philadelphia in 1838. Two years after its opening, Leeser wrote the following:

> Sunday schools are nothing new among our Christian neighbours, as many sects of them have had such establishments for shorter or longer periods. Among our people, however, the case is very different, as far as the knowledge of the writer extends. . . . As may easily be imagined, some prejudice was at first manifested by various persons, who fancied that they discovered an objectionable imitation of gentile practices in this undertaking, forgetting that it is the first duty of Israel to instil knowledge of divine things in the hearts of the young, and this institution was eminently calculated to bestow this necessary blessing alike upon rich and poor without fee or price. It is but seldom that so noble an aim has been sought after, begun solely for the glorification of our Maker and the well-being of his people; it is therefore gratifying to record, that this unfounded prejudice has nearly died away.[45]

While still in Richmond, Leeser had already helped Isaac B. Seixas, a nephew of Gershom Seixas and the *hazzan* of Beth Shalome, run a school on Saturdays and Sundays. However, this early experiment proved to be ephemeral. The Philadelphia Sunday school, on the other hand, succeeded for several reasons. First, the Protestant Sunday school by 1830 had ceased to function as a general school for poor and frontier children and had fully embraced a religion-oriented curriculum.[46] Second, the public school movement was beginning to strike deep roots in the general community and often left Jewish parents with few options as to when they could arrange lessons for their children's Jewish education. Third, the Sunday school was supported by the women of the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, many of whom served as teachers.[47] Lastly, Leeser, now a mature individual and an established author, was in a position to help supply the school with appropriate children's religious literature.

Leeser's *Catechism*, an expansion of Eduard Kley's *Catechismus der Mosaischen Religion* (Berlin, 1814), as well as several works written by some of the Sunday-school teachers under Leeser's supervision, quickly became the standard text of Jewish Sunday schools in the United States.[48] Initially the Sunday school had to rely on Christian educational materials in which religiously objectionable passages

were either pasted over or torn out by Gratz's staff.[49] Although Leeser preferred Jewish parochial schools and advocated their establishment throughout his career, his efforts to develop Jewish Sunday schools proved more enduring.

The Leeser Bible

Isaac Leeser's literary magnum opus and most lasting contribution to the Protestantization of Judaism in America was his English translation of the Bible (1853–54).[50] He drew on a wide variety of Jewish sources, especially the German-language Bible edited by Leopold Zunz (1838) and the one annotated by Ludwig Philipson (1854). Leeser's Bible was neither a translation of a translation nor an entirely original work. Rather, using his own religious views as criteria, he pieced together an English-language Bible based on Jewish exegetical traditions. With regard to style, however, Leeser endeavored "to adhere closely to the ordinary English version," which, he maintained, "for simplicity cannot be surpassed."[51] In fact, Leeser viewed his Bible as the Jewish successor to the King James Version. "It would be a species of mental slavery," he wrote his readers, "to rely for ever upon the arbitrary decree of a deceased King of England, who certainly was no prophet, for the correct understanding of Scripture."[52] "Though the slight verbal changes grated upon the ears of us the older generation," a sympathetic Rosa Mordecai recollected in 1901, "the constant reading and reciting from it in Sunday School made it familiar to the young."[53]

The "Leeser Bible" originally was complemented by a very modest commentary that mainly reported variant translations from German-Jewish Bibles. Subsequently, with the second edition, the commentary was reduced to a few notes placed at the end. Thus, like other "Protestant" Bibles, the Leeser version emphasized the "Word" itself and not the commentaries. In its appearance, the Leeser Bible also functioned as a Protestantizing instrument. Initially, it appeared in quarto size, appropriate for use on a pulpit. Later, it was also bound in white leather and used for sacramental purposes at weddings and confirmation services.[54] Thus, Leeser's rendition of the *Holy Scriptures* clearly identified American Jewry with its biblical past and even drew high praise from many Christians, including Charles Hodge, the leading

"Old-School Presbyterian" theologian, who called for a similar work by a Protestant scholar.[55]

Conclusion

The legacy of Isaac Leeser's Protestantizing activities was both rich and enduring. His Bible won wide acceptance among both the Sephardim and the German Jews. Later, in the early part of the twentieth century, it was widely distributed among East European Jews by the Hebrew Publishing Company. Similarly, the Leeser-inspired Sunday school movement was first accepted among the Sephardim. With the decline of Jewish parochial schools after 1855, Sunday schools also found acceptance in German congregations and thus became the dominant form of Jewish education in the United States. During the 1850's, vernacular preaching in the American synagogue also won broad acceptance. Besides Leeser, Samuel M. Isaacs, Max Lilienthal, and, most importantly, Morris J. Raphall all contributed to the popularization of the Jewish sermon in America.

