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The “inhibition” of Morris Joseph: authority and change in late Victorian Anglo-Jewry

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In 1874, Parliament passed the Public Worship Regulation Act (PWRA), which forbade preaching anything contrary to the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles. The Articles represented a statement of beliefs to which Anglican clergy putatively assented. The real intent of the PWRA, however, was to limit the influence of the so-called “Anglo-Catholic” clergy, those churchmen who were seeking to reintroduce Catholic elements into liturgy and practice. It was designed to curtail creeping ritualism, with its whiff of Rome, and fortify the Protestant character of the Anglican Church. In the last quarter century of the nineteenth century, several clergymen were arrested for practices at variance with this Act, on charges of ritualism. Such charges could be brought since the Church of England was the “spiritual” arm of the State (“the State in its religious aspect”¹). The PWRA became a source of public controversy. As Gary Graber notes in his study of the Act, the issue of ritualism – that is, of the proper way of worship and the authority to enforce that worship – is neither religiously nor politically trivial, for “ritualism cut to the core of deeply held beliefs about the sacraments, the nature of the church and ministry, and the function of the state and the rule of law within the national establishment.”²

One of those arrested in connection with the PWRA was William Enraght, who presided over a church outside Birmingham. Part of the burgeoning Anglo-Catholic movement, Enraght argued that the Church of England had vacated the settlement of 1662, when the Act of Uniformity ruled that religious office could only be held by those who publicly affirmed and performed the ritual and liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer. He insisted that the PWRA was in spiritual and temporal violation of the Act of Uniformity. He maintained that this Act, which aligned

1 Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Pt 1, 3rd edn (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), 45.

2 Gary Graber, *Ritual Legislation in the Victorian Church of England* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993), xiv.

the Protestant principle of national sovereignty with Catholic ritual and liturgy, defined the Church.

Enraght persisted in conducting services in the Anglo-Catholic manner, and was arrested in 1880. Despite public sympathy (not for his cause *per se*, but for what was perceived as an infringement on conscience), Enraght was imprisoned for violating the PWRA, though he was released on a technicality. Following his release, he continued to carry out practices that conflicted with the PWRA and was finally “inhibited” in 1883. In Anglican ecclesiastical discipline, “inhibition” is a temporary suspension of permission to perform ritual and preach publicly.

In form if not substance, the outline of Enraght’s story, and the related issues of public authority, individual conscience, the expansion of religious pluralism (denominationalism, in particular), and the transformation of religious communities and traditions in modernity, is paralleled in the account of Morris Joseph, an Anglo-Jewish minister who was placed under an “inhibition” – Joseph himself later used this term – by the Chief Rabbi, Hermann Adler, in 1892 from accepting a United Synagogue pulpit. For instance, Joseph informed the Chief Rabbi that he could not in good conscience read aloud prayers that called for the restoration of Temple sacrifice. This refusal, along with several other points of contention, drove Adler to deny Joseph a ministerial position. Significantly, Adler and others involved in the Joseph affair – including Joseph himself – used specifically Anglican vocabulary to frame their dispute.

The parallel between Enraght and Joseph is not perfectly aligned (beyond the fact that they emerged out of different religious traditions): the former was a traditionalist in religious matters, while the latter had liberal inclinations; Enraght wished to increase the Church’s liturgy, Joseph sought to trim the Anglo-Jewish prayerbook; and Enraght’s dispute with Church authorities was vituperative, while Joseph’s disagreement with Adler did not darken their otherwise warm relationship. Nevertheless, the wider considerations for the Anglo-Jewish community made visible by Joseph’s narrative match those of Enraght’s narrative within the Church of England.

I want to use Joseph’s narrative, then, to highlight broader concerns about how the Anglo-Jewish community fitfully transitioned from one that was notionally Orthodox and obsessively committed to communal unity, even if that unity was ebbing, to one that began to take on features of congregationalism similar to non-Anglican Protestantism in England and to their Jewish counterparts in the United States. The question of

what should be the controlling story of English Judaism is at the heart of the dispute on which this essay focuses. This account will generate local variation on larger themes affecting all modern Jewish communities: what stories should we tell about ourselves, our relationship to history and text, and our interactions with other religious communities?

One of the questions I am attempting to answer out of this controversy is, what form might the Anglo-Jewish religious community take in an age of growing pluralism? What is novel about my approach here is that I propose that three models, drawn from English Christianity, were available: 1) the unity model, exemplified by the hierarchal model of Anglicanism (and witnessed in the Enraght drama); 2) the denominational model, similar to Methodism, a decentralized church organization held together broadly by kindred liturgical and worship practices; and 3) the congregationalist model, typified by Congregationalism, where authority was situated in the local church. I argue that the first model – which the Chief Rabbi’s office had attempted to mirror for the community – had fractured, and the controversy regarding Morris Joseph was an example of this fracture. The conclusion is this: as England moved toward, although never fully implemented, religious disestablishment by loosening restrictions on Nonconformists and Catholics, the second model and, especially, the third model became increasingly appealing, and that they are characteristic of much of religion in modernity. Religious pluralism flourished when barriers were lifted, and the Anglo-Jewry community followed this pattern as well.

