

**Loving Thy Neighbor as Thyself:
The Place of Judaism in the Identity of the English Unitarians**

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To My Grandfathers

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INTRODUCTION

The terms “Christian” and “Jew” seem simple enough. When someone uses these words it is automatically assumed that others understand exactly what is meant. This assumption is, however, ultimately erroneous. In lieu of using these increasingly complicated concepts, some try to qualify either word with the term, “orthodox,” thus bringing us to even more nebulous phrases: “orthodox Christian” and “orthodox Jew.” While this prefix does not shed any additional light on a precise definition of our original words, and in fact only obfuscates them further, it does reveal what is trying to be accomplished – that is, what we intend for others to understand – when we use the words Christian and Jew. In one sense, this attempt to arrive at an orthodox definition, by that it must be assumed a collectively accepted and concretized understanding, of the words Christian and Jew, is an effort to pinpoint the ideal type of either of these religious identities – a term, then, that inherently encompasses every necessary belief and practice of what it is, in one’s very essence, to be either a Jew or a Christian. Arriving at an agreed upon ideal type, however, may also prove an exercise in futility.

For some, to be Christian is as simple as acting morally and respectfully. For others, the same definition might apply, but with the qualification that such a person must also believe in Jesus. This only further complicates matters, however, as it prompts the question of what this person must believe about Jesus. Do you “believe” in Jesus only if you worship him as God, or can you “believe” in Jesus by simply recognizing him as the Messiah? The inclusion of doctrinal specifics means that some who may consider themselves Christian will be excluded based solely on the scope of the criteria used to define Christianity and Christian belief.

The same problem exists when discussing the definition of a Jew. For some, a Jew, just like a Christian, might be anyone who acts in an upright and moral way; perhaps this person must also believe in God. For others, one cannot be a Jew unless one also abides by certain laws, whether the Written Law, the Oral Law, or both. Of course, it is then important to consider which laws must be observed, and which can be neglected (if any) for one to still be a Jew. This creates a seemingly intractable complication: an infinite regression of definitional uncertainty that makes any one meaning of the terms impossible to accept. Must we then conclude that anyone who considers himself either a Jew or a Christian should be acknowledged as such – that is, exercise toleration – or is it fair to deny someone a particular religious designation because his identity is an affront to our own? While few today would argue for the latter, fortunately, as historians, it is not our responsibility to decide what must be, but rather to analyze and understand the importance of past struggles between perceived orthodoxy and resigned tolerance, and the lessons about religious identity that they can teach us.

One case that confronts these complicated questions about religious definitions and religious identities is that of the antitrinitarians, a group once considered so heterodox to Christianity that some believed they may as well have been Jews. The story of the antitrinitarians, particularly as they appeared in late eighteenth century England with the emergence of the Unitarians, allows us to investigate not only the unique ways that these people conceptualized their own religious identity as Christians, but also to understand how these Christians' identities were related intimately to Judaism.

The historian, Alexander Sandor Ungvary, mentions offhandedly in *The Hungarian Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century*, that, "From Antitrinitarian

literature, it is obvious that the Hebrew language never played so important a role in Christian theological controversies as in the Sixteenth Century Reformation.”¹ In fact, he tells his reader, “It has been proved that the whole Antitrinitarian ideology, from Servetus onward, has been rooted in post-Biblical rabbinical writings.”² Both of these statements begin to highlight the importance of Jewish sources to early antitrinitarianism, yet neither truly accounts for the significant and defining role that Judaism has had in antitrinitarian religious identity from the sixteenth century Spaniard, Michael Servetus, to the late eighteenth century English Unitarian movement. Rather than continue to fixate upon post-biblical Jewish sources and the Hebrew language, as Unghvary suggests, antitrinitarians began, both during the Reformation and in seventeenth century England, to connect themselves intimately to the Jewish heritage and identify intensely with the Jewish people as the proper worshippers of the one, true God. As a group that exhibited these patterns of behavior, yet still held firmly to the conviction that they were Christians, the religious identity of the Unitarians in the last quarter of the eighteenth century illuminates the difficulty of concretizing a precise definition of both the terms Christian and Jew and emphasizes the fluidity of orthodoxy and tolerance.

Antitrinitarianism, as a theological position that denied the doctrine of the Trinity, was perhaps the most conceptually disruptive proposal to emerge from the already tumultuous sixteenth century environment of the Protestant Reformation. Even in a time when theologians believed that they were fighting for an end to papal abuses and a reevaluation of religious authority, questioning the doctrine of the Trinity seemed to go too far. Antitrinitarianism did not reclaim Christian identity from the Church, but,

¹ Alexander Sandor Unghvary, *The Hungarian Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century Under the Ottoman Impact* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 376.

² Ibid.

according to most Christians – the orthodox majority, if you will – it destroyed the very nature of their religion by denying a foundational doctrine. Belief in the Holy Trinity acknowledged Jesus’ divinity, and as far as orthodox Christians were concerned, this was the defining element of the Christian religion. Up to this point, only one other group living in the midst of Western Christendom had thought to deny that doctrine, and they had been forever relegated to the lowest rung of Christian society, outcast and separated as a reminder of God’s disfavor towards those who refused to recognize his glory: the Jews.

With knowledge of this Jewish plight and an awareness of their refusal to be persuaded concerning the supposed veracity of the Trinity, the antitrinitarians of the Reformation turned to Jewish sources to help them argue against their stubborn coreligionists. Antitrinitarians learned Hebrew, reexamined the Old Testament and in many cases, absorbed rabbinic writings to assist them in the fight for the singularity of God’s nature.³ Unghvary’s comments make it clear that he recognized the practical significance of Judaic source material to the earlier antitrinitarians, but he failed to see that Judaism was so much more than an amalgam of language and writings supporting their ideological positions: it was a way of life so close to that of the antitrinitarians that some chose to consider Jews and antitrinitarians as essentially indistinguishable. Rather than just being influenced by Jewish sources, antitrinitarians began identifying with the Jewish people not only from a theological perspective but from a personal one as well. It is this complicated antitrinitarian religious identity that instigated in its own way a reevaluation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

³ It is important to note that at this time the use of Judaic sources was common amongst trinitarian Christians as well. They, however, sought to prove the veracity of orthodox Christianity with these sources, rather than use them to demonstrate God’s oneness.

Judaism, as the older of the two faiths, has often been characterized somewhat superficially as a religion of practice: adherence to the Law has often been emphasized as the religion's defining element. In a similarly simplistic manner, Christianity has been distinguished by its elimination of this ceremonial burden and by the adoption of a series of requisite beliefs, subsequently prompting its classification as a doctrinal religion. The variety of potential definitions discussed above emphasizes the ways in which these evaluations of the two religions are not fair, complete or reasonable, yet they have resulted in the artificial construction of two diametrically opposed ideal types. Instead of viewing Christianity and Judaism as two separate and disconnected religions – one based on practice and the other on belief – operating independently of one another, I propose an alternate conceptualization of the relationship between the two faiths based on antitrinitarian understanding and their resultant self-identity.

For the antitrinitarians, Judaism and Christianity – that is, orthodox Judaism and orthodox Christianity – were two faiths existing at either end of the same continuum of religious identity. These ideal types, although admittedly ineffable, must be understood for the purposes of this study, as the greatest conglomeration of religious beliefs and practices that might constitute either Judaism or Christianity. As such, any doctrinal or ceremonial alteration to one's personal religious expression resulted in a placement shift on this religious spectrum. By stripping away the distinguishing elements of doctrine and practice, a similar foundation existed underneath each religion: one of universal morality and a simple belief in a grand creator. This middle ground was known to the Unitarians as deism, a position remarkably close to their own yet shunned as irreligion. With the ideal type of Christian on the right, the ideal type of Jew on the left, and what was

essentially deism directly in the middle of these two poles, every Christian or Jew fell at some intermediate point on this continuum of religious identity. Antitrinitarians saw themselves and their religion as a shift away from orthodox Christianity, and understood that adjustment as a simultaneous move towards Judaism and the common deistic ground that lay between them. Ultimately, the eighteenth century Unitarians settled so close to the center – just to the right of it, in fact – that they drew from and appealed to the identities of both religions.

Beginning this tale of religious identity we find Michael Servetus, who more than anyone else set the precedent for the antitrinitarian use of Jewish sources, the Hebrew language and a return to the text of the Old Testament. In order to provide a more complete picture of antitrinitarianism during the Reformation, I also examine the case of the Hungarian Unitarians because their adoption of distinctly Jewish religious practices poses an interesting problem for our continuum of religious identity. Just as the concept of conversion assumes that one goes from having entirely Christian or Jewish beliefs, to having entirely Jewish or Christian beliefs, respectively, so too does the continuum assume that when one crosses the line between Christianity and Judaism, one ceases to be Christian, and becomes instead entirely Jewish – even if that Judaism only comprises a minimum of practices or beliefs. This, however, is rarely the case. As the example of Hungarian antitrinitarianism demonstrates, those who shift from one side of the spectrum to the other, rather than abandon the beliefs of their original tradition, generally adopt certain aspects of one religion while maintaining the desired particulars of the other. Thus, their place on the religious continuum becomes difficult to pinpoint, as it exists perhaps in some third dimension that encompasses both sides of the spectrum. Finally, a

look at Faustus Socinus and the Socinian movement that he inaugurated completes a survey of continental antitrinitarianism during the sixteenth century and prepares us for the spread of these antitrinitarian ideas westward across continental Europe, and over the Channel into England.

It is with Socinianism in England, then, that chapter two begins. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to sketch the complicated intellectual, social and religious scene that dominated the English landscape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and set the stage for the emergence of the Unitarian movement in 1774. The evolving notions of toleration and orthodoxy during this era lead to a discussion of English Dissent, as well as an evaluation of certain thinkers – both antitrinitarians and orthodox Christians – who arose during this time period. Each of these thinkers helps contextualize the antitrinitarian controversy that arose at the end of the eighteenth century. While the first two chapters demonstrate the phenomenon to which Unghvary alluded, they also begin to highlight the more pervasive presence of Judaism within the lives and identity of the antitrinitarians.

With the Unitarian authors examined in chapters three and four, the Unitarian proximity to Judaism and the relationship between Christianity and Judaism become truly perceptible. Theophilus Lindsey, the subject of chapter three, consciously understood his theological alterations to Christianity as a shift away from orthodoxy and its fallacious doctrines and as a natural move towards Judaism. His use of Jewish sources and arguments connects him to his antitrinitarian heritage, while his visible identification with the Jewish people as those with whom he shared so much both religiously and personally exemplifies the true closeness he felt to both the Jews and Judaism.

Joseph Priestley, Lindsey's friend and coreligionist, envisioned his faith similarly to the way Lindsey did, yet he represents another important element of antitrinitarianism: a preoccupation with Jewish conversion. Believing that his religion had already moved so close to Judaism, Priestley appealed to the Jews by emphasizing the newly conceived relationship between the two religions, and the subsequent ease of converting to Unitarian Christianity. Interestingly, his attempts to move Jews across the dividing line between the two religions, rather than have them convert from one pole to the other – as orthodox Christianity demanded – led him to propose a potential religious tradition similar to that exemplified by the case of Hungarian antitrinitarianism: a people who retained the practices of one religion while adopting the beliefs of the other. As a Unitarian, Priestley's profound acknowledgement of the religious spectrum demonstrates the way that antitrinitarianism reformed the conceptualization of Christian religious identity. While Priestley's conversionary desires have already been situated within his identity as a millennialist,⁴ they have yet to be contextualized as a part of Priestley's self-identity as a Unitarian who saw his religion in unprecedented theological proximity to Judaism.

The final chapter explores the controversial nature of antitrinitarianism by investigating the thoughts of the Unitarians' opponents in the late eighteenth century. As such, I explored the works of those authors who considered themselves staunch enemies of Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley and analyzed both the ways in which these orthodox Christians perceived the Unitarian identification with Judaism as well as the problems posed by sacrificing elements of Christianity in order to move theologically

⁴ See for instance the work of Jack Fruchtman Jr., *The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A Study in Late Eighteenth-Century English Republican Millennialism* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983).

closer to the Jewish people. While the orthodox Christians in this chapter do represent a common feeling among many strict Anglicans by opposing a Christian identification with Judaism, they do not represent the opinions of all English trinitarians. In fact, it should be noted that there existed trinitarians who valued Jewish sources, including post-biblical rabbinic texts such as the Mishnah, as the only way of understanding Christianity. Just as Michael Servetus had used Jewish sources to argue for an antitrinitarian conception of Christianity, these trinitarians used Jewish texts in defense of Anglican orthodoxy.⁵ Although their theological beliefs did not move towards Judaism in the same fashion that antitrinitarians' did, the trinitarians' enthusiasm for Jewish sources, if not the Jewish people, puts antitrinitarian religious proclivities into perspective.

While I have attempted to provide a coherent and thorough picture that demonstrates the inherent place of Judaism in antitrinitarian thought and identity, including the way that antitrinitarians conceived of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, my work cannot possibly cover all of the thinkers and trends that contributed to this fascinating phenomenon of religious identity. As such, I have tried to include in my study those writers whose voices and opinions were considered the most important during the antitrinitarian controversy. In part, I have determined who those people were by combing the secondary literature on seventeenth and eighteenth century English Dissent, but have also allowed the primary sources, themselves – in the form of tracts and pamphlets – to guide my understanding of the important authors and thinkers of this era.

⁵ This subject is the topic of David Ruderman's upcoming book. On one such character, Peter Allix, see Matt Goldish, "The Battle for 'True' Jewish Christianity: Peter Allix's Polemics Against the Unitarians and Millenarians," in *Everything Connects: Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin, ed. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 143-162*. The Christian practice of using Jewish sources was known as Christian-Hebraism, and will be discussed in the first chapter.

Sixteenth century antitrinitarian theologians existed in a number of European locales, and I have no doubt that an even more thorough investigation of these thinkers and their writings would reveal similar patterns of identity and behavior. In addition, the more tolerant environment of seventeenth and eighteenth century England created a veritable breeding ground for nonconformist thinking, resulting in numerous authors who deserve attention for their significance and contribution to this fascinating issue. Not only other antitrinitarians, but their theological opponents as well, wrote a nearly endless stream of invectives against the Unitarians that would undoubtedly provide further insight into the threat they believed this identification with Judaism posed.

The abundance of thinkers who commented on these issues is demonstrated by the lack of available biographical information on the authors of innumerable tracts, pamphlets and sermons that express sentiments either for or against antitrinitarianism – and many of which contain references, however brief, to Judaism. Although the nature of their works makes clear where their theological predilections lay, these inadvertently anonymous authors nonetheless add more voices to the loud cry that comprised either side of the Unitarian controversy. In addition, then, to Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley, each of them should be carefully scrutinized in order to truly demonstrate the depth and pervasiveness of this phenomenon of religious identity. Whether consciously or not, Englishmen wrestled with and conceptualized the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and the struggle that occurred between Unitarians and their opponents demonstrates the ways that Judaism formed an essential part of antitrinitarian – and Christian – identity.

CHAPTER ONE

A THEOLOGICAL REVOLUTION IN REVERSE: How the Reformation Returned to Judaism

On October 27, 1553, the putrid odor of burning flesh and singed paper penetrated the streets of Geneva as Michael Servetus, along with his controversial works, was burned at the stake at the behest of Protestant theologian John Calvin. Servetus' crime, diabolical beyond compare, was an analytic and perspicacious reading of the Holy Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation that allowed him to discern for himself the nature of Christian belief. The scriptural investigations of this Spanish scholar and theologian revealed to him the error of the Trinity, a doctrine fundamental to Christianity but not yet challenged during the Protestant Reformation. It was this tenacious excoriation of the Trinity that ultimately resulted in Servetus' sentence of being burned alive, a fate that later earned him the controversial misnomer as the first martyr of the Unitarian cause. In fact, Michael Servetus was not a Unitarian.¹ Rather, he opposed the doctrine of the Trinity as it was professed by the orthodox Christians of his day,² thereby making him an antitrinitarian.³ More important than Servetus' beliefs were the ways in which he

¹ Unitarianism used in this fashion is to be distinguished from any kind of formal Unitarian movement or sect such as emerged in Transylvania or later in England. Although Unitarian belief and a Unitarian movement encompass the same theology – that Jesus was a mortal man and that the Trinity was a fabricated doctrine – the Unitarianism mentioned here is not a Christian sect but a system of beliefs. Additionally, it is worth noting that Servetus considered Unitarian beliefs repugnant and would not have attested to them; Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 1978), 15.

² The term “orthodox Christian” was a complicated distinction in its own right during the tumultuous Protestant Reformation. Orthodoxy before the Reformation would have constituted the dogma of the Church as dictated by the Pope. However, because Catholics considered all Protestant forms of Christianity schismatic and heterodox, the term orthodoxy had to be reevaluated. The broader the net was cast to include the doctrinal beliefs of self-identifying Christians, the more general the definition of Christian orthodoxy became. For the purposes of this paper, orthodox will always include, despite whatever else it may not, a belief in the Trinity as it was stated in the councils of the early church.

³ While antitrinitarian will be the designation used for anyone who opposed in any way the doctrine of the Trinity as it was understood by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formulation, a more thorough

expressed and defended them. Integral to this Christian theologian's arguments was an inclination to utilize Judaism as an ally in the fight against trinitarians and their doctrines. It is this method of argumentation – the necessary incorporation of Jewish thought, philosophers, and texts – that emerged as a natural and irremovable aspect of antitrinitarian debate during the Protestant Reformation.⁴

The doctrine of the Trinity is the belief that the Divine Being, known as the Godhead, is one essence that exists in three persons. These three persons are God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each part is in every respect equal to the other two: each is divine and in fact, God. These three persons considered individually, though, are not three separate Gods but the one Almighty God.⁵ The doctrine itself is not stated as such in either the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures, but was developed through a series of Church creeds promulgated during the first half of the first millennium. In the 325 CE Creed of Nicaea, 318 church fathers agreed that they believed equally in “one God, the Father All Governing ... one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father ... and in the Holy Spirit.”⁶ The Creed asserts that each of these forms is fixed and equal, yet fails to elaborate on the actual nature of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as well as the relationship that each has to the others. It was not until the

explanation of the scholarly history of the term can be found in George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3d ed. (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 461.

⁴ For more on Michael Servetus, see Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946). See also Friedman, *Total Heresy*; in addition, a thorough study of the influence of Judaism in the life of Servetus can be found in Louis Israel Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), 511-608. On the implementation and utilization of Judaism by Christians, see generally Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁵ This wording of the Trinity is similar to that provided in Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1, 61. Scholarly definitions of the Trinity do not vary greatly, as naturally they all seek to express the same concept, but for an alternate phrasing see Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 461-462.

⁶ “The Creed of Nicaea,” in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H Leith (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1963), 30.

Athanasian Creed, promulgated ca. 500 CE, that these aspects of the Trinitarian doctrine were officially crystallized. This creed states that “the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance [Essence].”⁷ It is against this doctrine that Servetus protested, but not as a Unitarian.

Servetus, rather than entirely deny Jesus’ divinity – a denial central to Unitarian theology – formulated incredibly tortuous and complex beliefs about the nature of the three divine persons.⁸ Despite maintaining Jesus’ divinity, however, he eventually concluded that the Trinity as professed by orthodox Christians of his day was a total fallacy. In order to denote those who worshipped an abstract philosophical notion that destroyed the supremacy and unity of God instead of merely glorifying him, Servetus utilized the neologism “trinitarian” as a term of distaste and reproach, and considered trinitarians no better than atheists.⁹ In his monumental censure of the doctrine, *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, published in 1531, he writes, “Not one word is found in the whole Bible about the Trinity, not about its Persons, not about an Essence, not about a unity of Substance, [and] not about one Nature of the several beings.”¹⁰ Setting aside the particularities of his belief system, Servetus’ obstreperous invective against the Trinity was revolutionary.

⁷ “The Athanasian Creed,” in *The Creeds of Christendom with A History and Critical Notes*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1919), 66.

⁸ For an explication of Servetus’ complicated belief system, see Friedman, *Total Heresy*; Williams, *Radical Reformation*.

⁹ Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1, 168; Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 132.

¹⁰ Michael Servetus, *On the Errors of the Trinity* (1531), trans. Earl Morse Wilbur, in *The Two Treatises of Servetus on the Trinity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 50. This has been published in conjunction with Servetus’ work of 1532, *Dialogues on the Trinity* and *On the Righteousness of Christ’s Kingdom*. Both works can be found in Harvard Theological Studies XVI.

To make it clear, however, that his disbelief in the canonical understanding of the Trinity did not preclude a belief in Jesus' nature as superior to that of mere mortals, he avers, Jesus "is God, sharing God's divinity in full.... This does not imply two Gods, but only a double use of the term God, as is clear from the Hebrew use of the term."¹¹ As it would be tiresome and pointless to map out a comprehensive and consistent belief system from Servetus' canon, it is fortunate that the specifics of his antitrinitarianism are less important here than the sources revealed by his comment about Jesus' divine nature.¹² Servetus writes, "The nature of Christ's deity is seen from the Old Testament use of the word *Elohim* for beings less than the supreme God."¹³ As the Old Testament was a Christian text as much as a Jewish one, Servetus' use of those scriptures to explain elements of the New Testament is hardly surprising.

What makes his argument unusual is that instead of allegorizing the Hebrew Scriptures as a means by which to assert the superiority of the New Testament, Servetus employed them to reevaluate orthodox Christian dogma and better understand Christianity. Rather than view the Old Testament as Christians had for centuries, Servetus studied the ways in which Jews understood these texts, hoping thereby to acquire a more profound knowledge of the Bible and in turn a more thorough understanding of the truth of his own religious tradition. This use of the Old Testament is typical of Servetus' strategy of justifying his aberrant beliefs with defenses based on Judaism, whether the Jewish language, Jewish sources or Jewish philosophies. It was not Servetus who first thought to return to the original tongue of the Old Testament, however,

¹¹ Ibid., 3

¹² On Servetus' often contradictory comments and the difficulty of discerning a uniform system, see Jerome Friedman, "Michael Servetus: The Case for a Jewish Christianity," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1 (April 1973): 90-92.

¹³ Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 4.

nor even to employ Jewish sources for the sake of illustrating Christian theological proofs.

Christian-Hebraicism, or the practice of using Judaic sources for Christian purposes, was a developing methodology in the century preceding the Protestant Reformation and throughout the Renaissance.¹⁴ For Servetus, Judaism and its rich history of writings and systems of thought could be utilized to reconcile orthodox Christian positions with his own philosophical influences and proclivities.¹⁵ As Jerome Friedman, a Servetus scholar, writes, “The Spaniard hoped Jewish opinion might reconcile orthodox Christian position with acceptable Gnostic and Neoplatonic concepts while putting the package into new terms to express a more unified Godhead.”¹⁶ With Jewish means acting as a conduit, Servetus believed that this first potential accordance might lead to another reconciliation: the theological bridging of Judaism and Christianity. Not wanting to actually destroy the doctrine of the Trinity but to better comprehend it in the hopes of modifying it appropriately, Servetus contended that it was most effective to analyze the doctrine through a lens of Jewish understanding.¹⁷ To Servetus, this methodology was intended to rectify long-accepted misconceptions, but as it ultimately contested professed doctrines, Michael Servetus inaugurated the practice of Christians

¹⁴ For a thorough understanding of Christian-Hebraicism and Servetus’ position therein, see Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983). On Christian-Hebraicism in general, see Manuel, *Broken Staff*, and Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson, “Introduction,” in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1-17. While not necessarily pertaining directly to the topics at hand, the collection of essays in *Hebraica Veritas?* provides an excellent understanding of the breadth and importance of Christian-Hebraicism.

¹⁵ For more on Servetus’ philosophical influences, see Friedman, “Jewish Christianity,” 92; idem, *Total Heresy*, 144.

¹⁶ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷ Friedman, “Jewish Christianity,” 92-94.

appealing to Jewish sources in order to argue against orthodox doctrines such as the Trinity.

Judaism is manifest in three particular ways throughout the Spanish theologian's argumentation against the Trinity. The first is in his use of Jewish sources, whether texts, authors, or philosophies. With a remarkable understanding of Hebrew language and grammar, Servetus easily incorporated the rabbinical sources into his theological repertoire. While this fluency is apparent in his earliest writings on the Trinity, including, *On the Error of the Trinity* and *Dialogues on the Trinity*, the breadth of the rebellious author's knowledge of Jewish sources is only truly revealed in his seminal work, *The Restitution of Christianity*, published in 1553. Many Christian scholars of the sixteenth century were able to cite rabbinic authorities such as Maimonides, Rashi and David Kimchi,¹⁸ but in addition to these, Servetus armed himself with a thorough knowledge of over a dozen other Jewish figures. His rabbinic weaponry included Spanish thinkers such as Abraham Saba and Rabbi Isaac Arama – the latter a contemporary Jewish exegete who worked feverishly to refute the veracity of Christianity.

Servetus employed the thought of Rabbi Arama in order to critique Christianity while simultaneously bringing it closer to Judaism. As Friedman explains:

If the Spaniard was to make use of traditional Jewish criticism of conventional Christian interpretation of the trinity, it could be only on a basis at least partially acceptable to Christian belief. Certainly there was neither value nor interest in simply reviewing Jewish objections to Christian thought. His willingness to utilize rabbinic opinion was based

¹⁸ For Kimchi's influence on Servetus, see Jerome Friedman, "The Myth of Jewish Antiquity: New Christians and Christian-Hebraica in Early Modern Europe," in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard Popkin and Gordon Weiner (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 44-46; idem, *Total Heresy*, 124-125. On the importance of David Kimchi to Christian-Hebraicism, see Manuel, *Broken Staff*, 59-60.

upon the assumption the two traditions could be successfully merged. Thus it was important to Servetus that Jews did accept a ‘Christian’ view of the messiah: [Servetus writes,] “...the Hebrews said in this sense the messiah is from the beginning, not because of some sophistical trinity but because his person and visible form subsisted in God. Thus Rabbi Arama said concerning *Genesis*, that before the creation of the sun the name of the messiah was already seated in the throne of God.”¹⁹

Later on in the *Restitution*, Servetus again drew on rabbinics in order to better understand the nature of Jesus’ divinity: “The rabbis called divinity *schechina* from the verb *schechan* which signifies inhabitation,” he writes. “Therefore that divinity of Christ is an inhabitation in God.”²⁰ In both of these examples, Servetus was not attacking orthodox Christianity, but critiquing it by employing Jewish sources. Ultimately, he hoped to better understand his own religion. While only two of numerous instances, these quotations are nonetheless exemplary of the way that Servetus used rabbinic sources – some of which were so obscure that they could only be found as manuscripts within the Jewish community – for his own theological ends.²¹

Other Jewish sources to which Servetus turned were the Aramaic Targums, a particular favorite of the Spanish theologian. These texts, written before the time of Jesus, provided Servetus with perspectives and understandings of Old Testament passages not otherwise apparent to him or even necessarily constructive to his arguments. He drew particularly upon the Targum of Jonathan and the Targum of Onkelos, primarily because they bolstered his emanationist notions regarding Jesus and the Godhead.²²

¹⁹ Michael Servetus, *The Restitution of Christianity* (Vienna: 1553), 36, as quoted in Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 123.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74, as quoted in Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 124.

²¹ For an account of the influence of rabbinics on Servetus, including the way that he manipulated the meanings of his Jewish sources – whether intentionally or not – in order to suit his own needs, see Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 121-132 and *idem*, “Jewish Christianity.”

²² Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 125. Emanations are those intermediary elements that fill the void between God and creation. As Friedman writes, “Though Servetus never elucidated a clear system of emanations, his understanding of the Old Testament names of God, the multiplicity of personalities within the second

While *Kabbalah*, or Jewish mysticism, was once considered an influence on Servetus' thought and philosophy due to his occasional mystical argumentation and personal background (Spain was a bastion of kabbalistic learning), the theologian actually seems to exhibit more contempt for the philosophy than respect.²³ Ill feelings, however, still acknowledge the fact that he was at least somewhat familiar with kabbalistic philosophy. Whether or not he included them in his own writings or theology, Servetus marveled at the amount of learned authorities that supported Jewish theological claims, and he chided his fellow Christians about their inability to convert a people with such bolstered beliefs.

As a result of his intense utilization of Jewish sources, Servetus was posthumously accused by one trinitarian of having “convers’d a long time with *Jews*,” and of having “espoused many of their Opinions, and” of being “a great Admirer of them.”²⁴ While it is difficult to trace Servetus' every interaction due to the frequency with which he changed his location and his name, it is nonetheless believed that he did spend time among Jewish scholars and communities, and their influence on him is readily discernable in his writings.²⁵ It was because of the methodological approach he adopted – the utilization of Jewish sources not simply to prove Christian truths but to argue against orthodox Christianity in an attempt to better understand its nature – that Servetus

being of the Godhead and the various natures of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God indeed constitute a series of emanations flowing from God to man.” Idem, 142.

²³ Ibid., 126-127.

²⁴ John Edwards, *The Socinian Creed: or a Brief Account of the Professed Tenents and Doctrines of the Foreign and English Socinians* (London: 1697), 227.

²⁵ As a Spaniard, Servetus came from a country that had not only seen “the flowering of Christian culture and mysticism but also the golden age of Spanish Jewry and Islamic culture as well.” Certainly not every Christian Spaniard felt the influences of these religions, especially in light of the Spanish Inquisition which sought to purge such elements from the midst of Andalusian life, but Servetus' works do indicate that he was influenced not only by Judaism, but by Islamic thought as well. As Friedman mentions, Servetus did not write only with a Christian audience in mind, but with the belief that he was reaching both Jews and Arabs with his message. Some accusations against Servetus went so far as to contend that he was in fact a *marrano*, a Spanish convert from Judaism to Christianity who surreptitiously retained his Jewish way of life, but such claims are entirely unsubstantiated. Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 17, 18, 121.

was ultimately labeled a *judaizer*. In addition to the charge of antitrinitarianism, it was this derogatory appellation that followed Servetus from country to country as he fled for his life. In fact, the charge of judaizing was among those levied against him as John Calvin inhumanely ordered Servetus to be burned alive in Geneva's town square.

From a scholarly perspective, "judaizing" is best understood as "the utilization of Jewish mystical writings or rabbinic exegetical texts and opinions to elucidate crucial points of Christian theology along quasi rabbinic lines of thought."²⁶ Servetus' opponents, however, undoubtedly intended the term to carry far worse insinuations, including not only that he promulgated Jewish ideas but that he was also secretly a proselytizing Jew. To his enemies, Servetus' unjustifiable concern with Jewish sources and beliefs only discredited his distress regarding the Trinity, since Jews for centuries had offered similar arguments against this holy doctrine. Thus, when Servetus, a Christian denying seemingly irrevocable Christian beliefs, made Jewish arguments and admitted of his interest in Jewish sources, he became an odious target of ridicule.

If Servetus' use of Jewish sources was the first way that he employed Judaism in his theology, earning him the condemnatory label of judaizer, then the second method – the thorough and adept use of the Hebrew language and the Old Testament – acquired for him the somewhat more innocuous title of a Christian-Hebraist.²⁷ Servetus' knowledge

²⁶ Ibid., 143. Friedman explains two important points about the term judaizing when it is used in a scholarly capacity. The first is that it must be distinguished from the Christian use of Hebrew language and grammar designed to facilitate a greater understanding of the Old Testament: an element of Christian-Hebraicism. Secondly, it is unlikely that any sixteenth century Christian theologian in the public eye actually sought the judaization of Christianity, though the term was generally used with this intent by theologians who wished to discredit their opponents. Newman, *Jewish Influence*, in his opening pages discusses judaizing, the history of the term, and its significance in Christian history. Martin Mulsow and Richard Popkin, "Introduction," in *Secret Conversion to Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Martin Mulsow and Richard Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1-17 discuss the concept and accusation of judaizing in the context of actual Christian conversion to Judaism.

²⁷ See Friedman, "Christian-Hebraica."

of Hebrew, both grammatically and linguistically, is extensive and commendable.²⁸ He believed that it was useless to debate the meaning of Old Testament passages and words if one could not return to the language in which they were originally written. In fact, he attributed most theological errors to an “ignorance of the Hebrew tongue,”²⁹ contending more specifically that “heresies as to the deity of Christ came of ignorance of the Hebrew.”³⁰ In the preface to a Latin Bible that Servetus edited, he even encouraged his readers to familiarize themselves with Hebrew and to become acquainted with Jewish history before reading the prophets.³¹ It was important to Servetus not merely to read and reinterpret the Hebrew text of the Old Testament – a tactic technically as much Christian as it was Jewish – but to understand the way that the Jews read the Hebrew texts and to apply their beliefs in order to better understand Christian theology.

Believing that much of the misunderstanding regarding the nature of Jesus came from the Hebrew word *elohim*, Servetus elaborated in detail:

Let not the word, *God*, deceive you, for you do not and can not [*sic*] understand its meaning until you know what *Elohim* means, which, if you know Hebrew, I will make quite clear to you below. For you must bear in mind that all things that are written of Christ took place in Judaea, and in the Hebrew tongue; and in all other tongues but this there is a poverty of divine names. So we, not knowing how to distinguish between God [in one sense] and God [in another], fall into error. And that Christ became our God in the sense of the word, *Elohim*, is no more than to say that he became our Lord, our judge, and our king, after he was given by the Father a kingdom, all judgment, and all power.³²

²⁸ This antitrinitarian’s obsession with the Hebrew language extended beyond the need to engage with the original biblical tongue. In Servetus’ final letters to Calvin, he appealed to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and described the language as if it was not only alive and tangible but capable of so much more than other languages that could only be spoken or heard. Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 930.

²⁹ Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 125.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

³¹ Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1, 129.

³² Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 22-23.

Servetus also used Hebrew in order to demonstrate the ways in which that language supported his radical, if sometimes contradictory, antitrinitarian belief system. Explaining the different Hebrew words for God that were applied to Jesus, Servetus writes:

Again, this kind of Diety in Christ you may learn from the Old Testament, if you observe carefully what Hebrew word is used when Christ is called God. And along with this, mark the difference between *Yehovah*, the proper name of God, and *El*, *Elohim*, *Adonai*, and other similar names applied to God. And that Thomas spoke of Christ not as *Jehovah*, but as *Elohim* and *Adonai*, I shall prove below. Likewise the Apostle said *Elohim*.”³³

Again, a proper knowledge of Hebrew, according to Servetus, would have clarified any misconceptions.

Christian exegesis of the Old Testament regarding the Trinity was not limited to this differentiation between God and Jesus, and as such, the Holy Spirit remained a contentious point for Servetus as well. With Hebrew as his weapon, he sought no less to disprove its equal place in a Trinity than he had with Jesus. “And with the Hebrews *ruach* means nothing other than breath or breathing, which is expressed indifferently as wind and spirit,” Servetus writes.³⁴ Thus, Servetus mastered Hebrew for the purpose of better understanding Christianity, and in the process, utilized his prodigious knowledge of the language to debunk the orthodox notion of the Trinity. In addition, he rebuked Christians’ allegorizing of the Old Testament – a standard method of asserting Christian superiority – for foretelling this fallacious doctrine.³⁵ “The threefoldness in God sometimes inferred from Exodus iii. 6 is to be explained not as three separate beings, but

³³ Ibid., 23. The italicized words transliterated above were originally written in Hebrew characters, indicating both Servetus’ own knowledge, as well as that which he expected from his readers.

³⁴ Ibid., 35. The word *ruach* was originally written in Hebrew.

³⁵ For an understanding of Servetus’ interest in Judaism as a means of better expressing his own conception of the Godhead, see Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 121.

as a distribution of functions,” he asserts.³⁶ Instead of simply learning Hebrew and then reading the Old Testament in the original language to discern its meaning through a Christian lens, as most Christian-Hebraists did, Servetus investigated the interpretation of Hebrew phraseology as the Jews understood it. That is, Servetus went farther than using Hebrew to read the Old Testament; he studied this ancient tongue in order to understand how the Jews read and interpreted their own language and scriptures, and then he employed that understanding in arguments against Christian orthodoxy.³⁷

Orthodox Christians believed that when Jesus came to earth, God had created a new covenant with all of mankind, and the truth as it was revealed in the gospel about Jesus’ life automatically supplanted any contradictory revelations established by the original covenant with the Jews.³⁸ Servetus, however, considered the Old Testament more than just a prelude to the new one but of comparable importance because it established the bounds within which the New Testament could be interpreted. Thus, unlike most Christians who refused to consider arguments based on the Old Testament a reasonable means of refuting orthodox Christian dogma revealed in the New Testament, Servetus actually employed the Old Testament as a valid source from which to stage his attack on polluted Christian doctrines. Because “the Old Testament repeatedly teaches but one God,” Servetus contended, it was impossible for a doctrine like the Trinity to have been revealed in the New.³⁹ “In the Old Testament we are commanded, and that more than once, not to acknowledge many gods, but only one,” Servetus declares, adding

³⁶ Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 5.

³⁷ For more on the importance of the Hebrew language to Servetus, see Newman, *Jewish Influence*, 533-536.

³⁸ David Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England: 1603-1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 13.

³⁹ Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 5.

*“I am thy God, and, Thou shalt have no other gods beside me. And Hear, O Israel, the Jehovah is our God, and Jehovah is one.”*⁴⁰ It would have seemed polytheistic to deny the truth of these passages, yet their literal meaning was problematic for orthodox Christianity since statements about God’s unity could be portrayed as incompatible with trinitarian doctrine. Servetus wished to show that the establishment of God’s singular nature in the Old Testament was not to be disregarded for incorrect theological interpretations and allegorizing of the New. Whether Servetus’ argumentative methodology was effective is not as significant as the motives behind his technique. In contrast to all of those Christian-Hebraists who preceded him, Servetus did not simply wish to learn and employ Hebrew Scripture and Jewish sources, but rather, as Friedman explains, to “maintain a ‘Jewish’ understanding of prophecy and Scripture, and rebuild Christian theology along Jewish lines of thought.”⁴¹

The third way that Servetus incorporated Judaism into his polemic against orthodox Christianity did not concern the use of Jewish sources and language. Instead, it pertained to the Jewish people themselves. The Spanish theologian was preoccupied by both the proper worship of God as it was preserved by the Jews and by the reaction of the Jewish people to Christianity as a result of erroneous doctrines like the Trinity. Servetus often made observations like, “In this passage God sought *to keep the Jews from believing* in more than one God.”⁴² Demonstrating his concern with the nature of the Jews and the beliefs assigned them by revelation was disturbing to orthodox Christians. In fact, this very concern quickly made Servetus the target of innumerable invectives and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 55. Original emphasis. All emphasis in this chapter is by the original intention of the author unless otherwise indicated.

⁴¹ Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 132.

⁴² Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 5. Emphasis added.

harsh denunciations. For Christianity, it was irrelevant that God wanted the Jews to believe a certain way, because when the truth of the New Testament superseded the archaic covenant of the Old, the notion of “one God” no longer held the same meaning. Servetus’ message was controversial because he gave precedence to the fact that “the Jewish law teaches the strict unity of God,”⁴³ rather than the truths uncovered by the new and indelible agreement between God and all of mankind. In addition to his concern with the proper practice of the Jewish people, Servetus also used the Jews as a means by which to insult irrational Christian doctrines.

