

Reformed Missions and the Jews
by Wes Bredehof

In many of our Canadian Reformed churches, it appears to be customary to pray the “Prayer for All the Needs of Christendom” at least once per year. As we do so, it is always remarkable that we pray “for the mission among Jews, Moslems, and heathen, who live without hope and without Thee in the world.” We pray for the mission among Jews. But where is this mission? In this article, I would like to examine briefly the history of Christian missions to the Jews, the Biblical basis of such missions, and some suggestions for a Reformed approach to contemporary Jewish missions.

Mission among the Jews has especially become an issue of importance in the last half century. Since the founding of the modern nation of Israel in 1948, premillennial dispensationalists have often been preoccupied with the state of Israel and what its existence might mean for the return of the Lord Jesus. In this instance, the Jews receive attention because of their place in a particular eschatological scheme. As a result, there is a common view in North American evangelicalism that the state of Israel and/or the Jews retain a special place as God’s people. Aside from the possible influence this view may have on American foreign policy, the consequence is that the Jews often receive attention as a people group which should be given a high missions priority. This is reflected in evangelical support for such para-church mission agencies as “Jews for Jesus”

In Reformed and Presbyterian circles, missions among the Jews do not receive much attention today. Of all the churches involved with the International Conference of Reformed Churches, it appears that only one church (the Free Church of Scotland) is seriously engaged with the Jews. That one church appears to have but one missionary.

This dearth of Reformed missions among the Jews is difficult to understand. On the one hand, we find that the Canons of Dort in Chapter 3-4, Article 7, states, “Under the new dispensation, however, [God] took the distinction between the peoples away and revealed it to more...” But on the other hand, the Reformed churches have long included in their church books the previously mentioned Prayer for All the Needs of Christendom. Reformed and Presbyterian churches have long supported the concept of missions among the Jews, at least in principle, if not always in practice.

This is equally evident in the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God, which many smaller and more conservative Presbyterian churches continue to follow. In the section on the prayer before the sermon, the minister is directed “to pray for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations; for the conversion of Jews...” Furthermore, the Westminster Larger Catechism, in Answer 191, states that when we pray the second petition, we pray that “the gospel [may] be propagated throughout the world, the Jews called...” From all of this, it is clear that, historically speaking, the Jews have received a special place in the prayers of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Our aim now is to define this special place and inquire whether it is justified. Are the Jews simply one people among many? Should we wipe the dust off

our feet when it comes to the Jews and move along to other peoples who are more interested? What direction should Reformed missiology take when it comes to the Jews?

Brief History of Jewish Missions

To begin answering these questions, let us take a brief look back at the way these issues have been addressed in the past. While the early church was initially almost completely Jewish, the church eventually became known as a Gentile institution. Throughout the Middle Ages, the gap between church and synagogue grew ever wider. Jews and Christians scarcely conversed and it does not appear that meaningful Christian missions among the Jews were undertaken. In the seventh and eighth centuries, Emperor Leo III made an effort to forcibly convert the Jews in order to consolidate his empire. However, as mission historian Stephen Neill concludes, “this can hardly be regarded as missionary work.”¹ Pope Gregory the Great did argue for a gentle, persuasive preaching strategy in reaching out to the Jews, but he was exceptional in his views.² Whatever work was done among the Jews in the Middle Ages can be characterized as coercive rather than meaningfully missionary. More often than not, when Jews did not convert they were resettled or attacked. If they did convert, they were accepted neither by other Christians nor by their fellow-Jews.³ Medieval Europe did not present a favourable milieu for missions to the Jews.

This did not change with the first years of the Reformation. By the early 1500s, suspicion and dread of the Jews were rampant throughout Europe. In fact, there was a commonly held view in Europe that beyond the Ottoman Empire there were a great number of cannibalistic Jews preparing to rampage through Europe. The myth of the so-called Red Jews accounts for much of Early Modern Europe’s animosity towards the Jewish people.⁴

Unfortunately, this animosity was also carried by some of the Reformers at certain times. It is well known that, for most of his life, Martin Luther had a very negative perception of the Jews of his day. However, in 1523, Luther wrote a tract in which he argued that the preaching of the true gospel would lead to the conversion of the Jews. The name of the tract was: “That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew.” This tract has been seen by some as a positive overture to the Jews. However, this overture was not well received. Eventually, Luther became much more polemical towards the Jews. In 1538, he wrote an anti-Jewish work entitled, “Against the Sabbatarians.” In 1543, he followed up with “On the Jews and their Lies.” As J.S. Ross points out, “This book was to play so fateful a role in the development of anti-Semitism in Western culture.”⁵ On one occasion, Luther is reported

¹ *A History of Christian Missions*, Stephen Neill, Pelican, 1964, pp.83-84.