In addition, this essay also measures the significance of why both sides in the Morris Joseph controversy organized their respective arguments through explicitly Anglican categories. While other scholars have noted that Anglo-Jewish clergy, thinkers, and writers consistently used Anglican terms to frame Jewish ideas and debates, I want to show how they did so even when writing for or to a specifically Jewish audience. This fact tells us two things: first, Anglo-Jews were familiar and perhaps more familiar with Anglican religious concepts than those emerging out of Judaism; second, by applying Anglican categories to internal Jewish matters, and in the absence of any theological attraction to the Church of England, Anglo-Jewry performed what Basil Hall Chamberlain, one of the early Japanologists, called “protection by mimicry,”³ that is, Anglo-Jewry anglicized itself

3 Basil Hall Chamberlain, “The Luchu Islands and Their Inhabitants”, *Geographical Journal* 5, no. 4 (April 1895): 301.

without becoming Anglican, resisting the dominant religion by adopting its categories.⁴ This essay, then, will parse the meaning of pouring Anglican wine into Jewish wineskins. First, I want to provide some of the broader context in which the Joseph controversy was embedded.

The Anglican backstory of Anglo-Jewry

The political and religious background of the Joseph controversy and the related issue of religious authority and change provide the framework in which his inhibition must be understood. In the last third of the nineteenth century, the privileged status of the Church of England, at both the political and cultural level, was diminishing. Nonconformists – that is, non-Anglican Protestants – received the right to vote in 1868. In the same year, the onerous “church rate” was abolished. This tax forced Nonconformists to pay for the maintenance of the local Anglican parish along with the salary of its occupant. In 1869, the Ireland Church Act disestablished the Anglican Church there, recognizing the injustice of burdening the Catholic majority with the ecclesiastical costs for the small Irish Anglican community. Two years later, the Universities Test Act permitted non-Anglicans and non-Christians to take fellowships at Oxford, Cambridge, and Durham. While rarely involved in these political changes, the Anglo-Jewish community benefitted from the growing pluralism. Many disabilities had already been removed by the middle of the century, but then participation as putative equals became possible.

Despite the decline in Anglican status, the institutions and authorities of Anglo-Jewry were appreciably affected by Anglican religious discourse and culture. The United Synagogue, the official organization of Anglo-Jewry, was empowered by an act of Parliament in 1870, placing management of Jewish communal and ritual concerns in the hands of the Chief Rabbi and essentially making the United Synagogue the “established Synagogue”, similar in some ways to the Church of England as the established church. The Chief Rabbi was an archbishop in miniature: his social status and religious attitudes were regularly couched in Anglican language. According to Cecil Roth, Chief Rabbi Adler had “an inevitable tendency . . . to interpret his position in almost Anglican terms.”⁵ It was

4 See David Englander, “Anglicized not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain”, in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. Gerald Parsons, 4 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 1: 235–73.

5 Cecil Roth quoted in *ibid.*, 249.

said that he donned gaiters, in deliberate imitation of Canterbury.⁶ The Adlerian use of Anglican forms also involved specific parallels to the Archbishop’s role in the maintenance of religious institutions: Adler claimed that the right of “visitation of Provincial Synagogues and Schools is exclusively the function and duty of the Chief Rabbi, as is the visitation of a diocese by its Bishop.”⁷ Anglo-Jewish ministers were required to wear a clerical collar, mirroring the style – and, the hope was, the status – of Protestant clergymen. “The culture of the minister”, Arthur Kiron writes, “would be an index of the culture of the community, while his position in society would be equivalent to that occupied by the minister of other religious bodies.”⁸

The duties of a Chief Rabbi further mirrored those of an Anglican archbishop: to oversee the religious practices of congregations under his authority; to appoint ministers (that is, to confirm or deny the choice of an individual synagogue board); to enforce general conformity in worship; administer ecclesiastical discipline when necessary; preach on occasion; license marriage and grant divorce, according to Jewish law; and act as deputy for the Jewish community before Parliament and other religious bodies.

The form, status, and function of the British Chief Rabbinate would have been unrecognizable elsewhere.⁹ First, as Stephen Sharot writes: “The traditional rabbi’s authority rested on the recognition of his superior knowledge of the religious Law; the English Chief Rabbi’s authority depended on his occupying that office.”¹⁰ Hitherto, a rabbi’s primary responsibility had not been pastoral but, rather, to decide Halakhic questions. Second, the office was national. Continental Jewish communities had local Chief Rabbis, but they did not have the breadth

6 See Norman Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter: A Biography* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938), 55.

7 Hermann Adler quoted in Geoffery Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 148 n. 190.

8 Arthur Kiron, “Golden Ages, Promised Lands: The Victorian Rabbinic Humanism of Sabato Morais” (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1999), 102. While Morais is best-known for his time in the United States, he lived in England from 1846 to 1851, and Kiron here refers to Anglo-Jewry.