Needless to say, the Jews did not approve of any belief that threatened the unity of God. “Worst of all,” Servetus exclaims, “the doctrine of the Trinity incurs the ridicule of the Mohamedans and the Jews.”⁴⁴ To care what the Jews, and worse still, the Muslims, thought of orthodox Christian dogma only contributed to accusations that Servetus was a judaizer. “The Hebrews are supported by so many authorities,” he writes, “that they naturally wonder at the great division of Gods introduced by the New Testament, and they deem our Testament schismatical when they see us hold their God in such abhorrence.”⁴⁵ Of what relevance could it be, Servetus’ enemies asked, that the Jews found orthodox Christian dogma objectionable? To exclaim that not only the Jewish Scriptures but the Jewish people themselves disputed the Trinity – and to consider those valid arguments against orthodoxy – was sheer heresy.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 58. It is believed that Servetus saw this difficulty with the Trinity firsthand while growing up in Spain. There, he likely came into contact with *conversos*, insincere Jewish converts to Christianity, and concluded that they could not properly finish their conversion to Christianity because of the problems posed by the Trinity. For more, see Friedman, “Jewish Christianity,” 93, and idem, *Total Heresy*, 17, 18. On his contact with Jews and the controversy regarding his personal connections to Judaism, see Newman’s *Jewish Influence*.

⁴⁶ On Servetus’ mention of the Jews castigating Christianity, see Friedman, “Jewish Christianity,” 93.

These critiques were exacerbated by further vociferous and iconoclastic vilifications of the trinitarians: “The Jews also shrink from giving adherence to this fancy of ours,” Servetus assails, “and laugh at our foolishness about the Trinity; and on account of its blasphemies they do not believe that this is the Messiah who was promised in their law.” As if this were an insufficient taunt, Servetus concludes by exclaiming that, “not only Mohammedans and Hebrews, but the very beasts of the field, would make fun of us did they grasp our fantastical notion, for all the works of the Lord bless the one God.”⁴⁷ It was probably remarks such as these that prompted Catholics and Protestants alike to allege that he “had been in league with the Grand Turk in a conspiracy to undermine Christianity in western Europe and thus to pave the way for conquest by the Mohammedan power.”⁴⁸ The presence of the Ottoman Empire, whose leader was derogatorily referred to as a Turk (a term which Ottomans themselves used only in reference to Anatolian peasants), was a consistent motif within antitrinitarian controversy.⁴⁹

On a practical and political level, the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the early sixteenth century, was seen as a permanent threat to Christian Europe. Since the Ottoman invasion and conquest of Constantinople in 1453, a constant pressure had existed on the eastern boundary of European Christendom. Continuing to push westward, the expanding Ottoman Empire captured more than just the Orthodox Christian territory in the Balkans – taking, for example, additional Christian lands under its suzerainty by the 1503 Treaty of Buda. By the 1540s, the Ottomans had actually

⁴⁷ Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 67.

⁴⁸ Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1, 71.

⁴⁹ On the importance of Islam to Servetus, see Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 18-19.

annexed Catholic Hungary. Despite these military conquests, there was more than a political dimension to the potential worries evoked by Servetus' remarks.⁵⁰

At the chronological doorstep of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, it is no wonder that this burgeoning Eastern power was viewed as a serious threat during the first half of the sixteenth century. It is easy to understand how Christians might have feared an alliance between antitrinitarians and a Muslim power. With orthodox Christianity already being challenged from within, it surely appeared as though external, destabilizing, religious dangers were more plausible than usual. Thus, Servetus' alleged affiliation with the "Grand Turk" or Ottoman Sultan, while improbable, reflected a viable political and theological concern of the day.

As a Spaniard, Servetus came from a country replete with Muslim influences and culture, and likely had contact with – at least in the eyes of orthodox Christians – the same people who threatened from the east. Muslims were devoutly monotheist and according to Servetus, they scorned the very idea of the Trinity. If Servetus, too, mocked this sacred Christian doctrine, then orthodox Christians' recriminations that he would align with the Ottomans to prevent the propagation of the Bible, while outlandish, could hardly have seemed disconnected from the realm of possibility. In fact, Martin Luther exhibited little compunction when he designated Servetus a "Moor," a particularly pejorative Muslim epithet of the time. The accusation that Servetus appealed to Muslims and was influenced by Islam is known as Islamizing, and was not that different from the

⁵⁰ For a history of the early military victories and expansionism of the Ottoman Empire, see Donald Edgar Pitcher, *An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire from Earliest Times to the End of the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972). On Ottoman Warfare in Europe and its encroachment into Christian lands, see chapter 5 of Jeremy Black, ed., *European Warfare: 1453-1815* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). On the role of the Hungarians during this eastern encroachment, see Unghvary, *Hungarian Protestant Reformation*.

allegations of extreme judaizing. In fact, Islamizing probably made the latter claims seem more plausible and tangible.⁵¹

By declaring that these monotheists, i.e. Muslims and Jews, scorned Christianity for the doctrine of the Trinity, Servetus had not only chastised Christians, but he had employed these detested faiths in an unprecedented way: by using such reviled people against his own. Perhaps without regular contact, the Jewish contempt for Christianity would have been, if not acceptable, at least tolerable. However, Christianity had never been comfortable with the continued presence of Jews. For some, the very existence of Judaism undermined the validity of Christianity. That is, if Jesus truly was the Messiah, and if the New Testament did indeed supplant the covenant of the Old, then it was unfathomable that the Jews would not have realized the error of their ways long ago and have accepted Jesus as Christ. Thus, since inchoation, Christianity has felt the need to define itself against Judaism.⁵²

For Servetus to use Judaism as a weapon against his brothers in faith, despite their significant theological disparity, was both truculent and dangerous. The opprobrious nature of the Jews, however, was not the extent of Servetus' concern. The Spanish scholar illuminated the Jewish people's revulsion at Christian doctrines not because he believed that the Jews were religiously superior, but because he did not think that they

⁵¹ For a discussion about Michael Servetus and *Islamizing*, as well as the influences of Islam in his life and his relationship to this religion, see Newman, *Jewish Influence*, 573-579.

⁵² On the Christian perception of Judaism, see Manuel, *Broken Staff*. See also Newman's *Jewish Influence*, particularly pages 1-7, which provides an interesting yet somewhat dated discussion of Judaism's influence on Christianity since the first century. The manner in which Christians throughout the ages used "judaizing" as a negative epithet and an implied reversion to something inferior suggests the degree to which the religion's very existence complicated matters for Christianity. Nonetheless, Judaism, because of its presence, has continually proved a profound influence on Christianity. Also see Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, trans. Edward Quinn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), particularly page 7 of the introduction where she lists the premises that are most often included in Christian theological education.

could be led to Christianity when that spiritual path was obstructed by specious doctrines. One problem that Servetus hoped to rectify by expunging the doctrine of the Trinity from Christianity, then, was the Jewish reticence to consider conversion. “What a laughing-stock you would be,” he tells his coreligionists, “if you tried to sell them your three beings in place of one God. But let us prove the matter from Holy Writ, from the Old Testament as well as the New.”⁵³ Servetus intended to show that both the Jewish and the Christian scriptures demonstrated the oneness of God. He felt assured that if the Trinity were no longer an integral element of Christianity, then the Jews would realize the legitimacy of Christianity and the errors they had maintained for centuries.

The force of this argument was perhaps ahead of its time with Servetus, due to the fact that his beliefs were only somewhat digressive in an antitrinitarian sense – not abolishing the Trinity in its entirety, but merely alloying it. Later Unitarians who wished to “sell” Christianity to Jews and hasten their conversion did so under the banner of denying Jesus’ divinity entirely, purging the Trinity from Christianity in every sense, and asserting that Jesus’ sole role was as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy and the foretold human Messiah. While maintaining the divinity of Jesus, it is thus remarkable that Servetus believed the adjustment of such controversial doctrines as the Trinity might have created an environment in which Jews would have felt comfortable discussing Christian theology and ultimately denouncing their erroneous beliefs through conversion.⁵⁴

Although few who came after his time ever possessed the extensive knowledge of rabbinics and Judaic sources that Servetus wielded, his influence on the future of

⁵³ Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 53.

⁵⁴ A thorough discussion of the conversionary impulse found among antitrinitarians will take place in chapter 4.

antitrinitarianism cannot be underestimated. The techniques that Servetus employed to disabuse the notion of the Trinity – appealing to Jewish sources, utilizing the Hebrew language, and promoting the establishment of a dialogue with the Jews, etc. – became an important precedent to the antitrinitarian position in the fight for Christian truth. Unable to predict the enormous impact that Servetus’ incorporation of Judaism would have on future generations of antitrinitarians, his theological opponents were more justified in their concerns than might otherwise be believed. John Calvin’s actions against Servetus, although atrocious, were supported by reasoning that was ultimately not entirely unfounded: antitrinitarians were connected to Judaism in ways that ultimately threatened orthodox Christianity. Even in a time of such religious and political upheaval as the Protestant Reformation, Servetus’ ideas were revolutionary and subversive.⁵⁵

While Servetus’ contribution as the primary figure of a proto-Unitarian movement is undeniably important, he must be remembered for a variety of other points as well. First among them is his gruesome death. As the point at which we began our tale of antitrinitarianism, it is highly significant that our protagonist faced an unimaginably wretched execution as a result of his religious convictions. This radical’s recalcitrance served as a model for later antitrinitarians, who, although they were rarely subject to such horrible punishments, never offered their opinions unchallenged. Moreover, Servetus’ name was vilified long after his own day, and it brought ridicule upon those who, touting their connection to this antitrinitarian forefather, boldly associated themselves with him. Thus, both vituperation and laudation continued to follow the name of Michael Servetus throughout the Unitarian controversy. The rancor of ardent trinitarians, who often

⁵⁵ For an account of Servetus’ place in the greater Protestant Reformation, see Williams, *Radical Reformation*.

viewed Servetus' intransigence and perfidy as the criterion by which to evaluate their contemporary enemies, persisted long after his ignominious death,⁵⁶ and by the end of the seventeenth century, trinitarians still blamed Servetus for being the catalyst of antitrinitarian sentiments: "These hellish Instruments were *Michael Servetus*, born in *Arragon*, one of the Kingdoms of *Spain*, who having past his Youth in *Africa*, amongst *Jews* and *Mahometans*, was infected with their Blasphemies."⁵⁷ Blaming Servetus' corruption on his contact with the Jews 150 years after his lifetime demonstrates not only the influence that Servetus exerted but also the continued centrality of the connection between Judaism and antitrinitarianism that he established. It is this that concerns us most about Servetus' contribution to the discussion of the Trinity: as a Christian scholar, he introduced the importance of Judaism and Jews to an otherwise Christian theological debate.

Servetus was not the only antitrinitarian to emerge during the Reformation, nor was his antitrinitarianism the only schismatic interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity. In the years after Servetus' execution in Geneva, antitrinitarian ideas spread across the continent, south to Italy and northeast to Poland. Often, these cases of antitrinitarianism were not connected to Servetus at all, and each scholar and theologian developed, through his own reading of the scriptures and the influences around him, an understanding of Christianity and the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁸ Because Servetus' significance for our purposes lies not in his particular opinions about the Trinity, as

⁵⁶ See for instance, the thoughts of William Burgh, a layman who challenged the beliefs of Theophilus Lindsey, the founder of the first Unitarian Church in William Burgh, *A Scriptural Confutation of the Arguments against the One Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Produced by the Revered Mr. Lindsey in His Late Apology*, 3d ed. (York: A. Ward, 1779), 137.

⁵⁷ Jean Gailhard, *The Blasphemous Socinian Heresie Disproved and Confuted* (London: 1697), 2.

⁵⁸ Williams' *The Radical Reformation*, Section 11.2, Alterations in the Doctrine of the Trinity, gives an excellent account of the different way that the Trinity was interpreted during the Reformation.

inconsistent and muddled as they were, but rather in his methodology – utilizing Judaism as a means to explore and argue with orthodox Christianity – it is this factor that must be remembered as we continue to survey the experience of antitrinitarianism before the eighteenth century. Whether present as Servetus employed it or not, significantly, wherever antitrinitarianism appeared, there was almost always a notable connection to Judaism, either as a means of theological justification and argumentation or even as a personal identification with this condemned faith.

Shortly after Servetus' death, an attendee of the 1556 synod of Secemin named Peter Giezek, denied the doctrine of the Trinity outright, contending that only God the Father was divine. This was the first public instance of such a renunciation to occur in Poland.⁵⁹ Through an acquaintance of Servetus', Giezek had been influenced by the antitrinitarian behemoth's ideas. This influence was tempered by Giezek's studies at Padua and Krakow, and by the time his antitrinitarian beliefs had become manifest at the Polish synod, they had evolved distinctly from those of his intellectual ancestor.⁶⁰ Giezek contended that the Bible taught that "the Father of Christ is the only and Most High God; and whoever recognizes him as the true God is not far from the kingdom of God, be he Jew or Turk."⁶¹ Interesting as Giezek's antitrinitarian sentiments remain, what is of note here is his acknowledgement that the worship of God alone is the means to salvation – not the acceptance of Jesus – and that Judaism and Islam, as monotheist traditions presumably acknowledging the same God as Christians, each puts its adherents within reach of the kingdom of heaven.

⁵⁹ Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1, 286.

⁶⁰ Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1009-1010, includes an elaboration on the specific antitrinitarian ideals that Giezek expounded at the synod of Secemin.

⁶¹ Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1, 291.

Little more than a decade after Giezek's infamous disavowal, two "false prophets" were reported for corrupting the church in the Polish city of Lublin. Their particular theological abuses, however, were not native to Poland, but had apparently been imported into the country by a Polish businessman, Valentine Kawiec, whose continued visits to Hungary provided him with the opportunity to learn of a "new Judaism." According to the practitioners of this novel faith, Jesus was not an object of divine worship, and therefore, the Trinity did not exist. In addition to this blasphemous contention, Kawiec transmitted other ideas from this aberrant Hungarian sect, including Jewish practices such as the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath (i.e. Saturday and not Sunday). This amounted to a theology even more heretical than Giezek's statements and further reinforced in Poland the abrogation of paramount Christian doctrines like the Trinity. In the aftermath of the resultant controversy that took place in Lublin, discordant views of Jesus' nature became more pronounced, and the most radical dissenters consistently held that Jesus, being purely human, should not be worshiped in any way. Because these antitrinitarian dissidents were also inclined to venerate the Old Testament as superiorly authoritative to the New, they were labeled judaizers.

It can be seen by the influence of these Hungarian communities on the Lubian merchant and those he encountered that there was reason for orthodox Christians to be concerned about more than the abandonment of the Trinity: the next step – denying Jesus' divinity – could, it seemed, lead to Judaism and the adoption of Jewish practices. The situation in Hungary that led to the emergence of this Jewish-Christian sect, ultimately known as Sabbatarian due to the decision to keep the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday, evolved from the complicated religious and political scene in that region.

Transylvania, due in part to its complex governance and the influences and effects of the Reformation in that area, tolerated more religious dissention and factionalism than many other regions, and in fact, was the first place that a Unitarian church was able to emerge.⁶²

The Unitarian Controversy in Hungary surfaced just after the middle of the sixteenth century, and although itinerant preachers – generally those fleeing from other countries for their heterodox views – came to Transylvania denying the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity, the antitrinitarian movement that took root in Hungary is best understood as only partially influenced by these transients.⁶³ The controversy centered around the Transylvanian town of Koloszvar, which is significant not only as the site where Unitarianism took hold but as the place where antitrinitarians became so judaized that some of the movement’s adherents actually adopted Jewish customs and identified themselves as “members of God’s people,” a reference to Jewish chosenness.⁶⁴ The man ultimately responsible for the judaization of the Transylvanian Unitarian movement was the head of the college in Koloszvar, Francis David.⁶⁵

Before David’s aberrant influences and beliefs resulted in a falling out with his theological colleague and partner, George Biandrata, the two had transformed the Transylvanian religious environment. In synods and other public debates, Biandrata and David argued vehemently for the abolition of the Trinity, and jointly published tracts that

⁶² Ibid., 348-349; see also, Unghvary, *Hungarian Protestant Reformation*.

⁶³ One unsettled theologian, notable for his interest in Judaic sources, appeared in Hungary and contributed to the antitrinitarian sentiment there. Francis Stancaro was a Christian Talmudist and Reformed Hebraist, who had moved south after a controversy in the Baltic city of Königsberg. Insistent on the value of Jewish sources, Stancaro primarily employed the Old Testament and the Talmud in his arguments against the Trinity; Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 854-855; Unghvary, *Hungarian Protestant Reformation*, 328-330.

⁶⁴ Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1127-1128.

⁶⁵ On Francis David, see Unghvary, *Hungarian Protestant Reformation*, 315-384; see also, Williams, *Radical Reformation*, generally chapter 28.

called for an end to the practice of worshipping Jesus as divine. Together, Biandrata and David inaugurated and defended the Unitarian movement in Hungary.

It was not long before accusations of judaizing, spouted by their greatest theological opponent, Peter Melius, made their way into the lives of these two radical reformers. Not only was he the chief spokesman for Calvinism throughout the Hungarian lands, but Melius himself was well versed in Hebrew and other theological matters. He associated Biandrata and David with the condemnable judaizer, Michael Servetus, and alleged that all three of these antitrinitarians were highly influenced by anti-Christian rabbinic writings, including the works of the thirteenth-century rabbi, David Kimchi, and the fifteenth-century Spanish rabbi, Joseph Albo.⁶⁶ Melius also accused these Unitarian defendants of favoring the Ottoman rulers that then controlled the Hungarian lands; these Islamizing claims, unlike those uttered against Servetus, had resonance in a world that confronted the Muslim presence regularly. The pro-Turkish claims, however, had less merit than accusations about judaizing – since the latter were not entirely inaccurate – particularly in the case of David, who, in comparison to his firmly Unitarian partner, was emerging as the more extreme reformer of the two.⁶⁷

The controversial changes that faced the town of Koloszvar under David's theological tutelage were not entirely a product of his own meditations on Christianity, but were heavily influenced by a handful of judaizing reformers, the most important of which was the Christian-Hebraist minister, Matthew Vehe-Glirius. It was Glirius'

⁶⁶ Whether or not he was directly influenced by Albo, David was certainly indirectly affected by his writings and thought because of Albo's influence on Servetus, and the Spanish theologian's impact on David himself. Eventually recognizing the inconsistency in Servetus' writings, however, David moved beyond his antitrinitarianism and towards a firmer Unitarian theology. Unghvary, *Hungarian Protestant Reformation*, 334-336, 347.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 325, 327; Friedman, *Jewish Antiquity*, 45.

influence that facilitated David's movement away from Hungarian Unitarianism and towards the adoption of Jewish practices and customs. As an ardent antitrinitarian, Glirius believed that the New Testament was inferior to the Old Testament because it involved an unfulfilled promise: the promise of redemption. He further contended that until Jesus' return, at which point the commitments of the Messiah would be fulfilled, the laws of the Old Testament retained a superior position of authority. Openly admitting to his education by Christian Talmudists and rabbis, self-identifying as a Christian-Hebraist, and undeniably an observer of the Jewish people, it is no wonder that Glirius' antitrinitarian proclivities led him beyond the denial of the Trinity and towards the adoption of Jewish practices and a Jewish way of life. Despite having crossed the line that separated Christianity from Judaism by assuming the Jewish Sabbath and reinstating *kashrut*, the Jewish dietary laws, Glirius and his followers still identified as Christians because they recognized Jesus' divine mission.⁶⁸

Frightened by the judaization of the Unitarian movement that now seemed out of his control, Biandrata sought to curb David's influence in the Koloszvar community. As such, he recruited Faustus Socinus, an Italian theologian of antitrinitarian sentiments then living in Poland, to persuade David to return to the proper reverence of Jesus. At a debate staged between David and Socinus, a long disputation based entirely on scriptural exegesis ensued. The Italian theologian maintained his insistence that, although there was no requirement to do so, Christians should invoke Jesus as the conduit through which prayer was to be offered to God. Contrarily, David insisted that the Old Testament command to worship no other being aside from God should be strictly upheld because no

⁶⁸ On Glirius and the Judaic practices in Kolozsvar, see Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1126-1128; Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 105-106; Ungbhvar, *Hungarian Protestant Reformation*, 380-381.

command indicating otherwise had been given. While the debate between David and Socinus remained civil, in large part because Socinus had proven far more Unitarian in his beliefs than Biandrata had expected, Biandrata eventually accused his former partner of having returned to Judaism.⁶⁹ It should not be surprising that a Christian who had moved so definitively away from his tradition would be denounced as an apostate and corruptor, and virulently labeled as a judaizer and Sabbatarian.⁷⁰

After being brought to trial, David was imprisoned, and died shortly after his incarceration. At about this time, Biandrata launched a campaign that attempted to reverse some of the judaizing effects on Transylvanian Unitarianism. Sabbatarianism continued to spread throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, but legal measures were taken to mitigate its practice and influence.⁷¹ After incidents like this one, it is no wonder that orthodox Christians became increasingly concerned that any modifications to their tradition would lead to a regression into Judaism.⁷²

While cases appeared all over central Europe in which antitrinitarians were accused of lapsing into Judaism, one other instance is worth briefly mentioning because of its similarities to the events in Transylvania. In the middle of the sixteenth century, a faction within the Russian Church in Lithuania rebelled against trinitarian doctrine by fusing both Judaism and rationalist inclinations into their practice and belief system. These contumacious Lithuanians contended that the New Testament was inferior to the Old, adopted Jewish dietary laws, reinstated circumcision and began to practice the

⁶⁹ Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 2, 76.

⁷⁰ In David's case, such accusations were not unfounded, but they were issued with the intent of being derogatory. As Unghvary informs us, "According to the view of a more balanced church history, David did not work towards the coming age of Enlightenment, but rather backwards in the direction of Old Testament Judaism," Unghvary, *Hungarian Protestant Reformation*, 364.

⁷¹ Williams, *Radical Reformation*.

⁷² Mulsow and Popkin, "Introduction," 3-5, discusses antitrinitarianism and its relationship to the phenomenon of Christian conversion to Judaism.

Sabbath on Saturday. Similar to the pattern in Transylvania, it was the less extreme antitrinitarians (essentially Unitarians from a doctrinal standpoint), fearing that they would lose some of their own religious freedoms should the orthodox authorities see such abuses of liberty, who ultimately proved to be the Sabbatarians' most impassioned opponents. They accused the Sabbatarians of having accepted the "Jewish atheism."⁷³ This case of Lithuanian antitrinitarianism emphasizes the fact that the Transylvanian Unitarian controversy was not anomalous: antitrinitarian beliefs, as a movement away from orthodox Christianity, could lead to a return to Judaism or at least the adoption of a Jewish way of life. More generally, the cases of Servetus, the Hungarians and the Lithuanians all demonstrate the integral place of Judaism within Christian theological debates about antitrinitarianism and antitrinitarian identity.

The major antitrinitarian movement of continental Europe did not initially exemplify these Jewish elements to the extent that they were manifest elsewhere. This movement remains significant, however, because as it spread across Europe and particularly to England, it began to represent a version of Christianity that had allegedly moved too close to Judaism. Socinianism, as it came to be called after its founder, Faustus Socinus, is the sixteenth century movement that yielded the generic title by which many antitrinitarians were later referred.⁷⁴

Two elements proved central to Socinus' efforts to understand the nature of Christianity: reason and a firsthand reading of the scriptures. Socinus was well versed in

⁷³ Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1, 368-370. Mention of this instance can also be found in Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1148.

⁷⁴ Consider for example the title of John Smith's 1695 publication, *A Designed End to the Socinian Controversy*, and the title of John Edwards' 1697 pamphlet, *The Socinian Creed: or a Brief Account of the Professed Tenents and Doctrines of the Foreign and English Socinians*, as well as Thomas Burgess, who in 1791 referred to the "Socinian Heresy" on page 27 of his *Reflections on the controversial writings of Dr. Priestley*. See also Theophilus Lindsey's *Apology upon Resigning the Vicarage at Yorkshire*, page 24.

Hebrew, yet he and his followers differed from Michael Servetus and other sixteenth century antitrinitarians because they rejected rabbinic Judaism as a means of defending Christian truth.⁷⁵ Socinus believed that only a close and personal reading of the Bible, in conjunction with the unwavering application of reason, could result in the true knowledge of Christianity and religion. The Italian theologian's analysis under such guidelines led him to contend that Jesus was not divine but that his name ought to be invoked in prayer as the medium through which God should be addressed.⁷⁶ Socinus' religious convictions, while interesting, did not digress from the precarious path of antitrinitarianism and into Judaism. Instead, his role in the antitrinitarian movement, as it pertained to Judaism, was more akin to that of Biandrata in Transylvania or the Lithuanian Unitarians who persecuted their Sabbatarian compatriots. Fearing that without the retention of Jesus' invocation in prayer, antitrinitarians would ultimately lapse into Judaism, Socinus renounced those antitrinitarians who abrogated the Trinity but who then became more seriously inclined towards Judaism.⁷⁷ Upon observing the abuses of his religious brethren at home and hearing of similar tales from abroad, Socinus became convinced that Judaism was not far from his modified, yet ultimately correct, version of Christianity. The very acknowledgment of this concern indicates his recognition that antitrinitarian reforms constituted a shift towards Judaism. The following story about Socinus highlights his fear of an antitrinitarian abuse of Christianity.

⁷⁵ Manuel, *Broken Staff*, 62.

⁷⁶ The chronological development of Socinus' beliefs can be found in Williams, *Radical Reformation*. Another important source for Socinus' life and beliefs is Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 397.

As a religious man highly concerned with social justice and peace, Jacob Paleologus was a Unitarian who tried to discern the supremacy of Unitarian doctrines directly from the scriptures. He understood Unitarianism, particularly as it had appeared in the Transylvanian and Lithuanian manifestations, as a potential bridge to the other religions that constituted God's people – in his view, the Jews and Muslims. Paleologus posited that the ancient Jews were the people of God and that their descendants, extant in three forms, were capable of receiving salvation for their part in the true monotheistic heritage. The Mosaic Jews were those who had rejected Jesus; those who had accepted him were designated the "Christians" of the Jewish race. "Christian Turks" was a term used to identify Muslims, also a people of God because of their recognition of Jesus' divine mission.⁷⁸ For Faustus Socinus, such notions were unacceptable and heretical, and were a perfect example of antitrinitarianism gone too far. In a series of harsh invectives, Socinus denounced Paleologus for his blasphemous misconceptions.⁷⁹ Although Paleologus did not adopt Jewish practices as the Sabbatarian antitrinitarians had in both Transylvanian and Lithuania, Socinus still accused him of being a Jew, thereby making Socinus the Polish equivalent of Biandrata or the Lithuanian Unitarians.⁸⁰

Even before the death of Socinus in 1604 and despite the constitutional safeguards instituted in Poland, persecution of Socinians became increasingly more common as Jesuits made headway during the Counter Reformation. In 1605, Socinians

⁷⁸ Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1151, 1265.

⁷⁹ Theophilus Lindsey, the Unitarian minister, in his *Historical Overview of the State of the Unitarian Doctrine*, 195-196, gives an abridged account of this affair and expounds upon the inappropriateness of Socinus accusing others of judaizing.

⁸⁰ Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1150-1153 gives a full picture of Paleologus' beliefs, including the fascinating way that he conceptualized the relationship of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. His typology and terminology is both unique and very interesting. For biographical information, see idem, 1123.

published and distributed the Rachovian Catechism, a detailed confessional explicitly outlining their principles and ideology, which allowed for the much more rapid spread of their ideas around Poland and Europe. Where their doctrinal beliefs did not take root, oftentimes their emphasis on rational inquiry and toleration did.⁸¹ Eventually subject to vehement excoriations and outright persecution, the Socinians fled from Poland. Many of them departed for Transylvania where they immersed themselves in a legally recognized Unitarian movement. Still others left for alternate European locales, in particular, Holland, where somewhat more liberal attitudes prevailed and they believed they would be safe from harm.

Antitrinitarian thought was not unfamiliar to Holland at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and in fact had been an important form of religious rebellion there throughout the Reformation. With the settlement of Socinians in Amsterdam, however, the dominant antitrinitarian presence noticeably shifted to these eastern refugees. Eventually, Holland became the gateway by which antitrinitarian ideas were able to spread across the Channel and into England.⁸² Although English reformists had contested the doctrine of the Trinity well before the Socinians had migrated westward, it is with the influence of these Polish fugitives that we begin our investigation of English antitrinitarianism from the Reformation to the late eighteenth century.

⁸¹ For a brief but inclusive summary of the events that comprised the beginnings of Socinianism, see the first chapter of John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951).

⁸² For accounts of the movement of Socinian ideas from Poland to Holland and finally to England see *Ibid.*; Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*; Williams, *Radical Reformation*.

CHAPTER TWO

AN ENGLISH STAGING GROUND: Where Everyone was a Little Bit Different

At the end of the seventeenth century, John Edwards, a prolific writer with Anglican Calvinist sympathies, vehemently argued in defense of orthodox Christianity by lambasting his most condemned opponents, the Socinians, a constant target of his ire and vilification. “See how faulty, how erroneous, how dangerous, how pernicious the *Theology* of the *Socinians* is,” Edwards proclaims in his 1697 tract, *The Socinian Creed*. This dreadful doctrine “is patch’d up of several different Opinions fetch’d from sundry quarters, it is a Fardle of mix’s and disagreeing Notions, it is a Nest of Heterodoxies, a Galimaufrey of Old and New Errors, a Medley of Heresies.” Worst of all, he cries, “they joyn with *Jews*, *Pagans*, and *Mahometans* in disowning and denying this Great Mystery of Religion.”¹

Edwards was unconcerned that the movement’s founder, Socinus, had retained the invocation of Jesus in prayer in order to prevent a lapse into Judaism; nor was he interested in Socinus’ gross disavowal of any connections to Judaism and judaizing. As a sect that denied the divinity of his lord and savior, Jesus Christ, the Socinians were deemed by Edwards as reprehensible as any other people who blasphemed the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, they may have been even worse: for it was the Socinians whose antitrinitarianism condoned the trip down that treacherous path away from Christianity and towards Judaism. The Socinians were therefore an even greater threat to the integrity

¹ Edwards, *Socinian Creed*, 221. Original emphasis. All emphasis in this chapter is by the original intention of the author unless otherwise indicated.

of the Christian religion than the Jews, who had always refused to accept the divinity of Jesus.²

Edwards was not the only writer at the end of the seventeenth century to link the Socinians and the Jews in a vitriolic diatribe. In his work, *Blasphemous Socinian Heresie Disproved and Confuted*, Jean Gailhard rails against the “blasphemous *Socinianism* attended by Atheism, Deism, Prophaneness, Immorality, yea and Idolatry” which “doth bare and brazen-faced walk in our streets.”³ Connecting the Socinians and their nonconformity with the Jews, he declares, “Because we look upon *Socinians* in their Principles to be a sort of Jews, and as well as they, Blasphemers against our holy and blessed Saviour, so we will bring such Arguments against them, as we would if we were disputing against unbelieving Jews.”⁴ Since Jews and Socinians fell victim to the same theological fallacies – denying the divinity of Jesus and the existence of the Trinity – Gailhard contended that one could argue with a Socinian as the Christians had argued for centuries against the Jews and their heresies. As the opening clause of his quotation insinuates, he considered Socinians to be essentially Jews. Socinus would have found such accusations against him or his followers horrendous and outrageous, but that was irrelevant for Edwards and Gailhard, who considered both Jewish and Socinian heresies equally condemnatory.

A correspondence between the late seventeenth century Unitarian merchant Thomas Firman and the philosopher John Locke demonstrates the importance of the Trinity to religious identity and lends credence to the perceived relationship between

² On Edwards, see Roland Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 111.

³ Jean Gailhard as quoted in Peter Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 89.

⁴ Gailhard, *Blasphemous Socinian Heresie*, 40.

antitrinitarianism and Judaism. During the time that Edwards and Gailhard wrote and published their works against Socinianism, Firman questioned Locke about a Dutch woman's conversion to Judaism. No longer able to accept the Trinity, she considered Judaism her only religious option. However, in 1695, this woman converted back to Christianity when she was told that she could be a Christian but that she would not be required to believe in the Trinity.⁵ That the inability to comply with the doctrine of the Trinity forced this woman to convert to Judaism – and to return to Christianity, no less – demonstrates the perceived differences between Judaism and Christianity and the importance of the Trinity to Christian religious identity. Although the specifics of this case were likely anomalous, the attitude described here – that antitrinitarianism and Judaism were closely related to one another – was most assuredly more widespread. It is improbable that either Edwards or Gailhard was aware of this case, but it makes their concern about the alleged similarities of an antitrinitarian belief system such as Socinianism and the Jewish religion seem far more reasonable.

Both Edwards and Gailhard were writing at a time when the orthodoxy of their church was being threatened by the unofficial toleration of nonconformist elements prevalent throughout English society.⁶ Toleration in the middle of the seventeenth century was, in general, not viewed positively. In fact, toleration was more commonly conceived as excusing heterodox beliefs or practices from proper punishment, and even as condemning the heretical adherents to eternal damnation by not insisting upon the

⁵ John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion, and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 391.

⁶ Many others significant authors wrote against antitrinitarianism as well. For an abridged list, see J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, ideology and politics during the ancient regime*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 360-361.

rectification of their theological mistakes.⁷ In turn, orthodoxy in seventeenth century England was not simply the way of the majority but the only path to salvation. As such, Anglican orthodoxy should rightfully have been forced upon all those who eschewed the truth of the English Church.

To staunch Anglicans, Socinianism, as a nonconforming force that was alien to England, challenged the very fabric of that increasingly complicated society; as a heresy incapable of being tolerated, it had to be eliminated. Although its foreign origins were reason enough to mistrust it, the primary basis for attacks on Socinianism was the sect's antitrinitarian doctrine. The repudiation of this foundational belief of the Christian religion prompted the association of Socinianism with Judaism. Interestingly, many of those classified as Socinians did not even profess the specifics of that faith, nor did they consider themselves followers of Socinus; as antitrinitarians on their way to strict Unitarianism, however, they were nonetheless labeled Socinians, the most condemnable form of blasphemers. In his 1687 *Brief History of the Unitarians*, Stephen Nye notes on the opening pages of three out of the four sections that comprise his text that the Unitarians are "vulgarly called Socinians."⁸ It was this work that set off the 13 year Unitarian Controversy, a period of antitrinitarian publication – met of course by trinitarian defenses of their religious doctrines – during which Edwards and Gailhard published their anti-Socinian tracts. It seems, then, that whether they approved or not, many of the antitrinitarians' theological enemies collectively labeled them Socinians.⁹

⁷ Blair Worden, "Toleration and the Cromwellian Protectorate," in *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W.J. Sheils (Padstow: T.J. Press Ltd, 1984), 200-201.

⁸ Stephen Nye, *Brief History of the Unitarians* (1687), 3, 41, 117.

⁹ Nicholas Tyacke, "The 'Rise of Puritanism' and the Legalizing of Dissent, 1571-1719," in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 30. Mention of Socinians in other essays of

Over a century and a half before Edwards and Gailhard, the Reformation occurred in England at the same time as it had on the continent. However, in the sixteenth century, those who expounded the particular antitrinitarian sentiments endemic to this island country were generally disconnected from one another, and their ideas often overlapped with other nonconformist notions such as Antinomianism and Anabaptism.¹⁰ The difference between the antitrinitarianism that appeared in England during the Reformation and the continental manifestation of antitrinitarianism was that the former initially lacked emphasis on the antitrinitarians' relationship with Judaism. To be sure, there were accusations of judaizing and a recognition that the Jews also denied the doctrine of the Trinity, but not until the latter half of the seventeenth century were these connections made consistent and explicit.¹¹

This disparity likely resulted from the notable absence of a pronounced Jewish community in England before 1656. Without the presence of Jewish people, and considering the relative isolation of the English, it would have seemed absurd to accuse someone of extreme Judaic influences. The arrival of Socinianism during the seventeenth century, coupled with the unofficial readmission of the Jews to England at mid-century, changed this situation by giving antitrinitarianism both a name and a face. As a result of these developments, Socinians became the primary target of orthodox Christians' ridicule when they addressed the antitrinitarian problem.¹² Even during the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Socinianism had waned in influence and other

this collection indicates the degree to which "Socinian" developed as a condemnatory label during the seventeenth century. See also, Clark, *English Society*, 324-335, and generally, McLachlan, *Socinianism*.

¹⁰ Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1196. This work also thoroughly explains the place of these religious trends during the rest of the sixteenth century Reformation.

¹¹ Ibid., see generally chapter 30.

¹² Worden, "Toleration," 203-204.

sophisticated antitrinitarian ideas had been enunciated by Englishmen, Socinianism – as a belief system known not only for its denial of the Trinity but also for its emphasis on reason and a freedom of conscience – remained associated with both liberalism and antitrinitarianism. Socinians, long persecuted for their beliefs, were viewed in England as the corrupters of Christianity, and by some, as having themselves been corrupted by the Jews.¹³

Just as elsewhere in Europe, mid-seventeenth century England was neither stagnant nor stable, and the environment that greeted Socinian antitrinitarianism was one of social, political, and intellectual upheaval. This dynamism was ceaselessly perpetuated and transformed by a complicated religious and intellectual current termed English Dissent, which had its roots as far back as the Reformation.¹⁴ Despite the classification, Dissent was not a united movement with a concrete religious and political agenda. Rather, a dissenter – a term which came to represent all those who would not return to the Church of England after the monarchical restoration – was anyone who objected to the unrestricted hegemony of the Anglican Church over religious thought in England.¹⁵

English Dissent went by many names: it was also known as Rational Dissent, Protestant Dissent and the nonconformist movement. These various titles provide some insight into the nature of the different kinds of dissenters and the argumentative techniques they employed. Dissenters, known also as separatists and nonconformists – all initially intended as pejorative designations – were Protestants, oftentimes scholars

¹³ See generally, McLachlan, *Socinianism*.

¹⁴ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 1, *From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1978), 1-5.

