Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies

Volume 3 Article 3

2020

The eschatological worldview of Hungarian Jewish ultra-orthodoxy as possible background of influnce on Leopold Cohn

Motti Inbari
University of North Carolina, Pembroke

Journal of
MESSIANIC
JEWISH STUDIES
CHARLES L. FEINBERG CENTER

The Eschatological Worldview of Hungarian Jewish Ultra-Orthodoxy as Possible Background of Influence on Leopold Cohn

Motti Inbari
The University of North Carolina, Pembroke

INTRODUCTION

This paper explains the eschatological concepts that were held by Hungarian Jewish ultra-Orthodox rabbis in the late 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th century. Understanding this messianic worldview might offer an intellectual background to comprehend the Hungarian-born Leopold Cohn, founder of Chosen People Ministries, an evangelistic mission to the Jewish people. At the end of the paper I would argue that there is commonality between the ideology of Hungarian ultra-

Orthodoxy and pre-millennial dispensationalism, the ideology Cohn adopted after his conversion. Thus, there might have been some intellectual continuity between the different phases of his life.

In order to analyze the Hungarian Jewish ultra-Orthodox worldview, I will concentrate my attention on one influential figure – Rabbi Akiva Yosef Schlesinger (1837-1922), basing my examination of his beliefs on his treatise *Lev Ha'ivri* ("The Heart of the Hebrew.") The rabbi employed mystical teachings and viewed the modern era as so degenerate that the advent of the messiah must be imminent. He influenced generations of rabbis who adopted a dualistic approach according to which the only proper Jewish way of life is radical ultra-Orthodoxy, while any deviation from it represents the rise of Satanic powers, which are expected to grow prior to the End Times. Schlesinger and those who thought like him viewed their opponents – moderate Orthodox Jews as well as the secular - as the reincarnation of the mixed multitude: an unauthentic segment of the Jewish nation.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON JEWISH ORTHODOXY

Jacob Katz, a leading scholar of modern Judaism, argues that Orthodox Judaism is a product of the late eighteenth century when Jewish society on the threshold of modernity underwent a loosening of the bonds of tradition leading to the emergence of non-Orthodox tendencies and trends. According to Katz, the difference between Orthodoxy and earlier traditional Jewish society is that in modern times loyalty to tradition is the product

of a conscious decision. Awareness of other Jews' rejection of tradition, an option that was not available in most cases in pre-modern times, is, therefore, an essential and universal characteristic of all forms and variations of Orthodoxy. This term became the label for those who persisted in their traditionalist behaviour once different kinds of Jew appeared on the scene – maskilim (exponents of the Jewish enlightenment) or reformers who deviated from traditional norms while continuing to affirm their affiliation to the community.[1]

However, Orthodoxy is not just the guardian of pure Judaism, as its followers tend to argue. According to Katz, "Orthodoxy was a method of confronting deviant trends, and of responding to the very same stimuli which produced those trends, albeit with conscious effort to deny such extrinsic motivations."[2]

From the eighteenth century onward, Central and Western European Jewry witnessed the rise of the Haskalah movement and various forms of Reform Judaism. The latter part of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of Jewish secularism,[3] Zionism, and the Bund (Jewish Socialism) in Eastern Europe. These ideological movements attracted people searching for new forms of Jewish identity. For the most part, the traditional rabbinical and communal leadership responded with resolute

1 Jacob Katz, "Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective," in: Peter Medding (ed.), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry 2; The Challenge of Modernity and Jewish Orthodoxy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, 3–4.

2 *Ibid*., 5. David Sorotzkin offers a somewhat different analysis, arguing that Orthodoxy and modernity should be seen not as contrasting movements but as two symbiotic sides of the same historical development. As such, one should not see Orthodoxy as merely responding to heterodoxy; these two movements actually interacted with one another. Sorotzkin bases his argument on S.N. Eisentadt's idea of "multiple modernities," according to which secularity and fundamentalism are manifestations of the same modern phenomenon. David Sorotzkin, *Orthodoxy and Modern Disciplination: The Production of Jewish Tradition in Europe in Modern Times*. Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 2011, 3–16 (in Hebrew).

3 Shmuel Feiner, *The Origins of Jewish Secularization in 18th Century Europe*. Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press,2011.

opposition. However, they understood that they must create new structures and organizations in order to compete for the souls of the Jewish population.[4]

The existence of Jews who deviate from normative Halakhic (Jewish religious law) practice is by no means an exclusively modern phenomenon. In pre-modern Jewish societies, however, there was no question that normative Judaism was defined by allegiance to the law. The autonomous Jewish communities had the power to expel, fine, or excommunicate the deviants. The emancipation of the Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries eliminated the coercive power of the organized community. The growing number of Jews who preferred a less observant lifestyle created a dramatic change in the Jewish world as observant Jews became a small minority among the Jewish masses of Europe.