9 Stephen Sharot elaborates on and supplements the following points in “Native Jewry and the Religious Anglicization of Immigrants in London, 1870–1905”, *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 16 (1974): 39–56, and “Reform and Liberal Judaism in London, 1840–1940”, *Jewish Social Studies* 41, nos. 3–4 (1979): 211–28.

10 Stephen Sharot, “Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870–1914: Rabbinate and Clergy”, *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 15, no. 2 (1973): 168.

and depth of authority that Adler claimed. In the United States, attempts to impose a Chief Rabbi, even at the local level, were met with either opposition or indifference.¹¹ Third, Adler's Chief Rabbinate continued the centralization of power to his office that started under his father, even as religious authority elsewhere grew more diffuse. His authority grew in part because of communal indifference (decision-making power was in the hands of a few families), desire to approximate Anglican models of authority, and the lack of a compelling alternative. The *Jewish Chronicle* commented in 1846 on the breathtaking scope of the Chief Rabbi's authority: "It matters little whether the alterations introduced by the Chief Rabbi are an improvement or not; it is enough for us that he has authorized them, and our duty is to obey. The most Rev. the Chief Rabbi should be invested with the authority due to his high office . . . No committee of surveillance should be tolerated."¹² What is surprising about Adler's mandate is that membership in the community was fully voluntary: this status meant that the Anglo-Jewish community had no powers of taxation and could not call upon the coercive power of the state or any other apparatus of social control.

Finally, what makes the foregoing all the more unexpected is that there was no exigent demand from the Christian majority that Jews clothe their self-conception in particularly Christian forms. Unlike elsewhere in Europe, as Todd Endelman notes, "political pressure to make Judaism acceptable to the Christian majority was very weak."¹³ Neither was there a manic rush for assimilation among the Anglo-Jewish community. Surely some Jews aspired to join the wider culture and wished to relinquish any formal ties to Jewish identity. But the majority of Anglo-Jews retained such identity, whether out of family loyalty, habit, ethnic pride, or religious devotion. Borrowing from Christian vocabulary and adapting Christian forms of worship (use of an organ during services, making the sermon a weekly fixture, and others) is emblematic of modern Judaism. But what made much of Victorian Anglo-Judaism exceptional was its liberal embrace of Christian terminology paired with a resistance to reform Judaism itself along Christian lines in order to make Judaism palatable to

11 See Abraham Karp, "New York Chooses a Chief Rabbi", *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 44, no. 3 (1955): 129–98.

12 *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter, JC), 1846, quoted in Sharot, "Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy", 168.

13 Todd Endelman, "Englishness of Jewish Modernity", in *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, ed. Jacob Katz (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987), 235.

Gentiles and thus provide evidence that Jews were worthy of a passport to the gifts of Gentile culture and Gentile success.

Morris Joseph: an introduction

These salient features of Anglo-Jewish life lead me to the story of Morris Joseph’s inhibition. Before turning to the inhibition itself and its after-effects, I shall give an outline of Joseph’s life, as he is a relatively obscure figure in modern Anglo-Jewish scholarship.¹⁴

Born in London in 1848, Joseph was reared in an Orthodox home. His father, David Joseph, was a reader and secretary (that is, he registered marriages) at the Maiden Lane Synagogue. Joseph went to Jews’ College for ministerial training and studied there under Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler. He accepted his first pulpit in North London in 1868. His next posting came in 1875 when he became minister at Princes Road in Liverpool; the synagogue was open to Reform-style changes in liturgy and practice though without the underlying ideology of Reform. He led this Liverpuddlian congregation until 1881 when poor health forced him to resign. Joseph devoted this interruption to writing, although he was occasionally invited to preach at Bevis Marks. Restored to full health by the late 1880s, he led popular Sabbath afternoon services at Hampstead, while also teaching homiletics at Jews’ College.

Joseph’s *Judaism as Life and Creed*, published in 1903, acted as a kind of introduction to Judaism for both Jews and Christians. Ideologically, the book was centrist: more liberal than the traditionalists, more traditionalist than the Reformers. In many ways, it adopted the religious outlook of Solomon Schechter, the founder of Conservative Judaism in North America. A close friend of Joseph’s, Schechter lived in England from 1882 to 1902, and *Judaism as Life and Creed* reads like a primer on the latter’s thought. Schechter was to have read the manuscript but for his removal to New York as the institutional head of the reconstituted Jewish Theological Seminary in 1902. “To him”, Joseph wrote, “I owe much of the inspiration that has made this book possible.”¹⁵

Situated between Orthodoxy and “extreme liberalism”, Joseph notes

14 However, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who drew my attention to Marc Saperstein’s “Morris Joseph and the West London Synagogue in the First World War”, *European Judaism* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 33–46.

15 Morris Joseph, *Judaism as Life and Creed*, rev. 2nd edn (London: Routledge and Sons, 1910), vii.

that “thus far no attempt has been made to elucidate systematically the intermediate position, and to give a comprehensive account of Jewish belief and practice as they are conceived by men of moderate views.”¹⁶ He aims to preserve what he considers to be “historic” Judaism, the developed tradition that has grown organically over the centuries. He considers Orthodoxy and liberalism as historical outliers. Orthodoxy reduces Judaism to a theological test and cannot accommodate modernity; liberalism seeks to relax the demands of tradition and becomes the handmaid of modernity rather than its partner.

