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**A. C. Gaebelein and the Making of Hebrew Christians:
Race, Mission, and the Hope of Israel on the Lower East Side, 1893-1899**

Daved Anthony Schmidt
daved.schmidt@ptsem.edu

Prior to establishing himself as a nationally recognized voice in the American fundamentalist movement, A.C. Gaebelein spent his early ministry leading a mission to Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the 1890s. Between 1893 and 1899, a central aspect of his work there was the theory of “Hebrew Christianity.”¹ An early form of what would become

¹ Gaebelein and his colleagues also referred to this as Jewish Christianity and Christian Judaism in various writings. The two most important biographies on Gaebelein are Wilbur M. Smith, *Arno C. Gaebelein, a Memoir* (New York: Our Hope Press, 1946) and David Rausch, *Arno C. Gaebelein, 1861-1945: Irenic Fundamentalist and Scholar* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1983).

known as “Messianic Judaism,” Gaebelein proposed that converted Jews who accepted Jesus as the messiah could continue to practice Jewish rites and observances and maintain traditional Jewish customs and community ties.² He encouraged these new Christians not to join existing Protestant denominations, but rather form their own congregations where they could more easily retain their Jewish identity. Yaakov Ariel, the leading authority on evangelical mission work among Jews, has rightly argued that Gaebelein’s “innovative and daring missionary theory” arose from his dispensationalist beliefs.³ For Ariel, dispensationalist theology naturally led believers to support Hebrew Christianity because it gave prominent place in its eschatology to converted Jews who continued, for example, keeping a kosher diet, adhering to Mosaic Law, and celebrating traditional holy days.⁴ The retention of these elements among Jewish Christians was essential to God’s preparation for the Second Coming, dispensationalists like Gaebelein believed, and therefore he felt no qualms about either allowing converts to maintain such

² Several works have recently been published on Messianic Judaism as well as on the related subject of Christian Zionism. For the most part, however, these works do not address how race may have shaped these theological outlooks. See David A. Rausch, *Messianic Judaism: its History, Theology, and Polity* (New York: Mellen Press, 1982) and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (New York: Cassell, 2000). For Christian Zionism, see Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-Map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2004); Gerhard Falk, *The Restoration of Israel: Christian Zionism in Religion, Literature, and Politics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); and Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: the rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

³ Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the chosen people: missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 19. Ariel’s devotes an entire chapter to Gaebelein in his earlier work, *On behalf of Israel: American fundamentalist attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1991).

⁴ Ariel, *Evangelizing*, 9.

practices or about incorporating Jewish religious themes, symbols, and customs into his own mission work. His policy of producing Hebrew Christians stands out as “daring” given the era in which it was implemented. Gaebelein adopted this theory despite the fact that, as Ariel notes, many other evangelicals at this time viewed “American Anglo-Saxon norms and manners as part and parcel of the religion they wished to promote,” and expected potential converts to conform themselves and their observances to white, protestant interpretations of both Christian belief and practice.⁵ Gaebelein’s work on the Lower East Side, in other words, ignored prevailing white conceptions of race and conversion and the efforts by some whites to assimilate Jews into a racialized interpretation of Christianity.

While it is clear that millennial expectations were key to the work of Gaebelein and similar Jewish missions, what is less clear is how the theory of Hebrew Christianity and the missionary practices that stemmed from it confronted the racist expectation that conversion could assimilate Jewish immigrants into white, protestant society by uplifting them morally and materially. Eschatology was important to Gaebelein’s overall work, but the issue of race weighed more heavily on his theory and practices than previously recognized. To see this more clearly, however, one has to shift focus from Gaebelein’s eschatological beliefs to his views on ecclesiology. Primarily using the periodical *Our Hope*, the house organ for Gaebelein’s mission, this essay will first demonstrate that Gaebelein’s conception of the Church challenged what some whites saw as a connection between Christianity and white, American culture. Additionally, Gaebelein’s perception of the Jewish race and religion as unique from other races and religions led him to understand Christians and Jews as equal partners in terms of God’s salvific plan, and

⁵ Ibid., 19.

therefore to reject any notion that these immigrants could benefit racially, culturally, or materially through conversion. The second section will look more closely at how these ideas shaped what Gaebelein viewed as correct mission practices. It will focus specifically on the use of material benefits such as food, clothing, or educational opportunities by missionaries in their work, demonstrating that Gaebelein was particularly concerned about such things obfuscating the central Hebrew Christian message of the compatibility of Christianity and Judaism. Mission work that focused too heavily on materialism, especially if tied to ideas of white superiority, merely perpetuated hostility against Christianity within the Jewish community. Exploring Hebrew Christianity in light of the issue of race will contribute to a greater understanding of Gaebelein's early thought as well as lay the foundation for a more nuanced appraisal of evangelical mission work to Jews in this period and after.

The Postmillennial Advance and the *Irregulars'* Critique

On the evening of August 17, 1893, a riot broke out on the Lower East Side of Manhattan near Walhalla Hall, a large and popular dance house on Orchard Street. This area was home to thousands of Jewish immigrants living in the squalled conditions of a tenement community. According to a *New York Times* report, around 5,000 Russian and Polish Jews had attempted to gather that day under the sway of “professional Anarchists and Socialists” to voice their grievances over unemployment and hunger.⁶ The speeches made were purportedly sufficient “to make the hair of the capitalist curl,” and by sunset the crowd had become violent enough to

⁶ “Anarchists Kept in Check,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1893.

warrant the assistance of police from numerous surrounding precincts.⁷ While the crowds dispersed that evening, tensions nevertheless remained high on the Lower East Side. On August 19th, another disturbance took place mere blocks away from Walhalla Hall in a Methodist mission called Hope of Israel. Arno Clemens Gaebelein, a 32-year-old Methodist minister, served as its superintendent and with his evening sermon that day he discussed his conviction that Christ would eventually bring peace to all nations. During his message, however, he denounced the violence that had taken place and condemned those responsible. Tempers subsequently flared in the audience and a number began shouting at Gaebelein. In response, others rose to his defense. Emotions quickly reached a boiling point and any remaining order was lost when, hoping to contain what they considered an escalating situation, police stormed the auditorium. Fearing they would be arrested, the Jews at the Hope of Israel mission scrambled to escape the building. For those that did, another rally was planned later that night. Hard rain, however, dampened zeal and turnout was low. As the *New York Times* reporter facetiously observed, “Anarchists and Socialists do not like water, either internally or externally administered.”⁸

The Walhalla Riots, as the protests came to be known, were a relatively minor event in the Jewish immigrant community as well as Gaebelein’s young ministry. The incident, however, does serve as a useful point of departure when examining the context of Gaebelein’s understanding of Hebrew Christianity. The reporter’s portrayal of the crowd as susceptible to “Anarchist and Socialist” influence, exposes concerns more broadly felt by white Americans

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

than those of this single individual detailing this particular incident. A large number of whites in the last decades of the nineteenth century feared that the millions of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants entering the country posed a potentially mortal threat to American society as they knew it. This period had seen tremendous economic and social achievement for whites, and many closely attributed this success to their race. The perceivably superior styles of government such as democracy or economic philosophies such as capitalism, according to their view, were intrinsically part of their Anglo-Saxon heritage and the personal liberty afforded by such systems naturally fit the individualistic, rugged, and industrious Anglo-Saxon character. White progress in America was frequently spoken of in terms of the broader progress of “civilization,” a social-Darwinian term historian Eric Goldstein describes as denoting “a stage of physical and moral development more advanced than those of savagery and barbarism...”⁹ The immigration of seemingly less-developed peoples to this country thus perceivably threatened to destabilize and slow the advancement of white, American civilization. Foreign bodies were equated with foreign value systems that seemingly lacked a shared emphasis on core white, middle-class principles such as thrift, temperance, and industriousness. Correlatively, they also potentially carried foreign ideas such as those named by the reporter subversive to democracy and capitalism. The Progressive Age, then, was also an age of repressive attempts to deal in some way with this rapidly growing and seemingly destructive non-white segment of the population.¹⁰ In the last

⁹ Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 41.