¹⁵ Clark, *English Society*, 318, 321.

and theologians, who believed that Englishmen had the right to freedom of conscience: that is, to read the Scriptures individually and to practice Christian worship in accordance with the truth discerned therein without fear of punishment. As one scholar of Dissent articulates, “Rational Dissent was not a unified and coherent doctrinal position but a voluntary association of individuals who recognised the rights of others to absolute religious liberty.”¹⁶ By denying the monopoly on religious exegesis claimed by the Anglican Church, and interpreting the Bible as he understood it, a man became a nonconformist. It was the combined efforts of these dissenting individuals, each struggling to gain the right to believe openly as he chose and then retain that right for future generations, which contributed to the religious freedoms secured by Englishmen during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁷

Antitrinitarianism, considered perhaps the most pernicious form of dissent, was also not initially a cohesive movement with a defined direction and agenda – especially not as it appeared in England. As those who denied the doctrine of the Trinity, antitrinitarians were condemned as enemies of religion and society; nonetheless, they were intellectually comfortable within this nonconformist milieu and promoted a policy of religious liberty that might eventually guarantee them freedom of conscience. English antitrinitarians were plagued by many of the same issues that faced their continental counterparts: just as Michael Servetus, the Socinians, and other antitrinitarians were accused of corrupting Christianity, so too were these extreme English dissenters

¹⁶ John Seed, “‘A set of men powerful enough in many things’: Rational Dissent and political opposition in England, 1770-1790,” in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 159. The other essays in this collection also offer excellent insight into the Dissenting movement.

¹⁷ On the difficulty faced by the nonconformist movement, see the collection of essays, Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke, ed., *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

considered an unacceptable presence in a world that already deemed itself too tolerant of recusants. Despite the staunch orthodox aversion to antitrinitarians, the latter's theology became increasingly refined over the course of the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth centuries, and it was in this complicated world of English Dissent that their heretical notions crystallized into the Unitarian movement. The Unitarians were a product of their antitrinitarian heritage, and yet in a fashion like none before them, they utilized Judaism and identified with the Jewish people in order to justify their own version of Christianity.

The revolutions of the mid-seventeenth century forever changed the political and intellectual climate of England, and had vast repercussions on the legitimacy of religious dissent. By 1649, after seven years of struggle and uncertainty, Oliver Cromwell and an abridged Parliament ended the English Civil War with the execution of Charles I, demonstrating that those in power were not necessarily always in the right. Indeed, the king's bloody deposition as well as Cromwell's subsequent dictatorial and puritanical rule served as a palpable reminder of this newly recognized reality. Not long after the Restoration of the monarchy with Charles II in 1660, Parliament invited William III of Holland and his wife, Mary – the second in line for English succession – to oust Charles' brother, James II, a Catholic whose religious proclivities were deemed a threat to Protestant England. These events, known as the Glorious Revolution of 1688, resulted in a constitutional monarchy and the religious supremacy of the Church of England.

Parliament issued a Bill of Rights in 1689, followed by an Act of Toleration that was designed to protect the right of religious worship for certain Protestant dissenters. Because the rights allotted to the people were minimal and since certain groups were

prohibited from benefiting by the act, many historians have classified the Toleration Act as the “so-called Toleration Act.” One author writes, “The so-called Toleration Act of 1689 ... in actual fact did no more than exempt certain carefully defined classes of Dissenters from certain specific penalties designed to prevent the exercise of their faith. The Toleration Act thus mitigated the religious, but not the political disabilities of the Dissenters.”¹⁸ Significantly, though, the Toleration Act allowed most Englishmen to express themselves religiously and intellectually without fear of stern legal reprisals. This increased tolerance, so important to Protestant dissenters, followed the principle, although in limited fashion, of freedom of conscience and was concomitant with the acknowledgment that each man should be permitted to discern the truth from the Holy Scriptures for himself.¹⁹ England, as far as toleration was concerned, was far ahead of its continental counterparts. For instance, the Edict of Nantes, issued by Louis XIV of France in 1685, banished all Huguenots (Protestants) from French lands. In that light, the Toleration Act should be remembered for its significance as a landmark in English history that began the slow but steady breakdown of restricting individual freedoms.²⁰

In addition to religious liberty, Rational Dissent, as its name suggests, generally stood for one other principle: the exercise of reason. Guidance by reason was one of the elements that unified many English dissenters, and also connected them to their continental brethren, the Enlightenment thinkers. For both the Enlightenment and Rational Dissent – two intellectual currents that often overlapped ideologically and

¹⁸ Andrew Browning, ed., *English Historical Documents*, vol. 8, 1660-1714 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953), 360.

¹⁹ Lois G. Schwoerer, *The Declaration of Rights, 1689* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

²⁰ On the importance of the Toleration Act, see Jonathan Israel, “William III and Toleration,” in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 129-170.

personally – reason was the *modus operandi*. Considered in many ways an eighteenth century continental phenomenon, the Enlightenment was by no means restricted by such geographical and chronological boundaries. English philosophers such as Isaac Newton, John Locke, and David Hume were all members of the Enlightenment, and also made important contributions to Rational Dissent. Moreover, every one of them entertained antitrinitarian ideas and meditated on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.²¹

Not only is Newton considered a Christian-Hebraist of sorts,²² but his Judaic influences have been conflated with his antitrinitarian proclivities. As Lord John Maynard Keynes said, “It may be that Newton fell under Socinian influences, but I think not. He was rather a Judaic monotheist of the school of Maimonides.”²³ This statement emphasizes the concatenation of antitrinitarian and Judaic influences, and highlights their mutual rejection of certain Christian beliefs.²⁴

John Locke also became embroiled in antitrinitarian controversy.²⁵ Edwards and Gailhard, in addition to others, accused him of adopting the blasphemous Socinian

²¹ On the religious ideas of Newton, see generally Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton: The Fremantle Lectures 1973* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). On Locke’s religious inclinations, see Marshall, *John Locke*; on conversations between Locke and Newton about the Trinity, see page 390. See also, Herbert McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1941). For Locke’s position regarding the Jews and toleration, see John Dunn, “The Claim to Freedom of Conscience: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Thought, Freedom of Worship?” in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 171-193.

²² See generally Matt Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998). James Force, “Newton, the Lord God of Israel and Knowledge of Nature,” in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard Popkin and Gordon Weiner (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 131-158, provides an interesting account of Isaac Newton’s concern with the Jews and the Jewish religion.

²³ John Maynard Keynes, “Newton The Man,” Newton Tercentenary Celebrations (Cambridge, 1947), 30, as quoted in Goldish, *Isaac Newton*, 4.

²⁴ On Newton’s antitrinitarianism, see Manuel, *Religion of Isaac Newton*, 57-58, 60-61; Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England: 1688-1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 249.

²⁵ On his antitrinitarianism, see Marshall, *John Locke*, 138-141, 389-395.

heresy, a not uncommon denunciation for anyone whose antitrinitarianism appeared threatening to orthodox Christianity.²⁶ While Newton and Locke did exhibit numerous heterodox tendencies, they were not as vilified as those for whom they laid the intellectual groundwork – a group best represented by outspoken men such as Herbert of Cherbury, John Toland, and Matthew Tindal.²⁷

The English thinkers who fled farthest from orthodox Christianity – those for whom doctrine and dogma essentially became irrelevant – were known as deists. Just as English Dissent was not a cohesive movement, the guidelines for circumscribing deism were somewhat nebulous as well.²⁸ Deists believed in a supreme power, likely God, but not necessarily the fickle and meddling God of the Bible. Although each deist carried his own particular set of beliefs, it was generally understood that he rejected religious doctrine because it could not be substantiated by reason. Generally speaking, a deist believed that every man deserved the freedom and respect to live according to his own beliefs, and in this way, deism fit comfortably within the intellectual environment of English Dissent.²⁹

The first thinker to express deist notions as they would be grappled with for the next two centuries was Herbert of Cherbury.³⁰ As an ambassador in France, Cherbury

²⁶ Ibid., 415-420; McLachlan, *Socinianism*, 327n. On non-condemnatory associations of Locke and Socinus, see Clark, *English Society*, 328.

²⁷ Peter Gay, *Deism: An Anthology* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1968), 24-26. For an account of Newton's deistic tendencies, see James E. Force, "Biblical interpretation, Newton and English Deism," in *Skepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Richard Popkin and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 282-305. Newton and Locke may not have been as constantly and vehemently condemned as others because their fame as important thinkers did not necessarily center upon religious matters. Rather, they were men of science. Moreover, they did not object to revealed religion, as it will be seen that the deists did, and they even made efforts to conceal their more controversial religious tendencies, particularly antitrinitarianism.

²⁸ David Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17.

²⁹ Gay, *Deism* 11-12; Rupp, *Religion in England*, 259; see also, Clark, *English Society*, 324-326.

³⁰ Rupp, *Religion in England*, 261.

was exposed to a host of continental ideas that helped mold his deist notions.³¹ He published his seminal work, *De Veritate*, in 1624. In it, Cherbury attempted to construct a list of fundamental tenets that would comprise the “true religion” – one in which everyone could believe.³² Because people of all religious persuasions would be able to adhere to the set of ideas that comprised this all-inclusive “Church”, certain Christian notions had to be excluded, particularly any reference to the Trinity and by association, Jesus’ divinity. Thus, deism constituted an enormous threat to Christianity because it sought to destroy the distinctive elements of that tradition, and thereby make Christianity no more important than the other religions.³³

Herbert of Cherbury was certainly not the only author to meditate upon the common religious axioms and to try to remove the specifically Christian elements from religion. John Toland – familiar at least minimally with the writings of Rabbi Simone Luzzatto³⁴ – was a rational deist of the late seventeenth century who published his first treatise, *Christianity not Mysteriorious*, in 1696.³⁵ In a later work, *Nazarenus*, published in 1718, just three years before his death, Toland sought to “dechristianize” Christianity, thereby creating a civic religion based on morality rather than doctrine.³⁶ In essence, this deist claimed that the fundamental form of Judaism – that is, stripped of its extraneous practices and beliefs – was no different than true Christianity. He writes, “Thus therefore THE REPUBLIC OF MOSES might still have subsisted entire, such as it was, or rather

³¹ For a further understanding of Herbert of Cherbury’s philosophy and its importance to skepticism as expressed in *De Veritate*, see Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V., 1960), particularly chapter 8.

³² Rupp, *Religion in England*, 261, provides a simple summary of Herbert of Cherbury’s beliefs regarding natural religion. See also, Manuel, *Broken Staff*, 176-177.

³³ Harrison, *Religions in the English Enlightenment*, 64.

³⁴ Manuel, *Broken Staff*, 186-7.

³⁵ Rupp, *Religion in England*, 261; Gay, *Deism*, 52-53.

³⁶ Jonathan Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 613.

ought to have been, in Judea, and yet the inhabitants be very good Christians too.”³⁷ By asserting that the Jewish people could have been Christians without destroying the society created by Moses, Toland enunciated a salient deist position and demonstrated his own understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism: the two religions were fundamentally identical, and met at what was essentially deism.³⁸ As has been observed of Cherbury’s fundamentals: “Indeed if one wished to cast the net wide enough to enmesh even Christians of the most radical stripe – Socinians and Arians – articles concerned with Incarnation and the Trinity ... would have no place in a list of fundamentals. This omission would in turn allow for the inclusion of Turks and Jews.”³⁹

In a similar spirit but composed more methodically, Matthew Tindal, another prominent deist, published his work, *Christianity as Old as the Creation, or the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature*, in 1731. Tindal wished to demonstrate that everything essential to Christianity had always existed and was discernable by reason alone; thus, anything understood by special revelation had no claim to truth. By the turn of the eighteenth century, Judaism and Christianity, as religions based on the unique messages delivered by revelation, were no longer special in the eyes of most deists.⁴⁰

The deists, although more extreme in their nonconformity than other dissenters, nonetheless represented the two aspects that had become part and parcel of the intellectual environment fostered during English Dissent: first, the deists believed that knowledge was discerned by the application of reason, and that every man was equally

³⁷ John Toland, *Nazarenus: or Jewish, Gentile and Mahometan Christianity* (1718), as quoted in Harrison, *Religions in the English Enlightenment*, 165-166.

³⁸ For more on Toland’s conception of Judaism, see Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 197-205.

³⁹ Harrison, *Religions in the English Enlightenment*, 64.

⁴⁰ Rupp, *Religion in England*, 267-273; Gay, *Deism*, 9-13.

capable of utilizing his own, innate reason. Naturally following was the second principle: each man could read the Bible for himself and, applying his reason, understand whatever truth lay within those Scriptures. Unlike other dissenters, however, the deists contended that any truth revealed in the Bible could be found elsewhere – thereby rendering scripture unnecessary – and they were condemned as corrupters of Christianity. As a result, deists were sometimes labeled Socinians.⁴¹ In part, such allegations were a result of deists' rationalist inclinations, a hallmark of Socinianism as well, rather than simply the antitrinitarianism that accompanied their rejection of religious doctrine.⁴² The Trinity, as arguably the most sensitive issue among those comprising Christian orthodoxy, was consistently the doctrine that deists chose to explore, exploit, and attack; additionally, many of their influences have been traced to Jewish sources and a not uncommon concern with Judaism.⁴³ It is these consistent elements – rationalism and the promotion of religious liberty – in addition to their association with antitrinitarianism, and even a preoccupation with Jews, Jewish sources, and Judaism, that make the deists an important part of English Dissent. Not only did they express themselves within this intellectual environment, but deists also contributed to the expansion of its ideas and influence.

One seventeenth century author in particular is worth mentioning in this context, not only because of his relevance as a rational dissenter who supported religious liberty, but also due to the fact that his own religious proclivities inclined towards

⁴¹ On the association of the two terms, see the quotation by Jean Gailhard from footnote 3.

⁴² Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Toleration and Religion after 1688," in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 401.

⁴³ On both deism and its Jewish influences, see Richard Popkin, "The Deist Challenge," in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 195-215. See also Rupp, *Religion in England*, 272.

antitrinitarianism and because of the influence of Judaism on his writings and belief system. This is the poet and author John Milton. Spanning three quarters of the seventeenth century, Milton's life is not relevant simply because he was a renowned product of his environment, but also due to the fact that he helped create the intellectual climate in which so many important scholars and theologians formulated their own contributions to English Dissent. Milton's literary masterpiece, *Paradise Lost*, followed by *Paradise Regained*, is replete with religious issues and imagery. More importantly, his religious convictions, as gleaned from his writings, are not those of a devout Anglican. Rather, they hint at a rebelliousness that has earned him the appellation of an antitrinitarian nonconformist.⁴⁴ In addition to his remarkable grasp of Christian ideas and thought, Milton's writings reveal a familiarity with rabbinics and other Jewish sources.⁴⁵ The author demonstrates a commendable knowledge of not only the Torah and the Aramaic Targums but of the exegetical and theological literature of the seventeenth century.⁴⁶

Later Unitarians who read Milton attempted to connect themselves to this prestigious author, not necessarily on the grounds of his Jewish influences, but because of his less than inconspicuous antitrinitarianism. Theophilus Lindsey, a Unitarian leader during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, adopted a unique opinion in the late 1770s, saying that, "In *Paradise Lost* Milton appears entirely to have gone over to the Arian sentiment," and "in his *Paradise Regained* a nearer contemplation of Christ's character in the evangelists seems to have led him very naturally to what is called

⁴⁴ McLachlan, *Milton, Locke and Newton*, 6.

⁴⁵ Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 52. On Milton's rabbinic influences, see Jeffrey S. Shoulson, *Milton and the Rabbis: Hebraism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ It was once thought that Milton was also acquainted with the Kabbalah, but such suppositions have since been debunked as an improper attribution of the author's influences; Manuel, *Broken Staff*, 145-146.

Socinianism.”⁴⁷ While it is true that Milton’s antitrinitarianism became increasingly heterodox over the course of his career, Lindsey’s ascription of Socinianism can be considered no more than a hopeful exaggeration. It is still notable that an author with antitrinitarian proclivities writing at a time when Jews were not even resident in England, and later only in scant numbers, had such a commendable knowledge of Jewish sources and texts.⁴⁸ Alongside the significance of his Judaic influences and antitrinitarian tendencies is the fact that Milton was greatly influential as a proponent of toleration, the utilization of reason for the discernment of truth, and the Protestant dissenter’s credo of a Bible open to the interpretation of all.⁴⁹ The combination of these elements makes Milton a quintessential thinker of the seventeenth century nonconformist era.

Most Englishmen, such as Milton, despite whatever external influences may have prevailed in their lives, retained their Christian belief systems. Others, however, could not help but take their own religious practice beyond Christianity. Such was the case with the English Sabbatarians, named – just as they had been in Hungary – after their most visible modification to Christian tradition. The Reformation during the sixteenth century saw a disconnected smattering of instances in which reformists opted to change the Christian Sabbath from Sunday to Saturday.⁵⁰ By the seventeenth century, this inclination had become characteristic of the Puritans; even before the reign of Cromwell, some Puritans identified themselves as the New Israel and meditated seriously about the

⁴⁷ Theophilus Lindsey, as quoted in McLachlan, *Milton, Locke and Newton*, 18.

⁴⁸ On Milton’s antitrinitarianism, see John P Rumrich, “Milton’s Arianism: why it matters,” in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75-92.

⁴⁹ On Milton’s exercise of toleration, see Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich, “Introduction: Heretical Milton,” in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

⁵⁰ For an interesting account of Sabbatarian issues and also a variety of cases in which Englishmen were accused of judaizing, see Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 13-42.

significance of the Mosaic Law and the adoption of those practices which many believed had never been annulled. In addition to such Judaic inclinations, Sabbatarians also investigated Jewish sources and authors, and just as others who increasingly identified with Judaism, developed a concern over Christian doctrines, particularly the Trinity.⁵¹ The sect was viewed with grave concern by almost all other Englishmen: they feared that, in combination with the Sabbatarians' antitrinitarianism, their maintenance of Jewish practices like kashrut and even circumcision would lead them to Jewish conversion. This, they contended, would dissuade others from maintaining the truth of the gospel. Thus, Sabbatarianism represented a substantial threat to orthodox Christianity: not only had Sabbatarians found fault with Christianity, but they saw truth in Judaism.⁵²

Although they were certainly an extreme case, it was little wonder that Christians like the Sabbatarians had begun to identify with Judaism in light of the ways that nonconformist education had developed during the seventeenth century. Nonconformists, banned from institutions like Oxford and Cambridge that forbade dissent, in order to teach themselves and their progeny not only theology, but also science and mathematics, language and rhetoric, educated their children in their own academies. With reason emerging in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the means by which nature and the universe were to be understood, the students of dissenting academies learned about the Bible and religion in a similar way to the secular subjects.

⁵¹ David Katz, "Jewish Sabbath and Christian Sunday in Early Modern England," in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard Popkin and Gordon Weiner (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 119-130.

⁵² On English Sabbatarianism, see David S Katz, *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988); Bryan W. Ball, *The Seventh-day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

To approach the Bible rationally and scientifically one had to peruse scripture closely and with a discerning eye, and doing so effectively required the study of both the Old and New Testaments in their original tongues. Thus, in addition to Greek, dissenting students learned Hebrew as part of their nonconformist biblical education.⁵³ Hebrew, Jewish history and Semitic studies became integral components of the nonconformist education, and eventually, the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth centuries were awash with scholars who were well versed in the Old Testament, its language, and its laws.⁵⁴

A later but highly significant contribution to Semitic studies was made by the antitrinitarian, John Taylor.⁵⁵ In the mid 1750s he wrote a masterpiece of scholarship entitled *The Hebrew Concordance*. As a nearly epic detailing of the Hebrew language and word usage, it is considered by some to be “the most valuable product of Semitic studies in the academies.”⁵⁶ Significantly, not only was John Taylor a nonconformist, but he was an antitrinitarian. Contributions such as these that valued the Hebrew language, the Old Testament and Jewish history to such a high degree were hallmarks of the nonconformist education. They also contributed to the association of antitrinitarianism with Judaism.⁵⁷

⁵³ On dissenting academies and the presence of Hebrew and Old Testament studies, see Rupp, *Religion in England*, 172-179.

⁵⁴ Herbert McLachlan, *Essays and Addresses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), 196. See also Seed, “Rational Dissent,” 151. On Christian-Hebraism in England, see Goldish, *Isaac Newton*, 19-22.

⁵⁵ For details on John Taylor’s religious beliefs, see Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 2, 267-268.

⁵⁶ McLachlan, *Essays and Addresses*, 195.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that Hebrew learning was not limited to dissenting academies; Anglicans were also familiar with Hebrew and the Old Testament and actively engaged their nonconformist theological opponents in debate. On the importance of Hebrew in England in the seventeenth century, see Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 9-13.

The combined effects of the deists, authors such as John Milton, the Sabbatarians, and all of the other Protestant dissenters provoked in the latter half of the seventeenth century a perceived need for Parliamentary intervention in religious matters. As a result, Anglicanism was reaffirmed as the official religion of England by a series of laws known as the Clarendon Code. Despite the extension of limited religious toleration from the king, Protestant Dissent and its participants came under fire as anti-nonconformist legislation began to overshadow the late Stewart era.⁵⁸ These measures were not only detrimental to dissenting Protestants, but to the country's Catholic minority as well – an issue that proved close to the heart of King Charles II, as he had secretive (although not unknown) dispositions towards Catholicism. Because the dissenters and the English Catholics suffered similar constraints under Anglican religious and political domination, the king often appeared a supporter of Protestant dissenters, whose distress he tried to alleviate by thwarting restrictive religious legislation through various declarations of indulgence.⁵⁹ While Anglicans had always accused dissenters of popish inclinations and of aligning themselves with Catholicism (an accusation which of course went both ways),⁶⁰ royal indulgences only seemed to strengthen the case that Protestant Dissent was a subversive force intent upon overthrowing the Church and thus the state.

The first restrictive law of the Clarendon Code – the Corporation Act – was issued in 1661, shortly after the coronation of Charles II. According to this law, “no person or persons shall forever hereafter be placed, elected or chosen in or to any the offices or places aforesaid that shall not have ... taken the sacrament of the Lord's Supper

⁵⁸ See *English Historical Documents*, vol. 8, 1660-1714, ed. Andrew Browning (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953), 365-409.

⁵⁹ Tim Harris, *Politics Under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1993), 55-56, 67-68.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13; on the difference between popery and Catholicism, see *idem*, 66.

according to the rites of the Church of England.”⁶¹ This meant that all those who refused to take the sacraments according to Anglican tradition were excluded from membership in local civil and political government. A year later, the Act of Uniformity required all teachers and ministers to consent unequivocally to Anglicanism or else to be forced from their posts;⁶² the Conventicle Acts in 1664 and 1670 allowed the government to collect fines from anyone involved in nonconformist meetings. While the Act also provided for the imposition of fines on those who did not report known nonconformists, the Five Mile Act of 1665 ensured that no minister ejected from his post for separatist proclivities could reside near his old parish.⁶³ These statutes collectively crippled the English dissenters and thwarted the toleration that they believed they rightfully deserved.

The next set of acts, the Test Acts issued in 1673 and 1678, became the largest hindrance to Protestant dissenters. Written under the guise of preventing the spread of Catholicism and limiting the rights of papists – a burgeoning concern as Charles’ flagrantly Catholic brother, James, appeared the likely successor to the throne – these laws actually affected everyone who was unwilling to take “the several oaths of supremacy and allegiance” as well as the sacraments of the Church of England by prohibiting their employment in any civil or military post.⁶⁴ This amounted to preventing any conscientious dissenter from occupying a position that was funded by the state, and the Second Test Act simply extended these same strictures to those wishing to serve as members of Parliament.

⁶¹ The Corporation Act of 1661, in *English Historical Documents*, vol. 8, 1660-1714, ed. Andrew Browning (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953), 376.

⁶² Harris, *Politics Under the Stuarts*, 40-41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁴ The Test Act of 1673, in *English Historical Documents*, vol. 8, 1660-1714, ed. Andrew Browning (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953), 390.

For Anglicans defending their religion, this legislation was imperative, and even over one hundred years after the enactment of the Test Acts they were still considered an essential safeguard against dissenters. As William Keate, an Anglican apologist, wrote in the last decade of the eighteenth century,

I shall take the liberty to refer them to the words of the learned Judge Blackstone upon this subject, who professedly says, that the two bulwarks of our Church against Dissenters of all descriptions, are the Corporation and Test Acts; and in their intention and application he makes no discrimination between them. 'In order,' he says, 'the better to secure the Established Church against perils from Non-conformists of all denominations, Infidels, Turks, Jews, Heretics, Papists, and Sectaries, there are two bulwarks erected, called the Corporation and Test Acts.'⁶⁵

Not only did Keate consider Protestant nonconformists a danger, but he also made sure to note that this classification extended to forces external to Anglicanism and even Christianity, both conceptually and geographically. The Jews, also restricted by anti-nonconformist laws, were classified alongside the dissenters.⁶⁶

After the Glorious Revolution and the arrival of William III, this era of persecution abated. In 1689, Parliament issued the Toleration Act to assuage the harsh penalties imposed by the anti-nonconformist legislation.⁶⁷ Notably, the relief provided by the Toleration Act was religious rather than political. More important, though, is that this law did not extend to all nonconformists,⁶⁸ but rather excluded a specific subset of dissenters from its purview: the antitrinitarians. Clause fourteen, located at the end of the Toleration Act, states:

⁶⁵ William Keate, *A Free Examination of Dr. Price's and Dr. Priestley's Sermons* (London: J. Dodsley, Pall Mall, 1790), 38-39.

⁶⁶ On seventeenth century English intolerance and the accompanying laws, see Tyacke, "Legalizing of Dissent," 17-49.

⁶⁷ On both the role of William III in the continued breakdown of religious intolerance and on the Toleration Act, see Israel, "William III and Toleration," 129-170.

⁶⁸ For a thorough discussion of the variety of religious and dissenting groups in England, see in general Rupp, *Religions in England*.

Neither this Act nor any clause, article or thing herein contained shall extend or be construed to extend to give any ease, benefit or advantage to any papist or popish recusant whatsoever, or any person that shall deny in his preaching or writing the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity as it is declared in the aforesaid articles of religion.⁶⁹

It is unsurprising that Catholics were excluded from benefiting by the Toleration Act since they had long been viewed as the religious enemy, but the fact that antitrinitarians were the other group unequivocally denied relief by the Toleration Act indicates the degree to which contesting the Trinity was understood as a threat to orthodox Christianity.

The perceived threat of antitrinitarians was so large by the end of the seventeenth century, in fact, that in 1697, in order to reinforce the danger that they supposedly posed to a Christian state, the Blasphemy Act was issued. Designed “for the effectual suppressing of blasphemy and profaneness,” the Act was constructed to prevent anyone from denying the veracity of the Christian religion or from questioning the divine authority of both the Old and New Testaments. As antitrinitarianism was believed to encapsulate these crimes, the Blasphemy Act was targeted specifically at “those who would ‘deny any one of the persons in the holy Trinity to be God, or ... assert or maintain there are more Gods than one.’”⁷⁰ In effect, this law sought to marginalize the antitrinitarians – perhaps the greatest threat to orthodox Christianity – as much as possible. So, although the concept of toleration was becoming slightly more acceptable by the end of the seventeenth century, the heresy of the antitrinitarians was still too blasphemous to be allowed.

⁶⁹ The Toleration Act, in *English Historical Documents*, vol. 8, 1660-1714, ed. Andrew Browning (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953), 403.

⁷⁰ James A. Herrick, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists: The Discourse of Skepticism, 1680-1750* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 5.

While this antitrinitarian classification included all those Christians who denied the Trinity, one more significant group – notably mentioned by Keate – must be acknowledged within this categorization as well: the Jews. The Toleration Act effectively forced antitrinitarians and Jews, as two groups who denied the truth of the Trinity, into the same classification. The significance of this factor to the perceived relationship between antitrinitarians and Jews cannot be disregarded. Because Jews were technically antitrinitarians, their identical designation under the law reinforced and perpetuated the identification of many antitrinitarians with the Jews and Judaism, and resulted in the condemnation of both by their mutual enemies: trinitarian Christians.

This joint classification of antitrinitarians and Jews was not limited to the legal realm. Just as the Transylvanian and Lithuanian Unitarians condemned the Sabbatarians in their midst who were deemed excessive in their antitrinitarian beliefs, the Anglican opponents of nonconformists berated Socinians and other English antitrinitarians for corrupting orthodox Christianity and adopting the beliefs of the Jews. Those two enemies of Socinianism who were so appalled at late seventeenth century toleration – John Edwards and Jean Gailhard – repeatedly verbalized the perceived proximity of antitrinitarianism and Judaism.

Jean Gailhard, unable to believe that antitrinitarians could be as obstinate about the idea of the Trinity as Jews had been for centuries, directed his polemic at the Socinians as if they were making Jewish claims. “And tho’ sometimes I bring in things which directly relate to the Jews,” he writes, “yet they reach *Socinians* as well as *Jews*, for both are Enemies; the first indeed deny Christ to be the *Messiah*, though the Antients owned him to be God, and *Socinians* own him to be a *Messiah*, but deny him to be true

God.”⁷¹ While equating Socinian and Jewish arguments, Gailhard at least differentiated between the two faiths by noting their divergent views of Jesus. To Gailhard, though, neither conception of his Messiah was acceptable, and so he considered both Jews and Socinians enemies of true Christianity. While grouping Jews and antitrinitarians together was not unique, as demonstrated by earlier English legislation, Gailhard conflated the two theological dispositions in a way that the Test Acts and the Toleration Act had not: “Because we look upon *Socinians* in their Principles to be a sort of Jews, and as well as they, Blasphemers against our holy and blessed Saviour, so we will bring such Arguments against them, as we would if we were disputing against unbelieving Jews.”⁷² Like the Transylvanian Unitarians before him, Gailhard accused the Socinians, and by extension all antitrinitarians, of in essence being Jews.

John Edwards’ similarly motivated work asseverates the similarities between Jews and Socinians. “I could observe that they [Socinians] industriously comply with *Jews and Turks*, in opposition to and defiance of all Sober *Christians*,” Edwards writes. “To gratifie the former, they think fit to renounce the avowed Principles of the latter.”⁷³ In his eyes, the Socinians, a designation he too applied to essentially all antitrinitarians, had become like the Jews out of a desire to appease and attract them. For the Socinians, it was acceptable to destroy orthodox Christianity in order to become aligned with the Jews and the Muslims.

Along similar lines, but generally more extreme in his accusations than Edwards, Gailhard sets up one of the most vituperative denunciations he can muster: “I ask *Socinians*, Did Christ speak the truth when he said he was the Son of God, one with him,

⁷¹ Gailhard, *Blasphemous Socinian Heresie*, last page of preface.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷³ Edwards, *Socinian Creed*, 227.

or of the same Nature, and to him equal in Power? I farther ask, whether the High Priest and the rest did not well apprehend this to be the true meaning of his words?" Answering his own questions, he then declares, "If so, as certainly both are true; if *Socinians* had been in the place of the *Jews*, they would have used him as they did, and would do the like if ever it were in their power."⁷⁴ This amounted to declaring that had the Socinians been present in the days of Jesus, they would have acted as Christians accused the Jews of acting: by slaying the Messiah. As he declares, "The same Question as was between our Saviour and the Jews is now between *Socinians* and us; he said he was Son of God, equal and one with the Father, which *Socinians* no more than *Jews* are willing to believe."⁷⁵ Not only, then, did Gailhard consider argumentation with Socinians equivalent to debating with the Jews, but he advanced the notion that their Jewish proclivities extended to more than just their modern-day beliefs. The Socinians, with their detestably blasphemous destruction of Jesus' divinity by abolishing the Trinity, were akin to the ancient Jews who had murdered the savior of all mankind. When Edwards and Gailhard compared the Socinians with the Jews in such slanderous ways, they were no doubt aware that the connotation of labeling antitrinitarians Jews was more insulting than merely equating them with the Jewish people, as the word Jew had become for some an opprobrious and condemnatory term.⁷⁶ As one historian explains:

John Edwards maintained that Socinians had drunk deeply at the well of heterodoxy, their beliefs being a compound of virtually all of the trinitarian heresies which had ever been published. They were Ebionites, Sabellians, Samosatenians, Arians, Photinians, and Macedonians. But ultimately he identifies them not with the heretics, but with '*Jews*,

⁷⁴ Gailhard, *Blasphemous Socinian Heresie*, 99.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁶ Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660 – 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 48.

Pagans, and *Mahometans*', all of whom deny the great mystery of the Trinity.⁷⁷

Anyone who denied the Trinity, then, could be classified as a Jew, and that maligning appellation alone connoted vehement disapproval and odious overtones.

An issue relevant to both antitrinitarians and traditional Christian apologists alike was that the concept of the Trinity had always proven a hindrance to the Jews' acceptance of Christianity and of Jesus as their Messiah. For the defenders of orthodoxy, it was entirely natural that the Jews could not understand the Trinity: for not only was their rationality a hindrance to the comprehension of divine matters, but they were unprepared for a Messiah that was not entirely human. Of their inability to grasp spiritual issues, Gailhard writes, "They that are Servants to their carnal Reason, do not receive that which is above it; and in this matter there are other Causes of the blindness and hatred of Jews."⁷⁸ Of the complications of Jesus' nature, he explains that "The Divinity of Christ was the Stumbling-block to the Jews, who could not endure to hear him call himself the Son of God absolutely and without limitation."⁷⁹ Edwards also acknowledged the difficulty of this doctrine to the Jews, but lambasted the Socinians and other antitrinitarians in the process:

It is often mention'd by *Socinus* and other *Racovian* Writers that this doctrine and that of the *Incarnation* hinders *Jews* and *Turks* from embracing the *Christian Religion*. And even the late *Socinian* Penmen in their *New Tractates* talk much of this, that the doctrine of the *Trinity* puts a stop for the conversion of *Jews*, *Mahometans*, and *Heathens*: and thereupon they are very earnest with their Readers to abandon this Great Point of Christianity, in mere complacency with those Infidels.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Harrison, *Religions in the English Enlightenment*, 144.

⁷⁸ Gailhard, *Blasphemous Socinian Heresie*, 260.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁰ Edwards, *Socinian Creed*, 227.

While the two orthodox Christian writers believed that the Socinians' willingness to bow to the needs of Jews irrespective of Christian integrity was a sign that they were no better than the Jews in their religious sensibilities, in contrast, the antitrinitarians believed that they were returning to true Christianity. As it was more similar to the Jewish religion, a Christianity that respected the unity of God, they hoped, would ultimately prove attractive to the Jews.⁸¹

The conversionary desires to which Edwards referred were not by any means unique to the antitrinitarians, but rather abounded throughout seventeenth century England. Anglicans, Protestant dissenters, deists, and antitrinitarians all flirted with schemes of Jewish conversion.⁸² Unique to the antitrinitarian conversionary discussions, though, was the belief that the Jews' acceptance of Christianity was occluded entirely by the doctrine of the Trinity. Not only did the Trinity contradict the Jewish respect for reason, they contended, but it violated the centrality of the Jewish principle of God's unity. When antitrinitarians modified orthodox Christianity, they claimed to have done so in order to return the religion to its true form; only secondarily was it fortunate that these adjustments would be attractive to the Jews. According to authors like Edwards

⁸¹ While it was difficult to find direct statements by English antitrinitarians conveying this sentiment, Edwards' comments, although biased, make it clear that such beliefs existed. Although about American antitrinitarianism, the findings of Conrad Wright are nonetheless interesting: "In 1755, Jonathan Mayhew appeared in print with ridicule of the Athanasian version of the doctrine. He seemed to be blurting out, in characteristically blunt fashion, something which his more discreet colleagues only whispered among themselves. He spoke of the importance of the unity of God, 'the not sufficiently preserving of which *Unity and Supremacy* amongst Christians, has long been just matter of reproach to them; and a great stumbling-block both to *Jews* and *Mahometans*.'" As the author notes, making such observations aloud was hitherto not practiced. Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955), 204.

⁸² See for instance, Yosef Kaplan, Henry Mechoulam and Richard Popkin, ed., *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989).

and Gailhard, however, antitrinitarians were willing to destroy Christianity in order to satisfy the Jews and induce their conversion.⁸³

By the eighteenth century, both internal and external factors had combined to create a situation in which antitrinitarians began to identify with the Jewish people. The nonconformist education, with its considerable emphasis on the Hebrew language, Jewish history and the Old Testament, caused many antitrinitarians to feel in control of the materials that were once dominated by Jews and to reclaim the entire Bible as their own. Moreover, the eighteenth century saw greater acceptance of the notion of toleration: the restrictive laws of the Clarendon Code became neglected, and dissenters like antitrinitarians began to pursue their aberrant theological inclinations more freely. External factors contributed to this identification as well. Not only had antitrinitarians been classified with the Jews from a legal standpoint, but their theological enemies had accused them of essentially being Jews. The conglomeration of these elements amounted to an eighteenth century antitrinitarian identification with the Jewish past and people to which they had already been connected in so many ways.

Nathaniel Lardner was a significant antitrinitarian author active during the first half of the eighteenth century, whose Arian writings – more Socinian in many ways than Arian – were significant for later antitrinitarians.⁸⁴ In his influential book published in 1743, *The Circumstances of the Jewish People an Argument for the Truth of the Christian religion*, he writes, “These people called Christians, of Gentil stock and

⁸³ The details of antitrinitarianism and its conversionary and millennialist impulses are the subject of chapter 4.

⁸⁴ Arians believed that Jesus, though divine, was inferior to God, the Father, but retained the Incarnation doctrine which stated that Jesus was both God and man. For further specifics on Arianism, see Wright, *Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 202; Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 1, 371. On the difference between Socinianism and Arianism, see Clark, *English Society*, 326.

original, declare themselves worshipers of the one living and true God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God, who delivered the law by Moses, and often spake unto the children of Israel by the prophets.”⁸⁵ The title alone speaks to the nature of his intellectual influences and inclinations, and the author proclaims from the outset his intention to demonstrate the truth inherent to Christianity by discussing Jewish history. The Christians, he explains, worshipped the same God once revered by the Hebrew patriarchs – the very same God who gave the Jews his laws. This antitrinitarian approach is not unfamiliar. Michael Servetus also began his arguments for the true Christian religion by referring to the one God of the Jews, because good Christians, like good Jews, did not subscribe to the fallacious doctrine of the Trinity. Christians, as the inheritors of the Jewish way, “do not make void the law of Moses, but establish it,” Lardner writes. “For their religion strictly requires obedience to all the moral laws of righteousness and true holiness therein delivered, and upon which the greatest stress is there laid.”⁸⁶ As an antitrinitarian, the most righteous and holy element of the Mosaic Law was that God was to be worshipped in his oneness, and Lardner believed that the Christians were to preserve that divine ordinance as the Jews always had. The connections Lardner drew to ancient Judaism exemplify the way he understood himself and the theological tradition of which he was a part.⁸⁷

Lardner also maintained the antitrinitarian tradition of placing an esteemed importance on the value of the Old Testament. Emphasizing the centrality of the Hebrew Scriptures to Christians, Lardner writes, “Nor are they only worshipers of the one living

⁸⁵ Nathaniel Lardner, *The Circumstances of the Jewish People an Argument for the Truth of the Christian Religion* (London: 1743), 12.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁷ On Lardner, see Andrew Kippis, *The Life of Nathaniel Lardner*, in *The Works of Nathaniel Lardner*, vol. 1 (London: 1788), vi.

and true God, the God of the people of Israel, but they also receive the scriptures of the Old Testament, delivered in a succession of ages, at divers times, to the descendents of Abraham and Israel.”⁸⁸ This could hardly be misconstrued as controversial because all Christians believed, to some degree or another, in the Old Testament. However, the following statement demonstrates Lardner’s unique attitude on the issue, a product of both his nonconformist and antitrinitarian heritage. He writes of the Jewish Scriptures that Christians “believe them to be the writings of men, animated and inspired by the Spirit of God, and have them in equal veneration with the Jewish people themselves.”⁸⁹ Since the Jews did not consider the New Testament divine revelation, they valued the Old Testament as the singularly authoritative divine commandment. Although this was assuredly not the same way that Lardner revered the Jewish Scriptures, his words nonetheless attempt both a reclamation of the Hebrew Scriptures from the Jews while simultaneously excluding from the definition of Christianity any who did not esteem the Old Testament as highly as they did. Lardner’s identification with the Jews is present here in two ways: first, by linking Christians – in his view, good Christians who properly understood the Bible – to the heritage of ancient Judaism, and second, by formulating his designation of a Christian by that man’s willingness to value equally the Old and New Testaments. In this way, antitrinitarians began to circumscribe their understanding of Christianity in Jewish terms.