The creation of a Jewish ministry in the United States, however, proved to be a highly problematic undertaking. "In the emerging American-Jewish pattern," writes Leon Jick, "congregational life continued to be dominated by laymen, and rabbis were frequently reminded of the precariousness of their position."[56] Thus, at the beginning of the 1850's virtually every religious leader of standing was repudiated by his congregation. Lilienthal, Isaac Mayer Wise, and Leeser lost their positions, Leo Merzbacher's post at Emanu-El was in serious jeopardy, and Abraham Rice resigned and went into the dry goods business. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Leeser's vision of a professionalized Jewish ministry became the norm for Jewish religious leaders in the United States and still broadly serves as the basis for the American rabbinate, except in the most sectarian areas of Orthodox Jewish life.

Remarkably, as the spectrum of Jewish religious life in American broadened during the 1840's and 1850's with the rise of Reform Judaism and the arrival of ordained Orthodox rabbis in the United States, Leeser did not abandon his efforts to adapt traditional Judaism to American culture. Until the end of his life, he remained convinced that he could create a context wherein a Protestantized Orthodoxy could

serve as a unifying force among American Jews and even attempted on several occasions to organize national ecclesiastical bodies to regulate Jewish religious life in the United States.[57] His contributions to the Protestantization of mid-nineteenth-century American Judaism had an effect on the development of modern Orthodoxy as well as Reform and, ultimately, Conservative Judaism in America. Thus, in effect, he played an important role in the transformation and perpetuation of the Jewish heritage in America.

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Notes

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1. Jeffrey S. Gurock, *American Jewish History: A Bibliographical Guide* (New York, 1983), pp. 33–39. The terms "traditional Judaism" and "Orthodoxy" are used interchangeably in this article. Both of these approaches to the Jewish heritage are based on a supernatural view of "Torah from Sinai," and both recognize the authority of Halachah in the regulation of Jewish religious life.

2. Leon Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820–1870* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), p. 173.

3. Daniel J. Elazar, "The Development of the American Synagogue," *Modern Judaism* 4 (1984): 255–274, and Joseph L. Blau, *Judaism in America: From Curiosity to Mind Faith* (Chicago, 1976), pp. xi, 8, 9, 51–53. Also, see Sidney E. Mead, *Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York, 1963) and his "Denominationalism: Protestantism in America," *Church History* 23 (1954): 291 ff.

4. There is no standard biography of Leeser. For the first account of his life, see Mayer Sulzberger, "The Late Rev. Isaac Leeser," *Occident* 25 (1868): 593–611, republished in *American Jewish Archives* 21 (1969): 140–148 (hereafter cited as *AJA*). Book-length studies of Leeser include: Lance J. Sussman, "Confidence in God: The Life and Preaching of Isaac Leeser (1806–1868)" (ordination thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1980); E. Bennett, "An Evaluation of the Life of Isaac Leeser" (Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva University, 1959); Maxine Seller, "Isaac Leeser: Architect of the American Jewish Community" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1965). Also see Bertram W. Korn, "Isaac Leeser: Centennial Reflections," *AJA* 19 (1967): 127–141. On Leeser's opposition to Reform Judaism, see Henry Englander, "Isaac Leeser," *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* 28 (1918): 213–252. On Leeser in the context of the Philadelphia Jewish community, see Maxwell Whiteman, "Isaac Leeser and the Jews of Philadelphia," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 48 (1959): 207–244 (hereafter cited as *PAJHS*). Whiteman's article complements E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Glencoe, Ill., 1958). Also, see his "The Legacy of Isaac Leeser," in *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830–1940*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 26–47.

5. *Die Deborah* 13 (December 27, 1867): 98.

6. Maxwell Whiteman and Edwin Wolff, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1957), pp. 372–373.

7. William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 98–140. Also see Donald G. Matthews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780–1830: An Hypothesis," *American Quarterly* 21 (1969): 23–43.

8. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* ed. Phillips Bradley (New York, 1945), vol. 1, p. 303.

9. Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York, 1981), p. 1.