¹⁰ On Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and other legislation see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988) and

decades of the century the Jewish population alone in the United States rose from approximately 200,000 to around 1,000,000.¹¹ While Jews had previously enjoyed social access and even admiration among whites as spendthrift entrepreneurs relative to other racial groups, their increased presence made them equal targets of suspicion and also of assimilation.¹²

Many white Americans also included Protestant Christianity as part of what was essential to white identity and the “civilization” they had built and hoped to advance. Derek Chang in his study of evangelical home missions in this period has termed this “Evangelical Nationalism,” or, the belief in the “exceptional, providential destiny of America as a Christian nation.”¹³ Postmillennialism, the belief that spreading the gospel around the globe and reforming societies along Western Christian standards would help bring about the millennial kingdom described in Revelation 20, supplied a strong religious framework through which to express this optimism.¹⁴

Peter Schrag’s *Not Fit for Our Society: Nativism and Immigration in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). While this paper deals with immigration, the establishment of Jim Crow laws in this same period in order to curb the perceived threat posed by freed African Americans should be mentioned as well.

¹¹ Goldstein, 35.

¹² Goldstein states, “Native-born whites during this period tended to see Jews’ economic success and their perceived links to ‘civilization’ as characteristics that affirmed their membership in the dominant racial grouping.” (Goldstein, 18)

¹³ Derek Chang, *Citizens of a Christian Nation: Evangelical Missions and the Problem of Race in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 7.

¹⁴ For an analysis of postmillennial beliefs in this period, see James H. Moorhead, *World without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

Reading a letter before an anniversary gathering of the American Home Missionary Society in 1881, for example, Prof. Austin Phelps of Andover Seminary argued that the Western, Anglo-Saxon Protestant world would take the lead in bringing forth the Kingdom of God by converting and socially and materially improving other less advanced races. “And of all the Western races,” he stated, “who that can read skillfully the providence of God, or can read it at all, can hesitate in affirming that the signs of the divine decree point to this land of ours...Ours is the elect nation for the age to come. We are the chosen people.”¹⁵ Aligning postmillennial progress with that of white America, then, evangelical nationalists believed Protestant Christianity was the principle means of assimilating immigrant foreigners within America’s borders. Conversion, Chang states, “stood as the primary standard for inclusion” in American society and perceivably transmitted white, middle-class values to the foreign individual.¹⁶ The immigration threat and the efforts to assimilate immigrant peoples through conversion were addressed perhaps most clearly, however, by Phelps’ friend and colleague, Josiah Strong.

Strong’s popular book *Our Country: It’s Possible Future and its Present Crisis* was published only a few years before Gaebelin began ministering on the Lower East Side.¹⁷ Like

¹⁵ Quoted in Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and its Present Crisis* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1885), 218-19.

¹⁶ Derek Chang, “‘Marked in Body, Mind, and Spirit’: Home Missionaries and the Remaking of Race and Nation,” in *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*, eds. Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 135.

¹⁷ Strong was a Presbyterian minister and, at the time of *Our Country’s* initial publication in 1885, the Ohio representative of the American Home Missionary Society.

Phelps, Strong believed that God had ordained the white, Protestant people of America to usher in the millennium by exerting greater and greater dominance around the globe. “In my own mind, there is no doubt that the Anglo-Saxon is to exercise the commanding influence in the world’s future,” he stated, which would “hasten the kingdom of God.”¹⁸ Yet, America’s standing before God was not assured. Many threats constituted the “present crisis” besetting the country, in his view, but one of the most pressing of these was immigration. Qualifying his analysis of the issue, he stated that many immigrants “come to us in full sympathy with our free institutions, and desiring to aid us in promoting a Christian civilization.”¹⁹ But even these “same intelligent and Christian foreigners” know they “do not represent the mass of immigrants.”²⁰ The moral inadequacies of most immigrants were numerous. Immigrants furnished “the greater portion of our criminals,” did not properly observe the Sabbath, adhered to looser standards of alcohol consumption, and lacked enough education to effectively participate in America’s democracy. Such moral failures were seen most clearly in America’s urban areas where immigrants settled, Strong believed, echoing a growing contingent of Christian voices.²¹ Indeed, “there is no more serious menace to our civilization than our rabble-ruled cities.” The root of these problems, Strong stated, was that most urban immigrants failed to become Americanized. “Certain quarters of many of the cities are, in language, customs and costumes, essentially foreign” and therefore

¹⁸ Strong, *Our Country*, 179.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Strong was hardly alone in this argument. See Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 10-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 131.

“a mass of men but little acquainted with our institutions, who will act in concert and who are controlled largely by their appetites and prejudices, constitute a very paradise for demagogues.”²² Because they lacked good middle-class, Protestant morals, they suffered poverty and their communities became seedbeds for radical ideas, chief among them socialism. “Immigration is the mother and nurse of American socialism,” Strong contended, and urbanization was only “multiplying and focalizing the elements of anarchy and destruction.”²³ He concluded that in order to combat this particular crisis and shore up the foundation of the nation for its divine destiny American Protestants had to be more committed to home missions. God, he insisted, had given American Christians “the duty of Christianizing our own heathen,” and the progress of such work over the next fifteen to twenty years, he contended, would “hasten or retard the coming of Christ’s kingdom in the world by hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of years.”²⁴

Strong thus called for a twentyfold increase of home missionaries. No longer could American civilization protect itself with mere laws restricting immigration. “We need patriotic and wise legislation,” he stated, but this alone could not stave off the threats immigrants posed.²⁵

²²Strong, *Our Country*, 44 and 43.

²³Ibid., 43 and 180.

²⁴ Ibid., 188-189; 180. Boyer observes that “Protestant churchmen of the Gilded Age saw their creed not just in theological or ecclesiastical terms but as the foundation stone of the American social order. For them, the urban decline of Protestantism was not just frustrating, it involved moral and social ramifications of the gravest kind. They would not, if they could help it, watch from the sidelines as the moral destiny of the city was decided.” (Boyer, 133).

²⁵Strong, *Our Country*, 209.

The gospel was essential as well. It was the “radical cure of the world’s great evils,” uplifting converts spiritually, and therefore morally and materially by rendering them temperate, industrious, and prosperous.²⁶ Missionaries were especially needed in the cities, “which are gathering together the most dangerous elements of our civilization,” elements he believed would “in due time, unless Christianized, prove the destruction of our free institutions.”²⁷ Conversion, then, would not only save the individual’s soul, but also uplift and improve the immigrant by instilling in them the white cultural values to which Christianity was so closely connected. As Strong put it, “nothing but the gospel can transform lawless men and women into good citizens...Christianize the immigrant and he will be easily Americanized. Christianity is the solvent of all race antipathies.”²⁸ This was the approach taken by many of Strong’s opinion to the millions of Irish, Italian, Asian and Polish immigrants entering the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. And, it was also the approach taken to Jews.

