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AMERICAN JEWISH RESPONSES TO CHRISTMAS

by

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for Ordination

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DIGEST

Of all the nations in which Jews have lived since the destruction of the Temple, no country has been as open and as free to the Jews as the United States of America. The unique blend composed of a secular society, an accepting Gentile population, free immigration (until the 1920s), and church-state separation have combined to offer the American Jew opportunities he never had previously.

Yet, these same factors have also imposed great pressure on American Jews to assimilate. This thesis examines one such pressure--Christmas--and how American Jews have historically reacted to it. Reactions are grouped under three headings: acceptance, rejection, and accommodation.

Some Jews openly accepted the celebration of Christmas. They felt they could not or would not deny their children the American experience of the Christmas tree, the presents, and the sharing of the holiday with their Christian friends. They reinterpreted Christmas symbols as secular and lacking any Christological meaning.

The majority of Jews rejected Christmas. They felt that though it was accepted as an American holiday, it was one which had no relevance for them. Some Jews resented the pressure placed upon them to assimilate and celebrate. While

the individual Jew expressed his rejection in various ways, Jewish organizations, intent upon maintaining the Constitution's guarantee of church-state separation, often fought, in the courts and legislatures, public Christmas celebrations and decorations.

Another group of Jews found it impossible to ignore Christmas. They attempted to transfer the spirit onto the Jewish holiday of Chanukah, the nearest calendrical Jewish holiday to Christmas. The Reform movement was especially active in the magnification of Chanukah as a means of educating Jewish children and stemming the tide of Christmas observance among Jews. Eventually the Conservative and Orthodox movements joined in this magnification process.

This thesis traces the development of each of these responses, placing them in the context of developments in the larger Gentile community. Careful attention is paid both to the range of Jewish responses to Christmas and to the way these responses changed over time.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

Early American Christmas

The early American Jewish reaction to Christmas can only be understood in terms of the history of Christmas in America. This chapter will examine that history.

The first Christmas celebration in America took place with Columbus in 1492. While searching for the Spice Island his flagship ran aground on a coral reef off the Island of Santo Domingo on Christmas Eve. Rescued by the Indians, Columbus and his crew celebrated by feasting with them and their chief on Christmas Day. "Later, he [Columbus] built a small fortress nearby and named it La Navidad or the Nativity, in honor of Christmas and in thanksgiving for rescue."¹

Before the Puritans landed at Plymouth, the Spanish had celebrated Christmas in the New World. The first Franciscans came to America in 1524. "In Mexico they discovered two important December celebrations: one in honor of the war god Huitzilopochtli, at the time of the solstice, and one celebrating the birth of the Earth Mother, Tonantzin, who was represented as a 'child coming down from heaven.'"² The Franciscans introduced Christmas and

the Spanish traditions surrounding the holiday to the Indians. These became intermixed with Indian traditions, spawning customs some of which remain to this day.

In 1540 Coronado and his men spent Christmas at a winter camp near Albuquerque, New Mexico.³ The conquistadors, following upon the Spanish explorers and missionaries into Mexico, found that the Indians had an end-of-the-year festival at the December solstice. Some of the terms and rituals of the Aztecs were similar to those taught by Christian tradition.⁴ Other Indian groups in North America had festivals and customs which fit in well with Christmas. The Indians in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest had a well established feast or potlatch at winter solstice when gifts were given; a tribe in North Dakota had for a long time hung gifts on cedar trees in expectation of special blessings and absolution of all guilt.⁵ It was not difficult for the Indians, wishing to convert, to blend their festivals with those of the Christians.

From 1620 to 1750 communities in America settled by Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Dutch Reformed, Lutheran, Church of England, and German sect colonists observed Christmas according to their own traditions. Gradually some intermixing of custom and traditions began to occur.⁶

English colonization took place at a time of great controversy about Christmas in England. While the Feast of

the Nativity was a major festival for the Church of England, the Quakers, Puritans, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians opposed the establishment of Christmas. The English Puritans and their co-religionists in New England "condemned it as 'popish' and the secular celebration as a 'wonton Bacchanalian feast.'" ⁷

Furthermore the bulk of the colonists [English] came from those groups who were in opposition to the established religious order and found in Christmas an outstanding example of the religious and social institutions to which they were opposed. ⁸

Even in the staunchly British colony of Virginia, Christmas customs were beginning to change. In the first century of the Virginia colony the Christmas celebrations were very plain-"not from choice, but necessity." ⁹ The Virginian plantation Christmas celebration developed into a festival with visiting, eating, dancing, card playing, relaxation from labor, and extra food for slaves and servants. ¹⁰

In New England, the Puritan colonists actively opposed Christmas, for it was not ordained by Scriptures. On Christmas Day, 1620, Governor Bradford and fellow Pilgrims worked to erect the first common use building, ignoring Christmas altogether. ¹¹ In England, the Puritans were able to force an act of Parliament in 1647 to abolish all observance of Christmas. American Puritans followed suit when, in 1659, they enacted a law in the General Court of Massachusetts punishing Christmas observers:

. . . anybody who is found observing, by abstinence from labor, feasting, or any other way, any such days as Christmas Day, shall pay for every such offense five shillings.¹²

As additional members of the Church of England emigrated to the American colonies, and as schismatic movements developed among the New England Puritans, the severity of the law lessened until, in 1681, the law was repealed over the objection of many.

In New York there were various attitudes toward Christmas. In New Amsterdam, the Dutch colonists celebrated Christmas enthusiastically. The holiday period stretched from Christmas Day and extended for three weeks.

The courts and public offices were closed for three weeks and 'young and old entered into common sports--bowling, dancing, ball-playing and the like,--while tap-houses were crowded with jolly burghers whose merriment it was sometimes necessary to restrain.'¹³

The Dutch also celebrated New Years Day with gifts and social visits. The English military, after the capture of New Amsterdam in 1664, joined together with the Dutch Reformed Church in sanctioning Christmas observance. The New Netherlands colony has been credited with the introduction of St. Nicholas in America, though the time and form of his arrival cannot be determined.

The colonies to the south of New York were quite divided on the issue of Christmas observance. New Jersey had the Dutch Reformed Church, at New Brunswick, favoring Christmas, while Quakers, at Burlington, and Puritans and Scotch, at Newark, opposed it. In Pennsylvania, which was

officially a Quaker colony, the pro-Christmas German colonists with other assorted groups equalled in number the anti-Christmas Quakers. In Philadelphia, the Church of England supported Christmas, with the Episcopalians observing Christmas "scrupulously."¹⁴ In Maryland the Roman Catholic and Anglican colonists were outnumbered by the Quakers, Puritans, and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, all of whom were opposed to Christmas. The Carolinas and Georgia were further examples of heterogenous groups with differing attitudes.

By 1750 several factors had begun to influence the future of Christmas observance in the United States. The larger German immigrant sects, such as the Moravians, Lutherans, and German Reformed Church maintained their Christmas customs and introduced them to others.

After 1740 economics and politics began to interest the colonists while religious differences became less of an issue; the Christmas issue remained virtually static in each colony.

But even under the most favorable circumstances the celebration of Christmas in the colonies was a simple and prosaic affair compared with the mediaeval festival or with the holiday in Germany or England.¹⁵

Christmas during the Revolutionary War was a time of anxiety with conditions unfavorable to celebrations and holiday observances.¹⁶

The fact that English and Hessian troops celebrated Christmas during the Revolutionary War may have added a patriotic note to the denominational controversy.¹⁷

Some speculate that Washington crossed the Delaware on December 25, 1776, to surprise the enemy soldiers stationed at Trenton, New Jersey, while they were engaged in their Christmas revelry.¹⁸

As the eighteenth century closed, opposition from groups such as the Quakers began to diminish. While there was still controversy over the religious celebration of Christmas, the secular interest in it had magnified greatly. Opposition groups became less inclined to oppose Christmas once the holiday had been removed from the religious and political dominance of the Church of England. "This tolerance increased during the nineteenth century and undoubtedly encouraged popularity of the folk festival."¹⁹

Jewish Colonial Reactions

Little is written about Jewish reaction to Christmas in the American colonies. Chanukah, the Jewish holiday closest to Christmas on the calendar, finds little mention in colonial Jewish sources. However, there are records of individuals and congregations owning Chanukah menorahs (eight branched candelabras or oil lamps lighted during the festival).²⁰ Traditionally, Chanukah was a minor festival in Judaism; Purim, celebrating the deliverance of the Persian Jewish community from annihilation, was the holiday for joyous observance. As long as Christmas was not a major holiday for the Christians, there was no need for any change of status of Chanukah for the Jews.

The colonial Jew faced this major tension in his life. If he wanted a social and religious life he had to assimilate into the Christian world around him or he had to join with other Jews to form a Jewish community. It is possible that some Jews celebrated Christmas, but due to the very small size of the Jewish community they left no record. Most likely, they didn't celebrate Christmas because it had not become magnified by the general community to the extent it would become later. Statistics would have predicted against the survival of Judaism in early America. The Jewish population in America numbered 1,500 to 2,500 by 1790. This was very small in relation to the major population of 3,929,000.²¹ The majority of Jews, upon entering America, moved in the direction of establishment and support of a Jewish community within the locality in which they lived.

With the rarest of exceptions, he certainly wished no church membership; conscience and habit made it inconceivable for him to live except as a Jew, and he wanted his own socioreligious community, his own way of life. Unless prepared to abandon the Jewish heritage, the colonial Jew neither dared nor cared to separate himself from his fellow Jews. After all, he needed ritually prepared foods, and if he broke with his co-religionists they might refuse him a Jewish burial!²²

The Jewish community would then support the Jew and his family with all their needs religiously and prevent assimilation.

The desire for community and synagogue was replicated in small communities as Jews moved into towns in

numbers large enough to form minyans of ten adult males and later congregations large enough to build and support buildings.²³ By the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1776 there were five main Jewish communities in the original thirteen colonies: Newport, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Savannah.²⁴

Conditions for Jews in America were very different than those they had experienced in Europe. For centuries the European Jew had little opportunity to leave the Jewish community. The European Jewish community was bounded by communal charter, restrictive legislation, special taxes, restrictive trades and guilds, and church and government supported anti-Semitism. Very few Jews could overcome these disabilities to rise in Christian society. In order to protect the Jewish residents, strong communal institutions, including the synagogue, permeated every aspect of life, constantly reminding the Jew of his identity and heritage. In America, however, these disabilities did not develop. There were no community charters, imposed ghettos, no religious taxes, and little anti-Semitism. The Jew met a tolerance in colonial America that he had not experienced in Europe for centuries.