Like essentially all English antitrinitarians, Lardner was still, however, a proud Christian, and in order to keep the two religions separate, he made the definition of a Christian distinct from that of a Jew. He writes, “These Christian people differ indeed

⁸⁸ Lardner, *Circumstances of the Jewish People*, 12-13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

from the Jews in receiving a person as a great and eminent Prophet, whom the Jews reject.” Notably, this singularly distinguishing feature of Christianity was offered in Jewish terms: rather than at first referring to Jesus as the Messiah, something he did later, Lardner called him a prophet. The significance of this designation is that prophet was the appellation Jews applied to their religious leaders in biblical times. In Judaism, the prophets were part of the chain of transmission that ultimately resulted in the ability of modern day rabbis to claim the right to interpret the *Tanach* (the collection of books which for Christians essentially comprised the Old Testament) and the Oral Law. If Jesus was a prophet along the same line of authority, and the Christians were the inheritors of his commands and the interpreters of his mandate, then as a true Christian, Lardner maneuvered himself and other antitrinitarians into a valid position from which to understand and interpret the meaning of the Old Testament. Moreover, he simplified the differences between a Jew and a Christian by learning Hebrew and the Old Testament, claiming the Jewish heritage as his own, and making Jesus a Jewish prophet. It is also interesting to note Lardner’s use of the third person when referring to Christians. He never says, “we Christians,” but refers exclusively to “these Christian people.” This disassociation serves to distance the author from his subject and therefore show his supposedly disinterested and more valid position.

Lardner distinguished Christianity in one final way, but again, did so in Jewish terms: “And indeed the religion of Christians is that of Abraham, according to which he was justified, without the peculiarities of the law of Moses.”⁹⁰ Rather than tell his reader what unique beliefs qualified a Christian, Lardner chose instead to define his religion in contrast to Judaism. Whereas orthodox Christians might have said that the religion of a

⁹⁰ Ibid., 15-16.

Christian was a belief in Jesus' divinity and the doctrine of the Trinity – elements uniquely Christian – Lardner explained Christianity as Judaism without the Mosaic Law. Throughout the remainder of his book, Lardner attempted to demonstrate how the Christians had become the rightful inheritors of this ancient Jewish tradition. The significance of Lardner's writing is not that scholars – whether Protestant dissenters, Anglicans or Catholics – had not venerated the Old Testament and linked modern day Christianity to Judaism before this. It is that Lardner, as an antitrinitarian, wrote a book in which the foundations of Christian authority were delivered in Jewish terms and rested on Christianity's relationship with its parent religion. Lardner, then, preserved the antitrinitarian tradition of defining Christian identity as it was shaped by Judaism.⁹¹

Defining oneself in terms of the other was certainly not a practice confined to nonconformist antitrinitarianism. The very means by which the Jews of seventeenth and especially eighteenth century England defined and understood themselves were drastically altered by the influences of their host environment.⁹² Over the course of only a few generations from the seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, the Jews went from a group that defined itself almost exclusively by its own heritage, to one that understood its identity in the terms of its host society. This situation derived in part from the environment the Jews discovered after their unofficial readmission to England in the

⁹¹ Significantly, it is Lardner's writings as a dissenting scholar that persuaded Joseph Priestley, a preeminent Unitarian theologian (and one significantly involved with the situation of the Jews), to make the theological move from Arianism to Unitarianism. On Lardner's influence see Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 2, 265; R.K. Webb, "The Emergence of Rational Dissent," in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36; J. van den Berg, "Priestley, the Jews and the Millennium," in *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, ed. David Katz and Jonathan Israel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 258; and Joseph Priestly, *Memoirs of Joseph Priestley to the Year 1795* (Northumberland: John Binns, 1806), 30-32.

⁹² The following understanding about the intellectual situation of the Jews in England is derived largely from the work of David Ruderman and his book, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*. For a thorough understanding of the historiographical debate about the place of the Jews in England during the modern era, see his introduction.

middle of the seventeenth century, which was unlike any other they had encountered on the continent.⁹³ Along with access to relatively untrammelled private religious worship, English society afforded the Jews a practically unprecedented degree of integration, and perhaps more significantly, as the eighteenth century progressed, a forum that allowed them to engage in the practice of dissent and governmental protest.⁹⁴ While the latter privileges were exercised by but a few English Jews, the other unique elements of the Anglo-Jewish experience resulted in a situation unlike nearly any other in Europe: eventually, the Jews of England evolved from a multilingual society to a monolingual one. As the historian David Ruderman explains,

In a society that allowed its Jewish minority a relatively higher degree of social integration than anywhere else in Europe, where many professional, educational, and social barriers had practically disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century, despite the failure of the Jew Bill of 1753 and despite a residue of public hostility to both the Jewish upper and lower classes, linguistic assimilation into the English language proceeded rapidly, in the course of one or two generations, across all classes of English Jewish society.⁹⁵

English, rather than Hebrew, became the linguistic medium through which late eighteenth century English Jews conceptualized their identities. The effects of this linguistic

⁹³ This is true except perhaps with the possible exception of the Netherlands. Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 158-159.

⁹⁴ One conflict early in the seventeenth century during which certain Jews exercised their right to protest was actually the result of an incident internal to the Jewish community. The Sephardic Jews, in many ways mimicking the Christian anti-Semitism that prevailed at that time, opposed the entrance of the Ashkenazi Jews to England, and petitioned to have them removed to Ireland. Interestingly, the subsequent upsurge in Christian philo-semitism – a trend that tried to assimilate the Jews by being kind and respectful – brought a concomitant Sephardic reevaluation of the Ashkenazi Jews. Seemingly imitating their Christian hosts, the Sephardim seem at this point to have treated their coreligionists from the continent with a greater deal of respect and courtesy. While exemplary of the ways that the Jews practiced their right to petition the government, it is more important as an illustration of the Anglo-Jewish habit of reflecting the opinions and behaviors of the English society into which the Jewish community had become integrated. For a full explanation of this event and the larger phenomenon, see Gordon Weiner, “Sephardic Philo- and Anti-Semitism in the Early Modern Era: The Jewish Adoption of Christian Attitudes,” in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard Popkin and Gordon Weiner (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 189-214.

⁹⁵ Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment*, 7.

transformation were far reaching, penetrating to the depths of the Anglo-Jews' understanding of themselves, their religion and their environment.⁹⁶

Proceeding in the language of their host society, the Jews began to understand and define themselves in terms of the other – in this case, Protestant Christianity – much as the antitrinitarians were doing with them. The centrality of language to this transformation can hardly be overemphasized: as English became the medium through which daily life was conducted, integration into British society progressed with increasing thoroughness. While not everyone took advantage of the intellectual environment provided by Rational Dissent, a small group of educated Jewish elite appreciated a climate in which they could read such influential authors as Locke, Newton, Stillingfleet and Voltaire. “They absorbed radical ideas about God, revelation, nature and history from their firsthand engagement with books and conversations present in their own culture and society.”⁹⁷ Just as Anglo-Jews had done socially and religiously, the intellectuals among their numbers began to digest elements of their host culture. As Jewish thought became influenced by the ideas of Rational Dissent and the Enlightenment, many aspects of Jewish culture were transformed, and the tools of constructing an Anglo-Jewish identity were replaced. Jews even began to use the official English Christian translation of the Bible – the King James Version – rather than the Hebrew text or even a translation from the Masoretic text.⁹⁸ This created a common ground for religious discourse between Christians and Jews unique to the Anglo-Jewish experience.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid., 7, 215-218, and generally chapter 6.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁸ This is the version of the Hebrew Scriptures that is rabbinically approved.

⁹⁹ Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment*, 7-8.

While the Jewish community in England assimilated in ways that brought it more in line with English culture, the nonconformist education simultaneously provided Christians with a better understanding of Jews and Judaism. The result was twofold. On the one hand, Christians were afforded a considerably more equitable position from which to engage in religious debate, yet on the other, Jews lost their control and mastery of the Hebrew texts that had once given them an advantage over Christian scholars and theologians. This usurpation of what Jews had considered uniquely theirs did not go unnoticed. Christian claims on the Bible in the educated environment of English Dissent, like those made by Lardner, undermined the right of biblical interpretation that Jewish scholars had once taken for granted.

The combined effects of these various factors had staggering results on the cohesiveness of the Jewish community. As David Ruderman observes,

Ultimately, this rich blending of English elements with Jewish culture would create its special effect: the diminution of a separatist Jewish community and elite religious authority; the erosion of Jewish literacy and praxis to the lowest common denominator; the translation of Jewish belief into Protestant terms, with respect to both forms of worship and more personal expressions of religious faith.¹⁰⁰

While the experience of the English Jews was unlike any other Jewish community on the continent during this time, it is clear that such extreme cultural compromise and adaptation came with its own set of consequences. For a community that had established itself in the inimitability of its ancient heritage, assimilation and a common ground with the host society could jeopardize Jewish claims to a distinctive identity – an identity antitrinitarians hoped to adapt for themselves and their understanding of Christianity.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 10.

After more than one hundred years of unprecedented upheaval and remarkable change, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the rise and growth of English Dissent, an intellectual movement and environment that shaped the thinkers and ideas that emerged within it, while simultaneously transforming itself. The advent of antitrinitarianism within this milieu of consistently increasing tolerance set in motion the same phenomenon that had occurred during these religious nonconformists' continental manifestation: the utilization of and identification with Judaism. While this was a means of better understanding themselves, antitrinitarians also sought a more persuasive position within Christian discourse and considered their knowledge of Judaism a way to bolster their claims as the possessors of Christian truth. In addition, this theological proximity, they believed, might persuade an increasingly assimilated Jewish community to convert to Christianity. Disagreeing with both their deviant strategies and heretical theological assertions, orthodox Christians contested antitrinitarian claims to truth, and argued that they threatened Christianity by not only moving towards Judaism, but by in fact becoming Jews. All of these factors surrounding antitrinitarianism by the second half of the eighteenth century, culminated in the thought and actions of the two leaders of the Unitarian movement: Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley. It is to their story that we now turn.

CHAPTER THREE

AS CLOSE AS IT GETS: Theophilus Lindsey and the Unitarians' Jewish Identity

The pressure of antitrinitarian angst finally found relief on April 17, 1774 as the Reverend Theophilus Lindsey founded the first Unitarian Church at the Essex Street Chapel, thereby officially inaugurating the sect that would emerge as an essential component of the nonconformist movement in England.¹ Born in 1723, Lindsey grew up in the midst of English Dissent and, not yet exhibiting his heterodox tendencies, was educated at Cambridge University. He declined all inducements to become a scholar, and instead followed his passion for the ministry, deciding that he could best exercise the faculties of Christian charity that way.² After his schooling, Lindsey occupied three different ministerial posts within the English Church until he could no longer reconcile subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles (the Anglican catechism) and the trinitarian doctrine that it promulgated.³ Unable to assuage the rumblings of his conscience after a final fallacious avowal to these tenets, Lindsey concluded that it was morally reprehensible, not simply that the Church monopolized biblical interpretation, but that it offered praise and thanks to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. According to Lindsey, such tidings should be delivered only to God the Father. Distraught with grief over his

¹ Unitarian meeting-houses were alleged to have existed in London by the very beginning of the eighteenth century. However, this assertion is contained in Charles Leslie's, *The Socinian Controversy Discussed, wherein the chief of the Socinian tracts are considered*, published in 1708, and he did not offer this information simply as an observation but as a reason for concern. Regardless of the validity of these statements, Lindsey's was the first publicly, self-declared church that officially subscribed to Unitarian worship. For more on the spread of Unitarian ideas in the early eighteenth century, see Henry Clark, *History of English Nonconformity*, vol. 2, *From the Restoration to the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Russall and Russall, 1965), 156-158.

² On the Unitarian preoccupation with charity, see Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 2, *The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 278-279.

³ On the Thirty-Nine Articles, see E.J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929).

conflicting spiritual circumstances, Lindsey consumed himself in his work with the poor. It was not enough to quash the guilt growing within him, however, and so by the beginning of the 1770s, he felt no choice but to leave his Anglican appointment. Lindsey offered a carefully drafted defense of his resignation, entitled, *Apology for Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick at Yorkshire*, and after delivering a *Farewell Address* to his congregation, he and his wife moved to London to start anew.⁴ It is there that after two years of poverty and hardship, Theophilus Lindsey opened the first Unitarian Church.⁵

The increasingly unmanageable spiritual burden festering within Lindsey is an indication of the stifling nature of religious conformity: only after his move to London could Lindsey properly expound upon his theological sentiments. Unitarian ideas had certainly been present among the nonconformists in England before Lindsey, but not until his bold move was there a tangible Unitarian movement or sect. Lindsey created an institution that defined itself on the basis of its rejection of the Trinity, the humanity of Jesus as the Messiah, and the worship of only God the Father. Unitarians, unlike their Socinian brethren, would not even offer prayer through Jesus – that alone was blasphemous. Despite Theophilus Lindsey's bold enunciation of Unitarianism, the dissenting minister recognized the rich heritage of antitrinitarian thought and tradition that had preceded his own struggle.

Returning to the movement's continental beginnings during the Reformation, Servetus was for Lindsey the teleological benchmark of conscientious intransigence. "To

⁴ It is noteworthy that Lindsey, despite the significance of his resignation, was not the first to leave the Anglican Church to pursue his Unitarian beliefs. In fact, he followed the precedent set by William Robertson, a man who Lindsey wrote of as "the father of Unitarian nonconformity." Clark, *English Society*, 374.

⁵ In Priestly, *Memoirs*, 68-70, the author discusses Lindsey's hardships from the perspective of their friendship. See also Earl Morse Wilbur, *Our Unitarian Heritage*, chapter XXXI [book on-line] (Beacon Press, 1925, accessed 24 December, 2005); available from <http://online.sksm.edu/ouh>. See also Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, vol. 2, 280-285.

this violent and extreme prejudice, which was then entertained by almost all, against such as opposed the doctrine of the Trinity,” he writes, “we must attribute Calvin’s most ungenerous and barbarous behaviour towards the ingenious Spanish physician, and innocent sufferer, Servetus, whom he caused to be burnt alive at Geneva, for his opinions concerning the Trinity.”⁶ The Unitarian minister’s writings reflect his vision of himself among this long line of nonconformists, which included not only Servetus, but Socinus, the continental antitrinitarians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and especially the dissenting antitrinitarians of his own country.⁷ Significantly, one common trend among Theophilus Lindsey and his predecessors is that Judaism also had a natural and irrevocable place in the antitrinitarian theology and identity of the first self-declared Unitarian minister in England.

As a prolific author whose ideas became increasingly sharpened with each passing year, Lindsey’s understanding of Judaism and its relevance to Christianity and Unitarianism underwent a profound transformation over the course of his career. While at first Lindsey defended Unitarianism much as his antitrinitarian antecedents had – with Jewish arguments and by connecting himself directly to the heritage of the ancient Jews – Judaism became much more pronounced in his writings as Lindsey’s own religion gained popularity during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. His identification with the Jews and their religion surpassed those who had come before him:⁸ he began

⁶ Theophilus Lindsey, *The Apology of Theophilus Lindsey, M.A. on Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick, Yorkshire* (London: 1774), 38.

⁷ Ibid., 162, refers to “Wall and Lardner, and many learned foreigners.” This is merely one instance in Lindsey’s work where he reveals his connections to those antitrinitarians who preceded him.

⁸ There is of course a notable exception to this assertion: the Sabbatarians. However, the Sabbatarians were different from the Unitarians, because rather than merely identify with the Jews in such a way as to bring their Christianity ever closer to Judaism, Sabbatarians adopted Jewish practices, thereby creating a conglomeration of the two traditions. Unitarianism’s primary adherents did not cross over to Judaism, but only moved steadily closer to it while expounding their views and remaining Christians.

castigating Christians with Jewish arguments, praising the Jews for their faith and honesty, and encouraging Christians to be more like the Jews who relentlessly upheld the unity of God. In an unprecedented way Lindsey conceptualized the potential proximity of Judaism and Christianity and conflated the identity of Unitarians and Jews by asserting confidently that they were one and the same.

This identification with Judaism and the Jewish people was far more acute and self-aware than that of the antitrinitarians in the previous centuries. Moreover, these controversial notions were not limited to the thought of Theophilus Lindsey but extended to other Unitarian thinkers who were undoubtedly influenced and inspired by Lindsey's work. It is therefore in the writings of the late eighteenth century Unitarians, and in particular Theophilus Lindsey, that Judaism can truly be understood as an unavoidable element within antitrinitarian thought and debate.

The primary problem with the doctrine of the Trinity was not simply that it required the offering of prayer to beings other than the one true God, but that it inherently destroyed God's unity. It was in contradistinction to this troublesome notion that Lindsey defined the Unitarian position, centering his conception of Christianity upon a belief in God's oneness. He writes in his *Apology*, "The *Unitarian* doctrine therefore is no novelty; namely, *that religious worship is to be addressed only to the One true God, the Father.*"⁹ This circumscription of Unitarianism could encompass anyone who agreed to the worship of God alone.

Later Unitarians, following Lindsey's example, also based their theological arguments on this incontestable tenet. Robert Aspland, born in 1782, became a Unitarian

⁹ Lindsey, *Apology*, 147. Original emphasis. All emphasis in this chapter is by the original intention of the author unless otherwise indicated.

minister by age 19, and was one of the movement's most important and influential leaders during the early nineteenth century.¹⁰ He writes:

The first of all truths, whether considered in relation to its evidences or its import, is the Unity of God. Nature, in all its boundless variety, suggests the idea of *one* contriver, *one* architect; and the object of the several divine Revelations, the Patriarchal, the Jewish and the Christian, was to teach that there is One God, and to provide for the practical acknowledgement, in religious worship, of this great and fundamental truth.¹¹

Aspland's defense of God's unity was made on two grounds: reason and revelation. For Aspland, these two methods of understanding revealed the same truth: the natural world demonstrated the existence of but one creator, as did the divinely inspired messages delivered to the Jews and subsequently to the rest of mankind as the followers of Jesus. This characteristic viewpoint about God's nature defined Unitarianism, including Lindsey's own.¹²

Since reason, a faculty available to all, allowed the knowledge of God's unity to be discernable independently of Scripture, anyone could become a Unitarian. In order, then, to distinguish a Unitarian from a Christian, the latter definition was not confined to an understanding of this easily discernible truth about the one creator. Thus, Lindsey writes,

We shall in vain search the New Testament for fundamental points of faith, one only excepted, the belief of which is indeed necessary to every Christian; namely, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*. Without this no one can be a Christian. And he that sincerely believes this, will believe and do every thing else, that Jesus taught and commanded.¹³

¹⁰ Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 2, 88.

¹¹ Robert Aspland, *The Duty and Reward of sacrificing Temporal Interests on the Altar of Truth, exemplified in the Character of Abraham* (London: C. Stower, 1808), 15.

¹² In Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism*, 162, the author compares Unitarianism at the end of the eighteenth century to a kind of Christian deism, thereby highlighting the ubiquity among Unitarians of Aspland's combination of reason and revelation when articulating the unity of God.

¹³ Theophilus Lindsey, *A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Chapel in Essex-House, Essex-Street, in the Strand, on Sunday, April 17, 1774* (London: for J Johnson), 11-12.

A Christian, then, was one who believed that Jesus was the foretold Messiah.¹⁴ A Unitarian Christian, by extension, was as an individual who directed his worship only to God the Father and who also believed in this divine mission of Jesus. The direct implication of these tenets, and inextricably intertwined in their acceptance, is the belief that Jesus was not God, nor divine in any way. For Lindsey, such conclusions had always been the intention of prophecy: “the jews in all times, down to our own, have professed to expect their Messiah to be *a man*.”¹⁵ In fact, “by holding a *trinity*, and the *godhead* of Christ” one would automatically “destroy *the unity of God*.”¹⁶ While Lindsey’s conscience was much assuaged with the attestation of these truths, it was not enough for him that only he recognized them. “It is a point of great moment, not only that the strict unity of God, but also that the unity of his worship should be clearly asserted and professed by all christians,” he declares.¹⁷ In order to propagate the truth of the gospel as Lindsey understood it, he began writing fervently, intending thereby to prove that not only was the Trinity a spurious concept, but that it had never been part of the original Christian doctrine. To prove the oneness of God, Lindsey turned to the source that he believed first asserted this divine unity: Judaism.

Throughout Lindsey’s writing, beginning with his *Apology*, this devout Unitarian scholar utilized Judaism as one of the foundational elements on which to construct his

¹⁴ Recall the definition of Christianity put forth by Paleologus, the Unitarian whom Socinus had attacked: over two hundred years earlier and on the other side of the continent. Paleologus had contended that anyone could be a Christian who acknowledged the divine mission of Jesus. Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1151, 1265.

¹⁵ Theophilus Lindsey, *A Sequel to the Apology on Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick, Yorkshire* (London: 1776), 402. Lindsey has a tendency to neglect capitalizing proper nouns such as “Jew” or “Jewish” and “Christian” or “Christianity.” I have been unable to find any consistent pattern or reasoning behind this action, and have concluded that, along with the various archaic word-spellings throughout his writings, it was simply optional at the time to spell words in a certain fashion.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 66.

arguments. The first and most simple method he employed was to explain Christianity's connection to Judaism and subsequently prove the importance of God's unity to the Jews by analyzing arguments from the Old Testament. The *Apology* makes clear that Lindsey's primary tenet – that God alone is divine and should be worshipped – was extracted directly from Jewish law. He writes,

This being then the Mosaic law, that religious worship was to be appropriated to God, and incommunicable to any other person whatsoever, every Jew was bound to give divine honour to God, and could not give it to any other, without incurring the guilt of idolatry. Jesus, therefore, and his apostles were obliged by this law to worship no other being but God, unless it can be proved, that Christ, by his divine authority, or his apostles by his direction, did in any shape repeal it. But that they themselves conformed to it, and gave fresh sanctions to its authority, is now to be shewn.¹⁸

Lindsey wanted to prove that it was incumbent upon every person who designated himself a Christian to worship only God in his incontestable unity. By employing the same tactic that Servetus had – acknowledging the requisite beliefs accorded to the Jewish people – Lindsey sought to demonstrate this Christian obligation. As he explained, the foundational tenet of Jewish law and the duty incumbent upon every Jew was to worship God alone. Any Jewish person in ancient times who did not abide by this central law was condemned as an idolater. The implication of these remarks – and ones he felt more comfortable stating unequivocally in later writings – was that any who failed to respect God's divine unity, whether Jewish or Christian, ancient or contemporary, was an idolater as well.

It was the incorporation of Jesus' authority into Lindsey's comments that elucidates the gravity with which he offered this statement. Jesus, too, was required to abide by the Law of Moses: that is unless, Lindsey contended, it could be proven that

¹⁸ Lindsey, *Apology*, 120.

Jesus or his apostles repealed the Mosaic dispensation in any way. This could not be shown, however, because it was not the case. Grounding himself in the inviolability of Judaic law, Lindsey constructed his argument for the necessary retention of the unity of God's nature based on the fact that Jesus had not abrogated the Mosaic Law, but instead, had considered its tenets and beliefs so important that he too conformed to it unquestioningly. The first Unitarian minister asserted "the divine Unity in the strictest and most absolute sense; that God is One, and his name One, the God that made the world, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁹ Jesus worshipped Jehovah as he did because "the law of God, given to the Jews by Moses, and often confirmed afterwards by the same divine authority, invariably taught the Unity of God."²⁰ Included in divine worship because Jesus, as a devout member of the Jewish community, delivered a message that reached the gentiles, Lindsey connected himself to the ultimate defenders of God's indivisible unity: the Jews. This logic and methodology are not unique within Lindsey's canon. In fact, the Unitarian theologian consistently demonstrated the oneness of God by appealing to the Jewish conception of the divine being.

In 1791, Lindsey published a tract declaring idolatrous the belief in the Trinity or any worship other than that addressed to God alone. Because his definition of idolatry was founded on the Jewish notion in the Old Testament, knowledge of God's unity was based in part on a Jewish understanding of heresy. In *Conversations on Christian Idolatry*, Lindsey writes, "There are therefore no other gods, no other creators, but Jehovah alone, the God of Abraham, the God of the Israelites, according to the doctrine

¹⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁰ Ibid., 119.

of Moses and all the prophets.”²¹ It is the Jews – their history, laws and leaders – that taught the unity of God. To believe or worship him other than they did was incontestably idolatrous.

Although this statement on idolatry was published in a tract generally read by an educated class of scholars and theologians, these people were not the only ones to whom Lindsey hoped to convey this important message. In sermons to his congregation, he described the benefits brought to the pagan people of the world when Jewish worship was spread to non-Jewish lands. Lindsey declares, “We that are here assembled, are instances of the verifying of this our Saviour’s declaration. We are come from the E[ast] and West; from countries to which the law of Moses did not extend, and where Jehovah, the living and true God was not known.”²² Only through the fortune conferred by Jesus as he preached the worship of the one true God, Jehovah, the Lord of the Jewish patriarchs, did present day Christians come to acquire knowledge of divine matters. He says, “we have been invited to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God; to share in the future endless felicities of virtuous men, brought to light by the gospel of Jesus.”²³ As Lindsey tells his Christian audience, they should feel honored that as non-Jews, they have been awarded the privilege of participating in the proper worship of God.

Forsaking that privilege by demonstrating devotion to God in a way that denied his unity was, according to Lindsey, contrary to the teachings of the Jews, and therefore constitutive of idolatry. As Lindsey writes, “To understand the true nature of that

²¹ Theophilus Lindsey, *Conversations on Christian Idolatry*, 2d ed. (London: C. Stower, 1791; reprint in Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue, Tracts, second series, Vol. 8. London: C. Stower, 1805), 38 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

²² Sermon of Theophilus Lindsey on Matthew VIII.11,12 [preached on September 19, 1779], No. 2 in MS Lindsey 1, Harris Manchester Library, Harris Manchester College, Oxford. The writing on the cover indicates that this sermon was also delivered on January 28, 1781, May 13, 1783 and two other occasions in 1792.

²³ Ibid.

impious crime, which is denominated idolatry in the Old Testament, we need only attend to the two first precepts of the Decalogue, which we, as well as the Jews acknowledge to be the *Law of God*.”²⁴ For both Christians and Jews, the Old Testament was given directly to mankind from God. Orthodox Christians, however, perpetually transgressed against God by blaspheming his name with trinitarian fallacies derived erroneously from the New Testament, and therefore never delivered as divine commands to either Jews or Christians. Believing that the Old Testament provided the boundaries within which the truths of the New Testament could be understood, sacrilege such as the Trinity, Lindsey and other Unitarians contended, was the idolatry forbidden to the Jews in the Old Testament and therefore prohibited for Christians as well.

William Frend was a radical thinker active around the turn of the nineteenth century, who also believed that the Jewish understanding of idolatry in the Old Testament remained significant for Christians. As a professed Unitarian, he spent part of his career writing controversial political and theological tracts, and is considered a profound influence on the life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the renowned poet and philosopher.²⁵ In a 1788 exhortation to the Church of England, imploring its adherents to renounce the worship of a tripartite God, Frend writes, “Throughout the whole of the old Testament, Jehovah declares himself to be one, and that there is no other God beside him: the children of Israel, while they obeyed him, worshipped him as the one and only true God, and when they mixed with the worship of Jehovah that of idols, they were brought to

²⁴ Theophilus Lindsey, *An Historical View of the State of the Unitarian Doctrine and Worship from the Reformation to Our Own Times* (London: 1783), 504.

²⁵ On William Frend, see E.K. Chambers, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Biographical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 18-21. Coleridge actively sought to bridge the Unitarianism of the last decade of the eighteenth century with “conservative religious instincts of the Romantic reaction.” B.W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 217.

their senses by severe punishments.”²⁶ Not only was Frend, like Lindsey and Servetus before him, arguing with orthodox Christians by citing the behavior of the Jews and the statutes of their religion, but he also indicated that not to abide by the code that explicitly commanded the worship of God alone was to engage in idolatry. Such profane actions by the Jews had been corrected only by harsh, punitive measures. Whether or not Frend was suggesting that Christians should be punished for their trinitarian proclivities, he certainly insinuated, just as Lindsey had, that such behavior was in fact idolatrous.

Displaying nearly identical sentiments, the editor of the second edition of Lindsey’s *Christian Idolatry* declares in the introduction, “I am afraid that the Athanasian doctrine and worship seem little less than a breach of the covenant established between God and the Jewish people in the Old Testament, and between God and all mankind in the New.”²⁷ The Trinity, then, was a violation of God’s holy compact with, first the Jews, and afterwards humanity. This parallel and equitable evaluation of the covenants was important for Unitarians because it indicated that the two were inextricably bound together. Just like earlier antitrinitarians who did not privilege evidence from the New Testament above that of the Old, Lindsey also believed that “the jewish as well as the christian revelation ... must both stand or fall together.”²⁸ Lindsey wanted to convince his audience that those laws compulsory to the Jews in regards to divine worship were equally obligatory for Christians. In order for Lindsey’s claims to be effective and to

²⁶ William Frend, *An Address to the Members of the Church of England and to Protestant Trinitarians in General Exhorting Them to Turn from the False Worship of Three Persons to the Worship of the One True God*, 2d ed. (London: printed for J. Johnson, 1788; reprinted in Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue, Tracts, second series, Vol. 4. London: C. Stower, 1805), 5 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

²⁷ Editor of Lindsey, *Christian Idolatry*, viii.

²⁸ Theophilus Lindsey, *The Catechist: or an Inquiry into the Doctrine of the Scriptures, Concerning the Only True God and Object of Religious Worship* (London: 1792), xiv.

bolster their credibility, he had to maintain that arguments made from the Old Testament were as valid as those derived from the New.

Another way in which Lindsey subscribed to a Jewish conception of God was by referring to God by his Old Testament name, anglicized to Jehovah. “The one God believed in, and worshipped by the whole nation of the Jews,” he writes, “was, and still continues to be called, in their sacred books, Jehovah, which is his proper name, in every page of their canon, and their other writings.”²⁹ Rather than simply use the word God, or Lord, Lindsey made it a point to emphasize the significance of the name Jehovah. By doing so he accomplished two tasks, one following naturally from the other. In the first place, he asserted that the God of the Christians and the New Testament was the exact same God, Jehovah, who the Jews worshipped throughout the Old Testament and to the present day. Because Jehovah was incontestably the unified God to be worshipped only in his oneness, it followed from this first assertion that when he was worshipped by the Christians, he should be praised in this same, singular way. For Frend, too, this connection was significant. “Jehovah is the name by which God made himself known to Moses,” he writes, “Jehovah created the heavens and the earth; Jehovah called Abraham – spake to Moses – revealed himself to the prophets – was worshipped by the Jewish nation.”³⁰ For Lindsey and the Unitarians, there were no other “Gods, besides Jehovah, the God of Israel, the one living and true God.”³¹ This same God, the Lord of the Jewish people – a group to which the Unitarian minister was proud to be connected – was the only one to whom Lindsey would offer up prayers, praise and thanks.

²⁹ Lindsey, *Sequel to the Apology*, 24.

³⁰ Frend, *Address to Protestant Trinitarians*, 5.

³¹ Lindsey, *Catechist*, 23.

As a means of defending their own doctrine, trinitarians had sometimes sought to show that the Jewish conception of God was not in fact this singular Jehovah but that the Jews' understanding of the divine being had always included a tripartite nature.³² Associating Jewish belief with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament – an association that naively disregarded the importance of post-biblical rabbinics to Jewish religion and identity – Lindsey sought to debunk this myth about a Jewish belief pertaining to any kind of divine plurality. He expressed disappointment that “some have fathered [such a notion] upon them, and have pretended to gather it from the plural termination of a Hebrew word *Elohim*, indifferently applied to God and man, and from the Chaldee Targums, or paraphrases of the Old Testament, which yet do countenance no such doctrine.”³³ In a footnote Lindsey singled out a particular author who, he averred, had attempted to pervert Jewish teachings by trying to prove that the Jews – that is, those Jews who had not been tainted with certain rabbinic fallacies – held trinitarian beliefs: “Dr. Allix, in his *Judgment of the ancient Jewish church*, labours much to make this ancient Jewish church *Trinitarian*.”³⁴ Lindsey notes the Jewish resentment at such an allegation: “But all the Jews of later times cry out against such an imputation upon them and their ancestors, and unquestionably the Trinity is one of those doctrines that prejudice

³² This is an assertion that is made by the Unitarian minister in his *Apology*. In the *Sequel to the Apology*, 298, 383-4, Lindsey offered the assertions of Benjamin ben Mordechai, a convert who tried to convince the Jews that their ancestors had worshipped idolatrously and that the doctrine of the Trinity was therefore not so unfamiliar to their people and heritage.

³³ Lindsey, *Apology*, 87-88. On pages 95 and 96, Lindsey cited a number of Old Testament passages that not only explain the connotations of the word *elohim*, but demonstrate his knowledge of Hebrew.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 88. Peter Allix, a Christian-Hebraist with a profound knowledge of post-biblical rabbinic sources, worked tirelessly to disprove the antitrinitarian emphasis on Jewish teachings by attempting to show how – when the genuine Jewish oral tradition was separated from rabbinic forgeries – the Jewish tradition not only confirmed the truth of trinitarian Christianity but reaffirmed Jesus' spiritual kingdom. On this fascinating character, see Goldish, “Peter Allix,” 143-162.

them against Christianity,” he says.³⁵ Believing that the Jews never owned the concept of a trinity, Lindsey adopted the cause of their defense. “The Hebrews,” he declares, “who were the depositaries of these divine revelations, and above all other people favoured with them, never had any different doctrine, or disputes on so clear a point. They never dreamed of a *plurality in the deity*, as we Christians have affected to speak.”³⁶ These words express to a Christian audience Lindsey’s disapproval with their doctrine of the Trinity, while simultaneously defending the Jews against having ever made the same grievous error.

The *Apology* prepared the way for other Unitarians to trumpet the same concerns about Christians and similar defenses of the Jews. George Rogers, a Unitarian apologist, writes in 1790 that,

When once that primary idea, of One Almighty Father of the Universe, is given up, there is nothing so absurd and shocking which ignorance and folly may not adopt.... But this ignorance and uncertainty was not to be found amongst the Jews. God had manifested himself to them by the most wonderful evidence of his power, wisdom, and goodness. These divine attributes were all exerted, to give them a clear and perfect knowledge of their duty to Him.”³⁷

Rogers’ language, in both his explanation concerning the Jews’ knowledge of God and in his condemnation of the doctrine of the Trinity, conveys the same points as Lindsey’s, yet Rogers’ appears even more direct and firm. He lambasted the Trinity as the product of ignorance and folly, because like Lindsey, Rogers was no longer willing to suffer what he considered the erroneous doctrines of orthodox Christianity. In order to establish true notions about God’s nature, Rogers felt obliged to align himself with the Jewish position.

³⁵ Lindsey, *Apology*, 88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁷ George Rogers, *Five Sermons on the Following Subjects: The Place, Object, and Nature of Christian Worship Considered* [1790]. (London: 1793), 72.

This important emphasis on Judaism did not preclude Rogers' – as well as other Unitarians' – firm assertion that he was a Christian who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

Lindsey, also never abandoning his Christian identity, had to do more than make Unitarians the direct recipients of the Jewish tradition if he hoped to claim his place as a Christian authority. He did this by connecting Judaism and Christianity to either's relationship with the savior of mankind, Jesus. Significantly, though, it was the importance of Judaism to Jesus' life that served to bridge the divide between the Jews and the Unitarians. As such, the Unitarian minister explored the life and teachings of Jesus, and expounded relentlessly upon the centrality and prominence of Judaism to Jesus as well as the Messiah's unbridled insistence on the continued maintenance of the worship of God alone. By emphasizing these crucial factors, Lindsey hoped to maneuver himself into a position not only to receive the Jewish tradition of godly devotion, but into a place of Christian authority as well.

The first question for Lindsey to address was, what kind of man was Jesus? For, if the Jews and the Unitarians contended that praise and thanks could be offered to God alone as the only divine being, then by inference, no one else, including Jesus, could have been divine. In that case, Lindsey concluded, Jesus was a mortal man. Despite this logic, only one source could truly answer this query, and so it was to the words of the New Testament that Lindsey turned. Significantly, one of Jesus' defining characteristics, according to Lindsey's reading of the gospel, was his status as a law-abiding Jew. Jesus "owns himself to be one of the Jewish people, and a worshipper of the most high God, the

Father, in common with” the Jews.³⁸ This was a cornerstone not only of Lindsey’s position regarding Jesus, but of other Unitarians’ as well. Rogers emphasized Jesus’ Judaism when discussing his dedication to the worship of God: “We find our Lord also, during the whole of his ministry, adhering to this fundamental principle of his national religion,” he says.³⁹

After establishing Jesus as a Jew, Lindsey had no trouble inferring Jesus’ obedience to Jewish law. Thus, he writes, “Our Lord Jesus Christ himself uniformly and invariably taught this Jewish doctrine of the divine Unity. One is surprized how any could bring themselves to think he taught any other.”⁴⁰ Not only, then, was Lindsey explicit in recognizing an understanding of the divine unity and the proper worship of God as distinctly Jewish knowledge, but he became indignant that anyone could believe that Jesus would have taught anything other than these paramount Jewish beliefs.

In his work on Christian idolatry, Lindsey averred that the knowledge of God and his unity, despite having been originally revealed to the Jews, was in no way intended to be confined to them after the dissemination of the gospel. “Should any Christians object that this command [to worship God alone] related only to the Israelites, to whom it was delivered,” Lindsey writes, “it may be observed, that our Saviour himself, who was one of the jewish nation, and most sacredly observed himself, and inculcated on others, the commandments of God.”⁴¹ The minister did not make this claim groundlessly, but believed that since Jesus, the bringer of truth to all mankind, worshipped the God of the Jews, “then it must follow, that Jehovah, the God of the Jews, is, and must be, the God of

³⁸ Lindsey, *Catechist*, 10.