It is unsurprising, then, given this perception of immigrant groups like the Jews, that the *New York Times* reporter would broadly describe in grim detail the riotous unrest on the Lower East Side as merely the product of foreign, radical ideas. Likewise, given this view of religion as a vehicle for assimilating these people into white society, it is perhaps less than coincidental that the reporter included in his story the disruption at the Hope of Israel mission after Gaebelein had preached the gospel and denounced radical violence. Many considered such missions to be on

²⁶ Ibid., 200. Strong states here, for example, “the Christian religion, by rendering men temperate, industrious, and moral, makes them prosperous.”

²⁷ Ibid., 209 and 215.

²⁸ Ibid., 215 and 210.

the front lines of assimilation. As Daniel Lee has shown in his research on race and mission work, “By equating the Anglo-Saxon race with Christianity and by converting non-Anglo-Saxons to Christ, White Americans hoped to make veritable Anglo-Saxons of all the people in America.”²⁹ Conversion, therefore, had the power to sanitize immigrants of dangerous morals and ideas and to impart to them the middle-class values, worship styles, and observances that typified what it meant to be Protestant and American.

Gaebelein was certainly conscious of the labor disputes among the people around him as well as the presence of certain radical elements on the Lower East Side. Like Strong, he too was sensitive to the dangers economic disparities posed to the existing order. “We all know that nothing is wanting but another occasion, another manifestation of capital’s selfishness and greed, and [the violence] will rise higher than before,” Gaebelein warned. “How much higher need it rise before it will sweep the existing order of society off its base?”³⁰ Yet, Gaebelein’s interpretation of that unrest was drastically different from Strong’s. Gaebelein was not a postmillennialist but rather a premillennialist. He denied the Church’s ability to advance the Kingdom of God by Christianizing peoples and societies and instead asserted that only Christ’s return would bring about the millennium. The incoming tide of unrest was not a social problem to be conquered by the gospel in preparation for the millennium, he believed, but as a sign that human society was becoming so disordered that Christ’s return was imminent.³¹ Gaebelein, in other words, was convinced society was spiraling downward rather than progressively

²⁹ Daniel B. Lee, “A Great Racial Commission,” 86.

³⁰ “Editorial Notes,” *Our Hope* 1.2 (August, 1894): 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*

improving. This assumption was central to his understanding of Hebrew Christianity, which he began implementing in his ministry around this same time.

Gaebelein was already a relatively experienced urban missionary when the Walhalla incident took place in August of 1893. He had worked among Jews on the Lower East Side in various missions since 1887 and in 1891 had founded the Hope of Israel mission under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Gaebelein acted as the mission's superintendent and operated it out of the Allen Street Memorial Methodist Church on Rivington Street.³² He had been enthusiastic about missions since his childhood. According to a later autobiography, however, his interest in Jewish missions in particular came in the 1880s when he became convinced of the "blessed hope," a common phrase given to the premillennial belief in the literal, physical return of Jesus Christ that would inaugurate the God's Kingdom.³³ As Ariel and others have observed, premillennialism at this time typically gave a glorified role to Jews in the events leading up the Second Coming. Accordingly, a portion of Jews would fulfill ancient prophecies by returning to Palestine, accepting Jesus Christ as their messiah, and becoming a major force of evangelization around the world in the last days. Such were the beliefs of Gaebelein, and his premillennialist convictions were only reinforced by observing what he considered the signs of the times in such news stories as the labor disputes and social unrest taking place in the country as well as the early Zionist movement in Europe. He was especially encouraged, however, by his

³²Gaebelein was ordained in 1881. As the Hope of Israel mission grew in New York City, it helped coordinate branches in other cities such as Baltimore, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. By 1894, its headquarters in New York was moved to 209 Madison Street.

³³ Arno Clemens Gaebelein, *Half a Century; The Autobiography of a Servant* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988), 18-21.

work among Orthodox Jews. The orthodox community provided visual confirmation that a remnant of “faithful” Jews continued to maintain much of the religious practices of the Old Testament and, especially important, continued to await the messiah.³⁴ The hope that the Jews would awaken to realize Jesus as that messiah and that Christ would return was so important to Gaebelien and his work that from this conviction came the mission’s very name. “The Lord Jesus Christ,” Gaebelien wrote, is “the Hope of His Church, the Hope of Israel, the Hope of the World.”³⁵

Hope of Israel’s work in the community was like that of many other premillennialist missions of the period.³⁶ Gaebelien emphasized evangelization in his ministry and took pride that out of the many missions in the area Hope of Israel provided Jewish immigrants with the most “preaching services.”³⁷ He held two-hour evening Bible study classes on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Skilled enough in languages to have taught himself Hebrew and Yiddish, he devoted the first hour of each class to reading the New Testament in Yiddish and answering any questions the audience might have had, devoting the second hour to reading the New Testament again in English. On Wednesdays and Fridays, Gaebelien preached sermons in Yiddish. To help alleviate some of the hardships suffered by the people on the Lower East Side, Hope of Israel distributed food and clothing. Gaebelien and his assistants also frequently traveled

³⁴Ibid., 20.

³⁵ Ibid., 38.

³⁶ Ariel 19; see also, Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 144.

³⁷ “Report of the Work in New York,” *Our Hope* 1.6 and 7 (December-January, 1894-95): 168.

door to door offering rudimentary medical care. Of course, this aspect of the mission had evangelistic qualities as well. Jews who were treated by the mission or who approached Hope of Israel's dispensary, led by the homeopathic physician Dr. Grimm, received medical treatment as well as religious literature.³⁸ Religious print was essential to Hope of Israel's work. The mission circulated thousands of tracts and pamphlets on Christianity written in Hebrew, German, and "Jargon" (Yiddish) throughout the community. The mission also published a lengthier monthly periodical for Jews, *Tiqweth Israel* (Hope of Israel). While Gaebelein's presence in the community, especially at the beginning, did provoke moments of anger among residents, he did find some success through all these various efforts.³⁹ In the event of a conversion, like other missions in the area, Gaebelein carried out baptisms and expected Jews to join an existing Protestant denomination.

In the summer of 1893, however, Gaebelein gained the help of Ernest Stroeter. Stroeter was a professor from the University of Denver who was so impressed with Hope of Israel upon visiting while in New York that he offered his services. His arrival helped relieve some of the growing burden from Gaebelein. Less than a year later, Hope of Israel launched perhaps its most important publication, *Our Hope*. This monthly magazine, intended for the general public, sought to increase awareness about the mission's activities and raise financial contributions. More importantly, however, Stroeter was also a dispensationalist - a new interpretation of

³⁸ "Report of the Work in New York," *Our Hope* 1.8 (February, 1895): 197.

³⁹ "Report of Secretary North," *Our Hope* 1.1 (July, 1894) 19. Often the question and answer sessions of the meetings provoked the most hostilities. Gaebelein on several occasions notes that members of the audience would ridicule the answers he provided. See, "Report of the Work," *Our Hope* 2.1 (July, 1895): 23.

premillennialism centered on a different understanding of the Church and Israel. It is not entirely clear in what exact ways his dispensationalist beliefs were similar or different to the overall premillennialism of Gaebelein.⁴⁰ What is certain, however, is that based upon his beliefs Stroeter was convinced that Jewish converts could continue practicing their former religion after accepting Jesus Christ as the messiah. Beginning in 1893, Stroeter convinced the Gaebelein of his position. Shortly after, the work of Hope of Israel began to change fundamentally.