Moshe Samet proposed the following four characteristics of Orthodoxy:

> 1. A departure from the time-honored principle of *Klal Yisrael*, the perception of a unified Jewish community encompassing both the observant and the "backsliders." In locations where it was unable to control the Jewish community as a whole, Orthodoxy tended to separate itself from the larger community and to create its own institutions and congregations. In effect, Orthodoxy formed a society within a society.
>
> 2. Orthodoxy viewed modern culture with the utmost suspicion. As a rule, it rejected modern schooling, even when Jewishly-sponsored and directed, in favor of an autonomous and conservative Orthodox educational system. This system adopted a highly selective position toward "secular" studies.
>
> 3. Orthodox Jews adopted an extremely strict standard of observance with respect to the Halakhah. It could be argued

4 Adam Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, 2.

> that a stringent standard of observance previously associated with an elite now became the common norm. Likewise, there developed within Orthodoxy a belief in the ability of the pious Halakhic ruler to discern "Halakhic truth."
>
> 4. Under Orthodox inspiration, yeshivot were established for advanced religious studies. The students studied Talmud as a means of developing their religiosity and traditionalism and as a sign of piety. Later, in Israel, men studied in these institutions for years on end, regardless of the economic difficulties this created.[5]

Three different types of Orthodoxy developed in Europe: The first type, Neo-Orthodoxy, became the dominant approach among German Jews. Convinced of the inner significance of every detail of the Law, they observed it scrupulously while at the same time remaining open to the influence of the non-Jewish environment, to which they belonged by virtue of civic emancipation.[6]

The second type emerged in Eastern Europe and was willing to adapt to change on various levels. The followers of this philosophy reject modernity and its works on the principled level, even if they have to accommodate themselves to it in practice. The political and cultural developments in Eastern Europe did not include the adoption of modern education and political emancipation, and Jewish social structure was more diverse.

The third type of response is that of organized and total resistance to change – the radical ultra-Orthodox response that emerged in Hungary, and on which this study focuses. After various religious reforms were introduced in the Arad community under the leadership of Rabbi Aharon Horin (1766-1844) in the early nineteenth century, the traditionalists, under the leadership of Rabbi Moshe Sofer (1762-1839) (known as the "Hatam

5 Moshe Samet, "The Beginnings of Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism* 8, 3 (1988) 249–69.
6 Katz, "Orthodoxy," 5.

Sofer,") and Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (1758-1841),[7] went onto the offensive. In an effort to safeguard their community, the rabbis adopted an intellectual and institutional strategy that rejected all innovations; indeed, the Hatam Sofer coined the adage that "Anything new is forbidden according to the Torah." He argued that the integrity of the Jewish community depends on the strict adherence of its members to the Orthodox way of life; deviators automatically forfeit the right to be called Jews.[8]

The clash between traditionalists and innovators gained intensity during the decades following the death of the Hatam Sofer. The state authorities also became embroiled in the conflict after the government proposed the establishment of a modern rabbinical seminary, a suggestion that was accepted by the reformers but rejected by the Orthodox. In 1868, following the emancipation of the Jews in Hungary, the government asked the Jews to form a national representative body along the lines of other recognized denominations. The Orthodox minority refused to join such a body, and a schism took place, after which Orthodoxy developed its own institutions. This was the first instance in European Jewish history of an officially-recognized Orthodox subgroup.[9]

The attempt to retrace the genealogy and ideological development of radical ultra-Orthodoxy leads to Marmaros

7 Moshe Teitelbaum, the great-grandfather of Yoel Teitelbaum, exerted a profound spiritual influence over the Satmar Hasidic movement. Relatively little research has been conducted concerning Moshe Teitelbaum. The first scholar to examine both Teitelbaum Senior and Junior is Menachem Keren-Kratz, *Marmaros-Sziget: 'Extreme Orthodoxy' and Secular Jewish Culture at the Foothills of the Carpathian Mountains*. Jerusalem: Carmel, 2013 (in Hebrew). see also: Jacob Katz, *A House Divided: Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-century Central European Jewry*. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998, 77–85; David Myers, "'Commanded War:' Three Chapters in the 'Military' History of Satmar Hasidism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (2) (2013) 1–46.