² *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch, Orbis, 1991, p.226.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in the Apocalyptic Age: 1200-1600*, Andrew Gow, E.J. Brill, 1995. Cf. “Jews and Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Germany,” by Stephen G. Burnett, in *the Sixteenth Century Journal* 27.4 (1996), p.1062ff.

⁵ “Work Among the Jewish People: Historical Perspectives and the Contemporary Challenge,” by J.S. Ross, in *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches 2001*, Inheritance, 2001, p.181.

to have written, “If it is a mark of a good Christian to hate the Jews, what excellent Christians all of us are.”⁶ Towards the end of his life, Luther may have mellowed on this point again, but the sad fact was that the damage was done. Ross again: “The immediate result of Luther’s anti-Jewishness was the paralysis, for two hundred years, of Protestant attempts to evangelize Jews in Germany.”⁷ Much more could be said about Luther and the Jews, but we will push ahead to John Calvin.

Unlike Martin Luther, John Calvin probably had little personal contact with Jewish people. There were few, if any, Jews living in France during Calvin’s upbringing. Furthermore, his adopted city of Geneva did not allow Jewish people to live there. Nevertheless, we can say that he appears to have been familiar with Jewish authors since he occasionally interacts with them in a general way. Some of the remarks in his commentaries sound typical for his day. On Daniel 2:39, for instance, Calvin writes,

The rabbis confound the two monarchies, through their desire to comprehend under the second what they call the kingdom of the Greeks; but they display the grossest ignorance and dishonesty. For they do not err through simple ignorance, but they purposely desire to overthrow what the Scripture here states clearly concerning the advent of Christ.⁸

These comments are clearly directed towards contemporary Jews who reached a different interpretation of the text in question. Comments with this sort of disparaging tone towards the Jews can be found throughout Calvin’s writings. However, we do occasionally hear a different Calvin. We find these words in the *Institutes*:

Therefore, that they [the Jews] might not be defrauded of their privilege, the gospel had to be announced to them first. For they are, so to speak, like the first-born in God’s household. Accordingly, this honor was to be given to them until they refused what was offered, and by their ungratefulness caused it to be transferred to the Gentiles. Yet, despite the great obstinacy with which they continue to wage war against the gospel, we must not despise them, while we consider that, for the sake of the promise, God’s blessing still rests among them. For the apostle indeed testifies that it will never be completely taken away: “For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.”⁹

Calvin thus appears to have been of a better mold than Luther, or at least led future generations down a better road. Yet, the evidence appears to indicate that Calvin shared Luther’s overall lack of concern for the salvation of the Jews.¹⁰ This being what it may,

⁶ Quoted in *Hal Lindsey and the Restoration of the Jews*, Steve Schlissel and David Brown, Still Waters Revival Books, p.46.

⁷ Ross, p.181. “Though not a few Lutherans fervently believe in and pray for the spiritual restoration of Israel, it may well be that the roots of Post-Reformation ecclesiastical anti-Semitism are to be found in Luther’s theology.” Schlissel, p.30.

⁸ *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Daniel), Baker Book House reprint, p.174.

⁹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Battles edition), 4.16.14.

¹⁰ Ross, *op.cit.* Cf. “Book Review of *Reformation und Judentum: Israel-Lehren und Einstellungen zum Judentum von Luther bis zum fruhen Calvin*,” by Andrew Gow in *Calvin Theological Journal* 37.2

we must understand this apparent lack of concern in the overall context of an extremely anti-Jewish culture in Early Modern Europe. Remember: there were mass expulsions of Jews from central and western Europe from 1536 to 1560. If nothing else, we learn from this that, more than we often realize, we are affected by the culture in which we live.

