

PRECURSORS OF THE PIETIST "INSTITUTUM JUDAICUM"

by *BAROUH MEVORAH*

The Institutum Judaicum was established in 1730 in Halle, Germany, by clergy as well as academics in the spirit of the Protestant Pietist movement, some of whom were associated with the University of Halle. The attitude toward Jews and Judaism embodied by the founders of the Institutum, however, had been presaged by the writings of several German thinkers, believers, and academics since the end of the seventeenth century.

The first to clearly express such attitudes was the polemical scholar, Johann Christof Wagenseil. Wagenseil was considered by his contemporaries as a polyhistor, possessing particular expertise in Judaism and its traditional writings. He was appointed Professor of History at Altdorf University in 1667, where he later became Professor of Semitic Languages. Wagenseil became increasingly expert in the areas of halachic literature and exegesis, later halachic literature, other areas of Judaica, and in Jewish languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) and dialects (Yiddish, the language of the Targum, and Judaeo-Greek). He initially continued the hostility toward Judaism and its tradition characteristic of Martin Luther's later writings. Thus, during that early stage of his academic life, Wagenseil may be seen as tending toward religious Jew-hatred.

Wagenseil's chief polemic work against Judaism, published in 1681, was an academic compilation of previously unpublished anti-Christian Jewish manuscripts. Wagenseil annotated and explicated these manuscripts in accordance with his own

Barouh Mevorah teaches in the Department of Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The present paper is in part based upon work conducted in the inter-departmental seminar on "Sympathy for Judaism Among Trends in Christianity in Modern Times," taught jointly by Marcel Dubois and the author, during the academic year 1985-86. Translated from the Hebrew by Beth Uval.

views, and included a Latin translation of the Hebrew that was not always literal, and at times deviated from the original.¹

During his later years, Wagenseil's attitude toward Judaism become generally more sympathetic and appreciative. He still continued to nurture the hope that one day, at a time in history known only to God, the Jews would collectively convert to Christianity – a belief later to be developed by the Pietist trend within the Protestant Church. Wagenseil began to view the Jews as God's chosen people even in his own day, as a people that would retain its uniqueness even after converting to Christianity. When God would decide that the time was ripe for the Jews' collective conversion, they would resume their centrality in the world and their dominant role in bringing about the redemption. Wagenseil consequently believed that the Jews' social and political life should be immediately improved, and that true Christians should defend them from false accusations such as blood libels and the desecration of the *Hostia*.²

A collection of some of Wagenseil's discussions of this notion was published in Leipzig in 1705,³ the last year of his life. The first work in this collection, *Die Hoffnung der Erlösung*, sets forth for the first time the concept of an academic Christian institute for the study of Judaism, including a detailed program for the establishment of such an institution. He proposes this idea at the end of this work. Wagenseil begins by contrasting the contemporary flowering of all areas of academic study with the total absence of any effort to convert the Jews. He treats

1. *Tela Ignea Satanae. Hocest: Arcani, & horribiles Judaeorum adversus Christum Deum, & Christianam Religionem Libri Anekdotoi. Sunt vero: R. Lipmanni Carmen Memoriale. Liber Nizzachon Vetus Autoris Incogniti. Acta Disputationis R. Jechielis cum Quodam Nicolao. Acta Disputationis R. Mosis Nachmanidis cum Fratre Paulo Christiani, et Fratre Raymundo Martini. R. Isaaci Liber Chissuk Emuna. Libellus Toldos Jeschu.*

2. In addition to the Pietists, who strengthened this approach to the Jews, other Catholic and Protestant minority trends in several European countries and even in South America espoused a similar approach. Most of these groups shared the view that only God knows when the collective conversion of the Jews, which is part of His plan for the redemption, would occur. Most believed, moreover, that the role of human beings was only to lay the groundwork for that moment, but not make it happen. In his book, Wagenseil stressed that attempting to convert an individual Jew to Christianity (or acceding to a Jews' request for baptism) constituted opposition to God's redemption plan. At the same time, Wagenseil continually condemned the Jews' "usurious activities" and advocated a campaign to eliminate them.