8 Katz, "Orthodoxy," 6–7.

9 For more details on the schism see: Katz, *A House Divided*.

county, situated in the northeast of Hungary to the south of Galicia (after the First World War, the area formed part of Romania and later Czechoslovakia). According to Menachem Keren-Kratz, for a period of almost a hundred years, Marmaros and some of the adjacent Hungarian counties served as the arena for the consolidation of radical ultra-Orthodox ideology. During this period the region became a bastion of religious zealotry, influencing the whole Jewish world by marking the limits of resistance to all modern ideas.[10]

MESSIANISM IN THE HASIDIC MOVEMENT AND MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS IN ORTHODOX JEWRY DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Researchers of Hasidism are divided regarding the manner in which we should understand messianism in Hasidic thought and practice. The major outbreak of messianism that followed the spread of the Sabbatean movement ended in disillusionment. Hasidism, which was founded in the 18th century, approximately one century after the decline of Sabbateanism, did not share the collective messianic tension of the earlier movement. However, from the 1990s, strong messianic fervor developed in the Habad movement, challenging previous assumptions regarding Hasidic messianic passivity.

The dominant strand of research into the Hasidic movement, as identified in particular with the renowned scholar Gershom Scholem, adopted a more dialectical view of Jewish history. Scholem suggested that Hasidism had "neutralized" the

10 Menachem Keren-Kratz, *Marmaros-Sziget: 'Extreme Orthodoxy' and Secular Jewish Culture at the Foothills of the Carpathian Mountains*. Jerusalem: Carmel, 2013 (in Hebrew).

apocalyptical and collective fervor of messianic thought as manifested in the Sabbatean movement.[11] These approaches cannot provide a convincing explanation for the eruption of messianism in the Habad Hasidic sector among Hasidic zealots, as described below. Moshe Idel offered a more nuanced analysis, emphasizing that Hasidism is a diverse and longstanding movement. Accordingly, rather than a single, exclusive trend, efforts should focus on identifying diverse responses. According to Idel, the central theme of the first two generations of Hasidism was the spiritualization of the messianic age, with an emphasis on the possibility of individual and mystically-oriented redemption, rather than a collective perception. In later generations, the movement tended more to the collective, apocalyptic, and acute end of the messianic spectrum. Idel attributes this change to Rabbi Yitzhak Eizik Yehuda Yehiel Safrin, the founder of the Komarno Hasidic sect.[12] Another approach, represented by Mor Altshuler, argues that the messianic impulse formed the driving force of Hasidism in the movement's early stages, among the disciples of Rabbi Yechiel Michal, the Maggid of Zlotchov, but was sidelined after his death due to the failure of the messianic plan and the rapid growth of Hasidism from an esoteric sect to a mass movement. Altshuler suggests that this sidelining was not final, however, and that the inherent messianic impulse is liable to re-emerge in particular circumstances.[13]

The outburst of messianism in Hungarian Hasidism should be understood against the background of the particular circumstances pertaining at the time as well as the prevailing views in Orthodox Judaism around the turn of the twentieth century. The roots of

11 Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972, 176–202.

12 Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998, 212–47.

13 Mor Altshuler, *The Messianic Secret of Hasidism*. Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2002 (in Hebrew).

messianic tension lay in influences from the surroundings of Hasidism and in the dramatic changes in the condition of the Jews during this period.

Some of the explanations offered by Orthodox leaders for the enormous changes in the condition of the Jews in modern times drew on analogies with the messianic age. They argued that modern reality should be interpreted as the realization of prophecies relating to the period preceding the coming of the messiah.

We may divide the exponents of this position into two categories – optimists and pessimists.[14] The optimistic approach is identified mainly with Religious Zionist thinkers, and in particular with the philosophy of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, who explained that the rise of Jewish nationalism represents the "first pangs of redemption," that is – the beginning of the messianic process. According to this approach, which is based on natural messianism as described in Maimonides' writings, mundane actions by the non-religious Zionist pioneers reflect the first stages of redemption, which may be realized in full through the actions of mortals.[15] Neo-Orthodox leaders of Agudat Yisrael such as Yitzhak Breuer also shared this approach, which facilitated cooperation between the movement and Zionism.[16] An opposing trend depicted modernity in dismal and pessimistic terms as the "pangs of the messiah" – a period of distress and spiritual decline. Their approach was based on passages from the Babylonian Talmud describing the period of the ikvata

14 Gershon Bacon, "Birth Pangs of the Messiah: The Reflections of Two Polish Rabbis on Their Era," in: Jonathan Frankel (ed.), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry 7: Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era: Metaphor and Meaning*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 86–99.