Other Reformers such as Martin Bucer and Heinrich Bullinger were more positively oriented towards the Jews and their salvation. Bullinger compared Luther's attitude and methods to those of the Roman Catholic Inquisition. Bucer sought to win the hearts of the Jews for Jesus Christ by inadvisably giving them "long-winded and complicated sermons."¹¹ The Reformer Peter Martyr led a Jew by the name of John Immanuel Tremellius to the Reformed faith. After spending some time in England, Tremellius moved on to Heidelberg where he was an Old Testament professor from 1561 to 1577. To some degree, he appears to have been involved with the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism.¹²

As we move on from the time of the Reformation, we find that evangelistic outreach to the Jews begins to receive more emphasis. In the 17th century, more and more Reformed churches believed that Scripture passages such as Romans 9-11 taught that we ought to expect a mass conversion of the Jews before the return of the Lord Jesus. This is reflected in the Dutch *Staten Bijbel* annotations.¹³ This way of thinking became especially dominant in the Scottish Presbyterian churches. Samuel Rutherford, for instance, encouraged believers to pray eagerly for the mass conversion of the Jewish people. Listen to what he writes in one of his letters:

O to see the sight, next to Christ's coming in the clouds, the most joyful! Our elder brethren the Jews and Christ fall upon one another's necks and kiss each other! They have been long asunder; they will be kind to one another when they meet. O day! O longed-for and lovely day – dawn! O sweet Jesus, let me see that sight which will be as life from the dead, Thee and Thy ancient people in mutual embraces.¹⁴

This quote gives you a good sense of the enthusiasm of Rutherford and others for the so-called restoration of the Jews. This is worth noting. It is also worth noting that this enthusiasm developed from a certain view of Paul's teaching in Romans 9-11. In fact,

(Nov.2002), pp.365-367, "Detmers concludes that Calvin became increasingly hostile toward Jews and Judaism as he aged..."

¹¹ Ross, pp.181-182.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ On Romans 11:26, "Dat is, niet eenige weinigen, maar een zeer groote menigte, en gelijk als de gansche Joodsche natie." [That is, not a few, but a very great number, and in a manner, the whole Jewish nation...]. Herman Witsius quotes this annotation and goes on to write, "They depart from the apostle's meaning, who, by 'all Israel,' understand the 'mystical Israel,' or the people of God, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles, without admitting the conversion of the whole Jewish nation, in the sense we have mentioned." Quoted by Schlissel, p.49.

¹⁴ Ross., p.183. Ross quotes from *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, Andrew Bonar ed., Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1891, p.122f.

we can say that post-Reformation enthusiasm for outreach to the Jews was at least partly, if not mostly, eschatologically motivated.

In the 18th century, it was much the same. Jonathan Edwards, for instance, understood that Israel would be restored as part of the fall of Antichrist. After this event, the “latter-day Glory” would arrive. It is unclear whether the enthusiasm of Edwards (or of Rutherford before him) actually led to evangelistic work among the Jews. However, J.S. Ross does indicate that 18th century missions to native peoples in North America may have had their roots at least partly in a concern for the salvation of the Jews. According to Ross, John Eliot and other pioneering missionaries among native Americans believed that the native people were the so-called ten lost tribes of Israel. So, even though work was not necessarily being done among Jews in Europe, some European Christians believed they were missionizing the Jews by evangelizing the first inhabitants of North America.¹⁵ The important point here is that these missions were all eschatologically motivated, based as they were upon a postmillennial outlook which anticipated the spiritual restoration of Israel.

Before we move on, let us also stop a minute at the 19th century. In this time, it is again the Scottish churches that stand out in their enthusiasm for outreach to the Jews. It was first in the Church of Scotland, and then later also with the Free Church of Scotland. The remarkable thing is that there was a shift in thinking at this time with respect to the motivation for missions to the Jews. Premillennialism started to become popular, both in certain areas of Europe and especially in the United States. Eschatology became very controversial. In this context, the notion of a moral obligation to Israel emerged as the primary motivator behind missions to the Jews.¹⁶ What was this moral obligation? John Braidwood, writing in 1853, describes it in this way, “The Jews are the whole world’s benefactors. Through Jewish hands and eyes God has sent his lively oracles of truth to us. They penned, and they preserved the Bible.”¹⁷ In other words, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Jews. This debt should motivate us to make their evangelization a priority. It is true that many proponents of Jewish missions today continue to build their case at least partly on a certain system of eschatology (typically either premillennial or postmillennial), but there are also those, such as J.S. Ross, who argue primarily on the basis of this moral obligation.