The strong communal agencies did not develop in America either. The synagogue became the main agency for Jewish identification. While the synagogue had a modicum of control over the lives of its worshippers, it did not have the same pervasive nature for the American Jew as it did in

Europe. Its main disciplinary tool was the herem, or excommunication. In America "there is ample evidence that synagogal threats of excommunication against those who neglected religious observances were not always taken very seriously, and individual Jews even dared not to affiliate with the synagogue."²⁵ After Abraham Mollena moved from Georgia to New York he is not found on membership lists of synagogues. Another example is Meyer Solomon of Lancaster. He was begged to attend not only regular services but Rosh Hashonah (New Year's) services as well.²⁶

Other forces were at play to lessen strict traditional lives. Protestant decorum played a part in the Jewish demand for more orderly worship services. The Jews were not immune to the decline in piety which was affecting the eighteenth century Protestants. "Enlightenment thought and political liberalism spilled over into religion."²⁷ Without the ghetto and a rabbinate to support them, the impulse to observe ritual lessened. "For many who lived in the late colonial era, Judaism became a once-a-week religion."²⁸

Christian tolerance placed a strong pressure upon the Jew to become an "American" and assimilate. While there were some who maintained their Jewish identity even on the frontier, others found the hardships of pioneer life and remoteness from supportive communities insurmountable for maintaining their Judaism. Even in the cities the number of Jews was relatively small. Sephardic Jews went to great

lengths to maintain endogamy. But with the small number of Jews, intermarriage became inevitable. The Jacob Franks family is an example of parents that remained Jewish while the children and grandchildren married Christians. Franks did not have a single Jewish great grandchild. Though intermarriage was frowned upon by the community, it occurred with great frequency among the Jews even in the cities.²⁹

The majority of Jewish immigrants in colonial times were male Central European Jews. They came to America seeking economic advantages and not religious freedom. They settled in small towns and cities with few or no Jews and were usually engaged in trade or commerce. Without the supportive structures of Europe and the help of fellow religionists, it is no small wonder that a great many succumbed to intermarriage and acceptance of the American lifestyle.

With all the pressure for assimilation, the synagogue community helped maintain the majority of Jews religiously and ethnically.

Even though Jewishness no longer gave color to every moment of his life, the synagogue protected him from complete assimilation and surrender to his Gentile environment--and this was something of an achievement, for Shearith Israel in New York was the only permanent synagogue in all North America before the 1750's.³⁰

Christmas had little influence upon the colonial Jew. This may have been because Christmas had little effect on colonial America, or it may have been due to the Jew's inner

identification. Whatever the reason, it did not last long. In the nineteenth century Christmas celebrations confronted Jews with a major challenge.

Christmas Into The Twentieth Century

Many factors combined to make Christmas a major American festival beginning in the nineteenth century and progressing into the twentieth. With the separation of church and state officially sanctioned by the American Constitution in 1791, the major church groups opposing the holiday lessened their objections, since the celebration was no longer considered a symbol of the religious and political authority of the Church of England. By the 1860's Christmas was well established in many churches.

By 1870 Christmas was a national holiday. The Christian Sunday schools closely followed the national acceptance.³¹ The question then became not whether to celebrate Christmas but in what manner. Christmas first developed programmatically in the Sunday schools, which had gradually become denominational in character. The Sunday school Christmas program, if held, usually included gifts to the children. The mission schools were certain to have gifts for the poor.

An example of the degree of celebration developed in the Sunday school was the program offered by the Pilgrim Unitarian Church in San Francisco. A hall was hired and admission was charged. The children sang carols; young men and women had tableaux and shadow pantomime. In between the

tableaux the children danced to music; Santa drove into the room with live reindeer. Paper snow was pushed through the ceiling ventilators to fall on everyone below.³² Elaborate productions became models for the Jewish community to copy with Chanukah.

As some of the celebrations began to get out of hand economically, there arose a cry for emphasis upon gift giving, and not upon receiving them. Movements developed to bring the religious element back into the holiday. The Christian churches began to emphasize the family aspects of the Nativity with special services and programs. Religious values such as humility, brotherhood, and peace became values especially emphasized at this time of year. However, the religious element of Christmas began to decline in the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth. "The decline in the strictly religious significance of the occasion is but one evidence of the secularization occurring in this country during the past century."³³

One area that bridged the religious and secular natures of the holiday was that of the family celebration. American families developed their own ritual celebrations involving Christmas tree purchase and decoration, ritual dinners, gift exchanges, family attendance at church services, and even family holiday trips away from home. Family social ties were resumed during Christmas whether by party, by telephone, or by letter and Christmas card. The national holidays of Christmas and New Years Day and the

lengthy school holiday breaks provided students and employees with time to celebrate. Christmas became a national holiday between 1836 and 1890 when each of the states and territories legally recognized the status of the day.

One suspects that the legal recognition accorded December 25th was a sign of an emerging national self-consciousness which found symbolic expression in the Christmas festival. This idea receives slight confirmation from the fact that a large number of states recognized this day during the Civil War years when the sense of national identity attained a new intensity.³⁴

Christmas celebration became an "American" activity filled not only with religious overtones but also with patriotic ones.

The secular celebration, developing from folk ways, had its antecedents from the earliest colonial times. Each of the European groups brought with them their individual and diverse Christmas customs. In America, with increased communication and with survival necessitating increased cooperation, the customs of one group were introduced to many others. Several examples of cultural merger are the development and acceptance of Santa Claus and the Christmas tree.

In 1822, when Clement Clark Moore published his popular poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," he changed the fourth century Bishop of Myra, St. Nicholas, into a jolly, fur bedecked, fat man, bringing toys to children in a sleigh pulled by reindeer, arriving on the night of Christmas Eve. The poem lacked religious symbols though Moore was a

Christian minister; it was a poem everyone could accept. Thomas Nast's cartoons, from 1863 into the 1880's, pictured Santa Claus in all types of activities, including distributing gifts to Union soldiers during the Civil War.³⁵ Nast was the first to provide Santa with a patriotic image. In 1897, Francis Church, an editorial writer for the New York Sun, published an affirmative reply to Virginia O'Hanlon's letter of inquiry, asking if there really was a Santa Claus. The paper reprinted Church's letter for fifty years.³⁶

With editorial assurance that Santa Claus was real, the legend of Santa Claus developed with an emphasis upon gifts, joy, and merriment. Santa entered popular literature and songs.

With regard to the Christmas tree, the Germans brought this custom to America during the Revolutionary War. Gradually the custom spread and by mid-nineteenth century it had become widely accepted in America as important to the celebration of Christmas. Later Americans adopted the Christmas card, a custom learned from the British and the notion of a "Christmas Spirit," from Charles Dickens A Christmas Carol, which denoted "that the Scrooges of the world be convinced that the social ideals of family life, brotherhood, and benevolence transcend wealth and power."³⁷

Another Christmas custom, that of giving gifts, also grew to enormous proportions. Not only did children receive gifts, but adults began to give presents to each other as well. Gradually industry and business began to exploit the

seasonal exchange of gifts. Christmas soon became an industry all of its own--a mainstay of the consumer economy.

The commercialization of Christmas turned the holiday into a psychologically attuned method of paying ones social dues between parent to child, employer to employee, spouse to spouse, and friend to friend. One had to take on this social role of giving or risk being considered a "Scrooge," the epitomy of miserliness. The Christmas exchange of gifts reached into all facets of American social life, from Kindergarten, through school, into the office, and into the business world. It was these aspects of the holiday which demanded that American Jews respond to Christmas and then governed their response.

Christmas had much to offer the Jew. The new immigrant to America wanted to become American as quickly as possible. Christmas offered a patriotic American holiday of great fun and gaiety. To the assimilated Jew, Christmas offered a means of assimilation. His children could share in the decoration of the Christmas tree and exchange gifts with the Christians of the community. The Jew could feel accepted and more secure knowing that his children would be participating in the school Christmas celebration and singing holiday carols. What parent would want to deny their children the beauty of the Christmas tree, the joy of opening presents on Christmas morning, or the thrill of sitting on Santa's knee at the department store? The "Melting Pot Theory" of the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries put pressure upon the minority to conform to the majority. By celebrating Christmas, Jews submitted to this pressure.

Yet there were other Jews, from Reform to Orthodox, who evidenced different reactions to Christmas, everything from selective participation to absolute denial of the holiday as such. This did not relieve the societal pressures of advertising, of socializing, of living in modern America, but it helped make it bearable. Reactions varied from community to community, from organization to organization, and from person to person. Each had to decide whether to accept, reject, or substitute for Christmas.

This thesis will trace these three American Jewish reactions to Christmas--acceptance, rejection and accommodation--from colonial times to the present.

CHAPTER II

ACCEPTANCE OF CHRISTMAS

General Observance

Of the three responses of American Jews to Christmas, acceptance, rejection and accommodation, acceptance of Christmas is the least well documented. This is not surprising. For one thing, information about Jewish participation would be sparse before the last decades of the nineteenth century because the number of Jews in the United States was very small until that time. Jews also did not have their own periodicals in large numbers until after the Civil War, so even if they had celebrated Christmas, we might not know. Furthermore, Jews living in most of the United States would have felt little pressure to celebrate Christmas in the early part of the nineteenth century since Christmas itself was just becoming popular. In many places the resistance of the Protestant majorities to Christmas acted as a brake for the Jewish observance as well. Another custom became popular and was accepted by Jews, especially in New York and New England, until the decade of the 1870's. This custom was that of gentlemen "visiting" their female friends on New Years Day. This allowed those that did not want to give Christmas presents an opportunity to give "New Years" presents. So popular was the custom that if New

Years Day fell on a Sunday it was postponed until the next day. This custom became a hardship for Jews when New Years fell on a Sabbath for the Jew would then have to decide whether to celebrate the Sabbath or make the visits.

In an article entitled "What the Jews Think Of New Year's" in the Times of New York in 1856, the writer expressed the following:

To his Jewish fellow citizens, the writer noted, New Year's Day, with its accompanying practice of giving gifts, was a blessed institution. In other countries they had either to celebrate Christmas or disappoint their children; neither course endeared their ancient faith to rising generations of Israelites. In New York Jews could give their presents at New Years, and thus avoid "both horns of a dilemma."¹

The writer noted also that the Jewish immigrants from Germany did not participate in the custom but continued to give presents on Christmas Eve. He also noted that the Jewish families of long standing in New York City universally celebrated New Years. By 1875 American newspapers were reporting that New Years calling was waning and Christmas was developing into a major national festival.²

In San Francisco Rabbi Julius Eckman, in one of the very few articles that mention Christmas, in the Occident and American Jewish Advocate (hereafter the Occident), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, wrote in 1867:

It so happens that Hannucah falls about Christmas time, and that in many Jewish families in which their own festival is scarce noticed, Christmas is celebrated with presents to their children and illuminations in their parlors.³

In reaction to the growing importance of Christmas more attention was directed toward Chanukah from as early as 1863. The growth and development of the Hanukkah holiday will be covered in a following chapter.

As the nineteenth century progressed the pattern of American secular Christmas with Santa Claus, Christmas trees and gift giving, especially to the children, was becoming rapidly entrenched as American tradition. Jews everywhere, but especially in the small towns or areas with few Jews, began to respond to the holiday.