10. Important examples of American Protestants' views of Jews and Judaism are the remarks by Rev. Henry W. Ducachet (Episcopalian) and Rev. Ramsey (Presbyterian) on the Damascus Affair of 1840, *Occident* 18 (1860): 219 ff. On the Jews' struggle to protect their civil rights in the United States and, specifically, Leeser's role in that struggle, see Morton Borden, *Jews, Turks and Infidels* (Chapel Hill, 1984), passim. Also see Bertram W. Korn, "The Know Nothing Movement and the Jews," in his *Eventful Years and Experiences* (Cincinnati, 1954), pp. 58–78. Also see Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800–1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York, 1938) and Thomas T. McAvoy, *A History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1969).

11. The concept of "showcasing" Judaism was suggested to me by Prof. Jonathan D. Sarna.

12. E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen,* passim, and his *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (Boston, 1979, 1982). On Episcopalianism, see Raymond W. Albright, *History of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (New York, 1964); Powel M. Dawley, *The Episcopal Church and Its Work* (Greenwich, Conn., 1955); and Walter G. Posey, "Protestant Episcopal Church: American Adaptation," *Journal of Southern History* 25 (1959): 3 ff.

13. Isaac Leeser and Joseph Jacquett, *Biblia Hebraica* (Philadelphia, 1848). According to T. H. Darlow and H. F. Monle, *Historical Catalogue of the Printed Editions of Holy Scripture* (London, 1903), vol. 2, pp. 725, 729, the Leeser-Jacquett text was probably based on a Hebrew Bible published by Samuel Bagster (London, 1824, 1844). On Jacquett, see Franklin Spencer Edmonds, *History of St. Mathew's Church, Francisville, Philadelphia, 1822–1925* (Philadelphia, 1925), pp. 72–73, copy at Archives of the Episcopal Church, Austin, Tex. Also see Matitiahu Tsevat, "A Retrospective View of Isaac Leeser's Biblical Work," in *Essays in American Jewish History,* ed. Bertram W. Korn (Cincinnati, 1958), pp. 295–313.

14. On Grace Aguilar (1816–47) and Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885), see Henry Samuel Morais, *Eminent Israelites of the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 12–15, 236–240. Also see Jacob Neusner, "The Role of English Jews in the Development of American Jewish Life, 1775–1850," *YIVO Annual* 12 (1958–59): 131–156. Examples of Leeser's correspondence with British Jews include: Isaac Leeser, Philadelphia, to David Meldola, London, December 1841 (Dropsie College, Leeser Papers); Moses Montefiore, East Cliff Lodge, to Isaac Leeser, Philadelphia, January 3, 1843 (American Jewish Historical Society, Leeser Papers); and *Occident* 2 (1844): 340–342.

15. Joseph C. Blau, *Modern Varieties of Judaism* (New York, 1964, 1966), p. 83.

16. W. Engel Kamper, "University of Muenster," *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1911), vol. 10, p. 639.

17. When he emigrated to America, Leeser brought his student notebooks with him. The original manuscripts are housed at Dropsie College, Leeser Papers.

18. Lawrence Grossman, "Isaac Leeser's Mentor: Rabbi Abraham Sutro, 1784–1869," in *Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume,* ed. Leo Landman, (New York, 1980), p. 156; and

see Bernhard Brilling, "Abraham Sutro (1784–1869)," *Westfaelische Zeitschrift* 123 (1973): 51–64, and "Beitraege zur Biographie des letzen Landrabbiners von Muenster, Abraham Sutro (1784–1869)," *Udim* 3 (1972): 31–64. Also see Isaac Leeser, *Jews and the Mosaic Laws* (Philadelphia, 1834), p. iii; *Discourses on the Jewish Religion* (Philadelphia, 1867), vol. 1, Dedication Page; and *Occident* 18 (1860): 274. Abraham Sutro, Muenster, to Isaac Leeser, Richmond, February 24, 1829; Isaac Leeser, Richmond, to Abraham Sutro, Muenster, November 1825; Esther Sutro, Muenster(?), to Isaac Leeser, Philadelphia, July 17, 1864; Esther Faber Sutro, Ochtending (Coblenz), to Isaac Leeser, Philadelphia, October 19, 1865; and Sutro Esther Faber, Muenster, to Isaac Leeser, Philadelphia, December 2, 1866—photostatic copies in the possession of Jacob Rader Marcus. A small collection of Sutro Papers is housed at the Leo Baeck Institute (New York).

19. Leeser, *Jews and the Mosaic Law*. Several times during the course of his career, Leeser referred to *Jews and the Mosaic Law* as the definitive statement of his belief in revelation and as a summary of his view of the Bible; see *Occident* 3, p. 189, and 12, p. 539.