3. *Benachrichtigung, wegen einiger die gemeine Jüdischheit betreffenden wichtigen Sachen worinnen. I. Die Hoffnung der Erlösung Israelis, oder Klarer Beweis. Der annoch bevorstehenden / und / wie es scheint / allgemach heran-nahenden grossen Juden-Bekehrung / sammt unvorgreiflichen Gedancken / wie solche / nechst Verleihung Göttlicher Hülffe zu befördern. II. Wiederlegung der Unfvarheit als ob die Jüden Christen-Blut bräuchten. III. Anzeigung wie die Jüden von Schinden und wuchern abzubringen. IV. Bericht von dem Jüdischen Gebeth Alenu. V. Denunciatio Christiana, wegen der Jüden Lästerungen. Diesen sind beygefügt. Rabbi Mose Stendels / in Jüdisch-Teutsche Reimen gebrachte Psalmen Davids.*

the issue of the Jews' remaining a distinct people, and terms the continued existence of the Jewish People "a great miracle."⁴ Noting that in his time both Christians and Jews offer reasons for considering the future conversion of the Jews, Wagenseil enumerates various indicators of what he perceived as a growing Jewish-Christian rapprochement. He notes the improved attitude toward the Jews of several European princes and kings, the translation of several sacred Jewish texts into European languages, his own translations of anti-Christian Jewish manuscripts, and Christian study of the Hebrew language. Wagenseil notes that an improved attitude toward the Jews and Christian respect for Jewish holiday observances exists in certain parts of Europe. He mentions the readiness of Jewish physicians to care for Christians whose lives are in danger even on the Sabbath, and instances of Christians teaching Jewish children foreign languages. After noting these indicators of Jewish-Christian rapprochement, Wagenseil discusses the steps that need to be taken to encourage the Jews' mass conversion to Christianity which, he says, should not involve violence or any form of compulsion.

The seventh and final chapter of Wagenseil's work begins by enumerating those Christian attitudes toward the Jews which, he feels, prevent them from drawing closer to Christianity.⁵ At the end of this chapter, Wagenseil details his proposal for the establishment by Christians of a Jewish studies institute.⁶ He suggests raising a "not inconsiderable sum" of money and entrusting it to a prominent ruler, who would see to the construction of a proper building in an appropriate location, under his supervision. The "Institutum" faculty, continued Wagenseil, would reside in the building and receive a stipend, similar to the teachers at the Collegium Propagandae Fidei in Rome. "Four or five persons" knowledgeable in Hebrew and Aramaic and in "Rabbinicis, Talmudicis et Controversis Judaicis" would be invited to teach at the institute. The students would be trained to engage in "disputationes" with the Jews, and would be sent to places of Jewish residence to serve as "Zuversichtliche Bekehrer."⁷ Continuous funding would be needed to see that these emissaries'

4. Ibid., p. 21: "...das grosse Wunder für unsern Augen / wann wir betrachten / dass Gott gleichwohl die Jüdische Völckerschafft / nun so viel hundert Jahr / nach Zerstörung ihrer Policey / in so manchen Drangsalen / Verfolgungen / Vertreibungen von einem Land in das andere / und auch erbärmlichen *massacrirungen* / jedoch / biss gegenwärtige Stunde / beständig erhalten. Und da alle übrige Völker auff vielerley Weise untereinander vermischet worden / dergestalt / dass deren wahrer Ursprung nicht mehr zuerkennen / so ist und bleibt doch jederzeit die Jüdische *Nation* wie sie war / das ist / von allen andern Völkern abgesondert / von frembden Geblüt unbefleckt / untadelhaften Herkommens / eine wahre Nach-Geburt und Saamen des Ertz-Vaters Abrahams: Und / was der Haman vor etlich tausent Jahren zu den Ahasveros von ihnen gesagt / Esth. III, 8. Es ist ein Volck zerstreuet / und theilt sich unter alle Völker in allen Landen deines Königreichs / und ihre Gesetz ist anders denn aler Völker."

5. Ibid., p. 99: "Ein Jud wird von manchen viel weniger geachtet als ein Hund."

6. pp. 114-125 (end of tractate).