New Testament Directions

The question for us is: in which direction does Scripture lead us? Let us now turn to that question and briefly look at some of the relevant passages from the New Testament. There are important passages in the Old Testament as well, but for the sake of space, we will restrict ourselves to the New Testament.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.184.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.197-98. Schlissel (p.32) quotes from Thomas Collier, writing in the time of Oliver Cromwell. Collier makes a similar case – thus demonstrating that the moral obligation argument has been in existence since at least the 17th century.

¹⁷ *The Puritan Hope*, Iain Murray, Banner of Truth, 1971, p.177.

¹⁸ With respect to the Old Testament, in passing I would mention that B. Wielenga’s doctoral dissertation *Verbond en Zending* (Kampen, 2000) might prove helpful for developing a broader Biblical basis for

We may begin by looking briefly at Luke 19:41. The gospel of Luke (and Volume 2 in the Acts) accentuates the tenuous relationship between the Lord Jesus and the Jewish people. On the one hand, we see the Jewish people rejecting the Saviour. But on the other hand, we see our Lord filled with sadness and distress over their lack of faith. That is clearly evident in this passage, “Now as He drew near (to Jerusalem), He saw the city and wept over it...” What follows are words of judgment over Jerusalem for their rejection of the Lord Jesus. But this does not mitigate the fact that our Saviour’s tears flowed because of these people. We will momentarily deal with Paul in more detail, but right now, it is worth noting that he clearly showed his sadness over their rejection of the gospel as well. He said it in Romans 10:1, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” Should this not also be our desire? Should we not also be sad that these people, to whom were entrusted the oracles of God, have turned their backs on the Messiah?

The Great Commission of Matthew 28 should also receive our attention when we consider the Jews. In connection with this text, we consider them without any special status. Through the apostles, our Lord Jesus sent out the church to “make disciples of all nations.” We know that He did not make any exceptions when He said this. “All nations” means exactly what it says. We cannot exclude the Jewish people in whichever nation they may be found, also in the uniquely Jewish nation of modern Israel. Therefore, we may unequivocally say that the Great Commission does motivate us to missions among the Jews.

It is clear that the mission of the New Testament church began with the Jews. This unfolded according to the pattern set by Christ in Acts 1:8, “...you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” From what follows in the book of Acts, it is evident that these words were initially descriptive rather than prescriptive. Today as we look at these words, it is clear that even as Paul and other apostles were bringing the good news to the end of the earth, the Jews were still being evangelized in Jerusalem and in Judea. We know this from the central role that Jerusalem continues to play even to the end of the book. Paul ends up in Rome because he was accused of defiling the temple in Jerusalem. Hence, we cannot conclude that the pattern given by Christ in Acts 1:8 was conceived of as something with a beginning and an end – as if the apostles were beginning with the Jews and ending with the Gentiles. There was an historical progression to be sure, but the progression does not rule out the fact that God started with the Jews and intends the church to continue working for the evangelization of the Jews, even after the end of the earth has been reached. We may not employ Acts 1:8 to forget about the Jews!

At this point, let us take note of what Paul writes in Romans 3:1-2. We read there, “What advantage has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way!

missions to the Jews. In his dissertation, Wielenga attempts to develop a Reformed missiology upon the basis of classical covenant theology. Cf. “God’s Covenant: A Key to Missions,” L.J. Jooisse, in *Semi-Annual Newsletter of the Missions Committee of the ICRC*, October 2002 and *Covenant and Mission: Mission’s Covenantal Character*, Bob Wielenga, unpublished paper.

Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.” He said something similar in Romans 9:3-5,

For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Notice again in these words that Paul has an earnest desire for the salvation of his fellow Jews! If it would make any difference, he would even allow himself to be accursed for their sake. How can we ignore them? Moreover, Paul in these two passages reminds us of what we already saw in our overview of the history of missions to the Jews: the moral obligation. Regardless of what eschatological view we take, we cannot deny that we are the heirs of the Jews. Through the Jews we received all the things mentioned by Paul – in fact, we received Paul himself, and even greater yet, we received Jesus Christ! Do we not owe a debt of gratitude to the Jewish people for all these blessings? Paul’s words show us that there is indeed something special about the Jews. Even if we can no longer speak about them as God’s special chosen people, there is no way we can change history. We cannot change what the Scriptures relate, namely, that God worked through the Jews to bring salvation to us.