³⁹ Rogers, *Five Sermons: Christian Worship*, 73.

⁴⁰ Lindsey, *Apology*, 91.

⁴¹ Lindsey, *Christian Idolatry*, 61.

the Christians.”⁴² This reasoning was fundamental to Lindsey’s religion and his identification with Judaism, and one he reiterated in later writings. After fifteen years, he again declares, “The God of the Jews is, by the confession of Jesus, the God of the christians: for this was their common God, and Father, acknowledged by himself and his apostles.”⁴³ Thus, Jesus, as a Jew, taught nothing but the Jewish religion, and that religion believed only in one God.

To prove that Jesus taught only the Judaic law, Lindsey recalled a crucial aspect of his Messiah’s teachings. Believing himself to be a great prophet along the Jewish chain of authoritative transmission, Jesus referred to the rules of Moses which the Messiah claimed were the same as his own. “For that the jewish people now worship the same God, whom Christ and his apostles worshiped,” Lindsey writes, “is evident from our Saviour’s referring the jews, upon this subject, to what Moses had taught, as being his own belief.”⁴⁴ Thus, a direct connection with Moses, the spiritual and political leader of the biblical Jews throughout the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), became an important means for Lindsey to make himself and his coreligionists inheritors of the Jewish commandment to worship God alone. Again, this preeminent position could only be obtained by Lindsey’s connection, as a Christian, to Jesus. In this way, instead of being an object of divine worship and the beginning of the Christian religion, Jesus was transformed into a crucial link between Judaism and Christianity: not only was he the messiah for the Christians but also, as a teacher of the laws of Moses, the last prophet of the Jews. Recall too that this strategy had been employed by the Arian,

⁴² Lindsey, *Sequel to the Apology*, 25.

⁴³ Lindsey, *Catechist*, 11.

⁴⁴ Theophilus Lindsey, *An Examination of Mr. Robinson of Cambridge’s Plea for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ* (London: 1789), iv.

Nathaniel Lardner, and was therefore not only a means of connecting Lindsey even further to the Jewish heritage that he claimed for Unitarians, but of embedding him within the antitrinitarian tradition of which he was so intimately a part.

Lindsey was not the only Unitarian who utilized this approach. John Disney came to Essex Street Chapel in 1793 in order to assist Lindsey with his congregation. Interestingly, both ministers were married to daughters of the same man, the Archdeacon Blackburne, and both had worked with the Feathers' Tavern Association, a group which had sought to petition Parliament in the early 1770s for alleviation from strict adherence to the liturgy and the Articles of the Anglican Church.⁴⁵ The following statement from his *Reasons for Quitting the Church of England* makes clear that Disney founded his beliefs on similar principles as Lindsey did:

These, and the like expressions, together with repeated and continued addresses by prayer to Jesus Christ, and even to the Holy Spirit, instead of the one true God, who hath no equal, or sharer in the creation or government of the world, and who alone can hear the prayers of his creatures, are, according to my apprehension, in no way warranted by the word of God, as we read it in the Old and New Testament, the only authority upon which, as Christians and Protestants, we can depend.⁴⁶

Like Lindsey, Disney did not believe that any but God should be worshipped. To do so, he contended, was “in direct opposition to the express declarations of the Being, who declared himself, by Moses, to be ONE LORD, (Deut. vi. 4.) and of Christ himself, whose words, borrowed also from Moses, are, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, him only shalt thou serve* (Luke iv. 8.).”⁴⁷ For Disney too, Jesus, as a student of Mosaic teachings, was eligible to continue educating others in the proper worship and unity of

⁴⁵ Clark, *English Society*, 372-373.

⁴⁶ John Disney, *Reasons for Quitting the Church of England* (London: 1782), 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

God. As those who upheld this ancient tradition in the eighteenth century, the Unitarians considered themselves the true authorities on Christianity and God's nature.

Aspland took a similar approach as his ministerial predecessors and even went a step further by connecting the chain of authority all the way back to the Jewish patriarch, Abraham. He writes, "Let us address and expostulate with such Christians, as believing in the doctrine which Abraham, which Moses, which Jesus was commissioned to teach, the doctrine of the Unity of God."⁴⁸ Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, worshipped only Jehovah, who gave his law to the Jewish people through Moses, and which was later taught to and by Jesus. It is the word of Jesus that was brought to non-Jewish lands and resulted in the Christian religion. This chain of transmission was extremely important to the Unitarians and their understanding of theological truth and authority. Lindsey, recalling the significance of Jesus' actions, writes, "Christ never referred the Jews to any other than the Lord God *of their fathers*" for worship, and nor would he.⁴⁹ According to Lindsey and the Unitarians, then, Jesus was a devout member of the Jewish people, and the knowledge pervading his teachings was founded upon his profound understanding of the Mosaic Law, which strictly upheld the proper worship of God.

It was a result of his beliefs about Jesus' Judaism that led Lindsey to deduce Jesus' nature, and in turn, to define Christianity. As Thomas Morell, an avid trinitarian preacher of the eighteenth century, reminds us, Lindsey's "Stock [of necessary beliefs] is so small, that in his whole Budge he has but one Lord to order you; but *one* fundamental Point, *necessary indeed for every Christian to believe, viz. That Jesus is the Christ.* And

⁴⁸ Aspland, *Sacrificing Temporal Interests*, 20.

⁴⁹ Lindsey, *Apology*, 92. Emphasis added.

that is all.”⁵⁰ For Lindsey, being a Christian did not require a belief in anything more than Jesus as the Messiah – the Jewish Messiah who was expected to be entirely human, that is. Just as he derived the truth of God’s unity from Jesus’ Jewish teachings, so too did Lindsey conclude from this knowledge that Jesus was the purely human Messiah foretold in Jewish tradition. How, Lindsey contended, could Jesus have been the Messiah for a people other than his own and among whom he appeared? For the Jews, as well as for Lindsey, it was absurd to think that Jesus would have been divine. Reason also prevented this from being true because the notion that God could die was ridiculous. Lindsey condemned “the weak superstition and idolatry of christians, in worshipping one of the human race, who suffered death under the Roman power, as the supreme God; as if God could die.”⁵¹ This nonsensical fallacy, according to Lindsey, had utterly destroyed the Christian religion. “That *Jesus Christ is truly and properly God* ... I reckon the grand corruption of christianity,” Lindsey declares, “which, so long as it is considered as a part of it, will for ever hinder jews, mahometans, and all sober inquirers from embracing the gospel.”⁵² On account of this reasoning, he concludes, it must be entirely false “that Jesus at any time gave orders for any new God to be worshipped, himself, or the Holy Ghost, different from what the Jews had been accustomed to worship before? No such thing can be found, nor is even pretended.”⁵³ Since Jesus was obviously familiar with the tradition of which he was an integral part, Lindsey resolved that there could have been no command to worship any but God, and therefore no doctrine of the Trinity could possibly

⁵⁰ Thomas Morell, *The scripture doctrine of the Trinity justified: (in a discourse preached in the Cathedral church of St. Paul, London, June 2, 1774) with occasional remarks, on the preacher’s first sermon in Essex-House, Essex-Street, April 17, 1774* (London: 1774), 13.

⁵¹ Lindsey, *State of the Unitarian Doctrine*, 3.

⁵² Lindsey, *Examination*, iii.

⁵³ Lindsey, *Christian Idolatry*, 85.

have existed. The only requirement that could be necessary for Christianity, then, was the belief that Jesus was the foretold Messiah.

Having debunked the trinitarian delusion surrounding Jesus and his teachings, Lindsey remained saddled with the burden of proving that the Trinity was not originally an orthodox doctrine of Christianity. Tracing this destructive belief to its formal promulgation, Lindsey writes, “All Christian people, for upwards of three hundred years after Christ, till the Council of Nice [*sic*], were generally Unitarians, what is now called either Arian or Socinian.”⁵⁴ Only after the Creed of Nicaea, he asseverated, was there a formal Christian belief in more than one God. Lindsey attempted to show historically that the ancient Christian fathers did not believe in any kind of Trinity:

The ancient fathers, when they mention the objections of the heathens on this subject [the presence of the Holy Ghost] (viz. of Christians holding more Gods than One) do not speak of them as leveled against the notion of *three Gods*, but of *two* only; whereas, if the notion of the divinity of the Holy Ghost had been then fashionable, they would have made the same objection as is now made by Jews and Mohammedans; not against *two* Gods, but against *three*.⁵⁵

Although he mentions two gods here, Lindsey ultimately concluded that the original church had been Unitarian in its doctrine, retaining for years the true teachings of Jesus. The corruption of this early church resulted from the presence of gentile converts who eventually drove out the Jewish Christians. Lindsey explains that “The jewish christians ... were too much despised and undervalued by the learned heathen converts, who paid little regard to their sentiments, and took the lead in every thing.”⁵⁶ With the proliferation in both numbers and influence of these converts, “the doctrine of the Divine

⁵⁴ Lindsey, *Apology*, 24. Emphasis removed.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 146-147.

⁵⁶ Lindsey, *Catechist*, 93.

Unity,” as was taught by Jesus and his Jewish followers, “began to be corrupted very soon by heathen inventions.”⁵⁷ So, despite the fact that

*The whole Christian church in the apostolic age, made up of Jews and Gentiles, was entirely Nazarene or Unitarian; and the Jewish believers, though retaining some of their Jewish rites, as they did not impose them on others, gave no offence, nor caused any separation or division[, it was] the gentile Christians [who] were the first separatists or sectaries.*⁵⁸

According to Lindsey, then, factors external to Judaism destroyed the Unitarian nature of the original church.

Lindsey believed that there was one way by which proper Unitarian doctrine could have been retained in the ancient church: had the Jews been around to cure these inimical heathen infections. The first Unitarian minister expounds upon this theory while simultaneously connecting himself to the tradition of antitrinitarian writers who had held similar sentiments before him:

These [combined] churches of Jewish believers subsisted till the fifth century, but then sunk away, and we hear no more of them. Our countrymen, *Wall* and *Lardner*, and many learned foreigners, have lamented this coolness of the gentile Christians towards the Jewish believers, and their aversion to all communion and correspondence with them, which St. Paul laboured to have kept up, and had much at heart. It might have been a means of keeping the Gentile church steady in the worship of the one true God, through the *one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus*.⁵⁹

That is, consistent correspondence and a relationship with the Jews who believed that Jesus had been the Messiah might have been a sufficient means of insuring the retention of Unitarian doctrine within the ancient church. Lindsey writes later, “The jews, who in no small number at first embraced christianity, never departed from the doctrine of the Divine Unity, but preserved it pure and uncorrupt.” He continues, “These early jewish

⁵⁷ Ibid., iii.

⁵⁸ Lindsey, *Apology*, 161.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 162.

christians, who were such strict Unitarians, might have been a means of keeping the heathens, that in such great numbers were converted to the gospel, steady in this most important article, if they had been upon good terms with each other.”⁶⁰ The historical accuracy of Lindsey’s statements is irrelevant here because it is unimportant what kind of influence the Jewish converts to Christianity may have had on maintaining Unitarian doctrine within the ancient church – should such a doctrine even have existed. Notable is the fact that Lindsey believed that Jews made the best Unitarians. By explicitly categorizing these Jewish Christians as Unitarians, Lindsey’s terminology connected him and his tradition to the original Christians – Jews, in fact, who abided by the words of Jesus. It is because these earliest Christians were doctrinally Jewish – i.e. they had knowledge and love of only one God, the creator – that they did not sink to the baseness of false worship. Not only has Lindsey inculcated the gentiles for corrupting Christianity, but he has defended and praised the Jews for their part in retaining the Unitarian doctrine for as long as possible among these heathen offenders.

Lindsey’s praise of the Jews is not limited to such subtle accolades, but rather surfaces throughout his writings in far more direct ways. Rather than show appreciation for only the Jewish Christians of the first few centuries, Lindsey displayed an indebtedness towards the Jewish people of the previous seventeen hundred years. One of the most telling examples of this veneration appears in Lindsey’s tract, *Conversations on the Divine Government*, published in 1802. Expressing his gratitude for the Jews’ preservation of a proper understanding of the divine nature during centuries of Christian misunderstanding, Lindsey writes,

⁶⁰ Lindsey, *Catechist*, 91-92.

For my part, I see more reason every day of my life, to be thankful for those divine records which have been preserved to us by Moses and the people of the Jews; as I fear, without them, what with the refinements of philosophy on the one hand, and the idolatrous superstition of Christians on the other, the one true God would have been overlooked and unknown.⁶¹

Significantly, not only did Lindsey acknowledge the importance of the Jews' dedication to the notion of one God, but his words insinuate that it was the Jews who influenced his own thinking about the correct understanding of God's nature. To stop with only these approbatory remarks would surely have surpassed the honor bestowed on the Jews by most Christians, but Lindsey's laudations proceed, taking his reverence to an extreme.

For these reasons, honouring that most antient religion of the Jews with that high honour which is due it, and grieved when I see them undeservedly scouted and despised and ill treated by Christians, I am almost tempted, whenever I meet a Jew to move my hat to him, as one to whom I am under infinite obligations, as a martyr and confessor to the one true God."⁶²

Whether or not his words were intended to be hyperbolic, Lindsey's profession to his Christian readership that when he encountered a Jew – a not uncommon occurrence in his life – he had to fight the urge to show physically his respect, is certainly exceptional in Christian attitudes towards Jews.⁶³ As in the accolade above, Lindsey called attention to the Christians for their poor treatment of the Jews, and in fact, his words sound like an apology on behalf of Christians who still foolishly touted the Trinity and failed to

⁶¹ Theophilus Lindsey, *Conversations on the Divine Government Shewing that Every Thing is from God and for Good to All*, 2d, (London, 1802), in Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue, Tracts, second series, vol. 8. (London: C. Stower, 1805), 116.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 116-117.

⁶³ Although Englishmen displayed a far more amicable attitude towards the Anglo-Jewish community than their continental contemporaries, this was in large part a product of the environment of toleration that had been fostered in England, and also reflective of an understated philo-semitic trend reemerging during the late eighteenth century. Ultimately, however, that philo-semitic motif in the English relationship with the Jews had the more abstract goal of Jewish conversion in mind rather than the unrestrained reverence for their service to God and Christianity evident in Lindsey's writings. On philo-semitism and the conversionary impulse in this era, see chapter 4; see also, Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 64; Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, 91-93.

recognize the importance of the Jewish place in preserving the knowledge of God's nature.

This praise of the Jewish people was not limited to Lindsey's tracts, but occurred in his sermons as well. Preaching to his congregation in 1780, Lindsey salutes the Jewish preservation of proper worship: "The Jews, to their honour, have been immoveably fixed for upwards of 2000 years in this article of the Divine Unity, in the worship of the Father only." Continuing, he declares hopefully, "The time is coming, we trust, when Christians, in general shall return to the acknowledgement of this important point from which they have departed for so many ages."⁶⁴ The implications of praising the Jews in his sermons are different from those of providing such commendations in print. As mentioned previously, the audience of Lindsey's tracts was likely limited to the community of scholars, theologians and ministers who were interested in the opinions – in many cases for the sake of refuting what they viewed as blasphemous and outlandish claims – of an aberrant Christian thinker.⁶⁵ However, when Lindsey verbally expressed his veneration for the Jewish people to his congregation, he was addressing an audience that valued and respected his opinions. As a successful preacher, Lindsey was undoubtedly an influential person in the lives of his congregants, as is suggested by their adherence to his unorthodox belief system, despite the ridicule of their countrymen. While the size of Lindsey's congregation was, and to some extent always remained, modest, it grew steadily as his popularity and notoriety burgeoned. He drew a great number of influential people to his sermons, including scientists, members of Parliament,

⁶⁴ Sermon of Theophilus Lindsey on Joshua XXIV.15 [preached on April 23, 1780], No. 17 in MS Lindsey 1, Harris Manchester Library, Harris Manchester College, Oxford.

⁶⁵ The consequences of Lindsey's associations with Jews and Judaism as they were understood by his theological opponents will be discussed in Chapter 5.

nobility, and other wealthy and prominent individuals.⁶⁶ Among such company, Lindsey's approval and honor of the Jewish people could have had many more far-reaching effects than they otherwise might have had in his writings. While Lindsey eschewed discussion of political matters from the pulpit, refusing to stir unnecessary controversy, his public life as a writer was consumed by a constant struggle for the increased liberty of his countrymen.⁶⁷ Despite the fact that the Jews were neither the primary subject of his tracts nor his sermons, Lindsey can nonetheless be understood as a champion of the Jews and their deserved acceptance in English society. On the one hand, this is a result of the tolerance inherent to his nonconformist heritage, but on the other, it can be understood as a direct result of Lindsey's antitrinitarian identification with the Jewish people.

Embedded in Lindsey's approbatory preoccupation with the Jews was a concern with more than the significance of their national contribution; Lindsey also intimated interest in arguments about God's unity provided in Jewish sources and texts. In the *Catechist*, Lindsey constructed a dialogue between two characters, Artemon and Eusebes; Artemon's ceaseless appraisal of the Jews unsurprisingly represents Lindsey's own opinions. Replying to the question of whether or not the Jews had ever wavered in their worship of the one true God, Artemon offers the answer of the Lord Chancellor King: "The body of that people [the Jews] have been so immoveably fixed and confirmed, says he, in the belief of the *Unity of God*, which is every where inculcated in the mosaical law, that now throughout their sixteen hundred years captivity and dispersion, they have never

⁶⁶ Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. 1, 488; Clark, *English Society*, 380.

⁶⁷ Wilbur, *Our Unitarian Heritage*, Chapter XXXI.

quitted or deserted that principle, that *God is one*.”⁶⁸ Having reiterated the familiar laudatory sentiment previously introduced, Lindsey writes that this knowledge of their continued worship “is evident from their thirteen articles of faith, composed by Maimonides, the second whereof is, the *Unity of the blessed God*.”⁶⁹ Unlike theologians such as Michael Servetus, who demonstrated a profound knowledge of not only Maimonides’ work but also a slew of other rabbinic writings and Jewish sources,⁷⁰ it does not appear that late eighteenth century Unitarians such as Theophilus Lindsey can be classified so readily as Christian-Hebraists. By this time, Maimonides’ commentary on the Mishnah had been translated into Latin, and since Lindsey did not demonstrate a knowledge of Arabic, nor is it mentioned anywhere that he was familiar with this language, it is unlikely that he read this work in the original. It is also plausible that Lindsey’s knowledge of Maimonides’ commentary resulted not from a firsthand reading at all, but rather from contact with Christian-Hebraists or from conversations with learned Jews.

While it does seem that, like with his continental predecessors, Christian-Hebraicism should have been a natural part of Lindsey’s antitrinitarian argumentation, the minister’s lack of familiarity with rabbinics and other Jewish sources suggests a marked difference in the way that antitrinitarians like Michael Servetus and Unitarians like Lindsey utilized Judaism. The sixteenth century Spaniard hoped to better understand Christianity and its complicated theology, ultimately reconciling the religion with a variety of philosophical motifs, by employing Jewish thought and sources. Lindsey, on the other hand, did not need 1700 years of Jewish thought to better understand

⁶⁸ Lindsey, *Catechist*, 13-14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁰ On Servetus’ utilization of Maimonides, see Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 126.

Christianity. Judaism and its importance for Christianity, according to Lindsey, was more about the Jewish people – both ancient and contemporary – who preserved the proper worship of the one, true God, rather than the systems of thought that they had used to justify their own practices since the Diaspora.⁷¹ As an alternative to being labeled a Christian-Hebraist, then, Lindsey's fleeting mention of Jewish sources can be viewed as an attempt to further connect all those who testified to the oneness of God's nature, thereby demonstrating that Unitarianism, despite a qualifier of "Jewish" or "Christian", was in fact one tradition.

When Lindsey wrote elsewhere in his canon that, "to the present day, the jews, to their praise, have never swerved from the worship of the one true God, Jehovah, the God of their fathers, taught by Moses, and assented to and confirmed by Jesus Christ,"⁷² Lindsey solidified the connections between Unitarian leaders of the past – Moses and Jesus – and the Unitarian leaders of their Jewish and Christian disciples: Maimonides and himself, respectively. Although these are not the bold and clear statements that he eventually made regarding the nearly identical nature of Jews and Christians as Unitarians, they nonetheless indicate the presence of such thoughts throughout his writings. At the very least, Lindsey's incorporation of Maimonides, even if it only reflects the most superficial understanding of this medieval Jewish intellectual, demonstrates his curiosity about Jewish philosophers and thinkers and the value he placed on such arguments as a defense of his own beliefs.

⁷¹ A thorough investigation of Lindsey's writings in order to understand the depth of his own Christian-Hebraist inclinations as well as the specific sources with which he was familiar would be a valuable edition to this field of scholarship, but is outside the current scope of this paper. Lindsey's public display of his knowledge of Maimonides' work demonstrated in this passage reveals, however, at least a basic familiarity with Jewish sources and, significantly, a detectable degree of pride accompanying their incorporation in his own work.

⁷² Lindsey, *Examination*, v.

Jews were not the only Unitarian faith appalled by the doctrine of the Trinity, and if they deserved Lindsey's attention for their worship of God alone then one other group required mention as well: the Muslims. Christians would no doubt "fail to recommend the pure religion of Jesus to Jews, Mohammedans, and serious unbelievers," he observes. "For they are all of them highly offended at the practice of worshipping and praying to other persons besides the one person of the father, God blessed for ever."⁷³ As devout monotheists, Muslims were also uninterested in the potential salvation of Christianity because they too were unable to reconcile the belief in a three-part God. Lindsey succinctly states, "I shall not attempt to satisfy one who can doubt of a fact of such great notoriety, as that one great cause of the rejection of the gospel by Jews and Mahometans, is the doctrine of the Trinity, and of Christ's divinity in particular."⁷⁴ Lindsey was not the first antitrinitarian to consider the place of Islam, and Unitarian writers after him continued to remark upon their theological similarities with this third monotheistic faith.⁷⁵ In one such instance, Robert Aspland sought to show how Muslims, because of their Unitarian beliefs, stood alongside Jews and Christians as the inheritors of Abraham's example. He writes,

This sincere, faithful and zealous worshipper of the One God [Abraham], has indeed been suitably and signally rewarded in his offspring. The Arabians, his descendents by Ishmael, have, for more than a thousand years, shewn an abhorrence of idolatry; the Jews, his offspring by Isaac, have been a living temple in all ages where the name of the true God has been recorded and adored; and of one of his children are we the disciples, who are here assembled to serve God in the Unity of his nature, and to improve our piety by meditating on a recent example of heroic courage in the cause of Jehovah; 'and if we be Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'⁷⁶

⁷³ Lindsey, *Sequel to the Apology*, 66.

⁷⁴ Lindsey, *Examination*, 191.

⁷⁵ See for instance, Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 3.

⁷⁶ Aspland, *Sacrificing Temporal Interests*, 13-14.

In each statement by Lindsey and Aspland, the Muslims are mentioned in tandem with an identical evaluation about the Jews: either both faiths reject Christianity or both preserve and teach the true worship of God.

This parallel acknowledgement often appeared in antitrinitarian writings, but on a rare and revealing occasion Lindsey discussed Islam in isolation. “In what regards the mahometans,” he writes, “it is shewn in these sheets ... that Mahomet, however justly condemnable in other respects, inculcates the Divine Unity in the strictest manner; and reproaches christians, and even threatens them with divine judgments for holding three Gods, and making Christ God.”⁷⁷ Islam, as the religion of the Ottoman Empire, was not a presence that Lindsey or his compatriots readily felt, especially when compared to the frequency of his encounters with Jews. The lack of personal interaction and understanding of Muslims, however, in addition to his scant references to them, indicates that their inclusion in this work does not serve the same purpose in Lindsey’s writings that Judaism does. Rather than thoroughly identify with this foreign faith as a result of its proximity to Christianity, as he does with Judaism, Lindsey employed Islam as a voice through which to condemn trinitarians. The Turks, whom you revile so much and who are honorable only for their proper worship of God – he essentially shouts – even they scoff at and abhor the dishonor done to both the prophet Jesus and the Lord God for the pretense permitted by the ridiculous doctrine of the Trinity.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Lindsey, *Examination*, v.

⁷⁸ Although not a direct quotation, it is worth noting that when vehement denunciations like this appeared, they were in print, where his audience – as has been discussed – was most assuredly comprised of his theological enemies, the trinitarians. It would have been unnecessary to issue such statements in sermons to his congregants, who presumably did not need to hear such condemnatory maledictions.

The Jews also served as a mouthpiece whereby Lindsey condemned trinitarian Christians. By reiterating the reasons that the Jews rejected the gospel and by explaining why they considered the Trinity a reprehensibly absurd doctrine, Lindsey not only praised the Jewish people for their obedience to the primary tenet of their religion – i.e. that God is one – but he also defended their decision to continue shunning orthodox Christianity. Each of his remarks regarding the Jewish position in this capacity is in effect a reflection of his own experiences and opinions. The editor of Lindsey’s tract on Christian idolatry introduces this kind of argumentation, indicating the importance it held in Lindsey’s own writings. He begins by observing the Christian perspective of the Jews’ approach to Jesus: “Christian professors have often condemned the Jews of their prejudices and blindness, that they do not see and acknowledge the Messiah, of whom there are so many clear prophecies delivered in their own scriptures.”⁷⁹ He continues, though, not by justifying the claims of those Christians, but by explaining why the Jews were vindicated in their rejection of Christianity.

On the other hand, the Jews, I think, may with equal justice, retort a similar charge upon great numbers of professed Christians, who, though they are perpetually reading, or hearing the ten commandments, in the first of which God is declared to be *One*, in words not possible to be interpreted in any other sense, yet in defiance to the clearest and strongest light, they presume to acknowledge and worship *Three coequal Gods* in one substance.⁸⁰

If the Christians could utilize the Old Testament to understand the foretelling of Jesus’ coming, why is it, the editor asks, that they are unable to acknowledge and abide by the irrevocable commandment to worship God in his unity? While on the one hand this is a defense of the Jews and their unwillingness to convert to Christianity, on the other, this

⁷⁹ Editor of Lindsey, *Christian Idolatry*, ix.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

so-called Jewish sentiment is identical to the one held by the editor and the author about whose claims he was writing. Just like the Jews, he, as a Unitarian, was condemned for his beliefs; however, he contends that by respecting God's oneness, he too was abiding by the most basic and obvious command of the Bible.

Lindsey felt little or no compunction boisterously vilifying the Christians for their doctrinal misconceptions and using the Jews as his means for doing so. He told his Christian audience not only that he believed they were idolaters, but that the Jews thought the same: "It is the doctrine of the proper divine unity that they [the Jews] are continually upbraiding the christian world with departing from," he writes, "and while they consider christians as Idolaters, it is no wonder that the christian name is held in abhorrence by them, and that their conversion is effectually prevented."⁸¹ According to Lindsey, it was their inability to maintain God's unity that made Christians an object of Jewish scorn; moreover, it was explicitly their adherence to the belief in a Trinity that prevented Jewish conversion to Christianity.

Lindsey, in decisive opposition to trinitarian Christians, effectively aligned himself with the Jews in this doctrinal argument. Reinforcing this conception of his position, in the dialogue between Eusebes and Artemon, Eusebes asks whether or not the Jews and Christians of Lindsey's own time agreed on the object of religious worship. Artemon, once again obviously reflecting Lindsey's own voice, regretfully replies, "I am sorry to be obliged to answer, that they are not agreed."⁸² He then continues:

For besides Jehovah the only true God, the Father, whom the jewish people then worshipped, and still worship, and whom Jesus and his apostles acknowledged, and taught, and worshipped, the greater part of christians in all countries, have adopted two other *persons*, whom they

⁸¹ Lindsey, *Christian Idolatry*, 20.

⁸² Lindsey, *Catechist*, 14.

call *God the Son*, and *God the Holy Ghost*; both of whom they severally invoke in prayer, and worship: which is a great offence, and stumbling-block to the Jews, and makes them look upon Christians as little better than idolaters: a matter this which most assuredly deserves the serious consideration of all christians.⁸³

These statements were not meant to make the Jewish people feel comfortable with their decision to reject Christianity. Rather, his final words were an inducement to his Christian audience to consider the reasons for Lindsey's defense of Judaism. It was the rationale behind the Jews' lack of concern with this rejection, and by extension the logic of the Unitarians, that Lindsey wished to illuminate for Christians. By defending the Jews and indicating that the Trinity was a stumbling block to their understanding of Christianity, Lindsey actually sought to substantiate the doctrine as an obstruction to sober Christians' decisions to subscribe to orthodox Christianity. Both Unitarians and Jews, therefore, saw trinitarianism as idolatry, and it was this fact that Lindsey entreated all Christians to ponder.

For Lindsey, as for numerous other Unitarians and nonconformists, religious liberty and the freedom of conscience were extremely significant, and forcing his own views upon trinitarians – as they wished to do to him – was not a viable solution to his concern regarding their beliefs.⁸⁴ Thus, Lindsey urged Christians to meditate upon religion, using their own reason to guide them. A rather telling anecdote will serve as the best means of demonstrating what exactly Lindsey wanted from all those claiming to be Christians. He tells the story of “Mr. Edward Elwall ... a person of a serious inquisitive mind, [who] was never ashamed or afraid to own his opinions.”⁸⁵ First and foremost, then, Lindsey promoted the ability to ask questions about one's tradition, which was a

⁸³ Ibid., 14-15.

⁸⁴ See Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, 11, 56.

⁸⁵ Lindsey, *Sequel to the Apology*, 11.

hallmark of his nonconformist training. As a prolific Sabbatarian and apologist for God's unity writing about forty years before Lindsey, Elwall championed freedom of religion and the exercise of reason in all matters.⁸⁶ Lindsey writes, as Elwall "was wont to say, man [is] liable to mistakes, [and] whenever [Elwall] was convinced of his own, he had the courage to acknowledge and forsake them."⁸⁷ This, too, was distinctly important for the Unitarian minister. If one found errors with his own beliefs, then it was only proper to acknowledge those mistakes and repudiate the erroneous conceptions. "Amongst other things, contrary to the common opinions, he thought the seventh day of the week was to be observed for ever as the sabbath day," Lindsey explains. "Therefore he shut up his shop, and ceased from all business every Saturday, and opened it on Sunday."⁸⁸ It is at this point that the true motivations behind Lindsey's story fully emerge. He says that Elwall's actions "made the unthinking croud, instigated by those who should have known better things, to call him a *Jew*; and he is to this day remembered by no other name amongst the common people of Wolverhampton than that of *Jew Elwall*."⁸⁹ The implications of Lindsey's decision to share this story extend beyond the ways in which he already connected himself to the Jews and Judaism.⁹⁰

Most importantly, it seems, is that this champion of Unitarianism told the story of a Christian who, for exercising his reason and allowing that to guide his decisions to

⁸⁶ Edward Elwall, *A true testimony for God and for his sacred law. Being a Plain, Honest, Defence of the First Commandment of God Against all the Trinitarians under Heaven* (Wolverhampton: 1724). On Elwall, see Ball, *The Seventh-day Men*, 95.

⁸⁷ Lindsey, *Sequel to the Apology*, 11.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 11-12.

⁹⁰ It is worth noting that to call someone a Jew was not so unusual. For instance, during Elwall's time, John Ridley, a pastor who was eccentric in both his opinions and dress, was known locally as 'Jew Ridley'. It was likely due to Elwall's outspoken nature as a public figure – and as one who was actually prosecuted for his views in 1726 – that Priestley adopted the cause of Elwall's defense; Ball, *The Seventh-day Men*, 320.

worship God in his oneness, was labeled a Jew. For Lindsey, this story paralleled his own life in many ways; because he too was deemed a Jew for his beliefs and argumentative tactics, it is fascinating that he shared a story in which he turned the condemnatory application of the word Jew into an honorific. The Unitarian minister strove to convey that such appellations should not be shameful, but born as badges of pride. Moreover, in the same fashion that Lindsey sought to connect himself to Servetus, who had refused to disavow his beliefs despite being branded a judaizer, Lindsey attempted to link himself to antitrinitarian English dissenters like Elwall, who he considered part of this venerable tradition. Lindsey offered this account of Elwall's sacrifice to emphasize the nobility of such religious determination, and he wished to inform his readers that no amount of castigation would make him repudiate his own convictions. This message, as part of the sequel to his *Apology*, was read by his most stalwart theological enemies and by his most avid followers, alike. While the story likely did not provoke a religious reevaluation by either of these groups, to the rest of those Christians who might have read Lindsey's pamphlet, however, he offered this story in order to convey the need for each individual to use his own reason to discern the truth of the Scriptures, no matter what the consequences.

There is another revealing anecdote within Lindsey's writings that leaves the reader with an impression similar to that of the Elwall story. In his *Historical Overview of the State of the Unitarian Doctrine*, Lindsey mentions a somewhat ironic situation surrounding the story of Socinus and Paleologus. By a clever twist of fate, the Socinians had spent the duration of their time in England being accused of judaizing, despite the fact that the founder whose name they bore, Faustus Socinus, had actually lampooned

others for holding ideas that he considered too close to Judaism. As Paleologus was the man against whom Socinus had written such harsh invectives for opposing the invocation of Jesus, it is him whom Lindsey opted to defend. “The reason he alleges for his having called Paleologus a Jew, and persisting in it,” writes Lindsey, “shews to what pitiful arguments and excuses a learned man will have recourse, who is resolved never to own himself in the wrong.” Socinus’ treatment of Paleologus demonstrated precisely those qualities of which Lindsey disapproved in his tale about Elwall: an unwillingness to reflect on one’s own religious faults and unnecessary allegations of judaizing. Lindsey continues by sharing with the reader Socinus’ reasoning for his accusations against Paleologus: “For he maintains, that he ought not to be accused of reviling Paleologus by using such language, *because in the opinion of almost all the true churches of Christ, he [Socinus] was manifestly reckoned to judaize.*”⁹¹ Lindsey’s conclusion – as interesting as the one offered in Elwall’s story – exposes the marked difference between himself and the Polish antitrinitarian leader. He writes,

But what if *all* the churches of Christ, and *all* the members of them, without exception, had charged him with judaizing, in worshipping God, the Father only, and not Christ, or in any other peculiar opinions entertained and propagated by him? This would have been only more to his honour, whilst he had the testimony of Christ and his apostles in his favour; by which the truth of the gospel doctrine is to be proved, and not by the number of voices on this side or that side.⁹²

First of all, Lindsey observed, Socinus himself would have been considered a judaizer in Lindsey’s own time; in fact, those accused of judaizing in eighteenth century England shouldered the burden of Socinus’ name. More importantly, however, is that judaizing was not, for Lindsey, a shameful blemish to hide, but rather an honor to be accepted for

⁹¹ Lindsey, *Unitarian Doctrine*, 195.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 195-196.

as long as orthodox Christianity rejected the proper worship of God. Whereas others such as Socinus viewed this identification with Judaism as a negativism, Lindsey accepted it as an august onus. Just like his account of Elwall, Lindsey's apology for Paleologus was a projected defense of himself. His anecdotes simply reaffirm Lindsey's unique agenda and differentiate him from certain of his predecessors. Not only did Lindsey infuse past antitrinitarians like Elwall and Paleologus with an importance otherwise denied them, but by connecting himself and his theological brethren to the Jewish people, he actively pursued that which caused his forbearers their greatest troubles.

Perhaps the reason that Lindsey did not seem greatly perturbed by the notion of being remembered as a Jew is because he actually conflated his concept of a Unitarian with his definition of a Jew. At first, Lindsey classified Unitarians and Jews together for obvious reasons: because they suffered the same denunciations at the hands of trinitarian Christians. For instance, in his *List of the False Readings and Mistranslations of the English Bible*, he writes,

Those christians, who with Moses and the prophets of old, and their descendants, the present jews, believe the Divine Unity in the most exclusive sense; and who have maintained and taught, and maintain and teach, that Jehovah, the Father, is God alone, and to be worshiped, and no other person, neither Jesus Christ nor the holy Ghost; they have been almost universally calumniated, may I not say? and sometimes by learned and good men, as forcing an unnatural sense upon the sacred writing, as tampering with them at other times, and altering them, to make them speak as they would have them.⁹³

In his 1792 *Catechist*, however, Lindsey ceased characterizing Unitarians and Jews separately, and began to characterize the latter as the former. He writes,

⁹³ Theophilus Lindsey, *A List of the False Readings of the Scriptures and the Mistranslations of the English Bible* (London: 1790), 88-89.

That there is one all-perfect Being, the father, creator, governor, and preserver of the universe, is not a point so difficult of comprehension, but that the commonest understanding might see and retain it, when made known, as it is made known in the books of Moses and the hebrew prophets. This is apparent in fact from the history of the Israelites, to whom this knowledge of the *Divine Unity* was revealed by God himself, and who have ever since adhered to it. Even in their temporary deviations into the idolatry of the neighboring nations, it is allowed that they still retained the sole supremacy of Jehovah. But since their return from Babylonian captivity, for more than two thousand years, they have never departed from the *Unitarian doctrine*, which Moses their divine lawgiver delivered to them.⁹⁴

Lindsey, in every conceivable sense, considered himself a Unitarian. In addition, anyone who believed as he did – in the strict unity of God – was likewise a Unitarian. Therefore, the Jews of old, as well as their descendants, were Unitarians because they followed the doctrine of God’s unity as taught by Moses. To truly emphasize his point, Lindsey writes about Moses’ Unitarian doctrine and how “from him Mahomet borrowed it. So that it is from this original divine revelation, that the Mahometans in Europe, and all over the east, are *Unitarians*, believers and worshippers of the one only true God, and creator of all things.”⁹⁵ Islam here serves a different purpose than the one it did above. Rather than underscore Lindsey’s ridicule of the Trinity, characterizing Muslims as Unitarians actually expanded and solidified Lindsey’s definition of a Unitarian. More significant, though, than the Unitarianism of the Muslims, is the increasing importance placed on the similarities between Unitarian Christianity and Judaism.

George Rogers, a contemporary Unitarian preacher, acutely summarized the fundamental congruence of the two faiths. A year after Lindsey’s *Catechist*, Rogers published his sermon, “The True Nature of the Christian Church, and the Impossibility of its Being in Danger.” The title alone suggests the insignificance of the Trinity and its

⁹⁴ Lindsey, *Catechist*, vii.