20. *Jews and the Mosaic Law*, pp. 7–9, 13, 15–21. Also see Isaac Leeser, "The Jews and their Religion," in *He Pasa Ekklesia*, ed. Daniel Rupp (Philadelphia, 1844), vol. 1, pp. 362–366, and *Discourses* 6, p. 195; 7, pp. 157, 262; 8, p. 103; and 9, p. 21.

21. Leeser's sermons have been virtually ignored by historians. An annotated selection from his first sermon, "Confidence in God," appears in Joseph L. Blau and Salo W. Baron, *The Jews of the United States, 1790–1840* (New York, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 578–582. A recent article by Robert V. Friedenberg, "Isaac Leeser: Pioneer Preacher of American Judaism," *Religious Communication Today*, September 1983, pp. 22–27, contains numerous errors.

22. *Discourses* 10, p. 313. Also see Isaac Leeser, "Preface" (to *Jerusalem*), supplement of *Occident* 9, p. xiv.

23. Alexander Altman, "The New Style of Preaching in Nineteenth-Century German Jewry," in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altman (Cambridge, Mass, 1964), pp. 65–116.

24. Louis Jacobs, "Preaching," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), vol. 13, cols. 1003–1004.

25. *Occident* 2, p. 318.

26. On antebellum Protestantism, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Garden City, N.Y., 1975), pts, IV and VI; vol. 1, pp. 471–614, and vol. 2, pp. 79–115; Winthrop S. Hudson, *American Protestantism* (Chicago, 1961); and Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York, 1970).

27. F. T. Persons, "William Henry Furness," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1931), vol. 7, p. 80. On Jews attending his church to hear him preach, see Rebecca Gratz, Philadelphia, to Marin Gist Gratz, Lexington, Ky., May 28, 1837, in *Letters of Rebecca Gratz*, ed. David Philipson (Philadelphia, 1929), p. 237.

28. Carl Bode, *American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (New York, 1956), and Vern Wagner, "Lecture Lyceum and Problem of Controversy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15 (1954): 119.

29. *Discourses* 1, p. 2, see note.

30. Ibid., pp. v–vi.

31. Whiteman, "Isaac Leeser and the Jews of Philadelphia," p. 213, n. 34.

32. No study of the office of *hazzan* in the period 1654–1840 has been conducted. See Jonathan D. Sarna, "Introduction," *American Jewish Archives* 35 (November 1983): 90, 97–98, as well as bibliographies in Norman Linzer, ed., *Jewish Communal Services in the United States: 1760–1970* (New York, 1972), pp. 128–248; and Elliot C. Stevens, ed., *Rabbinic Authority:*

Papers Presented Before the Ninety-First Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (New York, 1982), pp. 111–118.

33. Hyman Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654–1860* (Philadelphia, 1947), pp. 84–86.

34. Jacob R. Marcus, *The Handsome Young Priest in the Black Gown: The Personal World of Gershom Seixas* (Cincinnati, 1970).

35. *Occident* 3, p. 582.

36. Ibid. 2, pp. 313–314.

37. Ibid. 3, p. 577.

38. On Leeser's relation to Mickveh Israel, see Isaac Leeser, "To the Parness and Members of the Congregation Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia," May 15, 1840 (typescript, Dropsie College Library), 15 pp.; *A Review of the Late Controversies Between the Rev. Isaac Leeser and the Congregation Mikveh Israel* (pamphlet, Philadelphia, 1850), 18 pp.; *A Review of "The Review"* (pamphlet, New York, 1850), 11 pp., copy in Korn Papers, American Jewish Archives.

39. On Leeser's view of the "Jewish ministry," see *Occident* 3 (1845–46): 218–221, 577–583; 9 (1851): 385–394, 433–443; 10 (1852): 177–187, 225–238; 15 (1857–58): 493–496; *and* 18 (1860–61): 304. More broadly, see Burton S. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in the United States* (New York, 1976); Thomas C. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science and the American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana, 1977); Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750–1850* (Philadelphia, 1978).

40. Prof. A. Karp of Rochester, New York, directed me to the *Occident*'s Advertising Supplement as an important but neglected source of data about the American Jewish experience, 1843–69. For example, see Advertising Supplement to the *Occident* 24, no. 7 (1866): 3, which includes five notices by congregations looking for *hazzanim*/teachers:

HAZAN WANTED

The congregation B'nai Israel, Augusta, Ga., is desirous of engaging the services of a gentleman competent to officiate as Hazan and Preacher, at a fixed salary of $1500 per annum and perquisites. An additional income may be expected by teaching a Hebrew school.