In a small town, without a wider Jewish community to buttress a sense of religious independence, it is a great deal to ask a family to be the only house on the block with a somber mood at Christmas-time, the only house without lights in the front yard or decorations in the window . . . at least it is a great deal to ask without passing resentments and longings on to small children.⁴

The phenomena of Jewish participation did not go unnoticed and unrecorded. In an article written about the effect of the Jewish free schools of Philadelphia to foster Sabbath observance in the homes of Jewish children, the writer, using the pseudonym "Observer," wrote to the American Israelite (hereafter the Israelite), Cincinnati, Ohio, for its January 16, 1880 issue:

The festivities of the season celebrated among our Gentile neighbors, are rarely forbidden in the Jewish home. There is a decided tendency to make Christmas as well as New Years a national observation upon the plea that many Christians do not take the cause of the holiday into consideration while participating in its enjoyment; presents are interchanged in Hebrew homes, and even trees decorated to please the children who would otherwise be deprived of that which their neighbors enjoy.⁵

In 1881 the Buffalo correspondent wrote the Israelite that Christmas had passed quietly with much gift giving to the children.⁶ The Philadelphian correspondent "Observer" once again reported in the Israelite of Dec. 30, 1881:

Do Jews keep Christmas? The comparatively meager attendance at the Sunday schools today; the number of presents circulating among us suggests that the descendents of those who died for the sake of monotheism are celebrating at their family boards the birth of the second member of the Trinity.⁷

In San Francisco, in the Christmas season of 1882, "the Jews made presents and were not loth to receive them from those who are thus inclined, and entered into the spirit of the day as though they were brought up to it."⁸ Leo Rale, writing as the Baltimore correspondent, in January of 1883, wrote that the Jewish merchants of Baltimore, benefited by the Christmas season, gave their employees "substantial mementoes," closed their businesses, and "devoted themselves to the enjoyments of the day."⁹ In writing about businessmen, the Israelite correspondent from Hot Springs, Arkansas, wrote:

Christmas here was observed by almost everybody, more from custom, no doubt, like everywhere else, than to do homage to the anniversary of Jesus Christ. The day was one like you might read about; spring-like and charming in its loveliness. The stores and business places generally, were closed after 12 o'clock and the battle against the martyred turkey was commenced soon after.¹⁰

In an article entitled "The Jewish Christmas," written by a "Horatius," in the January 5, 1883 issue of the Boston Hebrew Observer, Boston, Massachusetts, the writer stated

that it had become "a common occurrence" for Jewish families to exchange Christmas presents and erect Christmas trees.¹¹

Los Angeles, California, was represented in the Israelite by "Angeleno," who wrote in 1890:

Christmas is rapidly approaching, and one curious feature in this city is the fact that the Jewish people have dropped into the habit of giving and receiving presents almost as much as their Christian brethren. The universal desire to make others happy probably accounts for this custom.¹²

"Azmed" in New Orleans, Louisiana, reported about the Christmas season to the Israelite's December 25, 1890 issue:

Christmas, although essentially a Christian holiday, has never-the-less grown to be a day generally observed, not that we Jews in any way believe in the religious part of the holiday but we cheerfully accept the situation and join in the universal joyfulness prevailing, resting content with the knowledge that, at best, the Christmas celebration had its origin in our Chanukah, and even admitting the truth of the Christian doctrine we are only helping to celebrate the supposed birthday of a good and, at one time, devout Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.¹³

"Azmed" also reported that the Home Institute would have a Santa Claus celebration and he received his invitation from Miss Rhea Loeb. In Toledo, Ohio, in 1891, a correspondent wrote to the Israelite that the temple was closed for want of a rabbi, that there would be no Chanukah festival that year, and "lots of Christmas presents and Christmas trees" were awaiting the children of the congregation.¹⁴ "Maftir," writing from San Francisco, California, in 1891, wrote of the profusion of Christmas trees in that city's Jewish community.¹⁵

The Jewish literature regarding Christmas observance is very scant during the early years of the twentieth century. The 1903 Kishinev Pogrom, World War I, and rising rabid anti-Semitism led rabbis and editors to write about those problems. A resultant interest in Chanukah and expressions centering on Jewish persecution or areas concerned with the war resulted. For example, during the month of December 1915, the Israelite published several articles concerning Chanukah. On December 2nd the editorial mentioned the home observance of the holiday.¹⁶ On December 30th the Israelite reported about a sermon delivered by Dr. Joseph Silverman of Temple Emanu El, New York. The sermon given on Christmas Day, 1915, "has created a storm of protest from the Christian ministers who consider it as an attack on Christianity."¹⁷ Dr. Silverman called the current festive celebration of Christmas by Christians a "monstrous paradox" due to the great catastrophe occurring in Europe. In a second editorial on December 30th the Israelite recognized the universality of the Christmas festival and stated that Jews could still "pass the compliments of the season with their non-Jewish neighbors and wish them a happy New Year,"¹⁸ which the Israelite then did.

In the December 14, 1916 issue of the Israelite the editorial made a plea for emergency relief to aid Jews overseas in the war torn countries who were "starving, prostituting themselves for mere bread."¹⁹ The December 21, 1916 editorial centered on the history of Chanukah.²⁰

After World War I, when the country had time to return to more normative considerations, Jews began once again to think about Christmas.

In 1920 Rabbi Samuel Gup, in his Hanukkah sermon, wrote that religious apathy and dullness were current among American Jews. He stated that the progressive Jew thought that religious freedom meant freedom, not to hold fast to Judasim, but to forsake it. He blamed much of this situation on the fact that Jews no longer lived in the ghetto. Thus, the influences from the major culture were able to permeate all aspects of Jewish life. He stated:

. . .so penetrating are Christian attitudes into the views of the religious minorities of our land, that we Jews have too often taken these foreign concepts for granted and have inclined to regard them as our own. Our children are drawn into the participation in Christian festivities, especially at the Christmas season.²¹

The December 22, 1921 editorial of the Israelite compared the victories of Pershing and Foch to the Maccabean victory. Then the editorial changed direction to make the critical statement:

. . .we have the spectacle in modern Jewish homes of Jewish mothers and fathers neglecting the Chanukah lamps for themselves and their offspring and letting their children light the candles on the Christian Christmas trees in their own Jewish homes.²²

The article continued with a mention of the revival of Chanukah.

By 1925 there was a resurgence of Jews participating in Christmas, as seen by the following editorial:

Christmas is not entirely without significance to the Jews of the United States. While it is not in any sense a holy day to them, it is more or less of a holiday and to a certain extent the giving of Christmas presents, which is a general custom among the non-Jewish population, prevails among the Jews to the limited extent of giving gifts to servants, children, and employees. In a very few Jewish families, where there are children, there are even Christmas trees, absurd as this may seem.²³

The Christmas-Chanukah controversy had reached such proportions in Cincinnati, Ohio, that a letter to the editor from H. L. Marks stated:

Sir, A word to you before I leave the city. Broadcast news to all those young rabbis like Meyerfeld, Tarshish and Gup to talk on something more interesting and more advantageous than the Christ question. It is causing too much comment and nothing gained by it. There are other rabbis who know more than the ones mentioned above who are quiet on it. They are the smart ones.²⁴

In 1927 the Israelite editorial on December 22nd wrote:

Before another issue of this paper appears Christmas will have come and gone and New Year will be close at hand. These are legal holidays as far as the cessation of work is concerned. Christmas is observed with general abstention from work and business, as far as the closing of banks, shops, and factories, are concerned. The religious aspect of these holidays is practically almost entirely ignored by our Christian fellow Americans. They are days of exchanging mutual good wishes and the giving of presents. Among Jews these presents are given mainly to employees in the household and in business and more especially to children. In quite a few Jewish homes they go so far as to have a Christmas tree. There is no reason to doubt that the Christmas celebration is in reality the Christianized form of Chanukah. But be that as it may, there is no reason why even the most orthodox Jews should not wish their Christian friends a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, as the custom goes. The Israelite extends these to its subscribers, and contributors and takes this opportunity to thank

them for their continued support which has given the prosperity of this paper its impetus and upon which it rests. We, therefore, say once more, a Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year and in the words of Tiny Tim of Dickens' Christmas Carol, we say, "God Bless Us Every One."²⁵

During the decade of the 30's once again persecution of the Jews took precedence over literature dealing with Christmas, which was rarely mentioned. Emphasis returned to Jewish consciousness, the development of Chanukah, and the fighting of anti-Semitism and the Nazis.²⁶ This emphasis moved naturally into the war years of World War II. Once again editorials and sermons emphasized the Jewish fight for survival, comparing it with the Maccabean fight.²⁷

Even though World War II was raging in Europe, one sermon was able to fill in some of the picture of the war years regarding Jewish celebration of Christmas. Chaplain David I. Cedarbaum, writing in 1944, took issue with the blatant Hellenism of Jewish families having Christmas trees in their homes.²⁸ Apparently Jewish families were continuing to celebrate Christmas even through the war years.

After World War II the religious and ethnic identifications of Jews once more became heightened. Jews became aware of the incalculable harm that man can do to man. The Jew began to feel that no amount of assimilation would protect him from eventual anti-Semitism. Concurrently, the nationalistic drives of the Jew came into play with the establishment of the State of Israel. The resulting

resurgence of Chanukah and its magnification into a major holiday will be addressed in the following chapters of this thesis

Following the war there were still Jews celebrating Christmas. In 1949, Albert I. Gordon, in writing about the cultural changes of Jews in a midwest town wrote:

If course, there are still a great number of Jews who do not observe Chanukah; there are some who light the Chanukah candles and yet decorate their homes with Christmas trees 'for the children.' They argue that the fir tree isn't really a Christmas tree at all, that it does not belong to Christmas exclusively, and that if it helps to make the holiday beautiful, that's all that matters.²⁹

The argument that Christmas is a secular holiday in America, often stated before World War II, continued to be used as a reason for Jewish observance of Christmas well into the decades of the 50's and 60's.³⁰ It was during the 1950's that organized Jewish groups began to take notice of Jewish identity. The American Jewish Committee (hereafter AJC) began their scientific studies of Jewish communities.

Others such as the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (hereafter UAHC) and B'nai B'rith began to document with statistics some of the major attitudes and practices of American Jewry. For the results of these studies, see below. Other accommodation practices developing after World War II, such as Chanukah bushes, Chanukah Sam, etc., will be discussed in chapter 4.

In an article for Look Magazine, in 1965, Leonard Gross wrote about the current trend of Christmas celebration among Jews. He was chronicling a resurgence of Jewish tradition and identity as prejudices against Jews fell and the acceptance and status of Jews rose. The rejection of assimilation was creating a newly emerging awareness and magnification of Chanukah. In this article, Gross also wrote that there were still many Jews that continued to celebrate Christmas as a secular American holiday.³¹

The Jews of America received further impetus for identification in the Six-Day War and its aftermath. In 1972 Michael Pousner wrote about the increased identity of some Jews while others remained Christmas observers.

Pousner wrote:

Traditionally, Jews have responded to Christmas in a variety of ways. For the Orthodox, it's business-as-usual, with stores and Yeshivas open. The great majority of Jews, though, probably participate in the commercial aspects of the holiday while trying to keep it out of the home. But a significant number--no one knows how many--have Christmas trees, "Christmas" dinner and exchange "Christmas presents." They contend they're participating in the season's secular, not religious, observance.³²

One factor which put pressure upon Jews to observe Christmas was social pressure, real or imagined. In some sections of New York's East Side it was socially acceptable to have a Christmas tree. Other Jews of New York celebrated Christmas as a secular holiday.