⁹⁵ Ibid., vii-viii.

potential alteration as having an immaterial effect on Christianity. However, far more heterodox assertions are discernable within the sermon. With the advent of Christianity “no *new object* of worship is introduced,” Rogers says, and “the *same* common parent of mankind; the *same almighty Being*, to whom our nation owes such distinguished marks of favour and protection. He is equally the God of *Christians* and of Jews.” These declarations were not revolutionary but the standard antitrinitarian belief that the Christian God was Jehovah, the Old Testament God of the Jews. Rogers, however, surpassed this customary assertion, declaring that “Whatsoever is written in the law, and the prophets, is equally the object of the faith of both; and the expectation, which the Jews indulge, of a resurrection of the dead, and a future recompence of reward; the same hope is the basis of a christian’s creed, and the *distinguishing* article of his religion.”⁹⁶ While Rogers recognized that additional elements differentiated Judaism from Christianity, he still contended that the two religions were fundamentally indistinguishable, a notably deistic notion. Not only, then, were Jews and Christians both Unitarians, but that which was truly essential to either faith was deemed practically identical. Whether or not this theological supposition is true, it nonetheless indicates the degree to which Unitarian thinkers had mingled the traditions in their minds and the ways in which they conceptualized the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

Lindsey ultimately understood this relationship as a spectrum, whereby any modification to one religion was a natural move to or away from the other. He believed that his own abrogation of the Trinity did just that – moved him theologically towards Judaism. In a letter sent to his friend, William Tayleur, Lindsey described an encounter

⁹⁶ George Rogers, *Five Sermons on the Following Subjects: The True Nature of the Christian Church, and the Impossibility of its Being in Danger* (London: 1793), 28.

with a certain Jew, known as Mr. Rebello, and it is his description of this meeting that demonstrates Lindsey's conceptualization of Judaism and Christianity's relationship. The exchange was religious in nature; this was likely the case for most of Lindsey's conversations with Jews.⁹⁷ Assumedly questioning him about his reticence to convert, Lindsey writes that "After a long discussion, he said he did not see what he should gain on becoming a Christian. And when the gift of eternal life by Christ was mentioned to him, he was not sufficiently impressed with it, presuming that they [the Jews] were possessed of it already."⁹⁸ Rebello's unwillingness to accept Jesus as his savior, though, seemed as far as Lindsey could tell, to have little to do with his own adherence to Judaism. In fact, "It appeared from Mr. Rebello's conversation that though he condemned the Jewish tradition, he was averse from any reformation, lest in owning anything to be wrong, people should run away with the notion that all was wrong and desert Judaism."⁹⁹ According to this Jew, modifying his religion was not inherently problematic. His actual concern was that by accepting adjustments to that which distinguished Judaism, a flood of changes would ensue, and all would be abandoned for Christianity – something he did not wish. Lindsey noticed from his conversation with Rebello, however, that, "It appears also that many among [the Jews] of the richer sort are Deists, or very nearly such."¹⁰⁰ These deistic tendencies indicate a movement towards Christianity, and it is this acknowledgment of the religion's potential flexibility that

⁹⁷ See for instance, Theophilus Lindsey, London, to William Tayleur, Shrewsbury, 6 May 1788. Lindsey Letters, Vol. II., no. 20, John Rylands University Library, The University of Manchester, Manchester, where two such conversations are mentioned. While this letter is cited minimally in Herbert McLachlan, ed., *Letters of Theophilus Lindsey* (Manchester: University Press, 1920), 18, the part of the text to which I am referring was sent to David Ruderman from the editor of the Church of England Record Society, Grayson Ditchfield, and then passed along to me.

⁹⁸ Theophilus Lindsey, to William Tayleur, 13 May 1788, in Herbert McLachlan, ed., *Letters of Theophilus Lindsey* (Manchester: University Press, 1920), 138.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 138-139.

resulted in Lindsey demonstrating his own understanding of the religious continuum. Lindsey writes, “He was *instar multorum*, being a person of sense and reflection, and willing to give up a great deal and *come nearer to Christians such as we were*.”¹⁰¹ Mr. Rebello, according to Lindsey, saw that there was reason to move towards Christianity. Moreover, as Lindsey wrote to Tayleur, the Unitarians were already involved in a process of doctrinal compromise, moving theologically closer to Judaism than their orthodox counterparts would ever agreeably permit. For Lindsey, Unitarianism – the true Christianity – lay somewhere between orthodox Christianity and Judaism and did not exist entirely distinct from either faith.

Lindsey’s conceptualization of this relationship between the two traditions is not only reflected in this letter. Elsewhere, he demonstrated the unique connection between Judaism and Christianity, not as a result of the elements fundamental to each religion, but because their distinguishing characteristics were not incompatible. In

Rom. xiv. [the author] candidly admits and allows the scruples of some Jewish Believers, in continuing to observe their new moons and Sabbaths; and in forbearing to eat animal food at public entertainments, lest they should taste such things as were forbidden by the law of Moses, which they still held obligatory to themselves.¹⁰²

Lindsey is referring here to Jewish Christians – those Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah but decided not to abandon their Jewish practices – living in the first few centuries of the Common Era. Essentially, the New Testament maintained, a person who followed the Mosaic Law yet believed in Jesus was still a Christian by virtue of the latter

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 138. Emphasis added on last eight words.

¹⁰² Lindsey, Sermon preached on April 17, 1774, 13.

factor.¹⁰³ According to Lindsey, the biblical recognition of this mixed tradition legitimized its right to exist in modern times. Thus, Lindsey did not believe that being a Unitarian Christian, as well as followers of the Mosaic Law, were mutually exclusive because “God never designed that Christians should be all of one sentiment, or formed into one great church, as we speak: but that there should be different sects of Christians, and different churches. This, I say, plainly appears to be the appointment of God.”¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, Lindsey declared the line between Judaism and Christianity fluid, and so long as one believed in one God and that Jesus was the Messiah, few other beliefs or practices mattered.

With Mosaic Law as the Jewish side of the religious spectrum, and a belief in Jesus as the Christian side, Unitarianism, for Lindsey, became the common ground of the two religions. As nothing more than the belief in one God, though, it was little more than Lindsey’s belief in Jesus that separated him from the deists. In fact, when reading *The Universal Principles of Religion and Morality*, a guideline for the Thirteen Club, a deists’ organization begun by Benjamin Franklin and David Williams, it is almost difficult to distinguish between Lindsey’s most fundamental beliefs and those of the remaining late eighteenth century deists.¹⁰⁵ Williams writes, “We enjoy the most valuable blessings in common; and all acknowledge the most important truths. Are we not all the children of one benevolent Parent? Do not *Jews* and *Gentiles*, *Christians* and *Mahometans*, own his

¹⁰³ It can be inferred from Lindsey’s previous statements that an adherence to Mosaic Law actually had the benefit of insuring that the Unitarian doctrine would be retained and not corrupted by orthodox Christianity after the acceptance of its fundamental tenet: a belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

¹⁰⁴ Lindsey, Sermon preached on April 17, 1774, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, Franklin sought to infuse the waning deist tradition with morality, and not coincidentally, was a regular attendant at Lindsey’s Unitarian church during his time in London. Wilbur, *Unitarian Heritage*, Chapter XXXI. David Williams was a dissenting minister who lived from 1738 until 1816. In 1776, he composed the *Universal Principles* for the Thirteen Club; on Williams, see *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [resource on-line] (accessed 18 January, 2005); available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.

power, his wisdom, and his goodness? Do not all men acknowledge the eternal obligations of piety and virtue?”¹⁰⁶ Despite being a deistic affirmation, this sounds remarkably like the message that Theophilus Lindsey had been espousing. Williams adds,

If all good men, of all religions, would sometimes unite in adoring Almighty God, and acknowledging those great truths, which they all hold to be the most important, it might be hoped that those comprehensive principles would have a stronger tendency to harmonize and unite; than doubtful and less important opinions have hitherto had to divide them.¹⁰⁷

This is precisely what Lindsey hoped to accomplish: the recognition of a common religious ground rather than an emphasis on unnecessary and erroneous theological disparities. As his discussion of the potentiality of Jewish Christians indicates, Lindsey saw no reason that anyone who believed and worshipped God alone, despite his other beliefs, could not be Christian. The only element that distinguished Lindsey from deists was his belief that Jesus was the Messiah, but even that was made to seem only secondarily important to the retention of Unitarianism, as Lindsey consistently demonstrated by showing more respect to Jews than to orthodox Christians.¹⁰⁸ Despite their similarities, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, however, Lindsey and other Unitarians felt the need to defend revelation against such uncompromising deists as Thomas Paine and his tract, *Age of Reason*.¹⁰⁹

While deism, then, remained insufficient to satisfy Lindsey’s spiritual and religious needs, it was still a more serious tragedy for him that “the greater part of christians have now for many ages acknowledged and worshipped two other persons as

¹⁰⁶ David Williams, *A Liturgy on the Universal Principles of Religion and Morality* (London: 1776), xi.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ On the proximity of Unitarianism to deism, see Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism*, 161-163.

¹⁰⁹ Clark, *English Society*, 395.

gods equal to the Father, who is God alone blessed for ever; by which Jews, Mahometans, and serious Deists have rendered averse to the gospel, and its first divine teachers discredited.”¹¹⁰ It remained important to Lindsey that beyond their Unitarianism, Jews, Muslims and others who had not yet embraced the gospel, do so.

As the religion to which Christianity related the most, Judaism had a particular importance in Lindsey’s thought and writings. Although his particular method of utilizing Judaism indicates that Lindsey was not preoccupied with the conversion of the Jews, it was nonetheless an extant part of his agenda. In fact, it was the accompanying move towards Judaism inherent in the Unitarian doctrinal shift that prompted Christians such as Theophilus Lindsey to believe that the Unitarian proximity to Judaism made conversion more likely. However, while for Lindsey these were merely secondary concerns when considering the relationship of Judaism and Christianity, for theologians such as Joseph Priestley, these conversionary fixations were accompanied by millennialist designs that had roots much farther back than the eighteenth century. The place of the Jews in the grander worldview of Unitarians such as Priestley will ultimately expand our understanding of Judaism’s integral place in antitrinitarian theology.

¹¹⁰ Lindsey, *Catechist*, iii-iv.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEETING NEAR THE MIDDLE: The Amicable Approach of Joseph Priestley

With his spiritual fervor and moral fortitude, Theophilus Lindsey was the ideal leader to inaugurate the Unitarian movement: without hesitation, he defended the notion of God's unity and Jesus as the foretold Messiah of the Old Testament. Lindsey was not the only theologian who harbored such extreme antitrinitarian sentiments during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, despite his initiative to make Unitarian worship available to others. Joseph Priestley, a renowned scientist and scholar, also defended the strict unity of God and took up the reigns of leadership alongside Lindsey. While Lindsey did not embrace the controversy that surrounded his aberrant religious choices, Priestley, never diffident or conservative, reveled in the ability to incite his irascible opponents. Thriving on the theological argumentation that allowed him to defend Unitarian principles, Priestley sought to force the Christian public to reconcile the theological errors under which it had been buried for the last fifteen hundred years.¹

Priestley, born in 1733 in a little village near Leeds, abandoned his Calvinist upbringing at a young age and opposed those theological conceptions which contradicted his natural inclinations towards truth. Refusing to subscribe to the orthodox Christian beliefs of most ministerial schools, Priestley became the first student of a new dissenting academy at Daventry. Here his independent mind and liberal proclivities were nurtured, and soon, Priestley emerged as an Arian. Later, the writings of Nathaniel Lardner inspired his final move to Unitarianism. Priestly, despite the penury and rejection that

¹ On the different approaches to the public of Lindsey and Priestley, see Wilbur, *Our Unitarian Heritage*, chapters XXXI-XXXII.

plagued his early ministerial career, continued to relegate irrational orthodox Christian doctrines to the theological wastelands and encourage others to do the same. Hoping to come by another means of supporting his family, however, Priestly turned his attention to scientific experimentation, particularly in the realm of electricity and chemistry.²

His burgeoning prestige as a scientist never sublimated his passion for the study of theology, religion, and history. Ominous for his contemporaries was Priestley's growing involvement with controversial issues pertaining to political and religious liberty, which caused many people to fear his influence as a source of societal instability. The chaos following in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789 triggered the eruption of conservative sentiments among the English masses, and in 1791 a mob rose against Priestley, destroying his home and all of his work in Birmingham. Fearing for the safety of his life and his family, Priestley moved to London where he was able to associate regularly with his close friend and religious ally, Theophilus Lindsey.³

With his extensive resume as a scientist, minister, teacher, and author, it is a wonder that Priestley found the time to engage in other endeavors. However, while living in Birmingham in 1786, Priestley addressed letters to the Jewish community of England, inviting them to participate in an amicable discussion about the gospel and the truth therein. The ultimate goal on Priestley's agenda was to convert the Jews to Christianity. He did not expect, however, that his letters alone would convince the Jews to adopt his faith; rather, he hoped to prompt their own investigations of the New

² On the life of Joseph Priestley, see his *Memoirs*; Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*; Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol.1, 471-478.

³ *Ibid.*, 486-487; Clark, *English Nonconformity*, 293.

Testament, believing that their natural curiosity would subsequently lead them to the truth.⁴

This conversionary impulse was nurtured by more than temporal aspirations. For, it had a cosmic dimension as well. As is apparent in his writings and exceedingly evident from his correspondence, Priestley foresaw the coming of the millennium – the end of days when Jesus would return to earth and abolish the forces of evil – which indeed included a crucial role for the Jewish people. Integral to their part in this vision was the Jews' inevitable conversion and collective relocation to their ancient homeland of Judea. With the suddenness of the French Revolution just across the English Channel in 1789 – interpreted by some as a sign of Jesus' impending return – millennialist notions always present in Priestley's mind surfaced as never before.⁵

In order to understand the significance of Jewish conversion to Unitarians, as well as the place of the Jews in the Unitarian conception of the millennium, it is first important to recognize that neither notion – conversion or millennialism – was unique to Unitarians or late eighteenth century England. These ideas had existed since Christianity's inception and throughout the religion's history, and became manifest in an English milieu towards the beginning of the seventeenth century. Due to scriptural interpretations, especially of

⁴ J. van den Berg, "Priestley, the Jews and the Millennium," in *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, ed. David Katz and Jonathan Israel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 264.

⁵ With the upsurge in millennial interest after the French Revolution, a spate of new theories and millennial hypotheses emerged, accompanied by a preoccupation with the place of the Jews in the Christian worldview. Representing the dawn of a new age, people viewed this popular uprising as the beginning of the antiquation of governments. Since other signs were assuredly not far behind, avid millennialists searched sedulously for portents that would proclaim Jesus' return. The conversion of the Jews, as one of these prophesied signs, was a necessary precondition of his arrival, and so many resumed their lapsed efforts to bring the gospel to this misguided people. While Priestley had always considered Jewish conversion important, the French Revolution lent a renewed urgency to the potential effects of his efforts. Fruchman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, 59-61.

the Old Testament, the Jews had always had a significant role in millennial expectations.⁶ The particular approach of Unitarianism to Judaism, however, as detailed throughout the last chapter, made Unitarian attempts to convert the Jews different from their apocalyptic predecessors. A brief look at the origins of conversionary desires and millennialist expectations will provide an important context for understanding how Joseph Priestley and the Unitarians interpreted their role in the advent of millennial events.⁷

Millennialist and conversionary impulses have been a consistent factor in the Jewish-Christian relationship since the death of Jesus. As the centuries elapsed, further distancing Christians from their Messiah, numerous expectations arose regarding the foretold return of Jesus. These millennialist theories were based upon prophecies in the Old Testament, particularly those found in Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah, as well as the New Testament Book of Revelation, which, according to Christians, spoke of conditions by which the Messiah would return to earth and ultimately herald a one thousand year period of peace and prosperity for all. In addition, many of these prophecies, especially those from the Hebrew Scriptures, centered around the Jews. It was believed that in order for

⁶ Richard Popkin, "Can one be a True Christian and a Faithful Follower of the Law of Moses? The Answer of John Dury," in *Secret Conversion to Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Martin Mulsow and Richard Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 33-50, provides an interesting discussion about early millennialist influence on Jewish-Christian religious identity and millennialism resulting in Christian conversion to Judaism.

⁷ It should be noted at this point that the study of Joseph Priestley and his understanding of the millennium and the Jewish place therein is a thoroughly well-researched and understood subject. Two excellent sources on this phenomenon are Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, and van den Berg's, "Priestley, the Jews and the Millennium." In addition to Priestley's own writings, these authors provide excellent insight into this eighteenth century theologian's preoccupation with both the millennium and the Jews. Priestley's concern with the Jews, their conversion, and their place in the millennium does not seem to have been situated (at least not by any means, exhaustively) within the context of the minister's Unitarianism. In Stuart Andrews, *Unitarian Radicalism: Political Rhetoric, 1770-1814* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 31-40, the author's brief attempt to mention the significance of the millennium to Unitarians (and which barely looks at the place of the Jews – pages 35 and 36, if that), reveals the necessity of such a project's undertaking. As such, this investigation attempts a somewhat more narrow exploration of Priestley's conceptualization of the Jews as it was affected and shaped by his understanding of himself and his coreligionists as Unitarian Christians, and further, it explores the ways in which this religious identification brought Unitarianism closer to Judaism.

Jesus to return, not only did the gospel have to be spread to all corners of the earth, but the Jews had to be converted to Christianity, and furthermore, they had to be restored to their homeland of ancient Judea (although the order of the latter two requirements was by no means fixed from theorist to theorist). Other important signs included the destruction of the great empires, once considered Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome, but refashioned and reinterpreted to encompass the complicated political events of the day – hence, the excitement about the French Revolution. Millennialists were differentiated into two categories: pre-millennialists and post-millennialists. While the former believed that Jesus would come before the millennium, the latter contended that he would arrive after the designated epoch had transpired.⁸

The word millennium, as a one thousand year period of harmony and happiness, implied a belief in the perfection of the world – a world that no longer suffered from ills and wantonness, but one in which the final code of living had been dispersed. Anyone possessing such a worldview could naturally want nothing but the materialization of their millennialist ambitions. Thus, millennialists worked assiduously to induce Jesus' second coming. Whether one was a pre-millennialist or a post-millennialist, however, determined the kind of work one believed could make a difference. Because pre-millennialists thought that Jesus would arrive before the one thousand years of prosperity, there was little to do other than facilitate the necessary signs that indicated his return. They acknowledged the special role of the Jews in the forthcoming events, and in preparation for the end of days, emphasized the signs of which the Jews were an integral part: namely, their conversion and reassembly in Palestine. Post-millennialists, believing

⁸ Andrew Bradstock, "Millenarianism in the Reformation and the English Revolution" in *Christian Millenarianism: From the Early Church to Waco*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 85; Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, 4.

that Jesus would appear only after the highly anticipated millennium, felt that it was incumbent upon mankind to bring this period of peace and prosperity to earth. Therefore, they worked sedulously to inspire a more loving and harmonious world – one that often included a positive change in attitude towards the once vilified Jewish people – which would eventually lead to the Messiah’s return.⁹

Millennialist expectations were pervasive throughout the first few centuries, but with the expanding authority of the Holy See in Rome, these aspirations were highly discouraged. For, if the Bishop of Rome was in fact Jesus’ mouthpiece on Earth, then it could not make sense that Christians would anxiously anticipate the Messiah’s return in order to deliver them from their abominable lives. During the height of papal control in Europe, then, millennialist designs were generally less public. Accordingly, while there was certainly no absence of apocalyptic expectations through the fifteenth century, it was only with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century that a resurgence was noticeable.¹⁰

Curiously, England, a country that had lacked a visible Jewish community for three centuries, was one location where millennial notions forcefully took root. During the beginning of the sixteenth century, a fascination developed with the ancient Israelite people, and despite the fact that most Englishmen had never seen a Jew in person,¹¹ their history and language became an important topic of scholarship, religion and conversation.¹² In fact, the last decades of Queen Elizabeth’s reign inaugurated an era

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bradstock, “Millenarianism in the Reformation,” 77.

¹¹ Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, 46.

¹² Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 53, 90.

awash with millennialist tracts and theories, an environment which only fueled the Englishmen's preoccupation with Jewish conversion.¹³

Just as millennialists in the past had done, the English interpreted the biblical prophecies in ways that would suit contemporary circumstances. The fall of the Ottoman Empire in the east became an integral part of millennialist expectations: it was impractical, Englishmen believed, for the Jews to return to their land while it was controlled by Muslim occupiers – some even wanted to return the Jews to Palestine through paramilitary adventures.¹⁴ While the Ottomans were viewed as a challenge from the east, there also existed a western threat: the Pope himself was believed to be the antichrist. The prophecies spoke of the Roman Empire as the grand oppressor of the Jews in ancient Israel; in order for the Jews to be free, the Romans had to relinquish their control over Judea. By adapting this foretelling to meet their current political and religious climate, Protestants developed the belief that the Holy See, as the Roman substitute, was the oppressor of all true Christian people, and therefore had to be destroyed before the millennium could arrive. This animosity towards Muslims and Catholics suited many of the extant prejudices in seventeenth century Britain, and these fixations only emphasized the centrality of Judaism to the millennial affair. It was the necessary return of the Jews to their homeland which made the Ottoman Empire so important, and the experience of unjust Jewish oppression – the same now felt by Protestant reformers – that legitimized claims about the evil of papal domination. At the end of the sixteenth century, one theorist pointed out that “if history were to move toward

¹³ Richard Popkin, “Christian Jews and Jewish Christians in the 17th Century,” in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard Popkin and Gordon Weiner (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 57-72; see also, Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 89-126.

¹⁴ Endelmen, *Jews of Georgian England*, 54-55.

the millennium, then the fall of the papacy and the destruction of the Turkish Empire must take place (this latter to permit the return of the Jews to the Holy Land).”¹⁵

A significant millennialist, Thomas Brightman, emphasizing the importance of Jewish conversion, contended that the Jews could be returned to Palestine only after their acceptance of Christianity. As with many similar hypotheses, Brightman’s required an end to the papacy and the fall of the Ottoman Empire if the Jews were to actually be restored to ancient Judea.¹⁶ With the proliferation of millennialist tracts in the seventeenth century, the preoccupation with the Jews continued to flourish, and many titles even bore direct reference to this concern with Judaism.¹⁷

Since some respected predictions placed the millennium as early as 1650, preparations became pertinent, and this countdown subsequently triggered the personal, proactive involvement of the English.¹⁸ Englishmen developed millennial theories that allotted to themselves an integral role in the anxiously anticipated events of Jesus’ return. James Maxwell’s *Admirable and Notable Prophecies*, published in 1615, actually envisioned an English angelic agent that brought forth the end of days. Some Englishmen went so far in conceptualizing their role as to identify personally with the ancient Israelites, viewing themselves as an elected people and England as the new Israel.¹⁹ Notably, this interest in the Jews was derived almost entirely from reading about the people of the Bible rather than any interaction with or understanding of contemporary

¹⁵ Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, 12.

¹⁶ On Thomas Brightman and his millennialism, see Avihu Zakai, “Thomas Brightman and English Apocalyptic Tradition,” in *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World*, ed. Yosef Kaplan, Henry Mechoulan and Richard Popkin (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 31-44; Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 91-92; Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, 12-13.

¹⁷ For instance, Sir Henry Filch’s 1621, *The Worlds Great Restauration of the Calling of the Jews*. Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁹ Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, 11.

Jews. For instance, certain Puritans, honoring the text of the Old Testament, adopted Jewish practices like circumcision and observed Saturday as the Sabbath, not because they saw their neighbors acting in this manner but because those were the commandments in the Bible. This kind of identification manifested itself in other cases as well. One Englishman, John Traske, was persecuted extensively for his identification with ancient Judaism and constantly suffered accusations of judaizing. Traske, like certain Puritans and Sabbatarians, had decided to keep Jewish dietary laws and to observe other Jewish rituals like the Sabbath on Saturday. Eventually, some of his London followers left for Amsterdam where they were able to convert formally to Judaism and continue proselytizing.²⁰

Despite the results of more extreme instances like Traske or some Puritans, millennialist and conversionary ideas were not confined to the periphery of an overzealous and fanatically religious minority. One consequence of these apocalyptic preoccupations, and of the seminal role the English had convinced themselves they were to play in such events, was a movement in the middle of the seventeenth century to allow for the readmission of the Jews to England. Brightman had predicted in 1644 that if allowed back into the country, the national conversion of the Jews would happen by 1695, and the millennium could then follow.²¹ Thus, surrounding the Whitehall Conference, the meeting at which the English debated the readmission of the Jews, was the presupposition that their acceptance in England and their assimilation into English

²⁰ Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 18-34; Endelman, *Jews of Georgian England*, 54-55; Robert M. Healey, "The Jew in Seventeenth-Century Protestant Thought," *Church History*, vol. 46, no. 1 (Mar., 1977), 64.

²¹ Zakai, "Thomas Brightman," 31-44.

society, would hasten Jewish conversion.²² This approach to Judaism was unlike any other attempted before: rather than separate and ostracize the Jews, castigating them with polemics and persecutions until they realized the error of their wicked ways – the conventional approach towards the Jews during the Middle Ages²³ – some seventeenth century English millennialists welcomed the Jews into Christian society, hoping that eventually their assimilation would facilitate an understanding of, identification with, and conversion to Christianity. The sentiments behind this approach have been designated “philo-semitism.”²⁴

Understandably, the term philo-semitism insinuates religious tolerance, especially when compared to the term anti-Semitism. This dichotomy is, however, superficial, and philo-semitism must be understood as having marked similarities to its kin expression. For, in effect, both ultimately sought the destruction of Jewry, whether by potentially violent and hateful means (anti-Semitism) or simply by proffering a welcoming and interested façade designed to expedite assimilation and ultimately inspire conversion (philo-semitism). Despite the fact that the tactics of anti-Semites and philo-semites

²² The most thorough discussion of the Jewish readmission to England from the perspective of British history is Katz’s *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603-1655*. On the belief that Jewish acceptance would lead to their conversion, he offers the words of Thomas Draxe, and writes, “Christian subjects might provide an admirable example, for if they conducted themselves with piety ‘doubtlesly in many places many more Iewes then now are, would be moued and drawne to embrace the Gospell.’” Katz, *Readmission*, 94-95. See also, Healey, “Jews in Protestant Thought,” 76.

²³ Take, for example, the tragedy in Castile, Spain during the summer of 1391, during which vituperative anti-Jewish preaching resulted in the murder of hundreds of Jews and the forced baptism of thousands. This was an approach that would not simply be shunned by later Christians who worked for the conversion of the Jews, but scorned as well. On this event, see Mark D. Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom: Society, Economy, and Politics in Morvedre, 1248-1391* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 272. See also Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*, 3-4.

²⁴ On early philo-semitic and millennialist practices in Great Britain, see Arthur Williamson, “British Israel and Roman Britain: The Jews and Scottish Models of Polity from George Buchanan to Samuel Rutherford,” in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard Popkin and Gordon Weiner (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 97-117.

remained different, their underlying goal was essentially the same: they wanted an end to Judaism.²⁵ As has been observed:

Whether seen (as they were in anti-Semitic eyes) as coin-clippers, iconoclasts and thieves, compulsive proselytizers and cut-throat crucifiers, or (in philo-Semitic terms) as the residue of God's chosen people permitted to survive as a token of his enduring love for the true Christian, the Jews were rarely observed for their own sake but in terms of distinctive Anglo-Saxon attitudes and values that their presence seemed to challenge or negate.²⁶

Thus, millennialist expectations and conversionary impulses were issues that confronted and engaged Christian consciousness, rarely having immediate and direct implications on Jewish thought or in the Jewish world.²⁷ Obviously, the significant exception to this fact was the ultimate effect of the millennialist fervor during the first half of the seventeenth century. Although the Jews were not granted unrestrained admission to England in 1656, that year designated the English acceptance of, not only the ancient Israelites but their theological successors, the modern day Jews.

Out of this atmosphere of seventeenth century toleration for the Jewish people, and an interest in their ancient heritage, language and religion, arose a particular

²⁵ Perhaps this view is exceedingly cynical considering the fact that there were most assuredly Christians whose interest in the Jews (whether modern or ancient), their sources, and their language, did not necessarily end with a desire to convert them to Christianity. Those Christians, however, have been more generally designated Christian-Hebraists, a term discussed in the first chapter. For the sake of making a distinction between conversionary driven philo-semites and intellectually interested Christian-Hebraists, two groups that admittedly overlapped, this paper will use the aforementioned terms with the previous designations in mind.

²⁶ The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. *The Jew as Other: A Century of English Caricature 1730-1830*, exhibited in 1995, 6.

²⁷ One character is worth mentioning as a marked departure from this rule. Menasseh ben Israel was a figure of the Jewish community in Amsterdam whose complicated social networking, personal beliefs and particular occupational appointments prompted his quest to allow for the readmission of the Jews to England in the hopes that this would facilitate the occurrence of certain messianic expectations. For more on this, see Harold Fisch, "The Messianic Politics of Menasseh ben Israel," in *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World*, ed. Yosef Kaplan, Henry Mechoulam and Richard Popkin (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 228-243; Rivka Schatz, "Menasseh ben Israel's Approach to Messianism in the Jewish-Christian Context," in *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World*, ed. Yosef Kaplan, Henry Mechoulam and Richard Popkin (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 244-261; and generally, Katz, *Readmission of the Jews*.

conversionary impulse that was unlike any associated simply with philo-semitism or millennialism. This unique approach to Jewish conversion was found among antitrinitarians. The distinguishing element between antitrinitarian conversionary desires and those of all other Christians was that the antitrinitarians believed they were no longer presenting the Jews with the same Christianity that had always been offered to them. Rather, antitrinitarians had altered the religion, returning it to its original state wherefrom the irrationality and inconsistent absurdities had been purged. Now, antitrinitarians believed, having moved closer to a religion resembling Judaism, the Jews would feel more inclined to investigate the gospel and adhere to the properly understood truths that lay within it. Despite the pervasive millennialist atmosphere in England, that country was not the first place to see the emergence of this alternate strain of thought. In fact, the antitrinitarian conversionary inclination existed on the continent as early as the sixteenth century in the writings of the dissident Spanish theologian, Michael Servetus.²⁸

As an ardent antitrinitarian, Servetus marks not only the beginning of a rebellion against the Trinity, but of an association of these theological proclivities with a unique approach to the conversion of the Jews. In his *Errors of the Trinity*, Michael Servetus asked his audience the following question: “What sort of reasoning should you rely upon in order that such Jews might be persuaded as you see expecting the Messiah to-day?”²⁹ In this question the entire nature of the antitrinitarian, and eventually the Unitarian, approach to Jewish conversion and millennialism is encapsulated. Rather than denounce and vilify the Jews for their ignorance and folly, as many Christians were wont to do in an attempt to convert these unbelievers to Christianity, Servetus asked his Christian

²⁸ While Servetus did mention Jewish conversion, he was relatively disinterested in the millennium; Friedman, *Total Heresy*, 36.

²⁹ Servetus, *Errors of the Trinity*, 58.

reader on what grounds and with what reason he essayed to persuade the Jews to believe as he did. Turning the focus of conversionary designs onto the Christians, Servetus attempted to force a reevaluation of Christianity and by extension, its approach to Jewish conversion.

Servetus' unique method of viewing Jewish conversation is certainly fitting, considering the fact that he asked in his first treatise for perhaps the grandest alteration to Christianity as it had been known and understood for at least a thousand years. His own distaste for the Trinity was due in part to the irrationality of the doctrine, and Servetus linked that incomprehensibility to the Jewish refusal to accept Christianity. That is, the Trinity was the greatest stumbling block to the Jews understanding and accepting the Christian religion. Not only, Servetus concluded, was it necessary to remove this absurd and undoubtedly erroneous doctrine for the sake of Christianity, but doing so would alleviate the problem that had plagued the Christians for so long: how to convert the Jews. By simplifying the unnecessary complexities of Christianity and reclaiming the purity of Christian doctrine, Servetus consciously moved his religion closer to Judaism, and believed that such theological adjustments reopened the gates of conversion by spreading the gospel as it was meant to be understood.³⁰

³⁰ Servetus' lengthy exposition of his theological beliefs indicates immediately that these adjustments to orthodox Christianity were not simply coercive machinations designed to make the Jews feel more comfortable converting. Rather, antitrinitarian writings make clear that they altered Christianity because their consciences no longer permitted them to continue worshipping God in such a manner as the Trinity demanded. It was only natural that antitrinitarians would think that their modifications to orthodox Christianity were appealing to the Jews, because they believed that the implications fundamental to the Trinity – both in regards to God's nature and messianic expectations – were inherently contradictory to the teachings of Judaism. Without these complicating elements, antitrinitarians believed, there was no longer an obstruction to understanding the truth of Christianity. Therefore, discussing the antitrinitarians' view of conversion is not meant to invalidate the sincerity with which they approached their modifications to Christianity.

The leaders of the eighteenth century Unitarian movement, having altered orthodox Christianity in an even more extreme manner than Servetus, also contextualized their actions in a way that addressed the concern about the Jewish perception and reception of Christianity.³¹ Theophilus Lindsey believed that the Jews “look upon the doctrine of Christ being God, with abhorrence, as idolatrous.” Moreover he added, they, “it must be confessed, as it may be demonstrably proved, are already worshippers of the one only true God.” Lindsey remained convinced that “whilst the universal body of christians hold forth in their creeds such a deplorable error concerning the founder of their religion and will not recede from it, there can be no hope of the conversion of” the Jews.³² That is, as long as the Trinity remained part and parcel of a Christian’s creed, the Jews would remain opposed to conversion. As the first Unitarian minister wrote elsewhere: “The Jew and the Mahometan will ever be averse to the doctrine of *three persons being each of them god*, which directly contradicts the divine revelation given to the ancestors of the former, held by them both in the highest veneration; wherein it is most expressly taught that GOD is ONE; one single person.”³³ The Trinity stood in direct opposition to the revelation delivered to the Jewish people, and the truth of that revelation, Lindsey believed, was eternally inalterable.

³¹ As was mentioned in chapter 2, it was difficult to locate antitrinitarian writings in England during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century that discussed the complication of the Trinity to Jewish conversion. It is possible that this is due in part to the recession of millennialist fervor after the admission of the Jews and prior to the French Revolution. This does not mean, however, that such ideas were not extant. Notably, conversionary and millennial notions permeated the intellectual ranks of English society in the latter part of the seventeenth century. Many of the pioneering rationalists of the age such as Isaac Newton and John Locke – who both exhibited antitrinitarian tendencies – firmly believed in the national conversion and restoration of the Jewish people. On Isaac Newton and millennialism see Force, “Newton, Lord God of Israel,” 131-158; Manuel, *Religion of Newton*, 126-136.

³² Lindsey, *Examination*, iv.

³³ Lindsey, *State of the Unitarian Doctrine*, 3-5. Original emphasis. All emphasis in this chapter is by the original intention of the author unless otherwise indicated.

It is important to note the distinction between Lindsey's desires to adjust orthodox Christianity as a means to reach the truth rather than as a way to spread the gospel to the Jews. The latter result, Lindsey contended, was merely a consequence of the former necessity. Abolishing the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus from Christian doctrine, he writes, "will tend to promote the virtue and happiness of mankind, by removing some otherwise unsurmountable obstacles to the propagation of the divine truth of the gospel."³⁴ By removing such irrational and convoluted elements, Unitarians believed that they were simplifying Christianity, thereby easing the Jews' transition upon accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

In his *Sequel to the Apology*, Lindsey relayed some orthodox Christians' attempts to encourage the Jews to convert. Observing the underhanded and condemnatory conversionary schemes of trinitarians, Lindsey noted the absurdity of approaches that did not respect "the very design of [the Jews'] law, and ... the primary article of their faith; viz. that Jehovah, the one supreme God, was to be worshipped, and no other."³⁵ He did not believe that any version of Christianity disregarding this fact was "likely to remove the prejudices of unbelievers against the bible," especially not a version that created "a new object of worship, and substitute of Deity, found out by Christians for the jews, which their fathers of the circumcision never owned, and their sons now universally deny."³⁶ Criticizing trinitarians' alternate approaches to Jewish conversion was one means by which Lindsey conveyed the superiority of Unitarianism: having reacquired the

³⁴ Ibid., 3.

³⁵ Lindsey, *Sequel to the Apology*, 383-384.

³⁶ Ibid., 384. Here, Lindsey recounts the story of Benjamin ben Mordechai, whose attempts to convert the Jews by convincing them that the Trinity was conceptually familiar because their ancestors were idolaters, he considered categorically absurd. As was mentioned in chapter three, it should be noted again that Lindsey chose to capitalize or not to capitalize proper nouns such as "Jew" and "Christian" in a seemingly random fashion.

truth of the gospel from the convoluted doctrines of the previous millennium and a half, antitrinitarianism had a natural appeal, or so Unitarians believed, to the Jews.

William Hopkins, a lesser known eighteenth century antitrinitarian, explained the natural impossibility of endeavoring so earnestly to convert the Jews when gross theological misconceptions plagued the Christian creed.³⁷ “Upon some occasions, more especially in one of the collects for Good-Friday,” he writes, “we earnestly pray for the conversion of jews, turks, and infidels, and at the end of the very same collect, we inconsistently keep up a religious practice, that is one of the greatest obstacles to their conversion.”³⁸ This grand obstruction, according to Hopkins, was the Trinity and its accompanying idolatrous practices and beliefs: “For it is extremely evident, by all accounts, that neither jews, nor mahometans, who are believers of one supreme God, can be converted whilst they are taught to think, that the doctrine of three persons in one God, and the worship practiced in consequence of it, are essential parts of the christian religion.”³⁹ Hopkins was certainly not the only other Unitarian to implicate the doctrine of the Trinity for impeding Christian conversionary efforts.

Joshua Toulmin, an activist for the cause of the Unitarians who had earned the admiration of both Lindsey and Priestley, drew the same conclusions about the detrimental effects of holding notions of a tripartite God and worshipping a being other than the one true Lord.⁴⁰ He writes, “Thus does the doctrine of the trinity prove a stumbling-block in the way of jews, mahometans, and heathens.”⁴¹ Reiterating the words

³⁷ On Hopkins, see *National Biography*.

³⁸ William Hopkins, *A Friendly Dialogue between a Common Unitarian Christian and an Athanasian*, 3d ed. (London: 1794), 35-36.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁰ On Joshua Toulmin, see *National Biography*.

⁴¹ Joshua Toulmin, *An Exhortation to All Christian People to Refrain from Trinitarian Worship*, 2d ed. (1789), 37.

of a clergyman who was acting as a ship's chaplain, Toulmin writes, "I was sorry that the turks, jews, &c. were so very much offended with the christian religion upon these two accounts." He continues by explaining those elements of Christianity that the Muslims and Jews found so repulsive: "the one the worshipping of images, the other the belief and worship of the *trinity*, which seemed to them to be the belief of three Gods."⁴² Lindsey would have been unsurprised at such findings, believing himself that the outright defilement of Judaic monotheism by the Trinity was reason enough for the Jews – and free-thinking Christians – to eschew orthodox Christianity. "It is no secret," he preached to his congregants, "what has been the objection of Jews and Mahometans for ages against the gospel, which causes them to stumble at the very threshold and turn from it without farther examination. I mean, their persuaded that Xns are Polytheists that worship three persons, three Gods, instead of one God, the Father."⁴³ Without the Trinity, then, Lindsey and the Unitarians believed that the Jews would feel inclined at the very least to investigate and inquire about Christianity.