15 Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology*. Boston: Academic Press, 2009; idem, Faith at a Crossroads – A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism. Leiden, Boston & Koln: Brill, 2002.

16 Yosef Fund, *Separation or Integration: Agudat Yisrael confronts Zionism and the State of Israel*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999, 19–63 (in Hebrew).

de-meshiha (the footsteps of the messiah) as one marked by severe material and spiritual hardship.[17] Those who adopted this position include the Lithuanian Rabbi Yisrael Hacohen of Radin, who ordered his students to study the laws relating to the priests in the Temple in anticipation of imminent redemption, and his disciple Rabbi Elhanan Bonim Wasserman, who composed the influential book Ikvata de-Meshiha, in which he interpreted the collapse of religious life as a sign of the approaching End Times.[18] During the interwar period, the Habad Hasidic movement also developed an acute messianic tension that would intensify still further after the war.[19]

AKIVA YOSEF SCHLESINGER

Akiva Yosef Schlesinger (1837-1922) was a paradoxical and unusual character. The historian Jacob Katz commented: "Some have claimed that Akiva Yosef Schlesinger was both the grandfather of Zionism and the grandfather of Neturei Karta, and there is some truth in this claim… I do not know who takes more pride in him, but both drew elements from his philosophy, or if they did not draw them – then at least both show aspects that are close to his approach."[20]

17 For example, see Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97a.

18 Gershon Greenberg, "Foundations for Orthodox Jewish Theological Response to the Holocaust: 1936–1939," in: Alice Eckardt (ed.), *Burning Memory: Times of Testing and Reckoning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press 1993, 71–94.

19 Shalom Ratzbi, "Anti–Zionism and messianic tension in the thought of Rabbi Shalom Dover," Zionism 20 (5756–1996), 77–101 (in Hebrew); Menachem Friedman, "Messiah and Messianism in Habad–Lubavitch Hasidism," in: David Ariel–Joël [et al.], *War of Gog and Magog: Messianism and Apocalypse in Judaism – Past and Present*. Tel Aviv: Yediot Acharonot Publishers, 2001, 161–73 (in Hebrew).

20 Quoted in Michael Silber, "A Hebrew Heart Beats in Hungary: Rabbi Akiva

Schlesinger was born in Pressburg, Hungary and received a strictly traditional Jewish education. His father was part of the circle of Moshe Sofer (the "Hatam Sofer,") the founder of Hungarian Orthodoxy,[21] and he raised his son in keeping with Sofer's worldview. Akiva was ordained to the rabbinate in 1857 in Pressburg by Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer (the "Ktav Sofer,") the son of the Hatam Sofer. In 1860 he married Liba, the daughter of Rabbi Hillel Lichtenstein. Schlesinger and Lichtenstein would become the twin pillars of Radical Orthodoxy. In 1870 he emigrated to Palestine where he was involved in Jewish settlement activities; he was among the founders of the colony of Petach Tikva.[22]

In 1863 Schlesinger published his treatise *Lev Ha'ivri* ("The Heart of the Hebrew,") which fiercely criticized the phenomenon of religious reform and the neo-Orthodox stream's support for acculturation. This book was dedicated to the teachings of the Hatam Sofer, of whom Schlesinger considered himself a rightful heir.[23] The book was very popular and appeared in five editions. Schlesinger wrote the book against the background of the crisis in Hungarian Orthodoxy during the nineteenth century. Jews who adhered to traditional values faced a series of challenges during this period: the requirement by the state that educational institutions provide secular studies; growing linguistic acculturation; pressure to adopt a Magyar identity; and

Yosef Schlesinger – Between Ultra-Orthodoxy and Jewish Nationalism," in: Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Zionism*, 1. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 5763-2003, 226 (in Hebrew).

21 Jacob Katz, "Towards a Biography of the Hatam Sofer," *Divine Law in Human Hands: Case Studies in Halakhic Flexibility*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998, 403–43.

22 Michael Silber, "Schlesinger, Akiva Yosef," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Schlesinger_Akiva_Yosef, accessed March 4, 2013.