In the 1980's some Jews continue to celebrate Christmas with trees, presents, and visits from Santa Claus. If

one were to peruse the "messages from rabbis" as printed in temple bulletins or read anthologies of sermonic material containing Chanukah sermons, a very great number of them urge the celebration of Chanukah. Many bulletins contain information about Christmas observance and Judaism--to Christmas' detriment. The rabbis continue to fight Christmas knowing that it is still being observed by many--how many nobody knows--members of the Jewish community.

Personal Reactions

American Jews in all walks of life have become involved in Christmas celebrations. As early as 1848, the children of Mordecai Noah, one of the leading Jews in early America, wanted to celebrate Christmas. Chanukah, in those days, had neither the merriment nor the joyful gift-giving of Christmas. In order to meet his childrens' needs he "reinterpreted Christmas into the celebration of 'a great event worthy of being commemorated among civilized communities.' He urged everyone to celebrate it as the birthday of that religion which spread monotheism throughout the world."³³ In 1848 Noah wrote a letter to his daughter Zipporah revealing that her brothers, "Henry and Linny [Lionel] are making arrangements to hang up their stockings tonight for Christmas."³⁴

On February 14, 1879 the The Reformer and Jewish Times, a New York periodical, published a letter-to-the-editor from Daniel De Leon. De Leon was born of Jewish

parents in Curacao, came to the United States in 1874, and later became a prominent socialist and a founder of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.). He wrote to the paper in reaction to an article he had read by Felix Adler, the founder of the Society for Ethical Culture. Adler had written to the Reformer that Jews should not celebrate Christmas because it commemorated the sufferings of Jews and the birthday of Christ. De Leon criticized Adler's two points for the following reasons. First, Christmas itself was not the only time nor the paramount time when Jews suffered at the hands of Christians.

The miseries inflicted upon that heroic handful of the world's civilizers can therefore hardly be considered as an indispensable ingredient to be mentioned in connection with the definition of a Christmas celebration, they constitute rather a historic, an occasional incident illustrative only of the spirit of the times, of the barbarism of the age in which they were perpetrated; and only as such are they entitled to our notice.³⁵

Also, December 25th was not the birthday of Christ. The holiday as it was celebrated in De Leon's time was an amalgamation of pagan mythology and church doctrine used to help Christianity become acceptable to the heathens of Europe. Once De Leon felt that he had broken down Adler's arguments, he set about to argue for Jewish acceptance of Christmas:

The day has come when the advance guards of the Jews and Gentiles join hands together both agreeing upon the sublimity of the character of Jewus of Nazareth, and, while both repudiate the idea of his Jehovahship, still they do not object to designate him by the usual epitheton of Christ.³⁶

After this had been achieved there would be nothing to prevent Jews from participating in the Gentile festival. De Leon added support for his case by noting that the holiday had become merely a manifestation of heathenism, losing its christological underpinnings, and had added non-religious elements such as the Dutch legend of Sinterclas.

. . .the character of the whole matter has been turned essentially into a children's festival, around which all sorts of nursery tales are clustering thick and fast. Nor do these facts constitute the only recommendation for the celebration of Christmas.³⁷

He then repeated the idea that humans need revitalization at or around the time of the winter solstice. Nature, herself, guaranteed the perpetuity of the cycle creating the need for the festival.

De Leon next explained that the Jews, as a race, would not participate in German, Irish, Scotch, nor even Swiss holidays. It was logical that the Jew would participate in his own Jewish holidays such as Passover. But with regard to Christmas:

. . .because he with all these various races is one of the elements out of which the future American type is to be formed, because he, together with all these different races lives in a country, has immigrated into a country, where nature takes it in charge to instinctively render the victory of the Solar Hero over the witch's curse a climatic festival delightful to the inhabitants of this zone, because of all these several reasons he, so far from abstaining, should cheerfully help to perpetuate this attractive heathen principle in Christianity, thus contributing his share toward ushering in that longed for era when hostility between race and race shall cease, and the amalgamation between them shall be accomplished. "As yee sow, so shall yee reap."³⁸ (See appendix 4)

In another letter-to-the editor in 1880 "Vindex" wrote to the American Hebrew, New York, regarding some criticism he had heard regarding a social event which the Progress Club, a Jewish organization, had held on Christmas Eve, which happened to fall on Friday night, the Jewish Sabbath:

Now, notwithstanding what has been said to the contrary, I am certain (I might almost say, I know), that this entertainment of one of the best of our Jewish clubs in this city, was not given on the eve of the Jewish Sabbath with any thought or desire to reflect on the sanctity of the day, nor was it prompted by any feeling of levity or irreverence, but solely from the consideration that it was also Christmas Eve! Whatever may be said to the contrary, it cannot be denied that the founder of Christianity was preeminently a great and good man; and the natal days of such men should be remembered, honored and observed. Therefore, let it be understood that this jollification of this Jewish club was had upon the Jewish Sabbath not to dishonor Him who said to keep it HOLY, but to honor the great founder of Christianity whose teachings and examples have benefited mankind! Not that they loved Ceasar less, But Rome More!³⁹

It is clear that an entire Jewish organization organized a Christmas dramatic and social entertainment to honor Christmas Eve even though it fell on the Jewish Sabbath. "Vindex" wrote a vindication for the club to answer the criticisms, not about Christmas, but about the impropriety of celebrating it on the Sabbath.

During the late decades of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth many immigrant Jews felt great pressure to assimilate and adopt American customs. In San Diego, Samuel Fox was a wealthy real estate businessman, community leader, president of Temple Beth Israel, and a B'nai B'rith member and president.⁴⁰ He had immigrated to

America in 1880 at 18 years of age. Fox and his family celebrated Christmas every year. Though members of his family intermarried and converted to Christianity, Fox, himself, remained a devout Jew.⁴¹

In 1862, William Haas immigrated to America from his home in Reckendorf, Bavaria. William Haas had two daughters, Florine and Alice, who grew up in the upperclass Jewish environment of San Francisco, where their father had become wealthy and settled. Haas himself became not only a Jewish community leader but also a leader of the larger Gentile community. In attempting to assimilate and bring his daughters up as Americans, the family celebrated Christmas and Easter rather than Hanukkah and Passover because the former were the holidays of the culture they lived in.

The sisters grew up in the protected environment of the upperclass world. While they were not religious, this did not prevent them from becoming philanthropic organization Jews. Their philanthropy flowed over into the general Christian society as well. The sisters were considered "society ladies" in San Francisco. They both sent their respective children to Sunday school, attended High Holy Day services at Temple Emanu-El, and went to Memorial services for their appointed times. The attendance at the synagogue was a formality for:

The sisters knew little about Jewish rites. The menorahs, the beautiful lights adorning their Franklin Street homes, were merely artifacts

ornamenting their dining and living rooms. We might dine on gorgeously glazed hams, but only fish was served on Fridays. . . . Of course, they had heard about old Jewish traditions, but they were felt to be part of a different world, a world of old tantes [aunts] living in backwards Bavarian villages.⁴²

The sisters were married by rabbis, as were their children, but in gardens, homes, and hotels. All the male children of the family were circumcized but as a medical procedure, not as a religious ritual. This description of the background of the Haas sisters was provided in a biography written by Florine's child, Frances. This background information was important historically for it described in part the assimilated world of the wealthy Jewish society of the late eighteenth early nineteenth century in San Diego.

For the Haas family the Christmas party was an immense undertaking. Alice became the coordinator of each Christmas spectacular. Preparations for the party began months earlier. The theme of each party would be kept secret until the last moment. They were usually held in the basement ballroom with its raised platform at the rear. Infinite attention was given to detail.

One Christmas, the guest were magically transplanted to Mexico. Santa Claus pinatas dangled from gas fixtures, while colorful sombreros, Indian baskets, papier-mache chickens and horses, and full blown paper poppies decorated the long dining tables. In a scramble of merriment, gleeful children whacked noisily at the Santa pinatas and were showered with small gifts and candies.

Another Christmas, the ballroom became a scene from the Orient. Several of the ladies wore kimonos Aunt Alice had brought home from the Far East, where she explored shops more thoroughly than historical

landmarks. It was a "must" to forage out gifts for long lists of family and friends; gifts were as essential to Alice and Florine as breathing or sleeping. This evening Siamese silver and gold windbells chimed merrily, Japaneses paper butterflies and fans revealed their vibrant colors, and Hong Kong lanterns, shaped as odd animals, lit the tables. . . .⁴³

Not only did the sisters put on their pageant but they supported it with a floor to ceiling Christmas tree on a revolving musical base. Each Christmas Alice would find someone to dress as Santa Claus to give out the gifts. Usually the parties took place on Christmas Eve. For the children, who also had been invited to the party, Florine and Alice would sew sacks resembling stockings. The children would hang them up and when they awoke on Christmas day they would be filled.⁴⁴

The world of entertainment also has Jewish celebrants of Christmas. In his autobiography, Harpo Speaks!, Harpo Marx wrote about his early childhood in the tenements of New York City. The only holidays he and his family celebrated every year was the annual summer outing to a beach in the Bronx to swim. Thus, Christmas, as a holiday, held interest for Harpo. He noticed Christmas trees, wreaths, and holly on the doors of the brownstones across the street from the tenement. His teacher in P.S.86 had taught him the legend of Santa Claus. At nine years old he placed a stocking in the airshaft of his building on the night of December 24th to await the arrival of Santa Claus. When he received no toys in the stocking he waited for the

next year and told his brother Chico about it. That next year once again he placed his stocking in the airshaft. Chico awakened early on Christmas morning and they both found nothing in the stocking. Harpo was very dejected; Chico was very cynical.⁴⁵

After Harpo, and his brothers, had become entertainment celebrities, and he had plenty of money, he found he would buy in great quantities and fulfill those desires which he was deprived of as a child.⁴⁶ Harpo celebrated Christmas every year with his wife and children. They would string lights outside and would decorate the Christmas tree. Christmas and his wife's birthday were the children's favorite holidays.⁴⁷

Another entertainment figure, Robert Merril, in Good Housekeeping Magazine, wrote:

As a younster in Brooklyn, I always felt deprived because I could not have a Christmas tree. . . . So each year I envied the decorated trees that glowed resplendently in the homes of our neighbors, and I wept. . . . A few years ago, I decided to bring ecumenicism into my own home.⁴⁸

He brought a Christmas tree into his home.