7. Ibid., p. 115: "Wenn die *Studiosi* was rechtschaffenes erlernt / und sich getrauen mit denen Juden in *Disputationes* einzulassen / könnte man sie an Ort und Ende / wo Juden wohnhaft / als zuversichtliche Bekehrer ausschicken / welche aus dem *Aerario* des *Collegii* zu *Salariren*."

knowledge of "Literaturae Hebraicae et Rabbinicae" grew. They would have to be taught to be persuasive and, "as Luther suggested in his works,"⁸ avoid repellent behavior that would frighten the Jews,⁹ for the Jews are "of Christ's blood, whereas we are just heathens."¹⁰ Jewish books should be studied, Wagenseil said, and their errors refuted by the word of God.¹¹ He felt that the task of converting the Jews would be performed by Protestant theologians, as the "Romans" were concentrating their efforts on converting remote heathens and neglecting the Jews "living in Roman Catholic countries."¹²

These ideas of Wagenseil were later expressed in literary form in two books by the magister-preacher Johann Mueller, a teacher at the Gotha secondary school.¹³ Mueller's first work, a "dialogue" in German between a Christian named Gottlieb and a Jew named Jonathan, appeared in 1716 in Giessen.¹⁴ Prof. J.H. Majus, a theologian and Semitic linguist at Giessen University, wrote an introduction to Mueller's book based on Wagenseil's above-mentioned proposal. Majus noted that another manuscript by Mueller, a work intended for the Jews and written in Judeo-German (*Meschit*), had yet to find a publisher. Mueller's German dialogue was designed to show Christians how to discuss the subject of the Messiah with Jews,¹⁵ and made no attempt to conceal its Christological intent. The Jew Jonathan considers Gottlieb one of the "righteous Gentiles," while Gottlieb contends that his coreligionists who torment Jews are unworthy of the name Christian.¹⁶ As members of the chosen people and Jesus' relatives, Jews should be treated well in every material and spiritual sense, continues Gottlieb.¹⁷ The key argument in the dialogue turns on the interpretation of Isaiah 53:4-6, particularly the phrase, "surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Relying on the Bible, the *gemara*, and the Midrash,¹⁸ Gottlieb attempts to convince Jonathan of the Christological

8. Ibid., pp. 118-119: "in dem andern Theil seiner Wercke" (i.e., Altenburg edit. p. 314).

9. Ibid., pp. 116-117.

10. Ibid., p. 119: "so sind wir dennoch Heyden / und die Juden von dem Geblüt Christi."

11. "und was unrecht ist / aus Gottes Wort widerlegen" (Paulus, Rom. IX).

12. "als dass man / der mitten in Römisch-Catholischen Landen wohnenden Juden / ... / einige Acht haben sollte."

13. Lic. J.F.A. de le Roi, Pastor, *Die evengelische Christenheit und die Juden in der Zeit der Herrschaft christlicher Lebensanschauungen unter den Völkern: Von der Reformation bis zur Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Karlsruhe und Leipzig, 1884).

14. *Entwurf wie mit juden freundlich umzugehen und von wahrer Herzensbekehrung zu reden seyn mochte, in einem Gespräche dargestellt* (Giessen, 1716).

15. Details concerning Johann Mueller's German work, which I did not have before me, are found in de le Roi's book (see note 13). De le Roi's facts are accurate, but his selection and analysis are directed by his vulgar-missionary point of view.

16. Ibid., p. 2.

17. Ibid., pp. 5-36.

18. Tractate Sanhedrin, Midrash Ruth, Sifrei, Yalkut Shimoni, and others.

interpretation of these verses as referring to the Messiah's suffering in expiation for humanity's sins. Gottlieb accepts the Jews' hope for the coming of the Messiah, and terms "nonsensical" (*hevel va-riq*) the Christian denial of this hope. He differs with Jonathan as to the Jewish obligation to perform the biblical commandments and circumcise their sons, but agrees that if these matters are vital to him, then he is right in adhering to them tenaciously. It is sufficient for Gottlieb that the Jews recognize the true Messiah and "repent truly."¹⁹