Unlike the Reformers¹⁷ who use history to show discontinuities in order to justify divergence from tradition, and unlike the separatist Orthodox who ignore history as a religious factor, Joseph employs historical awareness to mark the continuities of the past with the present, to allow for organic change and a slow evolution of belief and practice. Schechter had taught him that history had sanctity too, and that what the people Israel confirmed within history carried with it the level of obligation found in divine command. History is the human role in the unfolding of revelation. The Torah gains and maintains its authority through the people’s veneration of the text. Its sanctity is assured due to its acceptance by the Jewish people – the “reverence and affection of successive ages”¹⁸ – rather than direct, divine revelation. Peoplehood mediates between individual conscience (the shibboleth of liberal Judaism) and divine authority (the veto power in Orthodoxy), creating for Joseph a Judaism true to experience and tradition.

Joseph’s inhibition

The wheels of Joseph’s inhibition and the community’s division over the Chief Rabbi’s decision began to spin when the Jewish Chronicle announced that Joseph had received “a call to the ministry”¹⁹ by a committee in Hampstead seeking a minister. They appealed to Chief Rabbi Adler to form a new synagogue in the West Hampstead area, which was approved. However, in that same issue of the Jewish Chronicle, it

16 Ibid.

17 In a sermon he gave later as minister at the West London Synagogue, he employed Christian categories to scold his Reform congregation for believing that all Reform “stands for [is] Dissent, that it is an incarnate protest against the accepted ideas and practices of Judaism.” Morris Joseph, *Message of Judaism* (New York: Bloch, 1907), 14.

18 Joseph, *Judaism as Life and Creed*, 12.

19 JC, 20 May 1892, 7.

was revealed that Adler “hesitate[d] to grant his certificate to the Rev. M. Joseph, a condition precedent to the election of a minister of the United Synagogue.”²⁰ He had misgivings regarding Joseph’s fitness for a United Synagogue pulpit, and requested a private interview.

Joseph was a natural fit for Hampstead. Its congregants were not opposed to reform-minded alterations in worship. The well-heeled members of the synagogue did not wish to be associated with Reform – Reform meant disunity – but its leadership had previously asked Adler to sanction some changes: elimination of the priestly blessing and the mussaf (additional) Amidah, permission to have a mixed choir and a confirmation service for girls, and to conduct part of the service in English. Adler permitted these modifications, most of which would have been rejected by Orthodox authorities elsewhere.²¹ Raymond Apple summarized the attitude of Hampstead’s original members: “a leaven of non-conformity has always characterized Hampstead, yet on the whole extremes have not been favoured and at times the most non-conformist feature of Hampstead has been its ‘middle-of-the-road’ approach.”²² Little wonder, then, that its leaders would invite Morris Joseph to take the congregation’s pulpit: he balanced respect for tradition with the need to get on in the world. However, the newly formed congregation was founded on “the understanding that it would be under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi.”²³

Herbert Bentwich, one of the leaders of the new synagogue, maintained that, while he and others wished to see changes at the margins, they were not willing to sacrifice communal solidarity: “The leaders of the true Hampstead movement, and with them the bulk of the Committee, have adhered, as I hope they will continue to adhere, to the principle that in matters of ritual there is no reform which can outweigh in importance

20 Ibid.

21 The desire for more radical modifications arrived a decade later with the Jewish Religious Union, led by Lily Montagu, Claude Goldsmid Montefiore, and Israel Abrahams. The modifications included family seating and optional head-covering for men. While Joseph sat on the initial committee for the Union (so did the Orthodox Simeon Singer), it eventually split into both traditional and Reform communities. The Union was the forerunner of Liberal Judaism.

22 Raymond Apple, *The Hampstead Synagogue, 1892–1967* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1967), 3.

23 *History of the Hampstead Synagogue and Order of Service on the Fiftieth Anniversary of its Opening* (London: United Synagogue, 1942), 4.

that abiding principle of Judaism – the maintenance of Union.”²⁴ Bentwich wished to retain the Anglican model of unity, broadened perhaps to include new attitudes and approaches to Jewish life, but averse to the Congregationalist preference to separate because of differences of practice or opinion. They wished to appoint Joseph, but not at all costs.

Two weeks later, the reasons for Adler’s hesitation were detailed. Joseph’s qualifications for Hampstead were not questioned, but his appointment was “inhibit[ed]” – pointedly using Anglican terms here – by the Chief Rabbi because Joseph “declined to modify his religious convictions at Dr. Adler’s bidding”.²⁵ Joseph would not be permitted to take the position at Hampstead, and the consequences of this event lay bare some of the significant shifts that the Anglo-Jewish community was undergoing.