23 Meir Hildesheimer, "The Attitude of the Ḥatam Sofer toward Moses Mendelssohn," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 60, (1994) 141–87.

widespread religious reforms in the synagogues. By the 1870s Orthodox Jews realized that they would soon become a minority within the Jewish population of Hungary.[24]

Schlesinger opened *Lev Ha'ivri* with an attack on the teaching of Jewish scriptures to Gentiles and the growing openness of Jews to study non-Jewish texts. This phenomenon had begun with the famous project initiated by Moses Mendelssohn (1726-1786) to translate the Hebrew Bible into German. Mendelssohn is considered one of the fathers of the Enlightenment movement that swept German Jewry.[25] Schlesinger regarded the study by Jews of non-rabbinical texts (which he referred to as "exterior books" and "Gentile knowledge") as the greatest threat to the Jewish world. He argued that those who read such books are considered "evil" and believed that attempts to return them to the fold were futile.[26] Mendelssohn advocated various changes to the Jewish way of life, with an emphasis on the adoption of Gentile culture. He called for the abandonment of the Yiddish language and opposed a distinctive Jewish dress. He also advocated the abandonment of traditional Jewish names. However, the real point of concern to Orthodoxy was that Mendelssohn did not seek to abandon Jewish tradition in its entirety, but rather to create a hybrid version of Jewish and German culture. Accordingly, Schlesinger considered neo-Orthodoxy to be an even greater threat to Judaism than the Reform movement that deliberately introduced changes into the synagogue structure and in Jewish rituals. He dubbed the neo-Orthodox "Sadducees,"[27] referring to the sect from the Second Temple period that rejected rabbinical authority and the Oral Law.

24 Silber, "The Emergence," 24–5.

25 David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

26 Akiva Yosef Schlesinger, *Lev ha'ivri*, Jerusalem: Zuckerman, 5784–1924, 3 (in Hebrew).

27 Silber, "The Emergence," 27–9.

As a counterweight to Mendelssohn's plan of acculturation, Schlesinger emphasized the distinctive identity of Judaism, which should be manifested in individuals' names, language, and dress. He referred to these three elements by the Hebrew acronym *shale"m*, which also means "complete," and argued that following the ways of the past and highlighting particularistic Jewish identity was a reflection of authenticity. His model of the ideal course to be followed by Jews was the mirror image of that promoted by Mendelssohn. He opposed changing Jewish first names (the process by which Aharon became Adolf or Moshe Martin). He rejected the call for the Jews to adopt the language of their Gentile environment and argued that Jews must remain separate from their neighbours and must not speak the Gentile languages. In the area of dress, too, Schlesinger prohibited such innovations as the shortening of the beard and sidelocks and growing long hair on the top of the head.

Schlesinger saw the dramatic changes in the condition of the Jews, and particularly the collapse of the world of traditional Judaism, as a manifestation of the approaching messianic age. Schlesinger refers to the discussions in the Babylonian Talmud concerning the period preceding the coming of the messiah. In the Rabbinic literature the "footsteps of the messiah" are described as a miserable period characterized by spiritual and material decline. For example, the Babylonian Talmud states that the messiah Son of David will come only in a generation that is either entirely guilty or entirely innocent (Sanhedrin 98a). Accordingly, Schlesinger argues, the emergence of the "Reform sect" is proof of impending redemption, based on his characterization of this movement as one devoted to the desecration of the Sabbath, intermarriage, rejection of the idea of miraculous redemption through the king messiah,[28] the selective observance of the commandments, and

28 The Reform movement consistently rejected the anticipation of an

the eating of forbidden foods in public.[29] He attacked the Reform as "Satan… a wolf in sheep's clothing," and warned his followers to separate themselves from Reform Jews.

Schlesinger's eschatological and dualist perspective led him to the conclusion that isolationism and an internal schism in the Jewish world were unavoidable and even desirable. He argued that the Talmudic vision of a generation that is entirely guilty and a generation that is entirely innocent in the pre-messianic period demands a sharp distinction: "Those who remain in the Jewish people will be absolutely righteous or absolutely evil." Accordingly, the best course of action is to divide the synagogues between the heretics and the faithful.[30]

Schlesinger found further evidence of the imminence of the messianic era in the teachings of the mystical book of the Zohar, applying the term erev rav ("mixed multitude") from the Kabbalistic treatise to those Jews who introduced innovations. The "mixed multitude" is mentioned in the Book of Exodus (12:38): "A mixed multitude (erev rav) went up with them, and also large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds." The traditional Jewish literature defines the "mixed multitude" as non-Jewish Egyptians who joined the exodus from Egypt, assimilated into the nation, and were later responsible for various problems, particularly incitement against Moses and God. In the Kabbalistic literature (particularly the *Ra'aya Mehemana* and *Tikunei Hazohar*), this group receives particular attention, and the radical ultra-Orthodox leaders base their teachings on these mystical sources.

individual messiah Son of David, just as it rejected the concept of the formation of the Kingdom of the House of David in the End Times. Reform Judaism saw redemption as a gradual and infinite process achieved through human efforts to "repair" the world. See: David Ariel–Joël, "Messianism without Messiah: The Messiah Who Will Not Come," in David Ariel–Joël and others (eds.), *The War of Gog and Magog: Messianism and Apocalypse in Judaism, Past and Present*. Tel Aviv: Hemed Publishers, 2001, 161–73 (in Hebrew).