Dispensationalism was an increasingly popular variant of premillennialism among evangelicals at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Its origin is attributed to John Nelson Darby and his colleagues the Plymouth Brethren, who sowed the seeds of the theology in North America during the middle third of the century. Its popularization in America was closely connected to the growth of popular religious print, lay Bible study, and the spread of holiness revivalism. Jewish converts to Christianity had certainly existed before the proliferation of this theology. The Hebrew Christian Alliance in Great Britain, for example, was founded in 1866 in

⁴⁰ Michael D. Stallard, *The Early Twentieth-Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 13-28 and 61-103. Stallard's work provides an excellent analysis of the sources behind Gaebelein's early thought.

⁴¹ For a history of the spread of dispensationalism in America see C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its Rise and Development* (Richmond, John Knox Press, 1958). This subject is often taken up in histories of American fundamentalism. See George M. Marsden, for example, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

order that such individuals could find fellowship and support from one another.⁴² However, widespread Christian interest in Jewish missions and the emergence of the messianic Judaism to be espoused by Hope of Israel coincided with the dissemination of dispensationalism. Scholars who have looked closely at this theology in the period have traditionally stressed its eschatology.⁴³ The Second Coming was certainly important in prompting believers like Gaebelein into quickly carrying out mission work to Jews before the return of Jesus Christ. But implicit in the millennial rhetoric of dispensationalism is an equally important ecclesiology. As Geir Lie has observed, “contrary to what most people actually believe, dispensationalism is not an eschatological position per se, but rather an ecclesiological position, which, in turn, colors one’s eschatology.”⁴⁴ Here, at the level of the Church, we can better see how Gaebelein combated racist tendencies in Jewish missions and how these tendencies shaped some of Hope of Israel’s practices.

Like other revivalist theologies of the period, a primitivist conception of the Church lay at the core of dispensationalism and Hope of Israel sought to emulate this ideal in its own mission. The church of the apostles, according to Gaebelein and Stroeter, was characterized both by its belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the frenetic missionary work this

⁴² As one conference official stated, “As Hebrews, as Christians, we feel tied together; and as Hebrew Christians, we desire to be allied more closely to one another.” Quoted in Rausch, *Messianic Judaism*, 26 as well as Michael Schiffman, *Return of the Remnant: the Rebirth of Messianic Judaism* (Baltimore: Lederer Messianic Publishers, 1996), 26.

⁴³ See Weber, *Living in the Shadow* and Sandeen *Roots of Fundamentalism*.

⁴⁴ Geir Lie, “E.W. Kenyon and Dispensationalism” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 17 (January, 2008).

conviction produced. A *premillennialist* belief in the Second Coming in particular was foundational to the life of the early church, in their minds, and the ‘recovery’ of such beliefs in the nineteenth century, as evidenced by their rapid spread, allowed believers to reclaim a central aspect of the apostolic faith. “The martyr church was the missionary church,” Stroeter wrote in *Our Hope*, “and it was the church aglow with the blessed hope.”⁴⁵ This conviction was foundational to how Hope of Israel came to define its mission as well as how it judged the mission work and goals of others. For, the beliefs of the primitive church contrasted sharply with those of the ‘historic’ churches (the various denominational bodies) which now populated the Christian landscape.

The most fundamental way the historic churches strayed from apostolic teaching was in their understanding of the Second Coming and evangelism. Postmillennial beliefs now carried the day among Christians, Stroeter observed, and prominent figures such as Josiah Strong hoped the prospect of advancing the millennial kingdom would encourage the churches to throw their weight behind increased mission work. “World conquering by the gospel,” Stroeter contended they believed, “was the only means of kindling true missionary enthusiasm.”⁴⁶ Postmillennialists, he noted, accosted believers such as himself for “crippling and undermining the missionary spirit of the church” by being too pessimistic about the Church’s power to transform the world through the gospel and lift society out of heathenism.⁴⁷ Yet, Stroeter pointed to the practical application of these respective worldview and concluded that postmillennialists

⁴⁵ Ernest Stroeter, “The Blessed Hope and Missions,” *Our Hope* 3.3 (October 1896): 115.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

had bitten off more than they could successfully chew. By tying the gospel to material and social reform, they obscured its message and wasted time and resources with the “gigantic, yet hopeless struggle with the existing and growing evils in state and society” and with “painful and fruitless attempts at solving what are called, ‘the burning questions of the to-day.’”⁴⁸ As a result, the historic churches were failing in their endeavors and having trouble raising money to support their mission work. Dispensationalist missions, on the other hand, aiming simply to evangelize the individual, were finding greater success and financial support through “irregular” faith missions – missions which operated outside any denominational governance and which were supported independently.⁴⁹

Side by side with the great regular organizations, the missionary boards of the churches, other bodies—call them “irregulars” if you please – have sprung up, who have made the evangelization (*not* conversion) of the world their aim and object, emphasizing *not* the gradual advance and development of a church-millennium, but the hastening and looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.⁵⁰

Gaebelein and Stroeter slowly moved Hope of Israel toward greater autonomy from the Methodist Church and would eventually sever all ties in 1897. Like these “irregulars,” they

⁴⁸ “Our Aim,” *Our Hope* 1.1 (July, 1894): 1.

⁴⁹ For a good analysis of the “faith principle” in mission work see David Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: the Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 185-190. Dana Robert in *American Women in Mission* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) looks at the overflow of interest in missions at this time.

⁵⁰ Stroeter, “The Blessed Hope and Missions,” *Our Hope* 3.4 (October, 1896): 113 (his emphasis).

rejected the “world conquering” conversion methods of the postmillennialists and, instead, emphasized the evangelization of individual souls in a world redeemable only through the Second Coming. Gaebelein and Stroeter believed this approach to be more faithful to the apostolic church and their mission endeavors more in line with their dispensationalist interpretation of God’s plan an human culture.

Gaebelein believed the reason the historic churches of his day had erred from God’s plan was that they had been seduced by notions that civilization could perfect itself and that the Church could play an integral part in this process. The postmillennial advance of Christian civilization, in his mind, ignored the fact that this civilization and dispensation, like every dispensation and civilization before, would end in human failure. In an article titled “God’s Purpose for this Age,” for example, Gaebelein argued that the present world was under the dominion of Satan. Christians must always observe the accomplishments of white, American society, or any other society for that matter, within this context. Western societies had achieved great and impressive things in the nineteenth century, Gaebelein conceded, but these achievements do not necessarily accord with God’s purpose, which is to save humanity through the Gospel. These accomplishments have tended to distract many Christians from this divine plan, convincing them to put faith in human and social progress. “In the face of God’s revealed purpose to save men to their uttermost by the invisible power of the spirit, through the word,” Gaebelein stated, “the world proposes to demonstrate how humanity can be its own savior, lifting itself up out of barbarism, ignorance, superstition to the highest plane of intellectual and moral

excellence...”⁵¹ God, rather, has a “controversy” with the world, according to Gaebelein. Nothing postmillennialist Christians do to Christianize and uplift the world will ever reap the intended benefits.

How is this controversy going to be settled? By an alliance, defensive and offensive, of the moral forces of the church with the world? That seems to be the programme [sic] of Christianity of the last decade of the nineteenth century. Politics are to be purified, society to be regenerated, the social evil, the drink evil, the opium evil and a host of other evils, are to be suppressed or abolished. The world lends the financial and executive power; the church supplies the “moral forces.”⁵²

Gaebelein certainly believed anarchism and communism were a threat to the existing order, and that temperance and other moral issues should be promoted, but he also believed anarchy and immorality were to be expected in this age leading up to the Second Coming. Neither the Church, being present anywhere individuals believed in Jesus’ messiahship, nor society’s evils, being inherent throughout the world, were tied to a particular race or certain cultural defect. Both evil and the Church were trans-racial and trans-cultural. The postmillennialist agenda to morally and socially “improve” converts to some Anglo-Saxon cultural standard, then, not only grossly misinterpreted Western technological progress, but also hampered the simple apostolic mission to save souls in preparation for the blessed hope. The progress of Christian civilization was an illusion; its base assumption of cultural advancement was at the very best ancillary to God’s

⁵¹ Gaebelein, “God’s Purpose for this Age,” *Our Hope*, 1.6 and 7 (December-January, 1894-95): 135.