Three reasons were cited for refusing Joseph’s appointment. First, he had permitted instrumental music at previous Saturday afternoon services. Traditionally, such music was prohibited on the Sabbath and other holidays. Adler tolerated these services only because they did not overlap with Sabbath morning services at other United Synagogue affiliates. Second, and most germane to our concerns, was Joseph’s moral scepticism regarding the restoration of the sacrificial cult at some future date, and consequently his refusal to recite prayers that called for the same. This refusal drove most of the commentary about this controversy, as it touched on the hoary distinction between universalism and particularism, the nature of religious authority and individual conscience, “national” sentiments among Jews, and the proper forms of worship. The third reason was the most general, that Joseph preached “views at variance with traditional Judaism”.²⁶ Adler declared that he saw no alternative but to “withhold my sanction of the appointment of Mr. Joseph.”²⁷

Joseph responded that “the religious tendencies of that congregation [Hampstead], so as they can be ascertained at this early stage of its existence, are known to be of an advanced character, and in inviting me to its ministry the Committee, it appeared to me, were simply giving effect to

24 Norman Bentwich quoted in Apple, *Hampstead Synagogue*, 2.

25 JC, 3 June 1892, 5.

26 Ibid., 6. Interestingly, David Woolf Marks, whose views were certainly at a further remove from traditional Judaism than Joseph’s, “took part in ... the laying of the foundation stone” with Adler at the dedication of the Hampstead synagogue. *History of the Hampstead Synagogue*, 5.

27 JC, 10 June 1892, 7.

a local desire to have those tendencies reflected in the pulpit.”²⁸ His initial response to his inhibition is a nod to congregational autonomy, something that the Anglican model of unity advocated by the United Synagogue could not abide as a centralized power. In addition, Joseph wished to speak freely from the pulpit without fear of Adler’s censure, preaching what he termed “progressive Judaism.”²⁹ While Joseph was willing to submit to the general authority of Adler, he refused to read the prayer for restoration of the sacrifices³⁰ and insisted that he preach according to his conscience, “in exercise of his undoubted right”, the *Jewish Chronicle* editorialized.³¹

Given this decision, Joseph offered a bleak appraisal of the London Jewish community’s commitment to reform: “All that has to be considered is, whether the religious needs of a progressist [sic] congregation are to be ignored, and its spiritual life starved in obedience to a rigid system, or whether the time has not come for identifying the Synagogue with that catholic spirit and policy which, while duly respecting the opinions of conservative minds, will give full satisfaction to liberal aspirations. I cannot profess to be very sanguine as to the result of this appeal.”³² He had reason to worry: Reform Judaism had little traction in the Anglo-Jewish world.³³ Most opted either for traditionalism (through affirmation

28 Ibid., 3 June 1892, 6.

29 Ibid.

30 In a sermon given years after this controversy, Joseph explains his opposition to the restoration of the sacrifices. A creature of his time, he vouched that the world was gradually improving in moral terms, that progress was an iron law, and wishing for the return of the blood-offerings constituted “idolatry”, the worship of “a God of a far-off age”. “The world cannot”, he writes, “sink back into the abyss from which it has painfully raised itself through the centuries.” Sacrifice is atavistic, standing athwart the moving tide of history, and the wrong way to worship God who measures a person by their moral action rather than their cult. Such persons who desire its restoration are the modern-day Nadav and Abihu, the sons of Aaron who brought to God “a strange fire” (Lev. 10:1) – that is, improper worship – and died immediately. Morris Joseph, *The Spirit of Judaism: Sermons Preached Chiefly at the West London Synagogue* (London: George Routledge & Sons; New York: Bloch, 1930), 43.

31 JC, 3 June 1892, 6.

32 Ibid.

33 Of course, there had been a small Reform community in England since 1840, led by David Woolf Marks. However, it did not find the same success as Reform in Germany or the United States. Todd Endelman argues that this lack of success was due to the absence of any external factor that necessitated the reformation of Judaism and that “the schismatic character of Reform invoked comparison with low-status, sectarian Nonconformity.” Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 115.

if infrequently in practice) or indifference. Factors external to the Anglo-Jewish world in the nineteenth century did not spur the creation of a fully dressed Reform movement as they did in the United States and Continental Europe. Joseph thus hoped that his inhibition would rouse the Anglo-Jewry from its somnolent state. In any case, he wanted a community that organized itself along Congregational lines, willing to abandon its quixotic pursuit of unity – a unity defined by the Chief Rabbi – in order to satisfy the expressed desires of the community.

While not a reformer after the American or Continental manner, he did – and in this he was not alone – consider traditional Judaism in England, with its accent on unity and conformity, moribund. He wrote:

I indulged the belief that at last the “orthodox” pulpit was, under authority, to be made broad enough to admit of the enunciation of liberal doctrine. I suppose the wish was father to the thought. I have no taste for controversy as such, nor a weak predilection for sensationalism, but I entertain the deliberate conviction that if there is to be a real, a living Judaism in this country in the coming days, it is only an enlightened teaching that will ensure it.³⁴

Joseph continued by reframing Adler’s rejection in Anglican terms. He suggested “that progress with its attendant salvation for English Judaism, is impossible within the confines of the Synagogue as by Rabbinical Law established.”³⁵ “By Rabbinical Law established” – this is a remarkable phrase. Joseph here is consciously echoing the classical definition of the Church of England which states that affiliation with the Church of England is obedience to the Church “as by law established”. In the Coronation Oath, the English sovereign swears to “maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England.” Here, Joseph lifts not just a phrase but a worldview, one that is assimilated into Anglo-Jewish self-understanding.