Mueller's Judeo-German manuscript was finally published in 1728, fourteen years after his German work. This latter book presents itself, both in the original Judeo-German version and in the various translations, as written by a Jew, "Rabbi Yohanan Kimhi, the righteous one of blessed memory"²⁰ (a French translation appeared in 1746.²¹). The work describes a conversation between Menahem ben Yishayahu Hacohen and Shmuel ben Yosef, which as such does not refer in any way to Christian writings; rather, it attempts to interpret the Jewish messianic belief in a camouflaged Christological manner. Until the end of the nineteenth century, some people in traditional Jewish society believed that *Or le-'et 'Erev* ("Light at Evening") was indeed a Jewish religious work,²² as it represents itself in its contents as intending to strengthen the messianic hope in Jewish hearts. The texts on which the conversation is based are all taken from the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash, and the rabbinic commentators, and neither Jesus' name nor that of any sacred Christian text are mentioned.²³ As was then customary, each chapter opens with a summary of its contents. The chapter headings of the French version convey something of its contents:

Chapter one: Où l'on montre, qu'il y a plusieurs Propheties dans l'Ecriture Sainte qui n'ont point encore été accomplies, et qui doivent l'être à l'avenir.²⁴

19. Ibid., 5-34.

20. The original Judeo-German manuscript was published, as noted, in 1728, in one thousand copies. Its title, *Or le-'et 'Erev* ("Light at Evening"), is based upon Zechariah 14:7. The author's name, Johann Mueller, is given as "Yohanan Kimhi." There are some discrepancies between the Judeo-German original and the translations to other European languages. An English translation was published in Halle in 1731, and an Italian translation in Brandenburg in 1732; a Dutch translation followed in 1735 in Holland. I have not seen these three translations, and have managed to ascertain only the existence of the Dutch translation; I have been unable to obtain any additional details about the first two translations. My comparison, therefore, is based on the French translation, also published in Halle, in 1746.

21. The French translation was entitled *La Lumière du Soir; Pour éclairer les yeux d'Israël, afin, qu'ils voyent les Consolations de Sion, lorsque le Seigneur ramenera Sion*. Traduit en François sur l'Original Hébreu-Allemand (Halle, 1746).

22. The Hebrew title page of *Or le-'et 'Erev* (see note 20) includes a sentence not found in the other translations: "And since it speaks wondrously of repentance and redemption, according to our holy Torah and the words of the sages, it was delivered to the printer through the entreaty and at the expense of certain prominent, God-fearing persons who anticipate His salvation, may God reward them and recompense them fully."

23. The German version of the book, printed in Gothic script, was published in Halle in 1736.

24. *La Lumière du Soir* (Halle, 1746), p. 7 and pp. 7-35.

Chapter two: Comment se fera la délivrance après plusieurs grandes tribulations.²⁵

Chapter three: De la pénitence, que feront les Enfants d'Israël de tout leur coeur et de toute leur âme, mais non selon la pénitence qu'ils font dans le jour de l'Expiation, qui ne dure qu'un jour.²⁶

Chapter four: Où l'on traite I. de la repentance, ou amendement, qui doit se faire par amour pour Dieu et non par Crainte; II. des grandes souffrances que le Messie fils de David a dû souffrir à cause des iniquités des hommes: recueillis de toute la Loi, des Midraschim et des Haggadoth.²⁷

Chapter five: De la contrition, de la foi parfaite et des guérisons de l'âme.²⁸

The discussion between the two occurs on a mail cart where they meet as Menahem is returning from a fair. At the beginning of the discussion, Samuel says that they have frequent opportunities to speak to priests (*galahim*) in the course of their business, and that the priests always try to convince them that their hope for redemption is in vain. They claim that the redemption has already occurred during the Second Temple period, basing their contention on Biblical verses. Samuel argues that the redemption is still to come, basing his argument on quotations from the Bible, the weekly readings from the prophets, the Talmud, the Midrash, and other sources such as *Jalkout*, *Netzah Yisrael*, *Kaftor Va-ferah*, R. Moïse de Tarana's book *Beit Elohai*, *Sefer 'Ir ha-Gibborim*, *Le Livre Ikarim*, *Traité de la Cabale*, *Le Livre de Mareh Musar*, and others.