⁵² *Ibid.*

plans. Applying this to efforts to assimilate Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side, however, such views were doubly misguided.

In addition to its interpretation of the primitive church and its relationship to human culture, the Hope of Israel mission and its policies were also influenced by dispensationalism's principle, which set it apart from other premillennialist theologies, that the Church did not supersede the Jewish people. Jews instead remained a distinct and independent people within God's plan of salvation and both simultaneously claimed God's favor. Because of this, Gaebelein and Stroeter understood Jews and Judaism as unique from other races and religions which might be considered by white Christians as inferior. In an article from 1895 titled "Does the Jew, in Christ, Cease to be a Jew?," for example, Stroeter claimed that "Mosaic Judaism is not one of the *natural* religions of the world, but a *revealed*, i.e., divinely appointed religious, social and political system, the most perfect and beautiful of its kind the world has ever seen."⁵³ Stroeter defined "Mosaic Judaism," or "Scriptural Judaism" as he and Gaebelein also called it, essentially as Orthodox Judaism. Reformed Jews had strayed in their beliefs and practices, in Gaebelein and Stroeter's opinion, from the faith revealed in the Hebrew Bible. Unlike other religions, therefore, Christians should understand Mosaic Judaism as a divinely revealed religion and sibling of their own faith. Instead of viewing the Jewish race and religion as inferior and foreign, Christians should rather remember that both peoples and faiths are intrinsically connected. "Do we realize that 'Christianity' is only a Greek form for saying 'Messianity'... The Lord Jesus Christ is in His human personality (and His body, the church, through Him) forever

⁵³ Stroeter, "Does the Jew, in Christ, Cease to be a Jew?" *Our Hope* 2.2 (August, 1895) 27. (His emphasis)

inseparably connected with the Jewish race, the Jewish religion, the Jewish state, and the land of Israel.”⁵⁴

Hope of Israel’s policy that emerged from these dispensationalist elements after 1893 was to advance the creation of Hebrew Christians. The mission rejected prominent approaches and attitudes that aimed to assimilate the Jewish people into white, American interpretations of Christianity. These approaches ideally removed from Jews as many seemingly inferior practices or characteristics as possible which set them apart from superior white Christians and white denominational forms of worship and belief. The purging of these elements was, it seemed, an outward, behavioral improvement that confirmed an individual’s inward, spiritual transformation. “Is not the almost universal impression that the Jew, in order to do this [convert to Christianity] most effectively,” Stroeter stated, “must rid himself as radically as possible of anything and everything in and about him that is Jewish, except, possibly, his countenance? And we are not sure but this latter would even be considered by some a desirable change.”⁵⁵ Upon renouncing such behavior the individual was then expected to join a denomination and indeed, the quickness with which the person proceeded to “un-Jew” him or herself and join a church was “one of the best and most convincing proofs of the genuineness of his conversion.”⁵⁶ According to Gaebelein and Stroeter, as seen above, to equate Christianity with the supposedly superior cultural values and achievements of white America, much less to use Christianity as a means of somehow imparting the material and social “benefits” of that culture to Jews, was contrary to the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Stroeter, “Should Jews by Proselyted?,” *Our Hope* 2.1 (July, 1895): 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

purpose of God and the pattern they perceived in the early church. What is more, Hope of Israel's idea of the Church and its relationship to the Jews dismissed the idea that Jews were ethnically or religiously inferior. "Their national life is not like that of other peoples and races. They alone have statutes and laws ordered for their national existence by the Lord God Himself."⁵⁷ Both faiths and respective believers enjoyed favor and equal importance in God's plan for the world. "We are *fellow-heirs*" Stroeter stated, "and *fellow-members* of the body with the believing Jews."⁵⁸ Jews who simply 'completed' their faith by accepting Jesus as the messiah, then, could thus continue celebrating Passover and Yom Kippur, maintaining a kosher diet, and attending synagogue on Saturdays. "The Jew must believe only that this God became manifest in Jesus of Nazareth...The Jew who accepts Jesus of Nazareth as his personal and his nation's true Messiah and Lord, is in the 'true apostolic succession.'"⁵⁹ Indeed, in Hope of Israel's view, these Jewish practices were far more valid than those of white, historic Christianity. Jewish traditions were, after all, given by God and the denominational diversity and practices that arose after the apostolic period were merely human-made divisions to the pure faith of the apostles. "[The Jew's] customs and observances (as far as they are Scriptural) are given to his nation by God, they are not human inventions or devices – which cannot be said of a great many so-called 'Christian' institutions, ceremonies, and observances."⁶⁰ Such requirements

⁵⁷ Stroeter, "Christian Judaism," *Our Hope* 1.1 (July, 1894): 10.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Stroeter, "Should Jews by Proselyted?," 10.

might be acceptable for members of other races and “natural religions,” who were outside the purview of God’s redemptive plan, but to require it of a Jew was “a practical denial of the fact that Christianity is after all only Messianity, i.e. the normal outgrowth of God’s revelation in the law and the prophets.”⁶¹

The Jews’ role in Gaebelein and Stroeter’s interpretation of the End Time, then, was not the only motivating factor behind Hope of Israel’s conception of Hebrew Christianity. Its approach to Jewish conversion rejected conventional thought about race and Christian praxis and instead was predicated on an alternative understanding of human society, the Church, and the Church’s relationship to Jews. If other missions understood this correctly, Gaebelein believed, they would see that attempting to impart some form of material and social benefit to immigrants through conversion in order to absorb those immigrants more thoroughly into American society was not only foolhardy, but also counterproductive. Gaebelein and Stroeter believed aiming simply for the immigrant’s soul by preaching the Jewish-Christian gospel of compatibility between the two faiths would reap greater rewards in terms of converts. Moving from this conceptual framework to the arena of practice, Hope of Israel implemented policy changes after 1893 aimed to buttress this message of compatibility. In addition to any eschatological dimension, these changes at Hope of Israel’s, centered on its understanding of the Church, countered what they viewed as dangerous methods used by other missions that linked the gospel with material gain.

⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

Conflict and Conversion

Hope of Israel was hardly the only Jewish mission on the Lower East Side. While on the whole cooperation was the norm, the close proximity of these different missions to one another, the different methods they used, and the various personalities of each mission's leaders often provoked rivalries and in some cases open disputes. In the summer of 1895, Gaebelein and Stroeter became embroiled in such a controversy with a converted Jew and Presbyterian minister named Herman Warszawiak.⁶² Warszawiak led the American Mission to the Jews out of the Presbyterian Church of Sea and Land at 19 Market Street, mere blocks away from Hope of Israel. For some time, his mission had been campaigning for funds to construct a large church building that would provide a worship place for Jewish converts and, ideally, encourage more conversions. The estimated cost was \$150,000, but it was declared to be "the one great need" that would bring the Jews of the area en masse into the Christian faith.⁶³ According to *Our Hope*, Warszawiak had been attempting to draw large crowds to his mission, thereby garnering more support from the denomination and other benefactors, by passing out yellow cards in the community that invited people to come to his Saturday afternoon service. After the service a person could exchange the card for a free ticket to a "wonderful electric picture show."⁶⁴ A

⁶² For information on Warszawiak and his mission work see Ariel, *Evangelizing* 70-71 and David Max Eichhorn, *Evangelizing the American Jew* (Middle Village, N.Y.: Jonathan David Publishers, 1978), 169-171.