In 1932 at the age of twenty-five, Charles Revson began the fledgling company Revlon, which today is a giant cosmetic concern. Revson was not a particularly observant Jew though he belonged to Temple Emanu-El in New York. He intermarried with Ancky, Johanna Catharina Chritina de Knecht, one of his models, in 1940. They had two sons and adopted a daughter. Christmas was a special family affair

which Revson looked forward to each year. They always had two Christmas trees, one of which the gardner would decorate, the other Revson and his wife would decorate after the children had gone to bed on Christmas Eve. Because Revson would not awaken in the morning before 11 A.M. and the children would be up much earlier, the second smaller tree was placed upstairs near the children's room with minor presents to occupy them until their father arose. Then, when Revson was ready to have Christmas, the family would move to the larger primary tree.⁴⁹ Revson also would provide Christmas bonuses for his employees which were geared to his subjective analysis of their performance for the year. Sometimes he would wait several days, weeks, or even months past Christmas to give them out because he did not want others telling him when to give a present.⁵⁰

In 1978, the phenomenon of Christmas celebrations by Jews caused a controversy in the New York Times, New York, when authoress Anne Roiphe wrote an article entitled "Christmas Comes To a Jewish Home." Roiphe acknowledged her assimilation, and pointed out that there were many other Jews that celebrated Christmas, too. Her mother had introduced Christmas as a secular holiday into her home when Roiphe was born on December 25th. As the atrocities of World War II became public Roiphe stated:

Our Christmas celebrations, ice cream molds of reindeer, holly with red berries in the vases, survived the pictures of the Holocaust that began to appear, but my religious feelings did not.⁵¹

Her children never knew a year when there was no Christmas celebration. Christmas for her family took on special meaning.

If all that Christmas offers my family is a commercial blast, a quick thrill of new possession, then my grandfather's instinct to avoid contact [with the Christian world] was correct and the future seems even narrower than the past as we lose tribal connections and replace them with emptiness. But we do not sink gently into this anomie. Contact with the great Christian myth and art that comes each December must be a spiritual experience.⁵²

In order to provide the spiritual content of Christmas Roiphe would include reading Dickens aloud to the children to emphasize the redemption of Scrooge into the community, the reading of "The Night Before Christmas," and the watching of television Christmas specials such as Frosty the Snowman and Rudolph, the Red-nosed Reindeer. The children learned of the victory of the kind and weak over the wicked. Roiphe compared American Christians myths of Christmas to myths of other cultures:

These myths have counterparts in tales found in Indian dances, Islamic fables, Shinto lore. We might, if we avoided all signs of one Christian tradition, be more ethnic, but not purer or more holy.⁵³

This stress on universalism could not be provided by Chanukah. The Jewish holiday occurring at the same season provided only a target for her negative feelings:

The Hanukkah story always irritated me. Why such a small miracle, just to make the oil last eight days, when the proper miracle would have been to have created Romans without the need to conquer and avoided the bloody war altogether. As I approach the Jewish traditions I find old angers rising. Rebellion against the antifeminism of the Jewish

patriarchy dies hard. It is difficult to be (though I know some are) both a feminist and a Jewish traditionalist. I prefer the stranger's ways.⁵⁴

The effect of this type of Christmas celebration was the following:

And through the 18 years of combined marriages there has always been in my house a Christmas, no longer any seders, no more High Holy Days at the temple, no masses, no born again conversions, just Christmas, a sacred event in our family life.⁵⁵

On December 25, 1978, The New York Times published some of the letters written in response to Roiphe's article. Many of the letters criticized Roiphe for her lack of knowledge, her lack of tradition, her misunderstandings of both Jewish and Christian holidays, and her "guilt" at being an assimilated Jewess. Several of the letters supported her stance, pointing to the secular nature of Christmas and the beauty of its observance.

Following the article in The New York Times, Roiphe wrote a book entitled Generation Without Memory-A Jewish Journey in Christian America, in which she reiterated her feelings of being an assimilated Jew in America. In the book she wrote about her reaction to the criticism which she received about the article:

The article was a brief observation of life on the assimilated plane. I described my uneasiness when the neighborhood rabbi saw us carry in our tree, and I talked about the way we as a family enjoyed the very secular Christmas we celebrated. I talked about being unable, as a nonreligious Jew, to create a Channukah holiday in our house. So dim was my memory of Sunday-school lessons that in the article I even mixed up the Syrians and the Roman invaders of Palestine in a brief allusion. Many Jews, some

of them dear friends were angry and upset that I had published this article. Many readers were enraged that I would push my views of religion or ceremony or affiliation on others. I had not meant to prescribe but to describe, but this subject of assimilation is so rooted in fears and animosities that merely bringing up the matter became for some readers an incendiary, provocative act. I had thought that I was writing a slight life-style piece and was surprised at the angry response from strangers, the threats and curses we received by mail or phone. I had obviously broken a taboo, crossed into a forbidden space.⁵⁶

Roiphe's rejection of Chanukah was again discussed in the book:

At Channukah the candles are lit to commemorate the miracle of the saving of the country from the Syrians. It is a holiday that reminds the Jews of a heroic moment when their bravest soldiers were triumphant. The Maccabees have won and the little bit of oil burns for eight days, a miraculous gift from God. I would be happier if God had not brought the Syrians to the doorstep in the first place. I would be more willing to mark the holiday if God did not let innocents die on all sides in the warfare. It seems just possible that the Jews have celebrated God for giving too little. Knowing what lies ahead for the Chosen People makes of this little bit of magic oil a meager gift indeed. Jews have accepted all miracles long enough.⁵⁷

While Roiphe had rejected Chanukah and had accepted Christmas she noted in the concluding section that she has inched back, as an adult, "into the intellectual, left-wing, primarily Jewish (though for most the Jewish part is not consciously relevant) class."⁵⁸ She regretted the lack of a good Jewish education which she might have been able to use to formulate her opinions:

I believe on balance that the well-being and happiness of my family would have been better supported within the wealth of a Jewish past. If I had had a deeper Jewish education I could return to it now (and fight for the betterment of the position of women with in). As it is, our

universalism, once my joy, my breakthrough toward freedom, becomes my burden.⁵⁹

Christmas can mean more to Jews than trees, tinsel, and presents. Mimi Sheraton, the food and restaurant critic for the New York Times, grew up in a Jewish home in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Her father was a wholesale produce merchant and her mother was always in the kitchen. Sheraton is convinced that her father's business, her mother's cooking, and the family's constant discussion about the purchase, business, cooking and eating of food influenced her greatly in her choice of career.

In Sheraton's family, they celebrated Christmas to a small degree. They hung stockings and received small presents. They did not have a Christmas tree in their home so Sheraton would enjoy her friend's trees vicariously. She would not attend church services for the holiday, however. Her family had no objection to her participation in her friend's celebration of Christmas in their homes. She began a lifelong hobby of collecting Christmas culinary recipes and the customs that went with the different dishes. With regard to Chanukah she did not remember any special dish in her own home that was especially made for the holiday.

Due to her profession, that of food and restaurant critic, she traveled quite extensively and would come across many different ethnic varieties of Christmas food expression. She assembled many of these and published them in her cookbook Visions of Sugarplums.⁶⁰

Christmas has thus made its impact on a wide spectrum of Jews, many of whom have chosen to celebrate the holiday in a range of different ways.

Rabbinic Reactions

While traditional European Jews could stand behind halacha, Jewish Law, and reject Christmas as Huchat Hagoy, a nonacceptable activity of Gentiles, American Jews were caught in a dilemma. They wanted to be good Americans and at the same time good Jews. This dilemma affected not only the common person, the layman, but also rabbis, leaders of their communities. Some reacted in ways other than total rejection of Christmas. At times this created great controversy: sometimes, especially in more recent times, less. Rabbis who accepted Christmas always formed a small minority among their colleagues. One of the greatest controversies centered around Rabbi Solomon Sonneschein of Temple Shaare Emeth, St. Louis, Missouri in the late nineteenth century.

The December 11, 1883 issue of the Israelite reported from St. Louis that:

The subject of Dr. Sonneschein's lecture last Friday evening was, "Can the American Jew Keep Christmas, and How?" He can--Dr. Sonneschein says the American Jew may keep Christmas.⁶¹

On December 14, 1883 in the Jewish Tribune of St. Louis, Sonneschein, the editor, published a synopsis of the lecture which he gave at the Temple Shaare Emeth in St. Louis. In the lecture, Dr. Sonneschein argued that Jews could keep Christmas; the problem was how.

He began his argument by explaining the current status of the holiday. He wanted to relate to the holiday as it was treated by the Christian world.

The word Christmas has ceased to be of any distinct religious bearing, and became a household word all over the world where the English language is spoken and English merriment prevails. This proposition standing undisputed, emboldens me, for the first time, to experiment its relation to the present status of American Judaism. First, can the American Jew keep Christmas: I say he can, without in the least disgracing his religious convictions or interfering with the building up of a stronger and nobler Judaism than that of former ages and the older continents.⁶²

He continued with the history of the holiday falling on December 25th, stating that it was church authority which placed the holiday on a day with deep pagan symbolism.

But the most remarkable feature in connection with this history of the Christmas day is the fact that the Maccabean priests who so thoroughly eradicated the Greek idolatry of their times, after their splendid victory over the Syrian tyrant, used the same priestly authority in making the 25th of Kislev, the Jewish month corresponding with the month of December, also a festival to be celebrated annually by the Jews in place of the pagan abominations and pollutions that were perpetrated among their own people in obedience to the prevailing heathen custom of the age.⁶³

He then identified the festival with Chanukah. His argument continued:

Christmas, in the eye of the American Jew is thus simply imbued with the character of a national holiday, and being prominently and exclusively a children's holiday, I do not see any reason why the American Jew could not keep it in common with his Gentile neighbors.

But the question is, "How will he do it?" In the first place we may remove the 25th of the Jewish month corresponding with December to the 25th of December proper, thus instituting the celebration of our Hannuccah on the same date that Christmas is

celebrated. . . . Our Jewish children may thus learn by practice and example to respect the work of the great Nazarene and the mission of his church.⁶⁴

One of his primary goals for Jews to be able to celebrate Chanukah at Christmas time was that it would remove one of the barriers to American Jewish acceptance by the Christians:

And, again, our Gentile neighbors and fellow-citizens will be made cognizant of the fact that the barrier between them and the Jew, ought to be removed, and, in fact, is removed, as far as we, the Jews, are concerned; our children will freely mingle with theirs. The national cement becomes indissoluble, and the bonds of humanity are strengthened thereby beyond any doubt.⁶⁵

Sonneschein summed up his synopsis with his greatest ideal for mankind:

The issue has to come anyhow, sooner or later, when all the members of the human race will have to practice their kinship and sympathies by realizing all the blessings of the divine grace and all the aspirations of the human ideal on holidays celebrated by all alike. The American Jew will certainly not shrink from contributing his share toward the grand realization of this happiest of dreams.⁶⁶

The Jewish Tribune reported "A New Controversy" on December 21, 1883, in an article that interviewed the two editors of the Jewish Tribune, Rabbis Sonneschein and Morris Spitz of Congregation B'nei-El and also Rabbi Henry Messing of United Hebrew Congregation of St. Louis, Missouri. Rabbi Messing was careful to emphasize that Sonneschein made his remarks as an individual and not as a rabbi, who would hold his congregation to follow through on what he said. He stated that, "The general voice of Israelites in St. Louis would be opposed to that plan [to

move the date of Hanukkah to Dec. 25th]. Sonneschein states that his proposition is premature; that if one or two families begin now it might in years become popular. He doesn't believe that his congregation will accept his suggestion now."⁶⁷ Rabbi Messing continued that he was reluctant to give his personal opinion since Rabbi Sonneschein did not speak as a teacher of the Jewish religion.