29 Schlesinger, *Lev ha'ivri*, 3.

30 *Ibid*., 5.

Two leading scholars in the field of Jewish thought, Yitzhak Baer and Yeshayah Tishbi, claimed that the epithet "mixed multitude" was attached to the leaders of the Spanish Jewish communities in the thirteenth century after they were accused of offending Jewish morality and forming alliances with Gentiles in order to harm the Jewish people and distance the Divine presence. The Kabbalistic works claim that when the messiah comes, the "mixed multitude" will be eliminated from the world. This formed part of their anticipation of the End Times as an imminent event in which God would reward the righteous and punish the wicked, including the "mixed multitude," for their countless offenses.[31]

Rabbi Chaim Vital, who lived in the sixteenth century and was close to Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, offered a different interpretation of the "mixed multitude," which he defined as an intermediate group between Jews and Gentiles. In the End Times, this group would be converted and brought fully into the Jewish fold. He viewed the *Conversos* – Jewish converts to Christianity who returned to Judaism in this period – as an example of this positive phenomenon.[32] However, the negative perception of this term based on the Zohar has since become universally accepted. During the Sabbatean controversy in the seventeenth century, both followers and opponents of Shabtai Zvi denigrated each other as the mixed multitude.[33]

The identification by ultra-Orthodox circles of modern Jewish trends as the "mixed multitude" is also based on the writings

31 Yitzhak Baer, "The Historical Background of the Ra'aya Mehemena," *Zion* 5, 1 (1940) 1–44 (in Hebrew); Yeshayahu Tishbi, *The Teaching of the Zohar*, 2. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1949, 686–92 (in Hebrew).

32 Shaul Magid, "The Politics of (un)Conversion: The 'Mixed Multitude' (*erev rav*) as Conversos in Rabbi Hayyim Vital's Ets ha–da'at tov," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95(4) (2005) 625–66.

33 Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement*, 1755–1816. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

of Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapira, the founder of the Dinov-Munkacs Hasidic dynasty. In his essay *Ma'ayan Ganim* ("The Spring's Gardens") he labelled Reform and Enlightenment as the reincarnation of the mixed multitude.[34] Like Shapira, Schlesinger argues that the current days are of the beginning of the pre-messianic days where the last selection between good and evil is about to be made.[35]

According to Schlesinger, in order to ascertain whether the messiah's time has truly come, God presents tests to examine the Jews' faith. He saw his period, with the destabilization of past ways and the great temptations facing the Jews to integrate into the general culture, whether by way of assimilation or acculturation, as a Divine test presented by God to His faithful. He declared that it was preferable to live in poverty, suffering and hunger than to enjoy popularity and wealth at the expense of changing the old ways and turning to "external books."[36] Schlesinger wrote: "And you, Sons of Zion who are truly faithful to the Lord… if you wish you and your seed to have a portion and inheritance with the Lord, do not veer from your forefathers' ways… let not your feet follow the paths of evil."[37]

For Schlesinger, joining Reform was equal to conversion into a different religion. It was preferable, he suggested, to "deliver one's soul" rather than join the Reform sect, which he considered a sin to be avoided even on pain of death.[38] He adopted a zealous approach, arguing that no mercy should be shown toward the

34 David Sorotzkin, *The Supratemporal Community in an Era of Changes: Sketches on the Development of the Perception of Time and Collective as a Basis for the Definition of the Development of Jewish Orthodoxy in Modern Times*. Jerusalem: Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007, 193–203 (in Hebrew); Zvi Elimelech Shapira, *Maayan Ganim*. Zolkeiw: S. Meyerhoffer, 1848 (in Hebrew).

35 Schlesinger, Lev ha'ivri, 27.

36 *Ibid*., 5, 23.

37 *Ibid*., 45.