I believe this provides a strong basis for missions to the Jews today. However, is there a stronger basis to be found in Romans 9-11?

Romans 9-11

This is a section of Scripture that has been very controversial. Paul makes several statements in these chapters that have caused no end of debate. For our purposes, we are interested in whether or not God’s Word in this place provides a solid ground on which to base missions to the Jews today.

We are dealing here with three full chapters in which the discussion ranges over a considerable amount of terrain. I would like to focus on one particular verse, since it seems to hit on the crux of the matter. The verse is Romans 11:26, “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob...’” The question here is, what does Paul mean when he says that “All Israel will be saved...”? Should we understand him to be referring to a massive conversion of ethnic Jews to faith in Christ? If so, does this passage provide a basis for missions to the Jews?

Let us take a brief survey of approaches to this question. This brief survey follows what William Hendriksen offers in his commentary on Romans.¹⁹ Speaking historically, it was common for Reformed commentators to understand “all Israel” as a reference to all, or at

¹⁹ *New Testament Commentary: Romans*, William Hendriksen, Baker, 1980, pp.379-382.

least virtually all, the Jewish people living on earth when the Lord Jesus returns.²⁰ When all the elect Gentiles have been gathered in, then there will be a mass conversion of Jews to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The first approach, then, is to argue that Paul is showing how God will save so many Jews in the future that it may be said in general that “all Israel will be saved.” This argument is based first on hints of this that seem to appear in verses 11, 12, 15, 16, and 25. Next, verse 25 seems to indicate that there will be an end to the partial blindness or hardening among ethnic Israel. In the third place, it would be unnatural to understand Israel in verse 26 as referring to a different entity than in verses 1-24 and verses 28-31. In those verses, the reference is clearly to the ethnic Jews, rather than Israel in any kind of spiritual sense. Fourth, if Paul were teaching that all elect Jews will be saved, the word ‘mystery’ in verse 25 would seem to be out of place. In the last place, this approach seems to do the most justice to the Old Testament quotations from Isaiah and Jeremiah in verses 26 and 27. These verses speak of a “comprehensive banishment of that sin that has been the cause of Israel’s alienation from God.”²¹

Hendriksen indicates several difficulties with this approach. He argues that “this theory... fails to do justice to the word *all* in ‘all Israel.’ Does not ‘all Israel’ sound very strange as a description of the (comparatively) tiny fraction of Jews who will still be living on earth just before, or at the moment of, Christ’s Return? As a counter-response, one could ask Hendriksen how he knows how great the number of Jews will be at the return of our Saviour. A second argument from Hendriksen is this: “The context clearly indicates that in writing about the salvation of Israelites and Gentiles Paul is not limiting his thoughts to what will take place in the future. He very definitely includes what is happening *now*. See especially verses 30 and 31.” However, we might respond, what Paul describes in verses 30 and 31 is the present disobedience of the Jews. Nobody denies that they are presently disobedient. The issue is: what will happen to them in the future?

One of Hendriksen’s stronger arguments is that “The reader has not been prepared for the idea of a mass conversion of Israelites. All along Paul stresses the very opposite, namely, the salvation, in any age (past, present, future) of *a remnant*... If Rom. 11:26 actually teaches a mass conversion of the Jews, would it not seem as if Paul were saying, ‘Forget what I told you previously?’” Though the relative strength of this argument is acknowledged, it is debatable whether the references to a “remnant” elsewhere in Romans *necessarily* refer ahead to the future event described here in Romans 11:26.

There are more arguments and counter-arguments that could be made with this first, most popular interpretation, but this is just a taste of some of the issues involved. Let us move on to another possible interpretation, the one offered by John Calvin. Calvin argues that

²⁰ Schlissel (p.50 and pp.53-57) lists numerous Reformed interpreters who have held to this position. Among them are Cocceius, Alting, Witsius, Koelman, Brakel, John Murraray, Charles Hodge, A..A. Hodge, and Jonathan Edwards. For a list of Puritan authors, cf. *the Puritan Hope*, Iain Murray, pp.44-45.