One of Magister Johann Mueller's students at the Gotha secondary school was the pietist Callenberg, later considered the practical founder of the Institutum Judaicum in Halle.²⁹ In 1727, Callenberg was appointed as an instructor at the Halle University, and from 1735 on, he lectured on the subject "How to Advance the Jews' Return to Christianity." At the university, Callenberg heard of Mueller's efforts to publish his Judeo-German manuscript, and suggested that he write a memorandum to the university proposing a public fund-raising campaign to finance his book's publication. Mueller sent Callenberg such a memorandum in 1725, and Callenberg called the matter to the attention of his teacher Franke, who began to raise the necessary funds. In 1726, Mueller was informed that a sufficient amount had been raised, and his manuscript was given to a converted Jew to be published. The book was printed on six and a half sheets, in one thousand copies. Callenberg and Franke's fund-raising efforts also made the opening of the Institutum Judaicum at Halle University financially possible, and the Institutum began operations in 1730, in accordance with Wagenseil's proposal.³⁰

In his 1884 German work,³¹ J.F.A. de le Roi terms both the precursors of the Institutum Judaicum and the Institutum itself "missionaries," without distinguishing

25. Ibid., p. 35 and pp. 35-84.

26. Ibid., p. 84 and pp. 84-120.

27. Ibid., p. 121 and pp. 121-185.

28. Ibid., p. 186 and pp. 186-216.

29. de le Roi, pp. 246-253.

30. de le Roi, pp. 262-269.

31. See note 13.

between the various types of missionary activity. "Mission" and "missionary" are concepts that bear various religious, historical, and actual meanings. The primary meaning of the word *missio* is "mission." This collective term also has a formalistic meaning. All types of missionaries see their work as "assisting" the Jews to begin their "return" to Christianity, and view their activity as imposed by divine order. Essential missionary work, which can be found in all trends of Christianity, sees in it Christendom's mission to the Jewish people. They see the Jewish people as the chosen people even in their "punishment" – dispersal in the Diaspora – for failure to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. "The blood relatives of Jesus," according to these missionaries, will eventually recognize their "error" and "return" to Christianity. Most of the missionaries believe that the date of the "return of the Jews" is known only to God. Until then, the Jews should continue to observe the biblical commandments (including the Sabbath and circumcision) and live in accordance with their historical heritage. Any attempt to divert and individual Jew from his traditional way of life constitutes, for most of them, an act opposed to the Divine plan.

The formalistic missionaries, on the other hand, see the persuasion of a Jew whose "soul is in error" to convert to Christianity as an achievement, and therefore advocated the conversion of individual Jews. These "practical" missionaries were not above material methods of persuasion. The essential missionaries believed that the Jews should be well-treated, and their material and political circumstances improved, in their own time. Historically, their approach made these essential missionaries heralds of ameliorated conditions and political emancipation for Jews living in Christian countries. Even Ch. W. Dohm wrote his well-known book³² from a point of view that was ideologically not far from that of the missionaries of the above type.

It seems to me that Johann Christof Wagenseil embodied both types of missionary approach – the essential and the formal – described above.³³ Mueller, on the other hand, embodied the essential point of view, but his books also served routine missionary purposes,³⁴ as did J.H. Callenberg and Prof. Franke. They instructed those students sent to small Jewish towns (an activity for which they received academic credit) to refuse requests from individual Jews to convert to Christianity, lest they disturb God's plan for redemption. The missionaries who tried to convert individual Jews, on the other hand, neither improved the Jews' civil and material circumstances nor heralded their political emancipation. On the contrary: their missionary activity advanced the process of Jewish social and cultural assimilation, and the erasure of their national-cultural uniqueness in the Diaspora.³⁵

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32. Ch. W. Dohm, *Über die bürgerliche verbesserung der Juden* (Berlin und Stettin, 1781).

33. See p. 99- 102 and notes 1-12 above.

34. See p. 102 - 103 and notes 14- 19 above.

35. Pastor de le Roi was a missionary who understood this concept in its vulgar and practical sense only.