Rabbi Morris Spitz, of B'nei-El Temple, was even more reserved than Rabbi Messing. When asked to speak out on the issue he stated:

I very much regret having to do so. . . . The Rabbi and myself are the best of friends. We edit the JEWISH TRIBUNE together, and it places me in a delicate attitude.⁶⁸

He continued that he was speaking to his congregation against the change of date. The Globe Democrat, St. Louis, Missouri, published a synopsis of his lecture where Spitz said:

The deeds of those heroes are impressed indelibly upon the pages of our people's history, and to wipe out the identity of the day appointed by them, you simply acknowledge they have fought in vain. There is now a destructive tendency in our church. Radicalism is working havoc amongst us. The true Christian does not admire the backsliding Jew any more than the liberal Jew, true at heart, loves to see his Christian neighbor forsake his faith.⁶⁹

Sonneschein, in the same article, commented on the criticism he had received from his colleagues. He stated that the other commentators were not at the lecture. He also would agree with them if indeed he had recommended that

Jews should abandon Chanukah and celebrate Christmas instead. He emphasized that he did not want to ask "Shall Jews and Christians celebrate Christmas?" He stated:

My question, which I have more than once announced in the pulpit as well as in the press, was distinctly worded, "Can the American Jew Keep Christmas, and How?" This phraseology is carefully and cautiously framed, and is per se an argument against the insinuation that I was, or that I am, advocating an innovation which certainly could have no other consequence but a dangerous and ruinous influence upon the integrity of one of the most illustrious feasts in the Jewish Calendar.⁷⁰

Chanukah was the feast he was suggesting. Sonneschein once again pointed out that the Pope transformed a heathen festival into a church holiday just as the Maccabean high priest transformed a prevailing pagan custom of the day into the festival of Chanukah. Sonneschein continued that he would never change the date of a biblical holiday. He continued:

American Judaism ought to as much as possible and compatible with the bounds of historical tradition emancipate itself from anything and everything which rears a barrier between us and our neighbors. Christmas is a National holiday, and as such we can certainly afford to keep our Maccabean commemoration and our feast of lights in this season of the year, and on the 25th of December.⁷¹

Rabbi A. Levy, an orthodox rabbi in St. Louis, rejected the entire notion and commented that this was a step too far even for the Reform movement.

Reaction to Sonneschein's lecture came quickly. In the December 21, 1883 issue of the Israelite, in a letter from St. Louis, came not only the detailed description of St. Louis readying for Christmas but news of the reaction to the lecture.

Rev. Drs. Messing and Spitz take decided objection to Dr. Sonneschein's proposition, that of a Jewish celebration of Christmas. The movement is only endorsed by a few templeites and not by Israelites. The Gentiles, however, take kindly to the idea. Said a friend to Dr. Sonneschein, "Your proposition to celebrate Channukkah on the 25th of December is a very bold and very inconsistent suggestion. It may please the children, but it certainly will find not favor with the parents." To which the doctor replied: "Whatever is done for children's sake and for the sake of reconciling the modern Jew with the drift of our age without impairing the historical essence of his religious tradition, will be accepted and accomplished. It will take time; but we have the time and the patience, thank God."⁷²

As the controversy began to heat up in St. Louis, the Board of Trustees of Temple Shaare Emeth called a special meeting. At that meeting, reported in the December 28, 1883 issue of the Jewish Tribune, a resolution "of outspoken non-concurrence" with the ideas of Sonneschein was passed.⁷³

Sonneschein, in replying to his critics in a letter to the Globe Democrat, on Saturday, December 22, 1883, stated that he hated controversies "for they do, as a rule, cater much more to the passions than to the patience of even rational people."⁷⁴ Sonneschein found that the controversy did move towards irrationality from his viewpoint:

The Chanuccah feast among the Jews in St. Louis was almost buried and forgotten until I came and redeemed its glory. And now sycophants and ignorants dare to publicly accuse me of the treasonable intention to betray the ancient and sacred Maccabean "Feast of Lights" for the sake of a short-lived flirtation with a worship and a rite certainly not shared by me.⁷⁵

The editorial page of the Boston Hebrew Observer on December 28, 1883, commented on Sonneschein's suggestion. In reviewing other liberal rabbis such as Lilienthal, S. Adler,

Einhorn, and Heubsch the editorial commented that they were always careful to preserve the true spirit of Judaism.

"Whatever objections were raised against innovating of time honored customs, it could never be said that these men sinned against the tenet of Judaism."⁷⁶ After these rabbis came others with their innovations.

We are sorry to see that another spirit prevails them. Dr. Sonneschein of St. Louis in a sermon delivered before his congregation "Can the American Jew Keep Christmas?" attempted to foist a distinctive Christian holiday on the Jewish citizens. We are at a loss to characterize such an attempt of a Jewish minister.⁷⁷

In Chicago, "Ibn Samiel," wrote to the Israelite:

We are, indeed, liberals in Chicago. But I am afraid this time the town, our rival, at the other end of the long bridge has stolen a march on us. We transfer, perhaps, the Sabbath to Sunday, or rather are wicked enough to utilize the Sunday for purposes other than worshipping Fortuna in our literary and social clubs. But we have not gotten far enough to transfer the 25th day of Kislev to the 25th day of December, and in our efforts to instill reverence for the high truths of Judaism into the hearts of the young generation--even by means of Sunday services--we have as yet not found the time to teach the biography of the sweet and great Nazarene.⁷⁸

He continued for another paragraph in a sarcastic explanation of spellings for Chanukah and Christmas and then became serious once more:

But to speak seriously, I am afraid Chicago is not yet ripe for this move. Our poor children will have to go for some time to come without their "Christmas Jumping Jack." Not that we are not acquainted with the historical growth of this festival of the winter solstice. Chicagoans are not afflicted with a short memory, and they will recollect a lively controversy on that point several years ago among their own doctors. The critical results to the contrary notwithstanding,

Chanukah is today a Jewish holiday, and Christmas is and remains a Christian festival. A glance at the sermons delivered yesterday must convince the most skeptical of this.⁷⁹

The following issue of the Boston Hebrew Observer of January 4, 1884, reported the reaction of Dr. Gottheil in his last sermon at Temple Emanu-El. He stated:

The Jewish candle-stick stands so near the Christmas tree that the idea of a union has been mooted and one of our Western Rabbis has actually proposed marriage. Possible objections he tries to meet with the fact that the festal season is Christian in name only, in reality it is an adaptation of an old pagan costume widely observed ages before the son of Mary was born or even before the Maccabees did their glorious deeds. A curious argument indeed. We are asked to merge our institution into that of the church because the institution is of a heathenish origin. This would be evolutionizing backward, as if two men who had fallen out with each other were bidden, instead of trying a manly way of settling their disputes, to go back to their boyish days and play again at foot ball and leapfrog, or that we should put sheepskins around our loines because our ancestors wore them.⁸⁰

Sonneschein found that the two elements for the acceptance of Christmas for Jews, those being the changing of the date of Chanukah to December 25th and the eventual acceptance of Jesus as a Jew and his work as Jewish, met stiff resistance from the Jewish community. In an attempt to meet these criticisms, he published a lengthy article in his Jewish Tribune on December 28, 1883. In discussion of pagan holidays versus Christmas he stated:

Right here I differ with my over-pious critics. There is a vast difference between a pagan feast in honor of the Sun-god and a national holiday which is solemnized by our Christmas neighbors and friends, partly in honor of the founder of their church. The great Nazarene is no god, and

is no idol! He is simply one of those blessed Jews who lived and died as the prophet and messenger of the Divine truth. Are we Jews afraid of him? Certainly not.⁸¹

Sonneschein continued that Jesus saved the Christians from idolatry and abominable ignorance. This was similar to what the Maccabeans accomplished. Therefore, the Jews could accept Jesus as a prophet to the Gentiles.

On the matter of the calendar, Sonneschein argued that Jews already accepted the Gregorian calendar for such things as their children's birthday. Also, the current calendar is not a Jewish one since it is an amalgamation of Persian and Syrian calendrical terminology.

He clearly emphasized his agenda for the universal acceptance of Jews and Christians for each other when he stated:

I am satisfied with the sound and safe ground of my proposition. I am a reformer, and a radical reformer at that. Half measures will neither count nor succeed in this our age, which strives after the whole truth. What has an absolute calendar to do with the living issues of this century, with the vital interests of these United States, which stand for one principle only-the fraternitization and emancipation of the human race. . . .⁸²

Sonneschein answered particularly to charges that he was betraying Judaism:

I was among the very first Rabbis in America who inaugurated and published a Reform Channuccah ritual in the vernacular. Here in St. Louis, all the other Reform congregations followed the example of my congregation inaugurated thus by me. A Chanuccah feast among the Jews in St. Louis was on its bed and forgotten until I came and redeemed its glory and re-established it in the hearts of the parents and children.⁸³

On the same date the Israelite printed a lengthy editorial regarding Sonneschein and Christmas as a national holiday. The editorial reminded the readers that Congress only had the authority to give national holidays to public servants and that Christmas was not a National holiday. Only the Bible had the authority to proclaim holidays and as such Chanukah, as an extra-biblical event, did not fit under the category of holiday either. Chanukah was then compared to the Fourth of July with Judah Maccabee as the Washington of his day:

If you want to transfer the Chanukah, transfer it to the Fourth of July, to which it has an affinity, and not to Christmas, to which it has not the least similarity besides the children's fun, and these will be as much pleased with their gifts any evening of the week during Chanukah. The noise over Dr. Sonneschein's proposition, to keep the Chanukah after the Gregorian calendar, is much smoke without any fire. It is not a religious question over which those gentlemen excite themselves.⁸⁴

The January 4, 1884 Israelite contained two editorial selections about the controversy. The first defended Sonneschein for having his own opinions but claimed that some of his pivotal assertions are incorrect. The editorial then discussed the issue of Sonneschein's personal authority overturning what all of Israel had opposed for centuries. It also criticized those Jews that would find fault with Sonneschein over this issue halachically but would hypocritically not follow other halachot.⁸⁵ (See appendix 6)

The second editorial made comment to a letter that Rabbi Spitz, of B'nei-El Congregation in St. Louis, sent to the Globe Democrat stating that he was writing a pamphlet concerning the Chanukah-Christmas controversy. Perhaps aware of the serious literary and personal battles between Spitz and Sonneschein which were taking place in the Globe Democrat and in the Jewish Tribune, the Israelite made an attempt to ameliorate the situation by recommending that Spitz not write the pamphlet:

We hope the rabbi of the B'nei El congregation will not enrich the Anglo-Jewish literature by a pamphlet which would be forever a sore to all parties concerned, to himself no less than to others, after the first impressions will have subsided. War is waged for the sake of peace. No benefit can accrue from such a pamphlet, either to the parties concerned or to the house of Israel. Let the matter rest where it is, and the parties all round might forget it, "for we are men and brethren."⁸⁶

The Jewish Tribune of January 4, 1884 also contained several articles regarding the controversy. Sonneschein printed the entire Israelite editorial of December 28th and included a summary of Dr. Kohler's response from the New York Herald. While Kohler agreed that both holidays fall in the same season and have similar origins from nature, he thought that the two religious traditions imbued each holiday with definite higher and irreconcilable meanings. He was negative in his opinion of the Jewish acceptance of Christ and Christmas.⁸⁷

Under the subtitle "Our Exchanges" the Tribune objected to the report in a previous Jewish Record in which it

was reported that Spitz had severed his relationship with the Jewish Tribune due to the Chanukah-Christmas controversy. The tenor of Sonneschein's reply became heated:

This piece of prevarication seems to have been perpetrated by our worthy ex-colleague. The facts are--and they can be proven black on white--that Spitz, for obvious reasons, was politely told to take his indefinite leave of absence fully a week before he himself could dream of the controversy. Our ex-colleague's veracity will bear watching.⁸⁸

In the second article in the same issue, the problematic relationship between Spitz and Sonneschein became evident with the publication by Sonneschein of Spitz's letter to the Globe Democrat. For several days letters between the two had been published by the Globe Democrat. In his letter of December 26th to the Globe Democrat, Spitz alleged that Sonneschein wrote letters to the newspaper using inappropriate defenses of Jesus when Spitz had not said anything derogatory toward Jesus; that Sonneschein displayed a terrible "animus" against his critics by his outbursts; that Spitz was aggrieved by the direction that Sonneschein's letters were taking; that Sonneschein asserted that "the Christmas tree has been transformed into the Hannuccah lamp. Why not say Judaism is but a transformation of Christianity?"⁸⁹ Spitz continued by explaining his relationship with Sonneschein. He finished the article with these words:

I never harmed him, and never intend to harm him; but I shall rise to defend Judaism against friend and foe all the days of my life.