⁶³ "Herman Warszawiak's Method of Getting 'Crowds to Hear the Gospel': a Protest and Appeal," *Our Hope* 2.1 (July, 1895): 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

message written in Yiddish at the bottom of the card stated, “The Tickets, to buy, cost 50cts.”⁶⁵ This tactic seems to have worked and for several weeks Sabbath afternoon services at the Church of Sea and Land were full of people there, according to *Our Hope*, superficially to hear the gospel.⁶⁶ Apparently, several people had been asking Gaebelein and Stroeter their opinions on the American Mission to the Jews’ practices, but they had refrained from giving any comment. Whether or not their silence was out of principle or indifference, it was broken in July of that summer after Warszawiak’s cards were distributed directly outside Hope of Israel’s doors.

Gaebelein and Stroeter’s protest against the “shameless proceedings” of Warszawiak on behalf of “poor, downtrodden Israel” touched off a controversy that played out in the literature produced by each mission into the fall of 1895.⁶⁷ *Our Hope* accused Warszawiak of inflating his mission’s success by manipulating Jews into coming to his services and encouraging insincere conversions simply for the sake of gaining money and support for his mission. The editors claimed they appreciated the “stinging shame and righteous indignation of the great mass of honest Jews over such an insulting appeal to the low passion for getting something free” and vindicated Hope of Israel by stating further that “we are in a condition to know that scores and hundreds of Jews of all classes are open and ready to accept a frank and straightforward invitation to come and hear the Gospel of Jesus the Christ.”⁶⁸ For its part, the American Mission to the Jews was “deeply saddened” that another Christian mission would be jealous of the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

success it had had doing God's work. Gaebelein and Stroeter retorted that they praised any true conversions made by the American Mission to the Jews and that they "spoke only of [those conversions] manufactured by H. Warszawiak himself for a purpose through his ticket scheme. To implicate God is dishonorable trickery and borders on blasphemy."⁶⁹ Aside from any petty rivalry, jealousy, or threat to their mission they might have felt, what was truly at stake for Gaebelein and Stroeter were the dispensationalist convictions that the gospel should be presented in a manner free from cultural baggage, and their core message that the Jewish people were unlike other races and religions, but rather on equal footing with the faith of the Church. These central convictions of Hebrew Christianity, they believed, were seemingly undermined in the mission field by Warszawiak's tactics as well as by strategies employed by other missions that similarly infused the prospect of material or social gain into their Christian work – whether those benefits were mere entertainment or more substantial advantages such as education or employment. A discussion of this minor controversy, therefore, can be expanded beyond the handing out of tickets to electric picture shows in exchange for attending worship services to encompass the practical subject of how Hope of Israel planned to convert Jews correctly and why it believed correct methods mattered.

Hope of Israel was aware that any efforts to lead Jews to the Christian faith on the Lower East Side faced a number of difficulties. While both Gaebelein and Stroeter often glowingly commented in *Our Hope* about "God's Spirit moving among the Jews to make larger numbers than ever of them willing and ever eager to listen to the gospel," in reality even they had to admit

⁶⁹ "A Startling Reply to our 'Protest and Appeal' in Reference to HW," *Our Hope* 2.3 (September, 1895): 53.

that few Jews actually took the next step to *believe* the gospel.⁷⁰ A contemporary approximation of those who converted to Christianity reflects this success rate. Louis Meyer, a Jewish convert respected in both Jewish and Christian circles and who later helped organize the American Hebrew Christian Alliance, concluded in 1902 that between 1880 and 1900 few more than 4,000 Jews had become Christians.⁷¹ While Gaebelein believed in the inevitable large-scale success of Jewish missions, he considered one of the biggest obstacles to the speedy fulfillment of this sign of the times to be the prominent place many missions gave to social concerns in their work. This was a hopeless endeavor on the part of Christians, as we have seen, but it also created problems from the standpoint of potential converts.

At the same time many whites viewed conversion to Christianity as a means to educate and instill middle-class morals within immigrants, many Jewish immigrants, marginalized by race, economics, and other forces, also explored the prospect of conversion as a means of obtaining the social and material advantages their community lacked. Ariel argues in his investigation of the Jewish response to Christian missions that most immigrant Jews “encountered the missionaries as part of their explorations of their new environment, seeking to

⁷⁰ “Report of Secretary North,” *Our Hope* 1.1 (July, 1894): 20.

⁷¹ Louis Meyer, “Protestant Missions to the Jews” *Missionary Review of the World* 25 (December 1902): 910-11. Quoted in Ariel, *Evangelizing*, 39. Meyer also wrote a manuscript titled *Eminent Hebrew Christians of the 19th Century*, which was not published in his lifetime. He hoped to combat the view that only poor and less-educated Jews converted to Christianity by highlighting important and successful Jewish Christians. Rausch has since edited and published it under the title *Louis Meyer’s Eminent Hebrew Christians of the 19th Century: Brief Biographical Sketches* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1983).

make sense of it and find means to accommodate themselves in a new society.”⁷² In the case of an actual conversion, the decision could be seen, at least partly, as finding a new set of “beliefs and values that made sense in their new country and helped them to build a new life for themselves in America.”⁷³ There were certainly Jewish people who were interested in conversion. But given the low number of converts relative to the immigrant population and given the conditions on the Lower East Side, many more individuals approached Christian missions out of mere curiosity and others understandably came to missions for material help in the form of money, food and clothing, medical care, and social access in the form of jobs and education. From Hope of Israel’s perspective, then, missions carried out correctly had to present the gospel in a way that combated any ulterior motives within the audience in order to evoke what it believed to be genuine faith in Jesus as the messiah. The alternative was to stifle authentic mission success and divert the thoughts of potential converts away from the gospel message by allowing the gospel to become a stepping-stone to inclusion within white, Christian society.

Gaebelein knew he could not avoid the idea among certain Jews that Christianity could be a means of obtaining access to secular aid. Hope of Israel, however, attempted to guard against this by severing as thoroughly as possible any connection between the Hebrew Christian message it preached and any effort on their part to help alleviate the poverty around them or to provide economic opportunities to their constituency. As seen in its criticism of postmillennial missions above, the mission believed this connection complicated the apostolic simplicity of mission work and distracted both the mission and its audience from the gospel message. This

⁷² Ariel, *Evangelizing*, 39.

⁷³ Ibid.

conviction partly lay behind Hope of Israel's response to the methods of the American Mission to the Jews. Warszawiak's tactics merely appealed to the "low passions" by wrapping the gospel in material advantages – however trivial it may have been. "The virtual *bribery* of Jews to accept Christ," according to an article in *Our Hope*, is one of the most damaging and misguided things one could do, since it merely induced "Jews to confess Christ by making it easy or materially well worth his while."⁷⁴ Hope of Israel's critique, as noted however, went further than Warszawiak's ticket scheme to include the general distribution of any relief through mission work as well.