Collectively identifying the Trinity as the occlusive object impeding Jewish conversion, late eighteenth century antitrinitarians had to decide how to handle this problem. In an exhortative sermon delivered in late 1779, Lindsey addressed numerous elements of the Unitarian platform. Guided by reason and contending that the Jews were as well, Lindsey declared that "rational inquiries can never be reconciled to what shocks their reason and their natural notions of God."⁴⁴ He hoped to rectify this problem "by a diligent study also of the word of God as believed in the scriptures, and fair and just representations of its doctrines." This would, he was sure, "pave the way for the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lindsey, Sermon on Matthew.

⁴⁴ Sermon of Theophilus Lindsey, September 19, 1779.

universal reception of” the gospel.⁴⁵ Although he did not publicly confront the Jews himself, Lindsey did believe that it was important to convey the Christian truth as it was understood by Unitarians as a means of prompting Jewish conversion:

It would certainly be one great step towards bringing Jews and Mahometans to believe the gospel, were we able to convince them, that christians revered Jesus Christ as the most highly favoured prophet of God, but did not worship him, nor any other person, but the single person Jehovah, the almighty Father and Creator of all things, the God of Abraham, the God of Israel, the one, only true God.⁴⁶

Despite not addressing the Jews directly in print, it is evident from letters sent to William Tayleur, including the one about Lindsey’s conversation with Mr. Rebello, that when afforded the opportunity, he shared with the Jews the Unitarian understanding of God.⁴⁷

In fact, a letter sent to Tayleur just a week before the one concerning Mr. Rebello described a dinner at which Joseph Priestley, and eleven Jews, including the prominent and outspoken figure of the Jewish community, David Levi, were in attendance. Upon noting his delight that all present worshipped the same God, Lindsey’s words were immediately countered with arguments about the “perfection of the mosaic law,” and a “conversation went on for an hour and half, without any pause” about religious matters. While the remarks of Priestley apparently calmed the polite but firm uproar from the Jewish gentlemen, “the whole passed and ended with great good humour on both sides.”⁴⁸ While Lindsey’s attempts at amicable discussions with the Jewish people about the proximity of his religion to theirs were limited to conversations such as this, it was Joseph Priestley who addressed the Jews in a public forum, attempting thereby to engage them in a general discussion about the benefits of converting to Christianity – Unitarian

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Lindsey, *Examination*, 195.

⁴⁷ Lindsey to Tayleur, 13 May 1788, 138-139.

⁴⁸ Lindsey to Tayleur, 6 May 1788.

Christianity – and the unavoidable importance of their conversion for the salvation of the world.

Priestley was not only a strict Unitarian and hopeful conversionist, but as a devout millennialist, he was wholeheartedly consumed by the centrality of the Jewish people to the prophesied events surrounding the second coming of Jesus. It was in large part these ardent convictions regarding the millennium that drove Priestley in 1786 to address publicly the Jewish community, inviting them to an amiable discussion about the gospel.⁴⁹ Priestley considered it evident “that the second coming of Christ [would] be coincident with the commencement of the millennium, or the future peaceable and happy state of the world (which, according to all the prophecies, will take place after the restoration of the Jews).”⁵⁰ Emphasizing their centrality to his worldview, Priestley considered “the restoration of the Jews to their own country...the great burden of all antient prophecy,”⁵¹ and made it his mission to convey to the Jews their importance in affairs both earthly and celestial.

Rather than simply bombard the Jews with prophecies and interpretations that they might dismiss as fallacious Christian fancy, Priestley, forever a scientist, approached the Jews as he attempted to approach everything: with reason. Believing, as Lindsey did, that the Jews had rejected Christianity due to the irrationality of the Trinity, Priestley concluded that the Jewish people were steeped in reason. Also like Lindsey, Priestley did

⁴⁹ Priestley was not the only Englishmen pondering the place of the Jews at this time. Titles of other millennialist tracts reflected the centrality of the Jewish role in the prophesied events: for instance, Joseph Eyre’s *Observations upon the Prophecies relating to the Restoration of the Jews*, published in 1771 and E.W. Whitaker’s 1784 publication of *A Dissertation on the Prophecies relating to the Final Restoration of the Jews*.

⁵⁰ Joseph Priestley, *The present state of Europe compared with antient prophecies: a sermon, preached at the Gravel Pit meeting in Hackney, February 28, 1794, being the day appointed for a general fast*, 3d ed. (London: printed for J. Johnson, 1794), 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

not wish to coerce others into accepting his faith, but contended that the only way to be truly convinced of the veracity of Unitarian Christianity was to inquire into such matters oneself by a judicious reading of the scriptures. Acknowledging the theological errors of Christians in the past, Priestley tells the Jews that “Christians in general, and especially the more civilized among them, are disposed to treat you with equity and humanity.” He encouraged the Jews to “*now* make enquiry into” these Christians’ faith so that “you will find that many of” those irrational “doctrines which you so justly abhor have been “rejected, as abuses and corruptions of” true religion.⁵² Priestley was proud that “this rational doctrine [Unitarianism] prevails more and more among christians.”⁵³ Because he did not read the Bible as others had told him it should be read, Priestley did not believe that anyone else should do so either. As an historical document, the truth of revelation was to be demonstrated through biblical explication, and it was on these rationally inspired grounds that Priestley wished to engage the Jews in conversation.⁵⁴

The Unitarian minister, accepting the truth of the biblical prophecies, tried to attract the Jews with the credibility of his interpretations, and therefore employed them in his letters to them.⁵⁵ Citing the scriptural prophecies found in Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel, but also the Book of Revelation, Priestley sought to allure the Jews by addressing that

⁵² Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Jews Inviting Them to an Amicable Discussion of the Evidences of Christianity*, 2d (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1787), 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁴ James J. Hoecker, “Joseph Priestley as a historian and the idea of progress,” *The Price-Priestley Newsletter* 3 (1979): 33.

⁵⁵ Interestingly, Jewish conversion to Christianity had little to do with millennial expectations and far more to do with the economic benefits of being a member of the Christian community. It was therefore generally only Christians who were interested in the second coming of Jesus. The editors of a book of eighteenth century cartoons, published by the Jewish Theological Seminary, have observed about Jewish conversion in Britain from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries that, “The majority of Jewish converts to Christianity during the period turned to their new faith more by their own volition than necessarily by external persuasion. Their individual reasons for taking this fundamental step ranged widely, from the visible demonstration of a deep seated spiritual belief to a desire merely for wider or freer acceptance within English society.” Library of JTS, *English Caricature*, 41.

which was promised them: their ancient homeland and a peaceful and prosperous future. Of Palestine, Priestley writes, “To you, as the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God has promised the possession of the land of Canaan.”⁵⁶ Aware that Diaspora Judaism had never relinquished its hopes of redemption, Priestley declared his support for Jewish salvation and recompense for their suffering. “You are destined, in the wise councils of God, to be the first of nations, and your faith and patience will be crowned with an abundant reward,” he writes. “Great beyond example as have been your sufferings, the sure word of prophecy assures you they will bear no sensible proportion to the happiness that awaits you.”⁵⁷ The significance of Judaism in world affairs was beyond compare in Priestley’s mind: “Your whole nation is to be the head of all the nations of the earth,” he exclaims, “in order to its being the medium of communicating happiness to all mankind, who are equally the offspring of God, and the care of his providence, with yourselves.”⁵⁸ Priestley pointed out his understanding that “to bring before” the Jews “the Christian prophecies in the Book of *Revelation*,” would be futile; instead, he consulted that “authority of which” the Jews “acknowledge,” i.e. the Old Testament. Therein, he says,

are sufficient indications of the near approach to the termination of your present dispersion, and of your restoration to your own country, the consequent undisturbed and perpetual possession of it, and a state of unexampled prosperity and high distinction in it, the greatest and most respected of nations.⁵⁹

Although his words could be misconstrued as petty appeals to gain converts, both his audience and his later declarations make clear that this was a heartfelt entreaty.

⁵⁶ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 7.

⁵⁷ Joseph Priestley, *An Address to the Jews on the Present State of the World and the Prophecies Relating to It* (Northumberland: A. Kennedy, 1799), 395.

⁵⁸ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 53.

⁵⁹ Priestley, *Address to the Jews*, 406-407.

While addressed to the Jews, these letters were also published in front of and read by a Christian audience, most of whom were Priestley's theological opponents. These onlookers, however, were of no concern to Priestley, as he valued only the ability to communicate to the Jews the importance of their future role. This becomes more apparent when Priestley expounded upon, not only the rewards promised to the Jews, but the punishments that would inevitably befall the Christians. "Now the only days of vengeance particularly announced by the antient prophets, to which Jesus here alludes," Priestley writes, "relate to the judgments of God upon the Gentiles who had shewn enmity to the Jews, and especially in their opposition to their resettlement in their own country."⁶⁰ Hindrance of the necessary Jewish ingathering to ancient Judea potentially subjected all gentiles to the grave consequences of divine vengeance. "There is nothing more clear in the whole compass of prophecy" than that "the heaviest of all the divine judgments will fall upon those nations by whom [the Jews] shall have been oppressed." In Priestley's eyes, it was the Catholics, as the successors of the Romans, who had most mercilessly oppressed the Jews; divine punishment, he says, "will involve almost all the nations of the world, but more especially those of these western parts, which have been subject first to the Roman empire, and then to the see of Rome."⁶¹ By connecting Catholic rulers to their geographical predecessors, those who had oppressively governed first century Judea, Priestley interpreted the biblical prophecies to foretell the destruction of those he considered the corruptors of Christianity. The absurdity of Catholic doctrine, according to Priestley, had not only resulted in centuries of oppression – both religiously and intellectually – but had also polluted and spread the gospel under idolatrous

⁶⁰ Priestley, *Fast Sermon*, 17.

⁶¹ Ibid.

pretenses. Biblical prophecies involving the Jews, then, allowed Priestley to justify his theological positions within a grander worldview.

Priestley was not the only outspoken Unitarian of public notoriety who believed in millennial prophecies. Richard Price, a prolific antitrinitarian author, mathematician, and activist, emerged as a political and intellectual leader during Rational Dissent in the second half of the eighteenth century. After attending a nonconformist academy, and becoming a dissenting minister, Price devoted much of his time to promoting the spiritual, intellectual and political rights of the individual.⁶² Before Price's death in 1791, he and Priestley had conversed about the millennium, adopting similar views about the nature of events to come and the proximity of their occurrence. The two ministers also shared a positivist view about the future state of affairs. Not only did they consider it their responsibility to work towards fulfilling the prophecies that would usher in the millennium, but they believed that their own efforts to be moral and upright individuals – and thereby set an example for all – could bring about a future, earthly paradise.⁶³ As late eighteenth century liberals, Price and Priestley considered it incumbent upon mankind to help bring about this good life, and “both men argued that everyone was morally obliged to relieve his fellows of any distress in which he found them, whether they were Christian, Moslem, or Jewish.”⁶⁴ While there was certainly nothing precluding others from holding comparably liberal views, such proclamations were a hallmark of a liberal, dissenting, and particularly Unitarian, agenda.

In his primary millennialist tract, *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind, with the Means and Duty of Promoting it*, Richard

⁶² On Price, see Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 1, 471-476.

⁶³ Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

Price exhorted all men to hasten the millennium by creating one thousand years of peace and prosperity in every way that they could. He contends that “the truth is, that there is a kingdom of Christ still to come,” but regardless it is man’s responsibility to strive to create “that better state of things upon earth which our Lord expresses, by *doing the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven*.”⁶⁵ This post-millennialist attitude, heavily influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment and Rational Dissent, put the power to change the world in the hands of men. Belief in this humanly acquirable peace, however, did not shake Price’s conviction that a future kingdom was at hand.

Price’s own millennialist conceptions were more akin to a Jewish understanding of this glorious age rather than the standard and more negative Christian one.⁶⁶ As he writes, “It appears evidently that the phrases, *kingdom of God*, and *kingdom of heaven*, which the Jews used to signify the reign of their Messiah, and by which it is expressed in the New Testament, were derived from these prophetic representations in Daniel,” a book of the Old Testament.⁶⁷ The millennialist concerns demonstrated by both Price and Priestley rested heavily upon Old Testament prophecies that centered about the Jews. As one millennial historian explains, the two Unitarian theologians

placed greater emphasis on the optimistic tradition that was steeped in highly positive images of peace and happiness. This vision is rooted in the Jewish apocalyptic or messianic tradition that projects a future golden age of bliss and happiness at the end of time. This tradition, less orthodox in terms of later Christianity, derives from the Hebrew scriptures, most notably Isaiah. Here a future era of happiness, justice, and prosperity is to befall the Jewish people, a veritable Sabbath age when the Jews would at

⁶⁵ Richard Price, *The Works of Richard Price with Memoirs of His Life*, ed. William Morgan, vol. 10, *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind, with the Means and Duty of Promoting it*, 1787 (London: Richard Rees, 1816), 3.

⁶⁶ Price, *Future Period of Improvement*, 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

last find rest, just as God had reposed from his labors on the seventh day of creation.⁶⁸

As if to emphasize this point, Price writes, Isaiah “foretells that under the reign of the Messiah, the *Lord would create new heavens and a new earth. The people of the Jews should be all righteous, and inhabit their land for ever.*”⁶⁹ Price’s millennialist views do not draw their significance from the fact that they are concerned with Judaism; rather, like Priestley, it was both the extreme degree to which the Jews had a central importance in those designs, and the fact that the Jews were praised instead of held in contempt for their position, that made his antitrinitarian millennial theories so uncommon.

Speaking of the same prophecy to which Price referred, Priestley says in his 1794 Fast Sermon, “The future happy state of the world, when the Jews shall be restored to their own country, and be at the head of all the nations of the earth, was first distinctly mentioned by Isaiah, and other prophets who were nearly cotemporary with him.”⁷⁰ Unfortunately, destruction and devastation might have to precede these important events. As Priestley says, “That those great troubles, so frequently mentioned in the antient prophecies, are now commencing, I do own I strongly suspect.”⁷¹ Just nine months later, Priestley left England to settle in Pennsylvania, and the minister became even further convinced that this important point in history was close at hand.⁷² In a November 1794 correspondence, he wrote to Lindsey,

A new state of things is certainly about to take place, and some important prophecies, I believe, are about to be fulfilled.... The late events, and my continued attention to the prophecies, make me see this in a stronger light than I did when I wrote my Fast Sermon. Many more of the prophecies

⁶⁸ Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, 39.

⁶⁹ Price, *Future Period of Improvement*, 7.

⁷⁰ Priestley, *Fast Sermon*, 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷² Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, 312-313.

than I was then aware of indicate the great destruction that will be made of mankind before the restoration of the Jews.⁷³

In a letter written in 1798 to Thomas Belsham, an important Unitarian minister and close friend,⁷⁴ Priestley revealed his conviction that Jesus' return was at hand, but quickly qualified his assertion by adding that this could not occur until the Jews had gathered in Palestine, an event that Priestley admitted no longer seemed forthcoming at that time.⁷⁵ No matter the immediate likelihood of any one event, the Jews remained the central axis around which all of Priestley's millennial hypotheses revolved. Certainly other signs, such as the French Revolution and those that prompted this devout Unitarian's feelings of impending doom five years later, could occur, but history would remain static until the Jews had "providentially fulfil[led] their divinely appointed task of moving history to its inevitable end."⁷⁶

Throughout his various appeals to the Jews, whether the letters of the 1780s or the *Address* at the end of the century, Priestley never lost sight of his goal of bringing the Jews to a discussion of Christianity in order that they might ultimately convert. In this and many other ways, Priestley could reasonably be mistaken for nearly any Christian obsessed with the apocalypse. However, Priestley was not just any other millennialist: he was a Unitarian millennialist. And as such, his approach to Jewish conversion was different from the abundant millennial theories that littered the pamphlets and tracts of the English publishing scene.

⁷³ Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey, November 12, 1794, as quoted in Andrews, *Unitarian Radicalism*, 35.

⁷⁴ On Belsham, see Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, 326-330, 342-343.

⁷⁵ Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics*, 30.

⁷⁶ Jack Fruchtman, Jr., "Joseph Priestley and Early English Zionism," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 2 (1983): 41.

It must be remembered that Priestley did not simply address a Christian audience as so many others did. Rather, he appealed directly to the Jews *in front of* a Christian audience – an audience that continually scorned and condemned him for his already aberrant beliefs. Thus, every word Priestley wrote must be understood within the context of a Unitarian believing that he could offer the Jews a Christianity that was not only purged of corruptions and finally in possession of the truth, but that was already closer to the Jewish religion and therefore easier to adopt theologically. Moreover, unlike conventional millennialists, Priestley’s preoccupation with the Jews extended beyond the eternal realm, and had potentially tangible implications in the English world of the eighteenth century, as well. This world was much like the one Lindsey envisioned – a world in which everyone would have the right to think and worship as he pleased without the fear of punishment. Priestley’s calls to the Jews, then, reveal the ways in which his Unitarianism shaped his understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

In predictable Unitarian fashion, Priestley sympathized with the Jews and justified, as Lindsey had, their inability to accept Christianity. “Your dislike of christians, and your abhorrence of their faith,” he writes to the Jews, “is not to be wondered at, when it is considered how much you have suffered by their cruel oppressions, and how contrary their doctrines have been to the fundamental principles of your religion.”⁷⁷ Not only did orthodox Christianity have no right to seek the conversion of the Jews, but it was absurd that they would do so with vile treatment and laughably irrational doctrines, Priestley reassured the Jews in front of a Christian audience. Elaborating on the reasons for the acceptability of their stalwart behavior, Priestley

⁷⁷ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 2-3.

writes, “A religion so authenticated as yours, is certainly intitled to your most zealous attachment.”⁷⁸ At certain points, these laudatory remarks appear obsequious. He fawns, “your faith is as firm at this day as it was two thousand years ago,”⁷⁹ and even opens his letters with this almost unnecessary and sycophantic accolade: “I admire your persevering faith in the promises of God, notwithstanding the most discouraging appearances. In this you shew yourselves to be the worthy sons of the great patriarch from who you are descended.”⁸⁰ Priestley also tells the Jews in his later *Address* that he, “from his early years has entertained the greatest respect and veneration for your nation, and ... has endeavoured to vindicate the honor of your religion, and to evince its superiority to all other ancient religions.”⁸¹ The excessive reverence Priestley demonstrated towards the Jews, however, was more than an attempt to curry favor as part of an alternate, experimental conversionary strategy. In fact, Priestley’s attitude was a direct product of his antitrinitarianism, because it was his understanding of Unitarianism’s proximity to Judaism that inspired his profound appreciation of the Jewish people.

Were it not for the Jews having preserved the proper doctrine of the divine unity – the foundations of his own belief system – Unitarian Christianity might never have reemerged. “God instructed you in the true knowledge and pure worship of himself,” Priestley tells the Jews, “so that by means of your nation, that most important doctrine of the *divine unity*, has, together with the spirituality of his worship, been preserved in the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁹ Priestley, *Address to the Jews*, 394.

⁸⁰ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 1-2.

⁸¹ Priestley, *Address to the Jews*, 393.

world through all ages, even to this day.”⁸² Echoing the same sentiments over a decade later, Priestley tells the Jews that “it has been by means of your nation that this most valuable knowledge, the only antidote to a wretched and debasing superstition, has been preserved in the world.”⁸³ Already sounding a great deal like Lindsey, Priestley identified the central elements of his own religion as inherent parts of Judaism. When addressing the Jews directly, as opposed to a Christian audience as Lindsey had, this can be identified as nothing less than a means by which to call attention to the similarities between Judaism and Unitarian Christianity in order to demonstrate the ease of moving from one to the other.

Priestley’s continued efforts to elucidate the traditions’ likenesses can be found packed amidst banal exaltations. He writes,

Children of the stock of Abraham, and heirs of the sure promises of God. Bear, I intreat to you, with the serious address of a christian, who reverences your nation, is a believer in the future glory of it, and is a worshipper of the God of your fathers, without admitting any other to share in the rights of divinity with him.⁸⁴

Not only did the Jews worship God properly, Priestley noted, but he, too, loved the same God and worshipped him in a practically identical manner. Essentially, Priestley was thanking the Jews because they were “the instructors of mankind in what most of all concerns them, viz. *religion*, in the knowledge and worship of the one true God.”⁸⁵ Because of them, the Unitarian doctrine had been preserved, and by identifying himself as an inheritor of this tradition of divine worship, Priestley acknowledged the similarities between his religion and Judaism. Moreover, Priestley sought to attract the Jews to

⁸² Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 8.

⁸³ Priestley, *Address to the Jews*, 394.

⁸⁴ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 1.

⁸⁵ Priestley, *Address to the Jews*, 393-394.

Christianity by emphasizing the proximity of the two religions, and therefore, his conversionary tactics can best be understood in light of his own identification as a Unitarian.

Upon making the closeness of the relationship between Judaism and Unitarian Christianity clear, Priestley began to explain their differences, all the while noting the simplicity of his doctrines and the ease of their adoption. The first step to understanding this proximity was creating a definition of each term. “All Christians are agreed with respect to the great articles of their faith,” Priestley writes, “They all maintain that Jesus had a divine mission, evidenced by his miracles and resurrection; that he was the person announced by your prophets under the character of *the Messiah*; and that, though he is ascended to heaven, he will come again to raise the dead, and judge the world.”⁸⁶ Just as Lindsey believed, Jesus was a Jewish prophet, and as it happened, the foretold Messiah of the Jewish Scriptures. In fact, Price emphasized that Jesus was the Messiah “which in their [the Jews’] religious services they were continually praying for in the words, *May his kingdom reign. May the Messiah come, and deliver his people.*”⁸⁷ Like any other prophet, Priestley explains, Jesus was a man and “a humble and devout worshipper of the same God that you [the Jews] worship.” In addition, Jesus “worshipped him [in] the same manner” that the Jews had always done. “There is, therefore, no reason whatever,” he adds, “why you should not attend to the miracles of Jesus, as much as to those of Moses, or those of any of the prophets who followed him.”⁸⁸ Legitimizing Jesus just as

⁸⁶ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 43. This statement was undoubtedly contested by his theological opponents, a topic that will be explored more thoroughly in chapter 5.

⁸⁷ Price, *Future Period of Improvement*, 2.

⁸⁸ Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Jews Part II* (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1787), 18-19.

Lindsey had, Priestley contended that both Moses and Jesus were sent by the same God and were part of the same chain of authoritative transmission.

Next, Priestley defined a Jew: “As you acknowledge any man to be a believer in the religion of Moses, who admits *his* divine mission; nothing is requisite to denominate any person a christian, but his believing the divine mission of Christ.”⁸⁹ This is sufficient “whether [one] believe any thing else concerning him, or not.”⁹⁰ As a final appeal to the simplicity of conversion, Priestley writes, “Admit the truth of these articles only, and we shall readily acknowledge you to be christians.”⁹¹ Without the complications of requisite doctrines like the Trinity (and even ceremonies like Baptism) in order to be a Christian, conversion had become remarkably simple. Again, the Unitarian’s understanding of himself as one who had shifted theologically away from orthodox Christianity, only to become more similar to Judaism, was the only way that such a conversionary strategy could be undertaken. Rather than jeopardize Christianity, Priestley believed that he and his coreligionists had done a service to truth, to humanity, and to God.

In order to further facilitate the reception of the gospel among the Jews, Priestley sought to create interim steps that moved Judaism towards Unitarian Christianity at the same time that Unitarianism was already approaching Judaism. To do this, he retained the distinguishing elements of the Jewish religion. He tells the Jews, “I, with some other

⁸⁹ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 43. While the late eighteenth century was a time of great dynamism for Anglo-Jewry in which increasingly more Jews were ignoring the statutes of the Mosaic institution and even becoming deists, it would still have been rather unreasonable to assume that every Jewish person understood the definition of a Jew as one who merely admitted of Moses’ divine mission. Likely, Jewish definitions of ‘Jew’ would have been more complex than Priestley suggests. Priestley’s definition, though, is understandable. It was more probable for the Unitarian minister to come in contact with liberal and even deist Jews, who had abandoned many Jewish practices, yet continued to self-identify with Judaism. This was reason enough for Priestley to simplify the definition of Jew to this extent. On the intellectual tendencies of certain Jews in eighteenth century England, see Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment*.

⁹⁰ Priestley, *Letters Part II*, 8.

⁹¹ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 43.

christians, believe in the perpetual obligation of all the laws which Moses prescribed to your nation.”⁹² Because Priestley wished that “some of you, at least, shall shew a better disposition towards christianity,” he explained to the Jews that becoming a Christian “does not at all interfere with your attachment to the laws of Moses.”⁹³ The acceptance of maintaining Jewish law among Christian converts from Judaism indicates Priestley’s recognition of the ancient distinction between Jewish Christians and gentile Christians. Jesus had commanded in the New Testament that the Jews should not discontinue the practice of the Mosaic Law, but the plan of the Pauline letters was to abrogate the Mosaic dispensation for the sake of bringing Jesus’ message to potential gentile converts. Priestley’s solution seems to be a fusion of these two strategies: Jews could believe in Jesus while retaining their laws and non-Jews could ignore what had never been incumbent upon them, yet believe in the Messiah.

Priestley did not believe that there was a conflict between Judaism and Christianity, and so rather than be mutually exclusive, as orthodox Christians had been for centuries, the Unitarian minister tried to show that the two religions were in fact simultaneously compatible. There was no reason, Priestley thought, that one could not subscribe to the creed of Christianity while practicing the rituals of Judaism. In fact, Priestley explains,

There is no occasion for you Jews to connect yourselves with any class of christians. On the contrary, since you are still to be distinguished as *Jews*, no less than as *christians*, it will be more convenient for you to form a separate church, and to keep your sabbath as you now do. There are some christians who observe the seventh day as well as yourselves, and we consider this circumstance as making no schism in the christian church.⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid., 5.

⁹³ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 44-45.

By retaining the distinctive Jewish elements in their lives, Jewish Christians would have acted as testaments to the world of the veracity of Christianity, and thereby persuaded even more non-believers to convert. Like Lindsey, Priestley concluded that, due to the proximity of the traditions and the fact that each was Unitarian by nature, it was possible to identify as both a Christian and a Jew.

Only Priestley's understanding of himself as a Unitarian permitted the uniqueness of his conversionary designs, and by extension, his millennial views as well. He believed that the Trinity had been the greatest stumbling block to the Jews' acceptance of Christianity. Its abolition naturally moved Christianity towards Judaism by reestablishing the former faith as a Unitarian religion. This theological shift, Priestley and other Unitarians believed, would prompt the Jews to investigate the gospel and then recognize its truths. As a millennialist, Priestley's preoccupation with the Jewish place in apocalyptic designs was naturally overwhelming to his worldview, but it was his identification as a Unitarian that convinced Priestley that his conversionary methods were unique and superior. The shift away from orthodox Christianity and towards Judaism made by Lindsey, Priestley and the Unitarians did not go unnoticed by their theological enemies. It is trinitarians' understanding of the Unitarians and their dangerous proximity to the Jewish religion that solidifies Judaism's natural place in the antitrinitarian conversation.

CHAPTER FIVE

EITHER WITH US OR AGAINST US: The Trinitarian Attitude towards God's Enemies

The radical cries of the Unitarians vehemently denouncing the Trinity in the hopes of forever returning Christianity to its original state did not fall on deaf ears in the complicated and tumultuous world of late eighteenth century England. Perceiving the Unitarians and their leaders not only as a danger to the political and social stability of England but also as a virulent force that would destroy the religious and moral fabric of an already complicated and heterogeneous society, orthodox Christians condemned the Unitarians, writing harsh invectives against their alleged insidious machinations to infect upstanding Anglican citizens.¹ In many ways, these self-righteous trinitarians, threatened by the social and religious change they saw around them and unable to halt the burgeoning strength of this liberal movement, sought to undermine the credibility of the Unitarians. Just as the opponents of antitrinitarians had done since Michael Servetus, orthodox Christians in England focused in part upon the Judaic undertones of the Unitarian program; rather than simply accuse the Unitarians of judaizing, trinitarians actually slandered these religious dissidents as *being* Jews. Even the Jews' own most outspoken defendant during the eighteenth century, David Levi, characterized the Unitarians as no more than confused and misguided Christians.² As the leaders and primary apologists of the Unitarian movement, Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley were scurrilously attacked for their aberrant views and judaizing agendas. Ultimately, it was the very fact that the ministers understood – and publicly acknowledged – their entire

¹ Rupp, *Religion in England*, 489.

² Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment*, 170-179.

religion as a theological shift towards Judaism that enabled their opponents to condemn them as Jews and corrupters of Christianity.

Thomas Burgess, born in 1756, received an Anglican education and was appointed the bishop of St. David's in 1803.³ As a staunch proponent of Anglicanism and orthodox Christian values, he considered the Unitarians' agenda utterly blasphemous to Christianity, and his *Reflections on the controversial writings of Dr. Priestley* voiced his displeasure with one of their primary spokesmen. In order to reasonably accuse Priestley of holding heterodox views, Burgess had to establish his definition of orthodoxy. Instead of defining Christianity in positive terms by outlining the requisite beliefs necessary for one to be considered a Christian, Burgess provided a negative definition of his faith in contradistinction to Unitarianism. He declares of Priestley that "the writer of these reflections does not scruple to maintain, from a principle of firm conviction, not of enmity to the objects of this reflection, that whoever denies the divinity of Christ, is not a *Christian*."⁴ As pugilistic as Burgess's work was, his decision to define Christianity in negative terms exemplifies the extremity of his opposition to the Unitarian doctrine in particular; he considered Unitarianism a particularly caustic strain of apostasy among all those that needed to be eradicated. His goal was to separate the Unitarians from Christianity because after they had removed the belief in Jesus' divinity Burgess no longer thought that any uniquely Christian aspects remained in the Unitarian religion. "We certainly all believe the doctrines enumerated by Dr. Priestley," Burgess

³ On Burgess, see *National Biography*.

⁴ Thomas Burgess, *Reflections on the controversial writings of Dr. Priestley relative to religious opinions, establishments, and tests: Part I*. (Oxford: D. Prince and J. Cooke, 1791), 57. Original emphasis. All emphasis in this chapter is by the original intention of the author unless otherwise indicated.

chides, “so does a Mahometan.”⁵ Knowing that Muslims believed not only in the unity of one God, but in Jesus’ divine mission as a great prophet, Burgess’ critique immediately called into question Priestley and Lindsey’s definitions of both Unitarian and Christian. According to Priestley, Burgess alleged, a Muslim qualified as both. As is evident by Burgess’ negative definition, it was not what Priestley included in his conception of Christianity that was so offensive to orthodox Christians, but what he excluded.

Burgess’ problem with Unitarian views was not simply that they were erroneous while remaining relatively innocuous: rather, they were “notorious violations of religion and morality” requiring “amongst our laws ... many positive statutes against” them. Significantly, Burgess reminds Priestley that, “among other offenses of this kind, the Socinian Heresy is punishable by the laws of England.” These legal ramifications, however, were merely in place to help curb the vitriolic effects of antitrinitarian beliefs, and were not Burgess’ main concern. As an aspiring Anglican theologian preoccupied with the sanctity of his religious tradition, Burgess cared primarily that Unitarianism was “to abjure all belief in God’s being and providence; to deny the truth of the Christian religion; to deny the truth of *the central doctrines of the Christian faith*; to revile *the ordinances of the established church*; with some other open acts of irreligion, immorality, and indecency.” Ultimately, these were all “offences against God and religion.”⁶ To deny God’s tripartite nature was effectively to destroy the essence of Christianity with invidious alterations, and since the Unitarians had forsaken the truth of the Trinity, they were deemed enemies to Christianity and the preservation of orthodoxy.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 27.

Thomas Burgess was but one of many who wrote against Priestley and the Unitarians. John Saunders, writing Priestley and Lindsey's names on his opening page in a belligerent fashion, attempted an even more proactive approach by challenging everyone to take a side on the issue of Jesus' divinity. He then insisted that those who supported the truth – that Jesus was God, Saunders believed – should relentlessly defend the honor of God's nature. In *The Footman's Pamphlet: of, the Footman's Arguments Against the Unitarians, &c. and in Defence of the Divinity of Christ*, Saunders asserted, "He who pretends to keep the whole law, and yet offends in one point, is guilty of all: and in like manner, he that knowingly subverts God's word by contradicting the gospel, will be found guilty of rebellion against Him, similar to those Jews."⁷ In essence, Saunders believed just as Burgess did: to abolish just one element of Christian orthodoxy was to obliterate the whole. Saunders, however, took his vilification one step further. The Unitarians, for their violations of the Christian religion, were akin to the Jewish people. Just as the Jews could not accept the divinity of Jesus, and were therefore not Christians, neither were the Unitarians – who denied this seminal tenet of orthodoxy – members of the Christian religion.

These kinds of comparisons between Unitarians and Jews were not uncommon among the orthodox. William Burgh, a controversial lay politician,⁸ felt obliged to defend the integrity of trinitarianism against Theophilus Lindsey, and in his two works dedicated to this purpose he did not fail to note that, "The antient Jew and the modern Unitarian alike suppress every testimony which the Christian cautiously bore to the

⁷ John Saunders, *The Footman's Pamphlet: of, the Footman's Arguments Against the Unitarians, &c. and in Defence of the Divinity of Christ* (Falkirk: Patrick Mair, 1793), 31.

⁸ On Burgh, see *National Biography*.

divinity of our Lord.”⁹ While these accusations by Saunders and Burgh reflect the clear and direct enunciation by orthodox Christians that set them against Unitarians and Jews, trinitarians perceived other important but less pronounced distinctions that distinguished them from their theological opponents.

According to orthodox Christianity, Jesus’ arrival on earth represented the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the beginning of a new and superior covenant between God and all mankind. As such, the word of the holy gospel superseded any command previously offered in the Old Testament, should the latter have contradicted the former. Written in the New Testament, orthodox Christians contended, was the veracity of the Trinity, and no application of reason or amount of forced logic could prevent that truth from existing. Whether believing that the New Testament was superior, that the Trinity was revealed therein, or that reason was not a means of critiquing the truths of scripture, orthodox Christians saw their methodology as distinctly opposed to the approach of the Unitarians. Moreover, upon ample meditation, they concluded that only one other group approached the gospel in the same way that the Unitarians did: the Jews.

A Charge to the Clergy, an anonymous pamphlet published in the year the French Revolution began, was written to incite opposition to the burgeoning Unitarian movement. “In whatever degree the Jewish Scriptures may be useful for the general confirmation of Christianity,” argued the pamphleteer, “it is from their relation to the Gospel, to which, we have been told by the highest authority, the Mosaic dispensation was but a prelude or preparative, that they derive the whole of the importance which they

⁹ William Burgh, *An Inquiry into the Belief of the Christians of the First Three Centuries, respecting the One Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* (York: A Ward, 1778), 244.

yet retain.”¹⁰ According to this author, the relevance of the Old Testament lay in its ability to confirm the validity of the New Testament. Because the Old Testament asserted God’s unity and not the triune nature of God, it was therefore less important for Christians. As if to emphasize this fact, Burgh writes, “As I have already said that the Old Testament affords but a very small part of the testimony of the Godhead of Jesus Christ, I shall produce but few separate passages from it, under the head of prophecy: such as receive their explanation from the New Testament, being better brought under that head.”¹¹ Foolishly, trinitarians asserted, the Unitarians ignored the superiority of God’s covenant with all mankind, suspiciously touting the doctrine of God’s unity written of in the Jewish Scriptures.

One of the chief reasons cited by the Unitarians for Jesus’ humanity was that the Jews, those among whom he had appeared, expected him to be a man. Moreover, the Jews did not believe that God would ever have allowed himself to be killed. Noting these problems, Burgh writes,

To the Jews, who had long known the one true God, and who had experienced prosperity or adversity as his mighty arm was stretched out to lead or to chastise them, the bleeding body of our Lord suffering death under their own hands, was indeed a stumbling-block; for it was altogether inconsistent with their idea of the Almighty Jehovah. A plurality of persons in the God who had declared his name to be ‘one,’ was to the Jews an unsurmountable difficulty; it transcended their faculties, and, as they conceived themselves in possession of a full acquaintance with the incomprehensible nature of their Maker, it was altogether inconsistent with their vain presumptions.¹²

Perturbed by this inclination to credit Jewish beliefs, orthodox Christians challenged this element of the Unitarians’ case. The Jews’ “ignorance is never to be considered as of any

¹⁰ *A Charge to the Clergy*, in *Tracts in Controversy with Dr. Priestley Upon the Historical Question of the Belief of the First Ages in Our Lord’s Divinity* (Gloucester: R. Raikes, 1789), 2.

¹¹ Burgh, *Confutation*, 50.

¹² *Ibid.*, 208-209.

weight in argument against the Godhead of Christ,” writes Burgh, “nor a defect of testimony in the Old Testament taken by itself, and not explained by the subsequent revelation, as any ground for denying that which it was never written with a view of ultimately proving.”¹³ He believed that it was not only ridiculous to concern oneself with the expectations of the ancient Jewish people in regards to the Messiah, but also that it was theologically irresponsible to deny the truths revealed in the New Testament simply because they were not discussed in the Old.

That the Old Testament was not written with the intention of revealing to the world God’s tripartite nature, then, was no reason to deny the verity of the Trinity. It was, in fact, the Jews’ expectations based on their incomplete scriptures that resulted in their inability to grasp Jesus’ nature. As he explained, it was “not possible [that] the Jews could ever have formed a definite idea of the expected Messiah” because “the object of the prophecy of the Old Testament is the coming of a great Deliverer, of whom such seeming contrarieties are declared.”¹⁴ More than an interpretation of their scriptures, it was actually the Jews’ understanding of Jesus’ own declarations that perpetuated their inability to comprehend the mysterious events surrounding God’s actions on earth.

Burgh explained that when the Jews of the first century sought Jesus’ death, they did so because of his blasphemous assertions: in regard “to the words for which our Saviour was condemned by the high priest and his council,” he writes, “we may therefore ascribe the same meaning, and conclude that they were designed to convey the same idea of our Lord’s equal and one Godhead with the Father.”¹⁵ Ultimately, the Jews found the truth asserted by Jesus so offensive that they implored Pontius Pilate, the Roman

¹³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵ Ibid., 92.

procurator in 33 CE, to sentence this unforgivable heretic to death. Burgh drew a crucial comparison that, incidentally, Lindsey and Priestley had both emphasized as well. He reasons that “the ground of the Jewish resentment appears” because “they were Unitarians” who “looked upon an equality or unity of Godhead between the Father and Son as the greatest indignity to the God of their fathers.”¹⁶ It was the Jews’ Unitarian heritage, then, which made Jesus’ suggestion so repulsive.

Recall the similar accusation that appeared in Jean Gailhard’s work at the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁷ Whereas he equated the Socinians, his own antitrinitarian enemies, with those Jews who killed Jesus, Burgh compared the same Jews to Unitarians, the antitrinitarian threat that confronted him in the late eighteenth century. Just like Lindsey and Priestley connected themselves to their antitrinitarian heritage, so too did orthodox Christians see their role as part of a long line of apologists for their tradition.