In conclusion, I would say, the Rev. Dr. Sonneschein is his own fiercest enemy. Ten years of arduous labors in the Doctor's future cannot counterbalance that horrible letter of Tuesday morning, about which there is one verdict:

Poor old Judaism!⁹⁰

Sonneschein retorted sarcastically that he was bested in the personal attacks upon each other by Spitz. Then he once more reiterated the main points of his suggestion: Jews could change the date of Chanukah from 25 Kislev to 25 December; he recognized the current impracticabilities of the suggestion; he did not say that Jews shall keep a Christmas which would be diametrically opposite to the spirit of Judaism; nothing of Chanukah was to be sacrificed with the date change; the modern Jew would find nothing abhorrent in doing this and it would help to ease existing prejudices against Jews.⁹¹ (For specific points see appendix 7.)

Sonneschein left the following parting words regarding the controversy.

The controversy is ended as far as we are concerned. Our opponents, however, will continue to controvert. The old Chanuccah myth will repeat itself. The small amphora filled with the underfiled vile of piety will continue to feed the flames of the holy indignation until something new will turn up. We even anticipate a vote of thanks from the "Associated Pious Press" for the opportunity we afforded them to fill their columns with all sorts of cheap orthodox pyrotechnics. Gesengte Mahlzeit, meine Herren.⁹²

As the controversy died down "Ibn Samiel," writing from Chicago, informed the Israelite that Sonneschein's suggestion had even been reported in the Radical, a paper

published for those interested in materialism and agnosticism. "Ibn Samiel" reported that even with this controversy everyone in Chicago had a very enjoyable Christmas. He wished everyone a Happy New Year.⁹³

Two years later, in 1886, the Israelite reported:

The revival of practical Judaism in St. Louis following the Sonneschein combat is said to be marvelous. The temples are well filled with worshipers every Sabbath and holiday, and the attendance at Dr. Sonneschein's Sunday lectures is said to be very good.⁹⁴

Then, in January 1888, the editor of the Israelite summed up the final consequences of the controversy in a criticism of an article in another paper. The editor of the Israelite commented:

The Jewish World (London), in its issue of December 23d, discussed Dr. Sonneschein's Chanukah-Christmas suggestions, without stating what that suggestion actually was; and instead of holding Dr. Sonneschein responsible for his idea of calendar reform, throws it upon the shoulders of the two hundred and more reform congregations with all their rabbis and leaders, none of whom to our knowledge have identified themselves with the matter, not even Dr. Sonneschein himself and his congregation acting upon that suggestion.⁹⁵

No one including Sonneschein had considered implementing the suggestion.

Other rabbis in the 19th century felt similarly positive about Christmas. However, the records and the reaction to them are not nearly as complete as with Sonneschein.

The Israelite reported in a letter from "Nickerdown" that on the night of December 25, 1896,⁹⁶ Dr. Emile G.

Hirsch stood for an hour and a half and pleaded with the congregation, in Zion Temple, of Chicago, Illinois, to observe Christmas as a great holiday. As for reasons Hirsch said that it is a universal holiday, neither Christian or Jewish. Even if Christmas marked the birthday of Jesus, there never lived a better Jew so that Jews could celebrate if they so chose. He continued:

We of the liberal church of Jews have no reason to protest at the name of Jesus. The name of him made it possible for a daughter religion to conquer the world. We Jews are religion poor and race proud.

I would have the Jews enter into the spirit of this day as a day of peace on earth and good will toward man. The birthnight of Jesus was a night of persecution to the Jews, and the fact has caused us not to celebrate Christmas Day.⁹⁷

There was little reaction in the literary world to Hirsch's comments. "Nickerdown" in the Chicago Israelite severely criticized Hirsch. (See appendix 15.)

Down to the present time individual rabbis have suggested that Jews could participate in the universal aspects of Christmas. So long as the Jew did not observe the Christological elements the Jew would not be compromising his Judaism. In 1939 Rabbi Harry Richmond of Temple Emanuel, Wichita, Kansas, as reported in the Wichita Eagle, stated, in his Friday night sermon "Christmas--A Season of Good Will":

Good Will, true to name, is beyond class or cleavage, Christmas so freighted, so envisioned is thrice welcomed by Jew and Christian alike.⁹⁸

Richmond continued that the Jew, because of his modern day milieu, cannot escape from observing Christmas, if not theologically at least realistically. His main concern centered around the examination of values derived from the observance of a religious festival in form and not by faith. He stated that his concept of religion was more universal than the forms of Judaism or Christianity in its search and presentation of ultimate reality. Christmas, fathered by Christianity, had reached a universal meaning above and beyond the religious sense of the holiday.

When the church or Synagogue, in a moment of spiritual ecstasy, forgets its humble origin and rises from the particular to the general, from tribal limitations to universal inclusiveness, mankind marches a step forward and religion becomes the true leveler of humanity. This forward step asks not for divorcement from origin, a forsaking of cherished traditions, a disregard for the distinctive and peculiar in church or synagogue. The rising tide is not a watering down process, in the criteria of Judaism or Christianity. It means an upward, human reach, transcending the confines of creed or cradle. The arms of the tree, reaching ever higher and higher, are deeply rooted in the bosom of the earth.⁹⁹

Richmond felt that a festival that expressed a centrality of goodwill, cheer, and peace was a festival that was speaking the universal tongue of human forgiveness which made all men kin. This expression of universal values allowed the emergence of a consciousness of human needs with an emerging appreciation of social, moral, and cosmic values. The universe was made up of great diversity which remained together in harmony. Thus could Jews rise above themselves

and celebrate the universal holiday of Christmas. It should be noted that during Richmond's decade, pre-World War II Reform Rabbis were stressing the universal values as opposed to the religious or ethnic values inherent in Judaism. Perhaps Richmond was reacting to the gross anti-Semitism occurring in his day in Europe and America. Christmas might have been one way of dramatically showing the Jews as part of mankind.

In the December 6, 1939 issue of the Christian Century Rabbi Louis Witt, of Dayton, Ohio, published his article "The Jew Celebrates Christmas." In the article Witt encouraged Jews to celebrate Christmas for several reasons.

He began the article by describing his experiences as a Rabbi attempting to stem the flood of Jews who wanted to celebrate Christmas: "I pleaded and scolded, waxed wrathful and tearful, year in and year out--in vain! The Jew today observes Christmas more than ever."¹⁰⁰ Even his own grown children protested that they were deprived as children from celebrating the holiday. While Witt felt that he had reason and logic supporting his arguments "the congregation seemed to be moved by a force deeper than reason."¹⁰¹

He analyzed it as the force of environment operating through the subconscious by the law of imitation, achieving massive effects through mass pressure and motivated by a logic all its own--the logic not of reason but of life.¹⁰²

Witt continued his article with a discussion of syncretization of Judaism. This force of syncretization

became an overwhelming tide which overcame and nullified the rabbi's effect in the struggle with the congregation. The Jew links up with this Zeitgeist and "participates in the spirit, not in the theology, of Christmas."¹⁰³ Since Christmas had become larger than a mere Christian holiday, its universalism and humaneness attracted the Jew. The Jew could join with the ever increasing numbers of Christians who no longer considered Jesus to be divine or supernatural:

The day is coming when the Jew will reclaim Jesus as one of his own, one with the blood of his ancestors, one with the spirit of his prophets, the noblest son of the synagogue. The Jew will then participate in a shared Christmas not only by virtue of the grace of the church for which he will be glad and grateful, but by virtue of his proprietary rights in the Christ as attested by the record of history.¹⁰⁴

There was a "tide" sweeping the Jew and Christian together into an acknowledgment of Jesus as the common heritage to both religions. Once the Jew could accept the human Jesus as a Jew who had an immense impact on history, then anti-Semitism, with the persecution by the majority over the minority of Jews would cease to happen.

Witt recognized that through history the harsh treatment of the Jew actually helped maintain Jewish identity. However, what would the Jew do in America without that pressure:

Comes a friendly environment. He thanks God for it. But such an environment by its pleasantness and lure tends to make him less distinctively, less separatistically, less sacrificially the Jew.¹⁰⁵

The Jew should not hold himself aloof from this environment for he must support this atmosphere so that he does not make it hostile to him once more. This Jew may appear to be less strict than another Jew who must battle his environment to survive. To the embattled Jew this other Jew, living in a pleasant environment, may not look like a Jew at all.

"Certainly, he will become less conspicuously, less particularistically, less dogmatically Jewish than the other, but he need not become less loyally Jewish."¹⁰⁶ Witt predicted that the Jew will continue to change over the next millennium, but no matter how much he might change, "he will still be a Jew, ever revaluing his traditions and perpetuating the historic selfhood of his people."¹⁰⁷

Thus, Witt no longer considered it necessary to prevent Jews from participating in Christmas. Instead, he interpreted their participation in positive terms:

I concede that a Christmas-Jew may be a good Jew, that he is drawn by a cheer and love in Christmas which have made it a day open to all creeds and colors and races, that he is not thereby drawn by even the breadth of a hair nearer to the worship of an ecclesiastical Christ, and that he is meeting the Christian on common ground which is both nobly Christian and nobly Jewish.¹⁰⁸

Thus, both the Christian and Jew would live in a society valuing each others rights to be different while they both worked together on those things they had in common.