Poor relief had been part of Gaebelein's mission since its inception and it certainly remained a part of his work after his adoption of the theory of Hebrew Christianity in late 1893. However, shortly after implementing its new theory Hope of Israel began deemphasizing this aspect of its mission. The published expenditures in *Our Hope* illustrate this most clearly. From June 1894 to May of 1895, Hope of Israel spent \$1223.70 on loans and relief to the poor. During that same period, the mission spent \$1344.18 for printing costs related to *Tiqweth Israel*, *Our Hope* and other material. For the entire year between May of 1895 and May of 1896, the money expended on poor relief and loans dropped significantly to \$399.05, while funds for print material rose to \$1690.40. The pattern remained the same over the next two years. Between May 1896 and June 1897, the mission spent \$1858.61 on print material and \$332.05 on relief. From July 1897 to July 1898, funds again climbed to \$2415.25 for print expenditures, while those for relief dropped to \$253.05.⁷⁵ Several factors may be behind these numbers. Apparently the winter

⁷⁴ "'The Peculiar People' on Missions to the Jews," *Our Hope* 4.5 (November, 1897): 172.

⁷⁵ These numbers are gathered from financial reports published in *Our Hope*.

of 1894/95 was particularly harsh and conditions compelled Hope of Israel to provide a greater amount of aid, which could account for the higher relief expenditures in the first report.⁷⁶ However, much of the resources the mission distributed that winter came from outside donors and winter relief stopped altogether by March. At the same time, the increased money spent on print material could be explained by *Our Hope*'s growing popularity in America as well as the growing demand for copies of Gaebelein's tracts and pamphlets in Jewish missions overseas. Even so, the trend exhibited by the reports reveals Hope of Israel's priorities. Certainly, for Gaebelein, the distribution of food, clothing, medicine and loans was not necessarily bad and certainly had their place on the Lower East Side. However, he believed the overuse of relief made the missionary more a provider of material aid rather than the conveyer of Christian truth. Simple preaching and sincere inquiry were required first before the individual could receive help from Hope of Israel. "Of course if a sincerely inquiring Jew suffers because of his faith, it is only common humanity to grant him a helping hand in his distress. But this is vastly different from making it an advantage to every idle and indigent Jew to inquire or pretend to inquire into the truth of Christianity."⁷⁷ The subordination of this "helping hand" in the mission's work ensured that the gospel message was given free of the advantages afforded by these worldly things. To Gaebelein, it was better to direct money to aspects of the mission that directly evangelized and benefited the soul rather than poor relief that sought to improve Jewish conditions and at the risk of distracting them from the gospel.

⁷⁶ "Report of Secretary North," 23.

⁷⁷ "'The Peculiar People' on Missions to the Jews," 172.

Hope of Israel's concern about connecting the Christian message with secular advantages, particularly access to employment and education, is most overtly displayed in its stance toward the fundamental Christian practice of baptism. Beginning in 1893, Gaebelein and Hope of Israel refused to baptize any new convert, asking instead that willing Jews go to other like-minded missions to be baptized. By 1896, a growing number of Christian observers believed Hope of Israel opposed baptizing converted Jews altogether. As a result, pressure had been mounting for the mission to state their position on the Christian ritual. Partly because of this, Hope of Israel published an official statement of organization that winter. In this statement, Gaebelein dismissed any idea that he opposed baptizing Jews in principle. Jews could be baptized, he believed, but Hope of Israel's "practice has been rather to counsel and urge delay with as little publicity as possible; also to recommend well-tried candidates for baptism to the kind services of some minister in sympathy with us."⁷⁸ One reason was that there were a number of abuses and corrupt practices in Christian missions associated with the ritual. Baptisms looked great on paper and were used by people like Warszawiak to impress benefactors into pledging money and support. Yet, more importantly, Gaebelein saw that many Jews believed baptism would provide an easier path to the advantages of white, Christian society. "In some way the two things have become so closely joined together in their minds that when an appeal for temporal aid is not granted for any, even the best of, reasons the baptized proselyte knows of no stronger rejoinder than to say, 'But you baptized me!' This is considered irresistible."⁷⁹ Writing in his autobiography years later, Gaebelein remembered many occasions when young men would ask,

⁷⁸ "The Question of 'Organizing' the Hope of Israel Movement" *Our Hope* 3.5 and 6 (November-December, 1896): 151.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

“If I become a Christian and get baptized, do you think Christians will help me to become educated as a physician, a dentist, or can I become a preacher?”⁸⁰ Hope of Israel’s policy here, as well as with the distribution material relief, hoped to curtail the challenge created by incorporating social concerns into evangelistic work. In the end, it distracted all parties from the gospel message.

Yet, an equally challenging obstacle to widespread conversion for Gaebelien was that, while he believed Christianity was ideally free from race and culture, he knew that for most Jews the Jewish faith was not. This was especially the case for the immigrants on the Lower East Side. Many having recently fled pogroms enacted in Eastern Europe, Christian missionaries found in the immigrant community “a strong minority consciousness that was not easily surrendered and that led them to place a high value on group survival,” Eric Goldstein has observed. “Since social ties were seen as a protective force that had guaranteed Jewish continuity with the past, most Jews were reluctant to break these bonds.”⁸¹ A convert to Christianity in the immigrant community, therefore, was perceived by those around him or her to be leaving behind more than his or her faith. Converting to Christianity meant a traumatic break with his or her community, Ariel argues, an “act of betrayal of one’s people, and heritage, as joining the enemy camp.”⁸² A poignant example this can be seen in a letter a recent convert received from his anguished sister. It is not clear if the man who received it was converted through Hope of Israel or a related mission. *Our Hope* printed it in December of 1895, however, in order to grant its audience a

⁸⁰ Gaebelien, *Autobiography*, 30.

⁸¹ Goldstein, 14. See also Weber, 144.

⁸² Ariel, *Evangelizing*, 40.

greater appreciation of Jewish converts and the struggles they faced.⁸³ “This morning I have bidden farewell to one of the brightest hopes of my life,” the sister opens, “[i]f I wrote forever I could not express the deep grief and sorrow your letter has caused our dear mother and myself.”⁸⁴ The sister continues that she would have rather have heard that her brother had died than that he had converted to Christianity. “I feel as if I am going to a funeral...As I am writing this I am shedding the bitterest tears of my life.”⁸⁵ She asked that, if there is any future correspondence, her brother would refrain from speaking about religious matters, and tersely rejected his advice to read the New Testament “with the contempt it deserves.”⁸⁶ Apparently the brother had tried to calm his family’s fear and anger by expressing his hopes that they too would convert in the future. To this, his sister disdainfully replied, “As for your thinking we shall any one of us some day be of your opinion, it is utterly ridiculous; for such a thing will never happen to us, to be so wicked as to change our religion.”⁸⁷

Similar feelings of betrayal were directed at Gaebelein himself a number of times in his ministry. Because of his proficiency in Yiddish and Hebrew, many in his audiences came under the impression Gaebelein was secretly Jewish. He recalled one man at a speaking engagement who stood and shouted, “Why have you to lie and be ashamed of your nationality? Here you

⁸³ “Letter of a Joung [sic] Jewess to Her Brother who had Accepted Christ,” *Our Hope* 2.6 (December, 1895): 138.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

started and said that you are a Gentile and now we all hear with our own ears that you are a Jew, just as we are.”⁸⁸ Gaebelein remembered similar occasions early on while handing out pamphlets in the community. “Some of the people were angry and insulting when the tract and invitations were put in their hands,” he remembered, “but as soon as they found out that the distributor was a gentile, and not a Jew, they treated him with respect.”⁸⁹ On other occasions, it seems members of the community sought to guard against conversions by undermining Hope of Israel itself. During winter of 1895/96, *Our Hope* ran an editorial note stating, perhaps with strategic credulity, “of late we have also been somewhat persecuted by some who say they are Jews and are not. A slanderous article appeared against Mr.G., in one of the Hebrew papers...[Things] worse than slander were then resorted to, down to forging of a name, so as to damage our character and our work.”⁹⁰ Christian missionaries could be tolerated in the community and their message even considered for reasons ranging from weeknight entertainment to obtaining a form of welfare. At the same time, however, the community often viewed any mission’s success as a threat and any converts as traitors. In addition to the potential that Jews would convert because of ulterior motives, then, Gaebelein acknowledged another challenge to conversion to be the perception within the Jewish community that missionaries were at best mischievous outsiders, and at worst, given mission efforts to “bribe” Jews, as cultural predators threatening to break the community apart.