²¹ *New Geneva Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson, 1995, p.1788. The detailed presentation of this first point follows NGSB.

“ ‘All Israel’ refers to the total number of the elect throughout history, all those who are ultimately saved, both Jews and Gentiles. Hendriksen asserts that Calvin is correct in understanding ‘Israel’ spiritually as a reference to the elect. However, he maintains that it is unnatural for Calvin to change the meaning of the term ‘Israel’ when in all prior references it clearly points to the Jews. In this way, Calvin does not really do justice to the context. I agree with Hendriksen’s assessment.

The third approach that Hendriksen offers is his own interpretation. He maintains that “The term ‘All Israel’ means the total number of elect Jews, the sum of all Israel’s remnants.” While he maintains that the reference is to those of Jewish religion or ethnicity, Hendriksen restricts it to those Jews who are elect. We could paraphrase his interpretation in this fashion: “And so all the elect Jews will be saved.” However, we could bring two objections to this interpretation. First, the criticism applied to Calvin can be equally applied to Hendriksen. The context speaks clearly of Israel in a general quantitative sense, therefore it is unnatural to restrict it qualitatively to the elect of Israel in verse 26. Second, Paul does not need to tell his readers that all the elect Jews will be saved. This is an obvious truth, a tautology. While we may not limit the Holy Spirit if He so desires to employ a tautology, it does seem rather out of place in the context of the usually tight reasoning of the apostle Paul.

So, having surveyed the different approaches, where should we stand? This is one of the most challenging issues in the New Testament. There are no easy answers. The first interpretation seems to have the least number of difficulties – but yet, there we also find problems, especially when it comes to integrating the notion of a remnant into an exegesis of Romans 11:26. So, where do we go? I think of what Peter wrote in his second epistle about some of Paul’s writings. Peter says in 2 Peter 3:16 that Paul has “some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” While it cannot be said that Hendriksen, Calvin or any other Reformed interpreters of this passage have twisted it to their own destruction, I would note that this is a passage “hard to understand.” Without any shame, we may humbly acknowledge that. And having acknowledged that, we should be cautious in building any program of missions to the Jews solely on the basis of this passage. As we noted previously, there are plenty of other passages in God’s Word that provide the basis – we can do without Romans 11 if we have to.

The Question of Strategy – Some Tentative Suggestions

We have now seen that we certainly do have a Biblical basis for missions to the Jews. Now the question arises, how? How shall we do these missions? Since I have no experience in outreach to the Jews, I can only attempt to suggest answers to these questions in a very tentative way. Let us just consider some important points that should probably be considered in developing a strategy for missions to the Jews.

In the most general sense, our missionary task is informed by what all men have in common, no matter what their background may be. Another way of saying this is that we have a point of contact. That point of contact exists in the facts of creation and the fall

into sin. We could summarize this with those Latin expressions used by Calvin and others, *sensus divinitatis* (sense of divinity) or *semen religionis* (seed of religion). All unbelievers have some inkling of God's existence, some understanding that there is a Judge who will mete out justice. This is clearly portrayed by Paul in Romans 1:18-23. All of humanity knows God, including the Jews.

However, with the Jews we can go one step further. The reason is that there is more in common between Christians and Jews than between Christians and other unbelievers. The Jews have their Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. If we examine the missionary sermons to the Jews recorded for us in Acts, then we see that the apostles are constantly referring to this common ground of revelation. It would seem that we must do the same today in our outreach to the Jews. What would set our missions to the Jews apart from missions to followers of other world religions would be the fact that we lay special emphasis upon the Old Testament. In particular, we would do our best to show that the Old Testament points to Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah who has already come and accomplished salvation for God's people. The Old Testament has to be preached in the light of the New Testament.

Closely connected to that is another important point. Judaism esteems the Old Testament as revelation from God. However, they also regard very highly the writings of the various Rabbis. There are the Talmuds, which are a commentary of sorts on the Old Testament. Midrash is a sub-category of the Talmud, and it concentrates on the law. The Mishnah codified the law of Moses in a topical form. Finally, there are the Targumim, Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament. Because of the importance of these documents for Judaism, it would be a helpful part of our strategy to be familiar with them. Understanding these documents will help us recognize Jewish ways of thinking and reasoning.