38 *Ibid*., 37.

sinners since the Bible did not offer a model of such forgiveness. Moses, for example, showed no mercy when he killed those who persecuted the Children of Israel, and the Prophet Samuel showed no mercy when he beheaded the Amalekite King Agag. These examples, he concluded, suggest that the proper response to sinners is violence. The zealous behavior of Pinchas in the Bible also lauds the use of violence: Pinchas murdered Zimri and Cozbi after they sinned in public.[39] Nevertheless, Schlesinger moderated the Biblical message somewhat, emphasizing that individuals must not turn to violence as this is forbidden by the law of the land: "However, we are not permitted to actually kill and to wreak the Lord's zealous vengeance, since the law of the land is the law ("*dina d'malchuta dina*"); we are bound by the Three Oaths not to rebel against the nations."[40] Regarding the principle "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), which would seem to mandate a peaceful approach, Schlesinger responded that this applies only if the sinners repent. As long as they refuse to do so, there is a religious commandment to struggle against them: "They are Sadducees, and they must not be pitied whatsoever."[41] For him, the identification of the sinners as the *erev rav* and as Sadducees removes them from the circle of Jews to whom one must remain committed, since this approach argues that there is a genetic distinction between proper Jews and the descendants of the erev rav; the obligation to behave peaceably does not apply in their case.

Schlesinger's adherence to the principles of zealotry led him

39 Schlesinger's opinions are over simplistic. For the Bible's approach toward violence see Robert Eisen, *The Peace and Violence of Judaism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 15–64.

40 Schlesinger, *Lev ha'ivri*, 47, 49. For a discussion of the effects of the Three Oaths on Jewish memory and practice, see: Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 211–34.

41 Schlesinger, *Lev ha'ivri* , 48.

to reject any change or modification in response to new realities, even if the changes were tactical rather than substantive. He rejected any revision in the structure of the synagogue, quoting Talmudic and Kabbalistic sources in support of his position.[42] He also prohibited the use of the local language, rather than Jewish languages as Yiddish or Hebrew, for sermons: "And on this matter our rabbi, may his memory be a blessing [i.e. Moshe Sofer], established a great rule prohibiting any change, whatever its nature, for we have only that which we inherited from our forefathers."[43]

Schlesinger engaged in a separate discussion on issues relating to women; here, too, he rejected any possibility of change. He called for the rejection of new fashions prevalent among women on the grounds of modesty. He also expressed his fear that a more moderate approach to women's dress would prove a slippery slope leading to the mass abandonment of the old ways: "Our forefathers were redeemed thanks to pious women and now, for our abundant sins, they are collaborating and causing licentiousness in our generation."[44] He advocated reprimands and demonstrations against women who exposed their hair, and even forbade women to wear wigs: "I absolutely forbid this for you."[45] He opposed the provision of religious or secular education for girls and advocated the maintenance of traditional gender roles.[46] He later moderated his position regarding women's education, and in the utopian society he depicted in an essay from 1873, he advocated teaching women Hebrew in order to strengthen its use as a spoken language in the home.[47]

42 *Ibid*., 63–4.
43 *Ibid*., 73.
44 *Ibid*., 79.
45 *Ibid*., 81.
46 *Ibid*., 84–5.
47 Silver, *Pa'amei lev*, 9.

Schlesinger argued that the situation was so bad that his supporters should not send their sons to the yeshivot due to the dangers they would face: "Happy is he who can protect his soul and his seed and not send them away from his home and his supervision until their time comes to marry." He believed that boys should study Torah for several years and then learn a trade, quoting a verse from the Ethics of the Fathers: "All study of the Torah which is not accompanied by work is destined to prove futile." However, boys must recognize that Torah study is the most important act, while work is of secondary importance.[48]

On the basis of these insights, Schlesinger advocated a retreat into an ultra-Orthodox enclave: "Save your infants and children." A place of refuge must be prepared that is free of spiritual dangers, avoiding the need to live with the heretics. This approach reflects a desire to respond actively to change rather than remaining passive. This is a form of zealotry that does not resort to violence but calls for the removal of the wicked from the community of the faithful and rejects any changes in the structure or language of prayer in the synagogue.

Schlesinger anticipated that Orthodoxy would be defeated in its struggle against modernity, and therefore perceived an urgent need to create the ultimate ghetto. His reading of the direction events was taking led him to conclude that the only safe place for faithful Jews was the Land of Israel, a remote and isolated land. Accordingly, in 1870 he emigrated to Palestine, and three years later he published a detailed essay advocating the establishment of a Jewish state to operate on the basis of Orthodox principles, organized around agricultural colonies.[49]

Schlesinger's struggle against acculturation, particularly in

48 Schlesinger, *Lev ha'ivri*, 67.

49 Michael Silber, "Alliance of the Hebrew, 1863–1875: The Diaspora Roots of an Ultra–Orthodox Proto–Zionist Utopia in Palestine," *The Journal of Israeli History* 27, 2 (2008), 119–47.