The story of Joseph’s “inhibition”³⁶ is part of a larger narrative of change within the Anglo-Jewish community, a narrative that joins the broader trend toward denominationalism – part of the Congregationalist model – in liberal, pluralist societies. Denominationalism, which is a natural consequence of religious pluralism (that is, a pluralism unconstrained, or at least less constrained, by policy and politics), means that religious

34 JC, 3 June 1892, 6.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid. Joseph refers here directly to “my inhibition”.

wants and desires are not the same and people are willing to separate on opinion. While “unity” had been a keyword for generations in the Anglo-Jewish world, it was beginning to lose its currency. Joseph was unwilling to bury his personal beliefs to satisfy some comprehensive notion of unity. “It is with a sense of relief”, he wrote, “that I find myself free from ties which, in my anxiety to preach what my conscience should declare to be true and right, might easily have proved to be galling shackles.”³⁷ Every choice entails loss, some path either not taken or left behind. Joseph, therefore, sacrificed unity – the Anglican model – for individual and congregational-level autonomy.³⁸

In defence of Joseph and the congregational model, one correspondent (who gave himself the Shakespearean moniker, “Under Which King, Bezonian?”) asked in the *Jewish Chronicle*: “Shall we have foisted on us one whom we do not desire, or accept a Minister we cannot heartily support? The Rev. the Chief Rabbi must indeed think of us as lambs led to slaughter.”³⁹ The denial of Joseph’s ministerial appointment ran counter to the Congregational model – each congregation decides who will lead it – that the writer desired. Both law and custom in England constrained religious pluralism. The Anglican model was essentially conservative: it sought to freeze the institutions of the community while allowing various factions within the larger umbrella to squabble over points of belief. But they were to squabble as brothers. In contrast, the Congregationalist model stimulates competition which is a spur to pluralism – and religious innovation – but does not advance unity.

Barnett Elzas, who trained at Jews’ College in London and later took up Reform posts in North America, offered a helpful perspective in understanding the fitful shifts towards a congregational model. Because of his time in both England and North America, Elzas had the opportunity to experience multiple models of Jewish religious life. He maintained that Anglo-Jewry was already undergoing American-style religious pluralism, even if this was not formally recognized. He asked rhetorically: “But why all this bitterness [about the dispute over Morris Joseph]? Is it that English Judaism may be a united whole, presenting serried ranks to all opponents?

37 Ibid.

38 Even Adler, in his installation sermon in 1891, admitted that the Anglo-Jewish world was divided: “That such diversities exist it would be but foolish and ostrich-like to deny.” Hermann Adler, *Anglo-Jewish Memories and Other Sermons* (New York: Bloch, 1909), 92.

39 *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 June 1892, 7.

... Into how many camps even is London Judaism divided?"⁴⁰ The regular pleas for Anglo-Jewish unity, by Adler and others, were in fact evidence of a fractured unity. Reality confounded these pleas. And the inhibition of Morris Joseph simply brought to broader public attention the acute adjustments that Anglo-Judaism was already undergoing. No doubt most English Gentiles, when they thought of Jews at all, considered them as a cohesive group and a separate community. This is the image that the Chief Rabbi wished to project and protect, but the image was growing fainter, with less definition.

The move towards a Congregationalist framework and away from a hierarchical one had always been part of the background noise of Anglo-Jewish life because of its voluntary character, but the late Victorian era witnessed challenges, both internal and external, to Anglican authority, and these challenges were replicated in the Jewish world. At issue was not authority per se but its distribution and activation. The Congregational model makes religious authority more diffuse at a macro level, though of course power can still pool into the hands of one person or a small group at the micro level. Elzas, from his Anglo-Canadian perch in Toronto, planted his flag firmly in the Congregationalist camp: "It is abundantly evident to all who have given any reflection to the situation, that a united English Judaism is no longer within the bounds of possibility." He continued with a decidedly contemporary appeal to congregational autonomy: "There must be liberty of conscience. Congregations, just as individuals, must be free to worship as they please, and not as we, or as any individual for that matter pleases."⁴¹ Elzas was getting at one of the central themes of modern religion: while religious choices take place in a social context and alternatives are constrained by what is cognitively available, they are private, not subject to check by any authority other than conscience. To suggest otherwise would be to condone religious coercion.