⁸⁸ Gaebelein, *Autobiography*, 32.

⁸⁹ “Report of Secretary North,” 19.

⁹⁰ “Report of the Work,” *Our Hope* 2.10 (May, 1895): 239.

Gaebelein believed that to be successful Christian missions instead had to confront Jewish “pride,” his interpretation of the group identity that Goldman described above. “[The Jew] is proud of his history, his race, his learning and his pure monotheism, with the sublime ethics of the religion of Moses and the prophets,” *Our Hope* stated, “[and] in the individual it takes the form of a pride that would be wounded or humbled by an admission that Jesus is the Messiah.”⁹¹ Returning again briefly to the protest against the American Mission to the Jews, enticing Jews into attending services with simple amusements, or in other cases using the prospect of secular advantages to entice conversions, were “insulting” and aroused “righteous indignation” because they threatened the community by appealing to vulnerabilities of some of its members. This, in turn, perpetuated an unwelcoming and sometimes even hostile attitude toward missionaries. The conflict conversion caused, Gaebelein believed, remained unchecked because not only was the Christian message that Jesus was the messiah obfuscated by social concerns, but also because the compatibility of the two faiths remained hidden as well. This situation was only compounded when missions expected Jewish converts to renounce all the beliefs and practices associated with Judaism upon conversion and to join a white interpretation of Christianity.

Hope of Israel believed its strategy of separating its Hebrew Christian message from the material advantages too often associated with conversion would curb some of these anxieties. They also hoped its message that the Christian and Jewish faiths were compatible would quell any anger as well. Gaebelein and Stroeter made a concerted effort in their mission work to show that the two faiths were harmonious and, as opposed to the assimilationist strategies of other

⁹¹ “‘The Peculiar People’ on Missions to the Jews,” 171.

missions that hoped to transform the Jewish individual and absorb him or her into a white interpretation of Christianity. They hoped that demonstrating the acceptability and validity of the continued observance of such elements as holy days and a kosher diet among converts would lessen the perception that Christianity was a threat and a religious outsider to the Jewish faith and community. In its statement of principles, for example, the editors address this perception by stating, “The bitterness of Jewish resentment against Christian missionary efforts has likewise been needlessly intensified by the unwarranted and radical rejection of everything Jewish in the convert to Christianity,” and that “the conviction in the Jewish mind that Jesus of Nazareth could never have been the messiah of Israel, is only confirmed when they see that His followers from among His own nation are not allowed to live like their fathers, in accordance with Divinely given laws and ordinances.”⁹² Reflecting on the changes it began implementing in 1893, the declaration noted that “Very soon after beginning his work, Rev. A. C. Gaebelein became convinced that the methods followed generally in bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews, by which they are taught to ‘forsake Moses,’ to detach themselves from the life and customs of their nation, and to become proselytes in any of the Christian sects – were not in harmony with the Divine purpose concerning Israel.”⁹³ Proselytizing, for Gaebelein, meant converting an individual from the worship of idols or other Gods to the worship of the Judeo-Christian God. It also entailed the impartation of certain forms of Christian faith and worship upon the convert, forcing the individual to abandon certain cultural practices and join a denomination. These methods were “not effective and mischievous” because they failed to consider the Church’s

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ “A Most Important Declaration,” *Our Hope* 1.8 (February, 1895): 177.

relationship to Jews.⁹⁴ “We do not doubt that the widespread dissatisfaction and distrust of Jewish converts are very largely due to the fact that Jewish missions have been conducted, for the most part, on wrong, i.e. proselytizing lines.”⁹⁵ As a result, only the “bad and consciousness Jews ever become converts to Christianity,” from the standpoint of the proud immigrant community, and from in its view these converts “are a good riddance.”⁹⁶

Hope of Israel claimed these methods were antagonistic in the Jewish community because they are more concerned with assimilating and uplifting Jews into seemingly superior interpretations of Christianity and white society than understanding the veracity of their faith in God’s plan. Such “antagonistic” methods, Gaebelein believed, were foreign in the early church. Gentiles, he argued, did not have to adhere to the Jewish practice of circumcision and dietary restrictions upon conversion. At the same time, Jewish converts did not have to give them up. “But was there ever in apostolic days any question raised as to whether this gospel belonged really to the Jews first? Was it ever proposed on the part of any body of Gentile believers to submit the *Jew* to any strictures, or, to demand of him the giving up of any of his national prerogatives and characteristics before he could become a fellow-heir?”⁹⁷ A Jew could not and should not “un-Jew” him or herself into white, American cultural standards, but rather continue to practice the customs and rituals of their ancestors. Through his work and experience, Gaebelein believed more and more Christians were being awakened to a new understanding of

⁹⁴ “Editorial Notes,” *Our Hope* 3.5 and 6 (November-December, 1896): 147.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁹⁷ Stroeter, “Christian Judaism,” 10.

Jews, one reflective of the apostolic church's stance.⁹⁸ Recovering this attitude and abandoning old assumptions about race and culture would be the real means by which to bring Jews en masse into the Christian Church and into apostolic succession; fulfilling, Gaebelein believed, the greatest sign of the times.

Conclusion

Gaebelein would continue supervising the Hope of Israel mission until 1899. While he continued to believe the Church and Jews were separate but equal within God's single plan, his increased involvement with other dispensationalists of slightly different ecclesiological views led him to the opinion that the Church was made up of neither Gentiles nor Jews. Therefore, Mosaic Law was suspended and while Jews were still not obligated to join an existing denomination, it was not necessary for converts to continue traditional practices. He and Stroeter parted ways amicably. For the six years between 1893 and 1899, however, the theory and practice of Hebrew Christianity drove Gaebelein's work at Hope of Israel. Despite prominent attitudes toward non-Anglo Saxon and non-protestant immigrant peoples entering the country, the mission advanced what it believed to be the true relationship between the Church and the Jewish people, therefore rejecting assimilationist approaches to Jewish missions. Gaebelein's dispensationalist convictions led him to reject the connection between Christ and white, American culture and the notion that Jews could be improved materially, socially, and morally by being assimilated into that culture. Those who 'completed' their faith by accepting Jesus the promised messiah could

⁹⁸ Ibid., 259. "The Holy Spirit has during the last years given all true believers through the Word much light concerning the chosen people of God, and the same Spirit has filled Gentile hearts with a burning love for Israel..."

retain the traditional practices of their Jewish past and more easily remain within their community. Questions, of course, remain. More research needs to be done on the relationship between the numerous missions on the Lower East Side, particularly between those influenced by dispensationalism and those that were not. Additionally, Gaebelein's view regarding missions to other races or ethnic groups besides the Jews should be explored. How did the experiences in this early phase of his career continue to impact his later ministry, despite the fact that his views evolved? As Gaebelein would play a large role shaping evangelical attitudes toward Jews in the twentieth century, how is his attitude toward race, seen here, reflected in later Christian Zionist and Messianic Jewish movements? Nevertheless, this paper has illuminated this short, but significant period in Gaebelein's ministry, his work through the Hope of Israel mission, and his early role in the making of Hebrew Christians.