the fields of language and dress, motivated him to leave Hungary and to develop a utopian approach embodying nationalist ideas that predated the Jewish national movement.[50] As a result, some Zionist thinkers later came to see him as the harbinger of Zionism. Later ultra-Orthodox figures found it difficult to identify with Schlesinger and showed an ambivalent and suspicious attitude toward his thought. They readily adopted his diagnosis of the situation, but his adoption of a solution based on Jewish nationalism met with reservations and confusion.[51]

Schlesinger's theological and ideological stance can be summarized as follows. His principled opposition to any change in the religious way of life has an eschatological foundation. According to this approach, the End Times are imminent and the signs suggest the impending arrival of the messiah. He based his position on passages in the Babylonian Talmud describing the period before the arrival of the messiah, and compared his own time to that described in the sources, reaching the conclusion that this is precisely the period alluded to. The messianic model he presented includes a period of such severe deterioration that only the messiah can bring salvation. Accordingly, all the signs suggest that the period of deterioration has reached its nadir so that God now has no alternative but to send the messiah. This catastrophic messianic strand of theology argues that religious Judaism has reached the brink of spiritual and physical annihilation; the faithful need only to cling to the ancestral ways without any change for a little longer.

The eschatological approach also included a strong component of dualism and demonology. Schlesinger, and those who followed his approach, argued that their small group

50 Schlesinger follows here the Hatam Sofer's approach to immigration to the Land of Israel. See: Moshe Samet, *Chapters in the History of Orthodoxy*. Jerusalem: Carmel, 2005, 26 (in Hebrew).

51 Silber, "The Emergence," 81–2.

represented faithful Jews who would enjoy complete redemption and all the blessings of paradise. For the radical ultra-Orthodox leader, the identification of their adversaries as the erev rav and the increasing number of sinners among the Jews provided proof that these were indeed the final days, since the messianic period entailed an absolute distinction between the righteous and the impure. Accordingly, he argued, the sinners were removing themselves from the Jewish people as part of the End Times events.

THE INTELLECTUAL WORLDVIEW OF LEOPOLD COHN: BETWEEN PRE-MILLENNIAL DISPENSATIONALISM AND RADICAL ULTRA-ORTHODOXY

I want to end this chapter with an intellectual speculation. Although some of Leopold Cohn's biography is clouded, we know that he grew up as a Hungarian ultra-Orthodox Jew, who was also a yeshiva student at Pressburg Yeshiva, the same institution as Schlesinger's, and at a similar time period. We also know that Cohn eventually converted to Christianity, and adopted the pre-millennial dispensationalism school of thought, common among many Evangelical Christians in America. This is not the place for me to discuss this ideology in detail. According to this philosophy, the second coming of Christ is an imminent event that will take place in several stages. Pre-millennial dispensationalism is also suspicious about modern times and pessimistic. In contrast to the liberal belief that human beings could work toward the building of a better, even perfect, world, dispensationalists insist that only divine intervention – the appearance of the Messiah – could remedy the problems of the

human race.[52]

When one compares Pre-millennial dispensationalism to Hungarian radical ultra-Orthodox worldviews, structural similarities become apparent. They both are marked by a belief in an imminent transition to the millennial kingdom. They both involve a pessimistic view of human nature and society. They both perceive a decline in humanity that is approaching its lowest point. Humans are so evil and corrupt that the old order has to be destroyed to make way for the perfected millennial kingdom. This approach adopts a radical dualistic worldview: reality is seen in terms of good and evil, reflected in an adversary perception of the relations between true believers and those outside the fold. Scholars refer to this religious pattern as catastrophic millennialism.[53]

My speculation thus is twofold: From one hand, maybe it was easier for Cohn to convert from Judaism to Christianity because the transition from radical ultra-Orthodoxy to Pre-millennial dispensationalism involves similar ideological structures; secondly, since radical ultra-orthodox leaders were anticipating the coming of the redeemer, and some of them were actively engaged in messianic speculations, as I explained in the case of the Munckacser Rebbe.[54] Maybe it made sense from Cohn's perspective to argue that the messiah all Israel was waiting for is actually Jesus of Nazareth?

I hope these questions might open up new avenues for research in the history and background of messianic Judaism.

52 Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America*, 1880-2000, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000, 9-21.

53 Catherine Wessinger, "Catastrophic Millennialism," in Richard Landes (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*. New York: Routledge, 2000, 61–3.

54 Motti Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity*, Zionism and Women's Equality, Cambridge University Press, 2016, 94-130.