Related to the issue of which model Anglo-Jewry ought to use is the question of authority. Broadly speaking, in the Anglican model, authority is vertical; in the congregational model, it is horizontal (although, of course, each individual congregation might well organize itself vertically). In the Joseph controversy, authority was used by Adler to quash Joseph's appointment on the grounds of belief. The editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, usually quite sympathetic to the Chief Rabbi's office, maintained

40 Barnett Elzas in *ibid.*, 15 July 1892, 6.

41 *Ibid.*

that Adler had overstepped the boundaries of his charge, acting more like an archbishop than a Jewish communal leader.⁴² The editorial stated: “He clearly shows that what is involved is nothing less than the claim of the United Synagogue to formulate Judaism anew and to demand from its ministers’ subscription to certain dogmas.”⁴³ “Subscription”, as with much of the narrative in this incident, has a distinctly Anglican flavour. Anglican clergy were required, by the 1604 Canons Ecclesiastical, to “subscribe” to the Thirty-Nine Articles, which articulated the Church of England’s internal identity and its position relative to Roman Catholicism and some forms of Continental Protestantism. The editor claimed that such subscription “has made the Church shallow without making it broad.”⁴⁴ By associating Adler’s actions with Anglican subscription, he implied that the Chief Rabbi was proposing a dogmatic test for ministerial positions, which would be a novelty in Anglo-Jewish history. A later commentator maintained, and was probably correct in his speculation, that using the prayer for the restoration of Temple sacrifice as a kind of doctrinal bright-line test for the ministry was “an extraordinary penalty for a rational view which I am convinced is held by a large number of Dr. Adler’s clergy, and which, if made a ‘test question’, would be followed by a wholesale inhibition.”⁴⁵ (A year earlier, in his installation sermon, Adler appeared to recognize the danger of dogmatism: “[the ideal Jewish minister] must not judge of events and decide upon his course of action with the assumption of sacerdotal infallibility.”⁴⁶) Adler was on a slippery slope: inhibit one minister for refusing to read the prayer for Temple sacrifice, then consistency and fairness would suggest that he would do the same for others who shared Joseph’s opinion.

Solomon Schechter also protested at what he perceived as Adler’s heresy hunting: “Will you allow me to point out how unpractical a test this is, seeing how very few could stand it. Not to speak of living men, would for instance Zunz, the father of Jewish science, have been permitted to preach in one of the constituent synagogues of the community? Certainly not – for did he not give expression to almost more advanced views on

42 Asher Meyers, the paper’s editor, was a close friend of both Joseph and Adler, creating an uncomfortable situation that forced him to prioritize his loyalties.

43 *Ibid.*, 8 July 1892, 11.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*, 5 Aug. 1892, 7.

46 Adler, *Anglo-Jewish Memories*, 85.

Biblical criticism than either Wellhausen or Stade?”⁴⁷ He also wounded Adler by contending that even Solomon Rapoport (1790–1867), a major East European rabbinic figure (respected by traditionalists and *maskilim* [members of the Jewish Enlightenment] alike), would be denied an Anglo-Jewish pulpit because he maintained that the book of Isaiah had multiple authors.⁴⁸ Rapoport had been Adler’s teacher. In any event, doctrinal examinations have a cascade effect. They are socially disruptive, and force clergy publicly to maintain positions they do not hold. Schechter wrote: “I should like also to plead to allow doctrine to rest quiet; for an appeal to it will only breed cant and hypocrisy.”⁴⁹ He insisted that Judaism does indeed have a doctrinal core – maintaining this position against some of Moses Mendelssohn’s more extreme disciples⁵⁰ – but there are matters for which there can be legitimate disagreement.⁵¹

The dispute over Joseph’s inhibition spilled into the pages of the *Jewish Quarterly Review*. In one article, Oswald John Simon, a leading lay figure in liberal Jewish circles (he helped establish the Jewish Religious Union, the forerunner of Liberal Judaism), concluded that Anglo-Jewry was at last untying itself from its determined but ultimately empty pursuit of communal unity, a unity at best gossamer-thin and, in any case, diminished to the point of insignificance. Like other reformers, he insisted that communal separation based on belief, practice, and private conscience ought to be privileged over cooperation and unity. Why should someone accept the authority of another whose worldview differed so significantly? That is, why should a portion of the Anglo-Jewish community that sought ritual and liturgical reform submit to a Chief Rabbi who hindered their ambitions? Simon writes: “Allegiance to conscience and the propagation of Judaism in the only way in which modern Jews and Jewesses can receive it, becomes a paramount duty. Henceforth the

47 Solomon Schechter in *JC*, 8 July 1892, 5.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Ibid.*

50 Schechter famously said that “there is Mendelssohn’s assertion, or supposed assertion, in his *Jerusalem*, that Judaism has no dogmas – an assertion which has been accepted by the majority of modern Jewish theologians as the only dogma Judaism possesses.” See “The Dogmas of Judaism”, *Studies in Judaism: First Series* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1896), 147.

51 Joseph’s sermons also echo Schechter’s sentiment: “A certain amount of belief is necessarily assumed . . . But the Bible never formulates articles of faith; even the Rabbins [sic], as a rule, shrank from formulating them.” *The Ideal in Judaism and Other Sermons by the Rev. Morris Joseph preaching during 1890–91–92* (London: David Nutt, 1898), 36.

very name of uniformity will be abhorrent. Even the multiplication of sects ceases to be a danger, and may possibly be the means of rescue for English Judaism.”⁵² Sectarianism can be a powerful corrosive, polluting public discourse and setting neighbour against neighbour, but it can also leaven a community, providing diverse religious choices for a diverse community rather than a single institution quarrelling over points of belief and practice. Simon opts for the Congregational model for Jewish organization: decisions ought to be made locally; power ought not to be gathered in the hands of one individual; and the congregation should have full autonomy to hire whom they wish in matters of religious leadership.