Burgh’s Jewish contemporaries interpreted and understood Jesus’ words in the same way that their ancestors had. “We must certainly admit the Jews to be the best verbal interpreters of such phrases as were peculiar to themselves,”¹⁸ Burgh writes, declaring that the Jews of each successive generation “have taught us to understand that whensoever our Saviour, or any witness of his gospel, declares him to be the Son of God, they intended thereby to convey an assurance that Jesus Christ is equal with the Father, and with him one, God.”¹⁹ Lindsey and Priestley both contended that the Jews had never derived any such meaning from the New Testament and so it had to be the Christian

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gailhard, *Blasphemous Socinian Heresie*, 99.

¹⁸ Burgh, *Confutation*, 64.

¹⁹ Ibid.

“articles which exclude” them “and not the unpolluted gospel.”²⁰ Disbelievingly, Burgh asks, “What Jew Rabbi has taken [the articles] under his consideration?”²¹ Distinguishing between the doctrines of orthodox Christianity and the Scriptures from whence they were deduced, Burgh explains that the only thing “they may indeed have looked into [is] the sacred word itself.” From these investigations “they have there found a Trinity revealed, and therefore reject revelation.” Manipulating Lindsey and Priestley’s concern about the Trinity as an impediment to conversion, Burgh agreed that “a Trinity” should be “acknowledge[d]” as the reason for the “exclusion of the Jew” because, he explains, that is what they find upon reading the New Testament.²² Whether or not they believed Jesus, then, the Jews, both ancient and modern, understood the meaning of his words as they were expressed in the gospel to convey his divine nature. To Burgh, a Christian was one who could discount Jewish expectations and previous revelation in order to accept properly the truth revealed in the New Testament. Because the Unitarians could not, he concluded that they were no different than the Jews.

The disposition towards the concept of God’s unity revealed but another similarity between Unitarians and Jews: neither was capable of understanding that which did not fall within the bounds of reason. According to Saunders, both Jews and Unitarians “argue from effects and causes, and make use of their reason,”²³ and therefore fail to understand that matters pertaining to God need not be constricted by the tools of the carnal realm. When investigating matters of a spiritual nature, “those men of learning and pretended abilities,” Saunders writes, “can see by the light of the natural eye to read

²⁰ Burgh, *Inquiry*, 233. Emphasis added.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Saunders, *The Footman’s Pamphlet*, 75.

the lines of the gospel, as the stand on record.”²⁴ Despite their basic ability to see the words before them, “they understand not their scope and meaning: they cannot compare spiritual things with spiritual, so as to comprehend them; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness, and grope at noon-day.”²⁵ Saunders’ disapproval of the use of reason was not merely a slight at Unitarians and Jews but a direct reproof of the principles of Rational Dissent, a movement in which the Unitarians were fully engaged and of which some Jews took advantage as well.²⁶ Speaking of the Unitarians, Saunders concludes that “where human reason cannot reach ... they condemn all for fiction and fancy: consequently, the gospel proves to them, like the unbelieving Jews and Greeks, a stumbling-block, a rock of offence, and foolishness.”²⁷ Taking pride in the fact that his religious system was not subject to the governance of any external forces, Saunders grouped the Jews and Unitarians together as those who were incapable of understanding the separation of the earthly and the spiritual realms. Note, too, that he used the term, “stumbling block,” in reference to the Unitarians, the same word that had been used when lamenting the Jews’ inability to comprehend the Trinity.

Unable to persuade the intransigent Unitarians to relinquish their spurious assertions, orthodox Christians sought to continue limiting Unitarian influence in the public sphere in order to prevent others from being swayed by their diabolical sophistry. The Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge was created in 1791, and the group submitted a petition to Parliament asking for the removal of laws against the antitrinitarians a year later. As a result of this political involvement, Unitarians were

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Clark, *English Society*, 418-420. On Jewish engagement with English Dissent, see Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment*.

²⁷ Saunders, *The Footman’s Pamphlet*, 75.

accused of acting dishonorably and as a faction with political ends rather than as a respectable religious sect.²⁸ Edmund Burke, the distinguished politician and political philosopher, spoke out against the Unitarians' use of religion for political gain: "This faction (the authors of the petition [i.e. Unitarians]) are not confined to a *theological* sect, but are also a *political* faction."²⁹ As it was a violation of "reason, nature, habit, and principle," Burke was "totally averse" to "persecution for conscientious difference in opinion."³⁰ However, contending that the Unitarians were exploiting their religious privileges to affect policy changes, he spoke out vociferously against them, particularly Joseph Priestley.³¹ The Unitarians, Burke complained, "do not aim at the quiet enjoyment of their own liberty, but are *associated* for the express purpose of proselytism" in order "to collect a multitude sufficient by force and violence to overturn the church." As evidence "of the second proposition," Burke attests, "see the letter of Priestley to Mr. Pitt, and extracts from his works."³² In a country like England where the Church and state were inextricably intertwined, Burke concluded, "designs against the church are concurrent with a design to subvert the state."³³ Burke's speech about the Unitarian petition continued with allegations about schemes to create a revolutionary situation like that found in France, and ultimately ended with a stalwart rejection of the Unitarians' proposal. While Burke's concern had less to do with the Unitarians' proximity and similarity to Judaism, he nonetheless established a precedent for critiquing Unitarian

²⁸ Andrews, *Unitarian Radicalism*, 7.

²⁹ Edmund Burke, "Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (1792), Vol. VI (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856), 118.

³⁰ Edmund Burke, "Speech on the Act of Uniformity," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (1772), Vol. VI (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856), 95.

³¹ Andrews, *Unitarian Radicalism*, 85-94. On Burke about the Unitarian academy, see Roper, "Toleration and Religion," 406.

³² Burke, "Petition of the Unitarians," 118.

³³ *Ibid.*

political involvement that other trinitarians adopted with more theological repercussions in mind.

William Keate, a defender of the Anglican Church who considered himself the direct enemy of both Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, was concerned that the Unitarians could not be trusted as members of the state and reliable compatriots if “they refuse to pledge themselves to their constituents, by the most solemn proof, after the Sacrament, which the laws allow, namely, an oath founded on the belief of the Christian religion.”³⁴ He could not fathom how

in a country professing the religion of Christ, and claiming no privilege from any Christian society but as his followers, those who deny him to be the Saviour of mankind, the Arians, Socinians, and Unitarians, as well as Jews and Turks, who ought not to have been excluded, shall assemble together with Christians, to promote the same salutary ends of government (with which the Christian religion is intimately connected) without defeating or obstructing each other’s intentions.³⁵

Admittedly, he confesses, it “is more than I can comprehend.”³⁶ If Jesus were not divine – a contention made by both antitrinitarians and Jews, Keate notes – he could not have been the savior of mankind; since it was in fact on his divinity that the English government rested by oath of all who served the state, it was incomprehensible that people like Priestley and Price should have been allowed to participate in government and infect society with their deleterious opinions denying this central principle. Unlike Burke, Keate saw no situation in which the Unitarians’ political restrictions should have been removed; just like the Jews, it was sufficiently generous that they were allowed to remain in England unpunished. He observes, “Quakers and Jews are obliged to submit to

³⁴ William Keate, *A Free Examination of Dr. Price’s and Dr. Priestley’s Sermons* (London: J. Dodsley, Pall Mall, 1790), 22.

³⁵ Ibid, 42.

³⁶ Ibid.

certain disabilities, while they deny the validity of such oaths,”³⁷ thus equating the Unitarians’ actions with other groups that opposed the foundational principle of the English government. Not only did Keate encourage the continued disenfranchisement of the Unitarians in the political arena, but the justifications he provided illuminate his prejudices. Ultimately, because neither Jews nor antitrinitarians could prove that they were Christians according to the Anglican definition, Keate and others wanted them marginalized in society as much as possible.

The chief danger that Unitarians posed to a Christian society was a willingness to accommodate Judaism at the expense of Christian truth. According to the Unitarians, it was a fortunate side effect of their modifications to the Christian religion that it became more like Judaism because, they claimed, that made it easier to attract Jewish converts. According to their theological enemies, however, this logic was to the absolute detriment of Christianity. John Saunders, in his *Footman’s Pamphlet*, argued that the specific modifications made by Unitarians when attempting to model Christianity after Judaism destroyed all divine revelation. He writes derisively, “But after all, if any man can prove that Christ was nothing but a mere man, the same ingenious reasoner proves also, that the New Testament is complete delusion, and by far the greatest imposition that ever was ushered into the world.” If Jesus is not divine, “therefore, cry” the gospel “down.”³⁸ Taking his cynicism about the destructive force of Unitarian doctrine even farther, Saunders writes, “and what better is the Bible, cry it down also, and let us make unto ourselves a new religion, and such a one, as will both suit our taste, and satisfy our

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

³⁸ Saunders, *The Footman’s Pamphlet*, 44.

humours.”³⁹ All of these detrimental changes led Christianity in one direction, the author contended: to Judaism. “We shall not only resemble the Jews of old,” should we adjust our religion as Unitarians wish, “but tread in the same footsteps as it.” He adds a warning: “let us not fail to observe also, that not only the Jews’ conduct, but the consequences which accrue from the conduct, are both pointed out, in order that we may judge and choose before we embrace.”⁴⁰ Saunders’ choice of language is of the utmost importance to understanding his perception of the threat Unitarianism posed to Christianity, and subsequently, to the way he conceptualized the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. He did not say that by denying Jesus’ divinity one became a Jew, but rather that this belief caused one to resemble the Jews. Since orthodoxy did not replicate Jewish practices or beliefs in any way, Unitarians who allegedly believed like both Jews and Christians, according to Saunders, had to have moved away from the latter people and towards the former. Unfortunately for him, this fused faith was both a mockery and abomination of true Christianity.

Saunders was certainly not the only Anglican apologist to decry the deviancy of polluting Christian doctrines in order to move towards Judaism. Burgh alleged that Unitarian modifications were made with the explicit purpose of attracting the Jews since “Christianity is not of that comprehensive nature of which Unitarians want religion to be.” He writes, “The truth ... is, that they want another religion which is not Christianity; and since the Jew, the Turk, and the Heathen Infidel cannot accede to the religion of the gospel, they are determined to reject such inflexible doctrines, and fabricate a religion of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 44-45.

a more complying temper.”⁴¹ Speaking primarily against Lindsey, Burgh notes that the Unitarian minister fails to realize that “the truths of Christianity, it was foretold, should be to the Jew a stumbling-block.” Why the Jews’ confusion at the notion of the Trinity was “a common subject of declamatory complaint among Unitarians,” Burgh did not know, especially when it was “on *account* of the doctrine of the Trinity,” that “the Jews and even the Gentiles are excluded from conformity with the Christian church” in the first place.⁴² Knowing this, “St. Paul had before declared the gospel a stumbling block to the Jews.”⁴³

To demonstrate the intended difficulty of the Trinity to the Jew’s ability to understand Christianity, Burgh recounts a dialogue between a Christian martyr and a stubborn and unbelieving Jew. “The Jew declares” to the martyr “in the very same spirit of modern Unitarianism,” the following: “What you say, that this Christ is God from all eternity, and yet that, being made man, he underwent a human birth, and that he was man without being the Son of a man, appears to me, not only a paradox, but to be actual folly.”⁴⁴ Although part of Burgh’s story, the words relayed from the martyr to the Jew were undoubtedly destined to be directed from the paper at the tip of Burgh’s pen to the hands of Theophilus Lindsey:

To this Jew the Martyr replies: ‘I know that this revelation seems a paradox, and particularly to those of your race who have never been disposed to understand the things which are of God, not to do them, but, as God himself proclaims against you, only those things which are taught by your own Rabbis.’ ‘I know that, as the word of God hath spoken, this great wisdom of God, the almighty Creator of the universe, is hid from you.’⁴⁵

⁴¹ Burgh, *Inquiry*, 234.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 224. Emphasis added.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

Unable to comprehend matters divine because of Unitarians' similar concerns as those held by the Jewish people, the doctrine of the Trinity proved a "stumbling block in the way of the Jew and the Unitarian."⁴⁶

Arguing with the Unitarians, Burgh believed, was the equivalent of arguing with the Jews, a fact not unfamiliar to his predecessors, Edwards and Gailhard. As Burgh writes, "In [Tertulian's] book against the Jews, he employs many of the same arguments that I have already produced from Justin Martyr to prove the divinity of our Saviour" to the Unitarians.⁴⁷ Concluding by derisively echoing the words of Lindsey himself, Burgh writes, "To the Jews and to the Unitarian it is alike a stumbling-block, 'For unquestionably the Trinity is one of those doctrines that prejudice them most against Christianity,' *Apology*, p. 88."⁴⁸ Unable to understand the Trinity, the Unitarians were willing to compromise the integrity of the gospel and Christianity in order to make both more accommodating to those who were predisposed to disdain and misunderstand all three. Thus, Unitarians shifted theologically towards Judaism in order to rectify their own shortcomings, threatening not only the English people and their government, but the very foundations of English society, religion, and salvation.

It was curious to Burgh that Lindsey was so quick to emphasize the Trinity as the grand problem of Jewish conversion when he had boldly alleged that during the first three centuries of Christianity the church had actually been Unitarian.⁴⁹ If in fact Lindsey believed that the Jews had not converted to Christianity because of the Trinity, Burgh wondered why the Jews had failed to convert during those first three centuries when

⁴⁶ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 188.

⁴⁸ Burgh, *Confutation*, 209.

⁴⁹ For the Unitarian minister's specific statements on this matter, see Lindsey, *Apology*, 24.

aberrant doctrines had not posed such insurmountable problems. “But if this doctrine were the ground of Jewish opposition, what withheld the concurrence of the Jew during the first three centuries, when ‘all the fathers and other Christian people were generally Unitarians?’” Burgh asks. “Did the Jew alone find a Trinity among the Christians, of which they were themselves ignorant? Unquestionably they did, if Mr. Lindsey’s position be true, and that by the Trinity alone the Jew is excluded.”⁵⁰ If Lindsey was correct in his two assertions that, a) the Trinity was the doctrine that prevented Jewish conversion, and b) the early Church was entirely Unitarian, then it was only possible that the Jew himself imagined the Trinity as part of Christianity in those early years when he declined conversion. Obviously, Burgh believed, this was preposterous, and so one of Lindsey’s two premises must have been incorrect. That the early Church was Unitarian could not have been true, as the Trinity had – from the moment Jesus declared it so – been known to mankind. Thus, Lindsey’s modifications of orthodoxy were not an attempt to return Christianity to its original and pure state, but the results of another specious argument designed to justify the creation of a religion that would prove satisfying to the Jews by moving closer to Judaism.

Ultimately, outrage at Lindsey’s blasphemy and his wretched treatment of orthodox Christianity overwhelmed Burgh. He decries, “Instead of inviting the Jew to embrace the unpolluted truth” Lindsey would rather “taint and corrupt her, or trick out a substitute, who with easy compliance shall consult his taste.” The treacherous Unitarian minister would sooner submit to the will of the Jew and “bribe him by a conformity with whatever he requires”⁵¹ than simply accept the gospel as it was written. After attesting

⁵⁰ Burgh, *Inquiry*, 225.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

that Lindsey promoted a blasphemous mutation of the Christian religion in order to accommodate its most ancient enemies, Burgh put forth his most audacious claim. He writes, “But the Jew requires that the gospel shall be the same as the law; and be it so, says Mr. Lindsey, rather than that the Jew and I should differ. Since he refuses to be a Christian, why, I will go over to him and become a Jew myself. – In effect he has done so.”⁵² By accusing the founder of the first Unitarian church of having become a Jew, Burgh has capitalized on one of the most fascinating arguments made by trinitarians of the late eighteenth century against their Unitarian opponents.

There is no need to reiterate all of the ways that the Unitarians were theologically similar to the Jews, but it is important to recall their recognition of the theological proximity of Unitarianism to Judaism and the manner in which they conceptualized the religious spectrum that moved them closer to the Jews and farther away from their orthodox Christian counterparts. Undoubtedly, this proximal relationship to Judaism created a certain connection and identification with the Jewish religion – issues which have already been discussed in previous chapters – but while it is one thing to make such connections on one’s own, it is entirely different to be forced into these identity stereotypes by one’s enemies. The author of *A Charge to the Clergy* offered his own conclusions about Lindsey’s theological movement from Christianity to Judaism. Applying the words of an ancient church father to the Unitarians, he writes, “But from a desire of being Jews and Christians both at once, they are neither Jews nor Christians.”⁵³ Whether Unitarians were actually Jewish or Christian is inconsequential. As the author recognized, they desired to be a religion that encompassed both traditions simultaneously.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *A Charge to the Clergy*, 30.

It is these similarities between the Unitarians and the Jews – attempting a fusion of their two religions – which Burgh berates. “The God of the Jew and of the Unitarian is the same,”⁵⁴ he cries. As Lindsey repeatedly emphasized, he worshipped Jehovah, the God of the Jewish people and their forefathers. Burgh notes contemptuously that these blasphemers derive their understanding of the Lord “from the Old Testament, in which the God of the Unitarians is certainly addressed.”⁵⁵ Making a mockery of his sincerity, Burgh writes of the Unitarian minister as the inheritor of the Jewish tradition, since “none can now doubt” that “the Lord Jehovah” is “the object of Mr. Lindsey’s adoration.”⁵⁶ These condemnations return Burgh to his most damning malediction. He asks contemptuously, “Does Mr. Lindsey at length speak out and profess himself a Jew? or would he persuade us that the Jewish and Christian religions are under the same dispensation.”⁵⁷ Orthodox Christians such as William Burgh saw an enormous divide between Christianity and Judaism that kept the former safe from the corruptions of the latter; Lindsey’s attempts to reconcile the two by compromising the integrity of Christianity could reveal nothing less than his status as an enemy to the gospel, the Trinity, and to God. For this reason, he was no better than a Jew and had essentially proclaimed himself as such.

Orthodox Christian apologists were not Unitarians’ only enemies during the late eighteenth century. In fact, Joseph Priestley was most talented at accruing opponents of all sorts. His invitation to the Jews to engage in a friendly dialogue about the truth behind Christianity, although well intentioned, earned him a rather unexpected enemy

⁵⁴ Burgh, *Confutation*, 95.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Burgh, *Inquiry*, 274.

from the community to which he was appealing. David Levi, a learned hat-maker and cobbler living in England during the second half of the eighteenth century, was the only Jew who responded to Lindsey's call, but he did not do so in a way that the Unitarian minister would have preferred. While the Anglican-Jewish community was reticent to reply to the incitements of Joseph Priestley, either out of fear of engaging in religious debate that might offend their gracious English hosts or because they saw an inherent danger in the investigation of theological matters outside the realm of Judaism, David Levi did not seem concerned to state his opinions in the enlightened environment of his time. As a Jew who sought to defend the integrity of his tradition rather than become a notable enemy of an aberrant Christian sect, Levi argued against the Unitarian position as it was expressed by Joseph Priestley with the hopes of terminating his enticements to the Jewish people. Despite this, Levi's arguments appear identical to those issued by William Burgh and other orthodox Christians in a variety of ways because ultimately, Levi and the Anglicans had the same goal: to refute the claims uttered by Unitarians in order to prevent any conversion to their convoluted faith.⁵⁸

The Jewish apologist's first issue with Joseph Priestley was his inability to comprehend how the Unitarian minister could label himself a Christian without believing in the word of the gospel as it was written. As far as Levi was concerned, Christianity was defined by a belief in the divinity of its Messiah and the subsequent doctrine of the Trinity evident from the text of the New Testament – precisely the reading William Burgh suggested the Jews would have. He writes in response to Priestley, "Permit me,

⁵⁸ On Levi's reaction to and perception of Joseph Priestley, see David Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestley in Answer to Those He Addressed to the Jews Inviting Them to an Amicable Discussion of the Evidences of Christianity* (London: 1787). For Levi's significance and position in late eighteenth century England, see generally David Ruderman's, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*.

Sir, to ask you, whether you sincerely intend, in this discussion, to defend Christianity? For your doctrine is so opposite to what I always understood to be the principles of Christianity, that I must ingeniously confess, I am greatly puzzled to reconcile your principles with the attempt.”⁵⁹ In some ways offering up his own understanding of the definition of a Christian, Levi declares, “Whoever calls in question the authenticity of *any part* of the New Testament, cannot with propriety be called a Christian in the strict sense of the word.”⁶⁰ Obviously there was little difference in Levi’s definition of a Christian from that of his Anglican compatriots. It becomes apparent that this similarity stems in part from his awareness of the Christian debate happening around him: “Even you yourself, and those that are of your opinion, are not considered as Christians, by those that account themselves orthodox,” he tells Priestley.⁶¹ By citing a host of passages that allegedly attest to the divinity of Jesus and the potentiality of his tripartite nature, it becomes clear that Levi had no intention of accepting Priestley’s claims of being a Christian. The Jewish apologist therefore considered the Unitarian minister’s inducements invalid.⁶² Levi reiterates to Priestley and the Unitarians, “For your doctrine is so opposite to what I always understood to be true Christianity, as taught in the Gospels, (to the history of which you refer us,) that I think it is almost impossible for the person that embraces it, to be denominated *a Christian*.”⁶³ According to Levi, then, Priestley was not a Christian and had no grounds from which to persuade Jews to join the Christian faith.

⁵⁹ Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 8.

⁶⁰ David Levi, *Letter to Dr. Priestley in Answer to His Letter to the Jews Part II* (London: 1789), 15.

⁶¹ Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 73.

⁶² Levi, *Letters Part II*, 16-17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 11.

For Burgh, Priestley's attempts to convert the Jews were foolish because they compromised the integrity of Christianity. For Levi, different reasons made it similarly ridiculous that Priestley would essay to persuade the Jews to convert under the pretext of Unitarian enhancements to Christianity. In Levi's view, Christianity had to be a unified religion, not plagued by the divisiveness that the Unitarians only perpetuated. He tells Priestley, "You must be sensible, that to convert a nation, such as the Jews, to Christianity, the professors thereof ought to be unanimous, in what the work of salvation consists ... and this is not the case with what is called Christianity."⁶⁴ Having foreseen such an argument, Priestley had written in his first set of letters to the Jews, "Some of you may perhaps say, that you cannot enter into any discussion concerning the evidence of christianity, till the different professors of it shall agree among themselves, and tell you what it really is." He argues, though, that "this demand would be manifestly unreasonable; because it is very possible that Christianity may be true, though many persons should hold wrong opinions concerning it."⁶⁵ That is exactly right, Levi would have allowed; it was the Unitarians, in fact, who professed these erroneous opinions. As Levi accuses, "For do but figure to yourself, dear Sir, how ridiculous it must appear, for you to invite the Jews to embrace, what you yourselves do not rightly understand."⁶⁶ Undoubtedly Levi's words were reassuring to and appreciated by at least some of the Christians who so vehemently fought against the Unitarians and their bastardization of orthodox Christianity.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 72-73.

⁶⁵ Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, 42.

⁶⁶ Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 29.

⁶⁷ Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment*, 174-175, offers two examples. Another interesting case where Levi's remarks were lauded as a victory over Priestley was in the inscription on an etching of the Jewish boxer, Daniel Mendoza, upon defeating his English opponent. It reads that the Christian pugilist "proved

Levi made two more observations that are essential to recognizing him as the important opponent of Unitarianism that he was. In the first place, he observed that the Unitarians were characterized alongside the Jews under the heading of antitrinitarians, not only in legal terminology, but theologically as well. “You are included in the same condemnation as the Jews,” Levi tells Priestley, “for not believing in the doctrine of the Trinity.”⁶⁸ That is, Unitarians were considered as “unchristian” as the Jews because they did not believe in those doctrines which the rest of the Christian world considered fundamental to being denominated a Christian. Unlike orthodox Christians, however, Levi would never dare say that the Unitarians were Jews, as Burgh had alleged. For, that would have been a slight to Levi’s own religion and a move he would never have wished to make. However, he did conclude, like the author of *A Charge to the Clergy*, that the Christianity envisioned by Unitarians was in effect neither Jewish nor Christian.

Recall that in Priestley’s view (and in Lindsey’s as well) it was not a problem for the Jews to retain the Mosaic Law so long as they allowed that Jesus truly had a divine mission. This would have resulted, or so the Unitarian ministers proposed, in the formation of a special Jewish-Christian church. To Levi, this idea was not only absurd but offensive: “But such a church as you have here described, I think never was heard of, as I verily believe it is neither Jew, nor Christian, and for which I am really at a loss to find a proper name; however, this is what you call Christianity.”⁶⁹ He could not believe that this abominable amalgamation of Judaism and Christianity would result in a

himself ‘as inferior to the Jewish hero as Dr. Priestley when opposed to the Rabbi [sic], David Levi.’” Endelman, *Jews of Georgian England*, 220.

⁶⁸ Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, 74.

⁶⁹ Levi, *Letters Part II*, 21.

legitimate religion. That Unitarians such as Priestley actually considered this suggestion plausible and even worse, Christian, was ridiculous.

Whether or not Levi considered it a legitimate religion, he assuredly recognized the proximity of Unitarianism to his own faith, a factor continually acknowledged throughout the writings of Priestley and Lindsey and of which their theological opponents also admitted. It would be unfair to do anything more than surmise that perhaps part of Levi's intention in debunking the legitimacy of Unitarianism was that he considered their suggestions a legitimate threat to Judaism, but the proposition is not implausible. As we know, the late eighteenth century Jewish community was not stagnant or unaware of the evolving environment in which it existed. In fact, when people left the Jewish fold to become Christians, in many cases, they disregarded Judaism for something far more inimical to religion in general: deism. According to the Unitarians who encountered these deistic Jews (think particularly of Lindsey's conversation with Mr. Rebello), the Jews had allowed their religious practices to lapse while retaining the skeletal beliefs of their tradition: that is, a belief in one God. As such, they ultimately resembled deists more than anyone else. When Levi read of the Unitarians' hybrid tradition, he may have realized that for those Jews who had already moved so far from Judaism, it may have been convenient that a simple belief – in Jesus' divine mission – could have qualified them as Christians and gained them even greater acceptance in English society. Appreciating that the deists of his religion still identified as Jews, such a convenient offer as the Unitarians were posing may have appeared like the ultimate threat to the already diverse Jewish community.⁷⁰ This fear is, of course, not explicitly stated in Levi's letters to Priestley, but the fact that he chose to defend the purity of orthodox Christianity along

⁷⁰ On Levi accepting the deist Jews, see Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment*, 178.

with his own religion certainly suggests the possibility that such concerns were at work. Significantly, though, this Jewish apologist understood and highlighted the public perception of Unitarians as theologically similar to the Jews, and can therefore serve as an example of the general conceptualization of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the late eighteenth century.

The opponents of Unitarianism, be them Jews such as David Levi or trinitarians like William Burgh, were not united in their opposition to this faith, which claimed to be so inextricably linked to both Judaism and Christianity. While Levi wanted to defend Judaism and perhaps ward off the threat that Unitarianism potentially posed to the preservation of his community, Burgh was determined to stop at nothing but the end of Unitarian designs. As he declares, “Nothing less than the absolute renunciation will satisfy me. Shall they who concur with the Jew, ‘who crucified the Lord of glory,’ and with the Mussulman, to whom the name of our Redeemer is an abomination, make pretensions to the title of Christians? shall they pretend that they worship the Father, and are therefore Unitarians?”⁷¹ Just as time and again, the Unitarians mentioned the Muslims as perceiving Christianity in a similar fashion as did the Jews, so too were trinitarian inclusions of Islam presented in tandem with their observations about Jews. However, in the same interesting fashion that Lindsey discussed the Muslims in isolation at one point, Burgh did so as well.

Burgh did not believe that aligning themselves with the Muslims against orthodox Christianity would allow the Unitarians to lay claim to the faithful worship of God. “Nor is the name of Mahomet idly introduced, nor is it without proof that the Unitarian has expressly ranked himself under his bloody crescent,” Burke accuses. The Unitarians

⁷¹ Burgh, *Inquiry*, 237.

“bring down the sword of Mahomet upon the worshippers of the Son and Holy Ghost, I might indeed add of the Father also.”⁷² In his mercilessly unforgiving way, Burgh lambasted Lindsey for his comments about the Muslims:

And as a motive to the east to wage this holy war, and no doubt make reprisals upon this western world for the crusades of former days, they declare an intention ‘to lay down in what articles *we, the Unitarian Christians* (of all others) do solely concur with *you Mahometans*, to which we draw nigher in these important points than all other Protestant or Papal Christians. With *our* additional arguments to *yours*; to prove that both *we* and *you* have unavoidable grounds from scripture and reason to dissent from *other Christians* in such verities.’ They pronounce themselves ‘*your fellow-champions* for these truths,’ and acknowledge Mahomet, for whose glory they are so very zealous, to have been ‘a preacher of the gospel.’⁷³

After his extended rant, he adds, “It is true this language has not been used by any existing Unitarian, but Mr. Lindsey has trumpeted forth the panegyrick of those who did use it, which is in a manner acceding to and subscribing it himself.”⁷⁴ This denunciation serves a similar purpose in Burgh’s writing as Lindsey’s comments about Muslims served in his. Lindsey was not trying to cultivate an image of himself as aligned with the Muslims, but merely sought to use them as an example by which to demonstrate the absurdity of believing in the Trinity. Likewise, Burgh assuredly knew that Lindsey had not joined with the Muslims against the western world, but used them to emphasize Lindsey’s ever increasing distance from Christianity.

Burgh ultimately failed in his attempt to “demand the acquiescence of the Unitarians in the Godhead of Jesus Christ” despite bringing so many arguments “to establish the Divinity of our blessed Redeemer.”⁷⁵ He did not believe that it was every

⁷² Ibid., 234.

⁷³ Ibid., 234-235.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 235.

⁷⁵ Burgh, *Confutation*, 187.

man's right to read the Holy Scriptures for himself and practice his religion according to the truth he saw within them, and would stop at nothing less than the renunciation by the Unitarians of their erroneous and dangerous doctrines. Believing that he had at the very least convinced his reader, if not Lindsey himself, of the Unitarians' heresy, and perhaps also acknowledging Levi's decision to dismiss as folly the Unitarian doctrine, Burgh concludes that "we may, with those believing Jews, lay aside the Unitarian system of Mr. Lindsey."⁷⁶ Combining his rejection of Unitarian assertions with his acceptance of the beliefs of the biblical Jews in order to undermine the claims of both about God's nature, he writes,

I have an undoubted right to avail my cause of every argument which its adversaries contribute; and now accordingly, against the antient, I establish the concession of the modern Unitarian; and *Christ is therefore the being glorified*; whilst, carrying this forward, against the modern I equally establish the assertions of the antient Jew, and therefore *Jesus Christ is denominated GOD*.⁷⁷

Ultimately, Burgh and other orthodox Christians refused to accept the Unitarian position as a valid one. With their noxious beliefs, Unitarians had perverted Christianity and violated its most sacred doctrines. Their pernicious blasphemy, however, became most evident when seen as part of the Unitarians' grander scheme to pollute Christianity with their relentless judaizing. The Unitarians attempted to move closer to Judaism in order to destroy the belief in the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity, the most important doctrines of Christianity. This, orthodox Christians contended, could never be allowed to happen.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁷⁷ Burgh, *Inquiry*, 312.

CONCLUSION

With the emergence of Christian-Hebraicism during the Renaissance, Judaism began to be understood as more than simply an antiquated faith that had outlived its usefulness and whose people clung tirelessly to a divine covenant that had since been amended. Christian-Hebraists not only returned to the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, but they even explored post-Biblical rabbinic texts, believing that only a proper study of such sources could lead them to a true understanding of Christianity. Both before and after the Protestant Reformation, Christian-Hebraists continued using Judaism to confirm and validate the truths of orthodox Christianity. The antitrinitarians, however, saw in Judaism a theological ally that had not only retained the proper knowledge of God, but whose sources and people could help them justify their aberrant beliefs and combat erroneous orthodox doctrines that had polluted the purity of the Christian religion.

Few Christians had a more thorough knowledge of rabbinical sources and texts than Michael Servetus, the first significant antitrinitarian in a long line of theological rebels. It is Servetus who believed that Judaism provided the proper forum within which to understand Christianity, and his works convey the unequivocal influence of Judaism on antitrinitarian thought. As the forerunner of a centuries'-long struggle, Servetus viewed his modifications to the Christian religion as not only aided by Jewish sources but as a theological adjustment towards Judaism and the Jewish people. By conceptualizing Christianity in proximity to Judaism, Servetus exemplified the profound effects the older religion had on antitrinitarian identity. Rather than understanding Judaism and Christianity as existing in conflict with one another, diametrically opposed by their

contradictory principles, antitrinitarianism demonstrated that the two religions existed on a religious continuum whereby adjustments to one tradition would bring one closer to or farther away from the other. Antitrinitarians from Servetus onwards, whether consciously or not, modified the tenets of orthodox Christianity and moved theologically closer to Judaism.

Antitrinitarians recognized their natural relationship with Judaism as a necessary part of abandoning long-standing Christian doctrines like the Trinity and of forming an identity that was different from orthodox Christianity. However, in some cases, this identification went further than a doctrinal adjustment towards Judaism. Rather than remain Christian in practice and become more Jewish in belief, the abrogation of the Trinity prompted a more thorough move into Judaism instead of just towards it, whereby not only Jewish beliefs but Jewish practices were adopted as well. This is best exemplified by the Sabbatarians, whose disillusion with Christianity's tripartite God led them to the Old Testament and eventually – whether in Hungary, Lithuania, or England – to the adoption of the Jewish Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary laws.¹ Rather than merely modify Christian beliefs towards a more Jewish understanding, Sabbatarians actually incorporated Jewish practices into their lives, thereby crossing the imaginary line that separated Judaism and Christianity. Extreme cases like the Sabbatarians not only demonstrate the flexibility of the religious spectrum, but also justify the Christian concern that antitrinitarianism was the first step along a tempting path towards Judaism.

¹ It is worth noting that all Sabbatarians were not necessarily antitrinitarians, nor did a Sabbatarian, by definition, have to adopt circumcision and Jewish dietary laws. It just happened that in a number of cases, the decision to respect the Sabbath on Saturdays, instigated a further reevaluation of Christian practice that led to the abrogation of certain Christian doctrines and the adoption of additional Jewish practices.

Most antitrinitarian sects did not make this move into Judaism, but instead allowed their heterodox Christianity to draw them steadily closer to this condemned religion and people. On the continent, George Biandrata and Faustus Socinus are emblematic of this pattern: both recognized the dangers of straying too close to Judaism. Consider, for instance, Biandrata's struggle against Francis David's judaizing and heresy, and Socinus' insistence on retaining the invocation of Jesus as the person through whom to offer prayers to God. Both antitrinitarians recognized that they had not simply converted to a distinct religion, but had arrived at their new faiths by migrating theologically from orthodox Christianity and towards the adoption of beliefs that made more sense to them. By going too far, however, either man knew that antitrinitarianism could stray from Christianity and result in a return to Judaism.

Like Socinus and Biandrata, English antitrinitarians also firmly retained their Christian identities, but unlike their continental counterparts, the English antitrinitarians embraced the Jewish identification that naturally came with their new religious inclinations. Antitrinitarians such as Nathaniel Lardner created connections with the Jewish heritage and used this freshly enunciated relationship with the Jewish people to maneuver themselves into a position of Christian religious authority. Eventually, the Unitarians emerged in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, shifting theologically closer to Judaism than ever before and conceptualizing their proximity to Judaism as an essential move towards reclaiming Christian truth.

Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley were at the forefront of this controversial movement; they took pride in their relationship to Judaism and identified intensely with both the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. This did not mean that

Lindsey and Priestley abandoned a Christian identity – for they never considered themselves anything other than devout Christians – but their definition of a Christian was based on one simple belief: that Jesus was the foretold Messiah. By denying orthodox Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and the belief in Jesus’ divinity, they shifted steadily closer to Judaism, resulting in an unprecedented proximity to this religion. Lindsey and Priestley alike declared that both Jews and Christians were Unitarians who venerated the same God and abided by the same moral code. Jews, they believed, were distinguished only by their retention of the Mosaic Law and Christians by their belief that Jesus was the foretold Messiah. The moral deism of Judaism and Christianity caused, or so Unitarians claimed, a remarkable concurrence between the religions rather than an unmanageable bifurcation.

Their own enthusiasm for this proximity led Lindsey and Priestley to believe that Jews might also see this connection – a possibility insinuated by Mr. Rebello and perhaps perceived by David Levi as well. Thus, the enthusiastic ministers hoped that the Jews would convert to Unitarian Christianity upon investigating the gospel and realizing the truth of the Christian religion revealed therein. The supposed likelihood of the Jews’ conversion to a sect of Christianity conceived as nearer to Judaism than orthodoxy is most telling. In the first place, the very acknowledgement that there existed a kind of Christianity closer to Judaism indicates the existence of the religious continuum and the need to view all Jewish-Christian identities as points on that diverse spectrum. Additionally, the fact that those designating themselves Christians could move so close to Judaism as to prompt the Jews’ conversion to this muddled faith underscores the reasons that orthodox Christians considered Unitarianism such a pernicious threat.

Orthodox Christians contended that antitrinitarians violated the religion by abrogating the doctrine of the Trinity, and were therefore no longer Christians. It was this fluid relationship between Judaism and Christianity, revealed by antitrinitarian identification with Judaism, however, that made these antitrinitarian actions seem so dangerous. Rather than simply being a different Christian perspective, antitrinitarianism was a move away from orthodoxy and towards Judaism – a factor recognized by writers such as William Burgh and John Saunders. Moreover, once that movement began, orthodox Christians believed that it would be impossible to stop it, and thus, all antitrinitarianism would inevitably lead to Judaism. No longer able to distinguish themselves as an entirely distinct and disconnected religion, orthodox Christians were forced by antitrinitarianism to reexamine their own understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and zealously guard their place at a far end of the religious continuum.

As a rejection of the defining element of the Christian religion, antitrinitarianism instigated conflict, controversy and debate no matter where it arose or in what form it was manifest. Antitrinitarians were seen as corrupters of true Christianity, not simply because they denied the divinity of Jesus and disregarded the doctrine of the Trinity, but because they understood their religious beliefs as existing in remarkably close proximity to Judaism. Sixteenth century antitrinitarians employed Jewish sources in order to argue against the doctrine of the Trinity and later antitrinitarians began to identify with the Jewish people, allowing themselves to be drawn ever closer, both theologically and personally, to the Jewish religion. In the late eighteenth century, the English Unitarians, led by Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley, brought antitrinitarianism closer to

Judaism than ever before and understood their Christian authority as deriving from this theological proximity. Significantly, this did not stop either of them from contending incontrovertibly that they were Christians. Not only does their example demonstrate Judaism's irrevocable place in antitrinitarian identity, but it requires now, as it did then, the understanding that Judaism and Christianity do not dwell in separate spheres but exist along a great continuum with an infinite amount of possible identities in between these religious poles.

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