

Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 366 pp.

In recent years there has been a renaissance in the field of American Jewish history. In view of the Jews' success as a group and their influence on cultural, political, economic, and social life in America during the twentieth century, many studies have emerged attempting to explain this historical phenomenon unprecedented in other western countries. Recent examples are Stephen Whitfield's impressive study *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (1999) and Sylvia B. Fishman's *Jewish Life and American Culture* (2000). Very few scholars, however, have attempted to explore how the history of the Jews in modern America was influenced by the host Christian society, especially its Protestant culture. This is indeed the unique historical perspective offered by Professor Yaakov Ariel's excellent book.

Ariel's study shows for the first time the full extent of the rich history of Protestant missionary efforts directed toward the Jews in America, examining it in the broader context of the Christian-Jewish relationship. Based on an impressive array of primary sources, and placed within a wide historical and theological context, Ariel's study is a model of scholarship. Despite its title, the book in fact deals with both the history of Protestantism and the history of the Jews in modern America, thus greatly contributing to a better understanding of the important role assigned to religion in American society during the twentieth century. It will undoubtedly serve for many years as the authoritative study on the issue of the Christian-Jewish relationship in the United States.

During the 1960s and 1970s many Jews and Christians were surprised to see the rise of a large and vigorous movement of Jewish converts to Christianity. The ideological and social roots of this movement can be traced back, as Ariel skillfully describes, to powerful nineteenth-century pietist and evangelical impulses among Protestants in Europe, England, and America. Based on a premillennialist messianic view that "considered the Jews to be the chosen people, heir to the covenant between God and Israel" (220), Christian missionary efforts accorded the Jews a singular role in the events leading to Christ's second coming and the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God, thus emphasizing the "central role of the Jews in the divine program for the End of time." (9) Such

an eschatological and apocalyptic approach is indeed one of the great merits of Ariel's study; he looks at Protestant Christian missionary efforts toward the Jews in the wider context of the Protestant philosophy of salvation history. The book is thus an important continuation of the author's previous pioneering study, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945* (1991). In the present work he shows how essential this apocalyptic and eschatological attitude is for the understanding of the content and form of Protestant missions to the Jews in America.

Within this broad ideological and theological context, the author traces the inception of the movement to evangelize the Jews in America through three distinct and well-defined stages. If in the 1870s there was only one mission laboring among the Jews in America, by the 1910s dozens had sprung up, employing hundreds of missionaries. During this first period, premillennialist missions were directed at the thousands of Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe, concentrating especially on young people and offering a variety of social services in order to win them to the Christian faith. (9-78) The second stage, between 1920 and 1965, saw the adjusting of Christian missions to the changing face of Jewish society in America, focusing more and more on the second generation and increasingly moving to middle-class Jewish neighborhoods. With the great transformation that took place in American society in the 1960s and 1970s, during the third stage, 1965 to 2000, missions became part of Jewish life. Jews are now accustomed to encountering missionaries on the streets and to be invited to visit their centers. With the information revolution of the last decades of the century, Jews faced missions through advertisements in newspapers and magazines as well as on the Internet.

Professor Ariel's study takes the reader on an extraordinary journey to learn about a variety of people, institutions, and movements, all aiming at evangelizing the Jews. He describes the host Christian religious culture that nourished these missions and the changing attitudes toward Jews among Protestants, as well as the various ways in which Jews reacted to them. This broad survey of the Christian-Jewish relationship exposes an important and generally unknown terrain in American religious history. In contrast to Christian states in Europe, where there is an established church, in America the lack of a formal religious structure offers the opportunity for a

dialogue and negotiation among different groups. The book, therefore, deals not only with the Christian mission to the Jews, but also with the unique religious space that made it possible due to the separation of church and state. Thus, unlike Europe where Jews formed separate cultural groups, in America “the social and cultural separateness of the Jews has been seriously eroded” during the twentieth century, resulting also in the expansion of “the number of converts to evangelical Christianity.” After a hundred years, as Ariel’s study shows, “the movement to evangelize the Jews is as energetic as ever” and “the missionaries are more than optimistic about their future stature and growth.” (291) Such a prognosis says much about the Jews, as well as about the Protestant movement in America.

With this impressive book, Professor Ariel has established himself as a leading scholar of the Christian-Jewish relationship in America. It will surely serve as a model for future analysis of the rich negotiations taking place among other religious denominations in America. Further, the valuable insights provided by this study will enhance understanding of the important role of religion in American history.

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