The Chief Rabbi did have some allies. Replying to Simon’s *Jewish Quarterly Review* article, Moses Hyamson, best known for acting as the interim Chief Rabbi from 1911 to 1913 between Adler’s death and Joseph Hertz’s appointment, also drew parallels between Adler’s actions and Anglican authority, as if the parallels settled the issue. “If a gentleman refuses to read the ancient prayers”, he says,

which express the sentiments of the major portion of the Jewish people of the present day, the Ecclesiastical authorities have, by the constitution of the United Synagogue, as much right to inhibit him as the authorities of the Church of England have to inhibit a clergyman who refuses to read the Liturgy. I go further and urge that if a minister preaches doctrine not in accord with the teaching of traditional Judaism, the Chief Rabbi would be guilty of pusillanimity and even faithlessness to the trust reposed in him, if, out of private regard, he did not exercise the power placed in his hand, to prevent the promulgation of what he knows to be falsehood from the pulpits of the synagogues under his jurisdiction. If no control be exercised over the teachings of the Synagogue, if breadth of view is to be the sole condition, what guarantee have we that the pulpit will not be thrown open to men who deny inspiration, ridicule ancient religious observances, and advocate the transference of the Sabbath to Sunday.⁵³

This passage is remarkable. Adler’s reasoning for his inhibition of Joseph is justified through the corresponding Anglican prerogative to keep clergy from their appointed pulpits. Hyamson does not resort to any historically relevant equivalent in Judaism; he cannot find one. He applies Anglican reasoning to vindicate Adler’s authority, and to curb Christian

52 Oswald John Simon, “Authority and Dogma in Judaism”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 5, no. 2 (Jan. 1893): 242.

53 Moses Hyamson, “Authority and Dogma in Judaism: A Reply”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 5, no. 3 (April 1893): 481–2.

practices from influencing Jewish traditions, for instance, moving the Saturday Sabbath to Sunday, as was done in a few American cities during Reform's "radical" phase in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁴ This is a self-aware translation of Gentile means to Jewish ends, a rarity in traditional Jewish circles and part of what makes Anglo-Jewry different from its brethren in North America and Europe.

Conclusion

The position of Chief Rabbi in England today still holds a measure of moral authority, but the office has largely shifted from one concerned with Jewish unity to acting as a representative to the Gentile world, an advocate for Jews and Judaism to participate in the public square, carrying to it valuable experience and moral insight. This change illustrates the partial victory of the Congregationalist model within Anglo-Jewry. While religion in England—and Europe generally—has not followed the "market" model of American religion, it has, if erratically, moved in that direction. In Anglo-Jewry, the stirrings of this transformation can be located in the late Victorian era, and the "inhibition" of Morris Joseph characterizes both the attempt by the Chief Rabbi to maintain the Anglican model and the use by reformers of the Congregationalist model with its emphasis on local conviction over unity.

This essay has traced a conflict of competing narratives in Anglo-Jewry, a conflict about the boundaries of community and the deep motivations driving these competing self-definitions. These narratives were shaped by models of English Christianity, represented by the Chief Rabbi and his fellow traditionalists, on the one side, and Morris Joseph and his fellow religious liberals, on the other. Both sides shaped this discourse by recourse to distinctly Anglican categories, mapping Christian debates onto an internal Anglo-Jewish matter. The traditionalists appealed to the Church of England's broad cultural and (quasi-) political authority as proper for the Anglo-Jewish community, while Anglo-Jewish liberals and reformers pointed to dissenters and Nonconformists (the Congregationalist model) as suited to the needs of a democratic polity, a new world where any form, apparent or real, of religious coercion constituted a stain on humanity's innate liberty. The story of Chief Rabbi Adler's inhibition

54 See Kerry Olitzsky, "The Sunday Sabbath Movement in American Reform Judaism: Strategy or Evolution?" *American Jewish Archives* (April 1982): 75–88.

of Morris Joseph⁵⁵ highlights, in *fine*, the two models, and shows how Anglo-Judaism was shifting from the dominant Anglican model to the Congregationalist one, just as the position of the Congregational model was attaining a rough cultural parity with the Anglican one in the world of English Christianity.

55 Following his inhibition, Joseph served as a minister at the West London Synagogue until 1925. Despite the contentious nature of this dispute, Joseph and Adler remained friendly, with the former delivering the *hesped* (eulogy) for the latter in 1911. See “A History in our Time: Rabbis and Teachers buried at Hoop Lane Cemetery. A Booklet to Commemorate the 50th Yahrzeit of Rabbi Dr. Leo Baeck” (London: Leo Baeck College, 2006), 17. Meir Persoff, in his excellent work on the tension between the Chief Rabbis and advocates of reform, maintains that Moses Hyamson delivered the *hesped*. *Faith against Reason: Religious Reform and the British Chief Rabbinate 1840–1990* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 113.