Further, we should never assume that the god of contemporary Judaism is the God of the Bible. In North American circles, it is common to speak about our Judeo-Christian heritage – which can be understood as saying that Jews and Christians worship the same God. Let us be clear on this. Judaism is monotheistic – this is a cornerstone of Judaism. They will hear nothing of a God who is three persons in one being. On the other hand, trinitarianism is intrinsic to Christianity. The Jews do not worship God the Father either – in fact, the notion of God being our Father is foreign to Judaism. In view of all this, we must conclude that we may not view Judaism as a truncated Christianity. Though there is a partially shared revelation in the Old Testament, contemporary Judaism is an entirely separate religion. We cannot therefore vaguely appeal to God in our evangelism of the Jews and expect that they will be on the same page.

Another consideration needs to be taken into account. This involves the diversity of Jewish people around the world. First, Judaism is not a monolithic entity any more than Christendom is. There are many varieties of Judaism, each of which may require a specialized approach and strategy. Historically, there was a distinction between Ashkenazi Jews and Sephardic Jews. In more modern times, we find Reform, Orthodox, Ultra Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Liberal and Conservative Jews. There are also

Hassidic Jews and large numbers of secular Jews – Jews for whom their Jewishness is only a matter of ethnicity. All of this means that the Reformed missionary among Jews has to know among what kinds of Jews he is working. This is another factor that prevents us from getting too detailed here regarding the approach that needs to be taken. This becomes even more complicated when we consider that Jews are found in many cultures around the world. Though not to be identified, culture and religion always have to be studied on the same page. We have to appreciate that a Conservative Jew living in Pittsburgh may need to be approached differently than a Conservative Jew who lives in Rio de Janeiro. Though they are both Jews, as human beings they will be affected in some way by the culture in which they live. Naturally, this holds true for all people, regardless of religion.

Two more points before we conclude. The first is that we remain conscious of what has happened in the last 50 to 60 years. The holocaust of Nazi Germany did nothing to help the cause of Christian missions among the Jews. Anti-Semitism is a charge that easily gets thrown around in our day. As a result, Christian missionaries are limited in what they can do in the state of Israel. Jews who do convert to Christianity are severely ostracized. The world in which we live needs to be taken into account as we approach the Jews with the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The gospel is a stumbling block as it is, we do not want to add offense where there need be no offense. Practically speaking, this consideration would lead us to be as non-abrasive and non-confrontational as we can. Like in so many other situations, the best approach is probably relational, building relationships of love and trust with individual Jews. If we do this, we will have many opportunities to give the gospel and we will never be open to the charge of anti-Semitism. Rather, we will be doing everything we can for the welfare of the Jews. George Knight put it well when he said, “There is one thing and only one thing that we must communicate to all men, and that is Christ. To refrain from doing so... is a form of religious anti-Semitism which is as basically evil as the philosophy of the Nazis.”²²

Finally, we are Reformed Christians. As Reformed believers, we hold to the importance of God’s covenant. After all, the covenant forms the Scriptural basis of our life before God. In many ways, the covenant defines what it means to be Reformed (though by no means exclusively or ultimately). The emphasis of the Reformed faith on the covenant should be advantageous as we reach out to the Jews. Why? Because, historically speaking, the covenant is also a fundamental belief in Judaism. The notion that the Jews are God’s special people, chosen from among the nations, is prominent in Judaism. The sensitivity to the importance of belonging is paralleled in the Reformed faith. More than one convert to the Reformed faith has noted these parallels. What this means is that Reformed believers are in a special place to reach out to the followers of Judaism. More than other Christians, Reformed believers have the theology in place that will facilitate the conversion of many Jews to faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. But will we seize the day? That’s a question for all of us to consider...

Yes, we occasionally pray for the conversion of the Jews. But should not the preceding motivate us to make it a more regular matter for prayer? Furthermore, what are we doing

²² Quoted by Ross, *op.cit.*, p.194.

to actually carry out our mission task among the Jews? Do we really believe in the moral necessity of missions to the Jews in the 21st century? These are all questions which deserve greater attention, especially by those Canadian Reformed churches located in areas with large Jewish populations. God is not finished with the Jews – but, in a manner of speaking, we have not even begun. My prayer is that this article will stimulate us to that end and for the ultimate end of the glory of God among all the nations.