Applicants, stating qualifications, should address either

LEWIS LEVY, President,
WILLIAM M. JACOBS, Secretary

WANTED

By the Hebrew Congregation Amunath Abothenu, of Fort Wayne, Indiana, a competent man to act as Chasan, Shochet, Mohel, and Teacher in German and Hebrew. Salary, $600 and perquisites. Applicants will please address at once the under-signed. None but those fully competent need apply. References required.

L. FALK, Secretary

WANTED

At St. Paul, Minnesota, a competent person to act as Teacher and Shochet. Salary, about $700 per annum. Applicants address

I. MENDELSON,
St. Paul, Minnesota

WANTED

By the congregation Shaaray Shamayim of Mobile, Ala., a Rabbi and Lecturer, competent to preach in the German and English languages, and superintend a Hebrew School. None need to apply but those fully qualified, and with the best of references as to character and abilities. Salary $4000 and perquisites. Applicants will address

S. RICHARD, Chairman,
Mobile, Ala.

A Hebrew Teacher, officiating at the same time as Chasan and Shochet, for the Kahal in Montgomery, Ala., on the 1st of August. Salary per annum, $2000 to $2500. Communications will be received by the undersigned, and the necessary information and all particulars given. Single men preferred.

H. WEIL, President,
Montgomery, Ala.

41. Bertram W. Korn, "The First American Jewish Theological Seminary: Maimonides College, 1867–1873," in his *Eventful Years and Experiences: Studies in Nineteenth Century American Jewish History* (Cincinnati, 1954), p. 164.

42. Quoted in Solomon Solis-Cohen, *The Jewish Theological Seminary: Past and Future—Address Delivered at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Commencement, New York, June 2, 1918* (New York, 1919), p. 44.

43. *Occident* 24, p. 200.

44. Ibid. 2, pp. 320–321.

45. Isaac Leeser, "Memorial on Sunday Schools (1840)," in Blau and Baron, *Jews of the United States*, vol. 2, pp. 447–449. Also see Joseph R. Rosenbloom, "Rebecca Gratz and the Jewish Sunday School Movement in Philadelphia," *PAJHS* 48 (1958): 71 ff., and David Uriah Todes, "The History of Jewish Education in Philadelphia" (Ph.D. diss., Dropsie College, 1952), pp. 43–56.

46. Jack L. Seymour, *From Sunday School to Church School: Continuities in Protestant Church Education, 1860–1929* (Washington, D.C., 1982), and Edwin W. Rice, *The Sunday School Movement and the American Sunday School Union* (Philadelphia, 1917). Also see Frank Freidel, *Harvard Guide to American History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), sec. 24.6.5, pp. 520–521.

47. On the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, see Henry Samuel Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia: Their History from the Earliest Settlements to the Present Time* (Philadelphia, 1894), pp. 127–129, 143.

48. Isaac Leeser, *Catechism for Young Children* (Philadelphia, 1839); Simha Cohen Peixotto, *Elementary Introduction to the Scriptures* (Philadelphia, 1840); and Eleazar Pike, *Scriptural Questions* (Philadelphia, 1857).

49. Jacob R. Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History* (New York, 1981), pp. 135–143.

50. Isaac Leeser, *The Twenty-Four Books of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, 1853). Also see his *The Law of God* (Philadelphia, 1845), 5 vols. For a detailed analysis of Leeser's role as a Bible translator, see Lance J. Sussman, "Another Look at Isaac Leeser and the First Jewish Translation of the Bible in the United States," *Modern Judaism* 5 (May, 1985): 159-190.

51. Leeser, *Holy Scriptures*, p. iv.

52. Leeser, *The Twenty-Four Books of Holy Scripture*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia, 1856), pp. iii–iv.

53. Rosa Mordecai, "Personal Recollections of Rev. Isaac Leeser" (American Jewish Archives, Englander Papers, 1901), n.p.

54. The Klau Library (HUC-JIR) has Bloch Publishing and Printing Company editions of the Leeser Bible from 1888, 1891 (4th ed.), 1894, 1897, 1899, 1901, 1905, 1907, 1912, and 1914.

55. *Occident* 12, p. 360. Also see Alexander A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (New York, 1880, 1969), and Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life*, 2d ed. (New York, 1973), pp. 162–168.

56. Jick, *Americanization of the Synagogue*, p. 130.

57. Joseph Buchler, "The Struggle for Unity: Attempts at Union in American Jewish Life, 1654–1868," *American Jewish Archives* 2 (1949): 21–46, and Whiteman, "Isaac Leeser and the Jews of Philadelphia," pp. 207 ff.