Witt concluded the article with the following:

I say then, as a rabbi, thank God for Christmas! May it, in the spirit of its Judeo-Christian founder, bring forth in ever fuller measure the love that is hidden away in the hearts of men

until like a flood it prevails over the face of the earth. I say, as a rabbi, let the Jew wherever he can and as far as he can share in the love and the loveliness of the day. He need not be less loyally, even though perhaps less dogmatically or separatistically, the Jew for it. . . . Is it neither treason of Jew nor triumph of Christian but partnership of Jew and Christian in the making of a better world in which the Christ can have part only by energizing and perpetuating and hallowing the partnership?¹⁰⁹

In the following issue of the Christian Century two pieces appeared concerning Witt: a letter-to-the-editor by Rabbi Edward L. Israel of the Reform congregation of Har Sinai of Baltimore, Maryland, replying at length to the Witt article; and an editorial commenting on the whole controversy.

Rabbi Israel's letter began by explaining the awkward position he felt that Witt had placed anyone who wished to criticize Witt's article, due to "this era of intensified anti-Semitism."¹¹⁰ He placed himself on record by stating:

It ought to be stated at the very outset that practically one hundred percent of the spokesmen of contemporary Jewish religious life will differ from Rabbi Witt's conclusions. Indeed, I know of only one other rabbi in all American Jewry who might possibly hold a similar point of view on this issue.¹¹¹

Rabbi Israel challenged two points of Rabbi Witt's argument. He began by questioning Witt's conclusions regarding syncretization. Israel agreed that Judaism had syncretized elements from Baal worship, and even Hellenism. However, he stated the reasons for the syncretization and

related Witt's suggestion to consequences in the Christian world:

Judaism has encountered a number of pagan elements which it has syncretized by religionizing or spiritualizing them. Does Rabbi Witt intend to maintain that Christmas is just such a pagan thing which needs syncretism with Judaism for purposes of spiritualization? I think that Christianity would bitterly resent the gratuitous inference implied in Rabbi Witt's adventure into the history of Judaism as applied to Christmas.¹¹²

Israel considered Witt's statements regarding the secularization of Christmas by Christians and the universalizing of the holiday for Jews as blundering and ill-considered. Israel condemned Witt for this affront to Christianity. In his opinion Christians had more respect for those Jews who were conscientious to Judaism and did not observe Christmas.

The second area of challenge concerned a point of Witt's argument "wherein he advances the direct inference that opposition to the religious observance of Christmas by Jews implies a Jewish harboring of anti-Christian grudges because of bygone Christmas-time anti-Jewish persecutions."¹¹³ Israel totally rejected this thesis. While he admitted to admiring the beauty of the Christian observance of Christmas, at no time had he felt any hatreds between the faiths nor did he need to imitate Christian worship.

Israel continued his criticism by speaking to the subject of Witt's anti-Zionism. For Witt, Zionism, as a response to persecution, was out of place in America. Israel, to the contrary, supported Zionism as a barrier to the flight of Jews away from Judaism. Witt's philosophy of

Jewish life was to "become less conspicuously, less particularistically, less dogmatically Jewish than the other."¹¹⁴

In regard to the reproaches of Witt's children for denying them Christmas in their childhood, Israel made the following statement:

Perhaps the same ineffectual lack of basic positive Jewish loyalty which Dr. Witt's article reveals was the cause of his failure to give them something positively grand and beautifully Jewish to compensate them for the absence of a Christmas tree and presents.¹¹⁵

In answer to the question "Why would Jews rationalize about Christmas observance?" Israel commented:

The real reason is their inability to give their whining children a positive Jewish compensation for the superficially alluring trappings which have nothing really to do with the spiritual significance of Christmas. It is only their folding up because of their lack of moral stamina to be historically different. It is not something which the religious Christian would hail as the true Christmas spirit.¹¹⁶

For Israel the only way that a Christian could accept a Jew celebrating Christmas honestly would be if the Jew were observing the birthday of Christ. "I feel certain that if Dr. Witt can celebrate Christmas in this only true religious manner--in the only manner acceptable to religious Christians--the devout Christian world will ardently embrace him, and the Jewish religious world will respect him for his personal honesty and consistency."¹¹⁷

The Christian Century editorial also spoke to this point. After a review of Witt and Israel's positions regarding the controversy, the Christian Century stated that there were two considerations which always entered into

a discussion between Christians and Jews, neither of which should enter this controversy. The two were the "ecclesiastical or theological conception of Christ," and the memories of the Christian persecutions of the Jews in centuries past. The magazine suggested that, if the Christian would lay aside his theological conception of Christ and the Jew would forget past persecutions, they would find that there was considerable ground that they could share:

Viewing this common ground, the Christian Century feels bound to take sides with Dr. Witt in his effort to release the spirit of Jewry from bondage to a tradition which denies it the right to participate in a free and gladsome celebration of the birthday of Jesus.¹¹⁸

Since Jesus was a common possession of both Jews and Christians, once both recognized this fact they would be able to relate more closely. The Christian Century continued:

A simple gesture of its recognition [of the common historical ground between Judaism and Christianity] would be the unconstrained observance of Jesus' birthday for which Dr. Witt pleads. But why should not Judaism do much more than this? Why should it not make a place for Jesus in its own faith? We are not suggesting that the place given to him should be the same as that which is accorded him in the Christian church. But why should not his teachings, his life, his death, his world-wide significance have a place in the liturgy and preaching of Judaism--a place fully consistent with the nobler ideals of the Jewish tradition?¹¹⁹

In conclusion the Christian Century expressed the "melting pot" conception of the ideal of American society, a direct criticism of Judaism:

To cherish it [Judaism] in withdrawal from the rest of society may be defended in a hostile environment, such as now exists in Germany, for example, but in

the environment of American tolerance where opinions and values emerge and are tested in the democratic process, it is not fair to democracy to cherish a religious faith which provides a sanction for racial or cultural or any other form of separatism.¹²⁰

Once the Christian Century had published Witt's original essay, Israel's reply, and the editorial, the controversy took on sufficient significance that Time magazine, January 1, 1940, published a two column article about the issue. (see appendix 17.) The Time article gave a few quotes from Witt and Israel and then editorialized:

Having furnished a battleground in which Jews could toss grenades at each other, the Christian Century last week dropped an editorial bomb of its own.¹²¹

Time ended the article with a quote from the Christian Century suggesting that Jews could do more about integrating Jesus into Judaism and integrating themselves into America.

Reaction came from rabbinical and lay sources as well. On December 5, 1939, Rabbi Solomon B. Freehoff, later to become the authority on halachah for Reform Judaism, wrote a letter of support to Witt. (See appendix 16.) He wrote that he had written a book entitled STORMERS OF HEAVEN in which he gave a favorable biography of Jesus. Christian missionaries took positive statements which Freehoff had made and quoted them, capitalizing each pronoun. They had made his statements sound like a religious adoration of a man-God. Freehoff warned Witt that rabbis are never safe from misunderstanding when they say any friendly words in regard to Jesus:

I am writing to you of this uncomfortable experience in reference to your magnificent article in the CHRISTIAN CENTURY. Everything you say is just and any intelligent Jew can agree with it. But I fear that Christians will treat you as they treated me. Especially will they delight in the statement at the bottom of page 1498 ". . . in a Christmas that welcomes the Jew and in a Jew that welcomes Christmas and in a Christ that is claimed by both." If at least you had said, "a Jesus that is claimed by both," it might not have been so bad. I can only hope that the evangelical Christians will treat you more kindly than they treated me.¹²²

Dr. Julius Mark, The rabbi of the Vine Street Temple of Nashville, Tennessee, included the controversy in his weekly column "Observations" for The Observer of Nashville, Tennessee. He gave a short synopsis of the two opinions and mentioned the Time article. While disagreeing with Witt, Mark was careful to admit that America was a free country where each man is entitled to his opinion. He stated:

The chief fault that we find with Rabbi Witt is that HE EXPRESSED THAT OPINION IN A CHRISTIAN PERIODICAL.

The same goes for Rabbi Israel!

These colleagues were lacking in good taste.

They could have waged their controversy in a Jewish periodical or the floor of a rabbinical convention.

They are guilty of "washing their dirty linen in public."¹²³

He continued that since Jews were responsible one for the other they deserved the rebuke of the editor of the Christian Observer.

On December 29, 1939 Rabbi Harry Egelson of Congregation Children of Israel, Memphis, Tennessee, wrote a

letter of support to Witt. While he could not agree with Witt's conclusions, Egelson did compliment the article as well written. He also wrote that he was not at all pleased with Ed Israel's heated rejoinder:

He could have disagreed without being so disagreeable about it. Even in controversy one can observe the amenities and decencies. I thought some of his statements nasty and horrid and the whole tone¹²⁴ ungracious and ungenerous, --not to say unfair.

Egelson inquired if Witt had heard from other rabbinical colleagues.

Witt wrote back to Egelson on January 15, 1940. In the letter Witt began again to define his purposes and arguments for the article. He was surprised that this controversy would make the pages of Time magazine. He specifically had chosen the Protestant Christian Century because it had a liberal and intelligent public. He had written the article three years previously and had held onto it for that period of time. He thought that he would receive quite a bit of criticism from both sides for the article so he had written to the Christian Century to inform them it would come. Witt was certain that his view was prophecy of a time in the future. He was critical of his critics, saying that most had not read his article nor did they understand what he meant if they had read it. "I am completely indifferent to the criticism. I feel as such as I am that I am writing to you [Egelson] that my view is prophetic, and that some day it's bound to prevail; in one hundred, five hundred or one thousand years--but what is time to truth!"¹²⁵

In his letter to Egelson, Witt was concerned about the misunderstanding that most readers of the original article would have about him. He reiterated that he was not interested in Christmas trees or presents. He was concerned with the human and historic Jesus who not only belonged to the Jew but would one day be claimed by the Jew "as the noblest son of Israel and Judaism." Witt was certain that the human and historical Jesus would one day be the only Jesus that the church would recognize as Master. These two conceptions would then be able to build a spiritual unity between Judaism and Christianity:

To this end neither the church or the synagogue needs to lose its historic selfhood. As a matter of fact, if I should be condemned by either side, it should be not on the side of the Jew whose history I am glorifying, but on the side of the Christian who may argue, as I wrote the Editor he would argue, that I am taking from the Church its Jesus in order to make him acceptable to the Jew.¹²⁶

As far as the reply by Israel was concerned, Witt wrote a letter to the editor of the magazine apologizing, not for Israel's opinion, nor his right to express it, but for the manner in which Israel wrote it. Witt stated:

As to Israel's letter, I have never read anything from a colleague of twenty-five years' standing so full of hate and dirt. I do not expect to speak to him again.¹²⁷

In actuality, Witt was happy that Israel had written the letter "because it gave the Editor of the Century a chance to reply with an editorial whose liberalism is noble beyond words, as was it [sic] understanding of the spirit and the content of what I wrote."¹²⁸

Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman of Temple Israel, St. Louis, Missouri, wrote an editorial on the Witt controversy for the January 4, 1940 issue of the Modern View. Isserman noted that when rabbis agree that is not considered news. However, when noted rabbis disagree it is considered newsworthy enough for Time Magazine to feature an article about the subject. Isserman attempted to defuse the controversy in his editorial. He noted that many famous rabbis, Hillel and Shamai for instance, had controversies in the past but that these two, Witt and Israel, certainly agreed on such issues as one God, the value of prayer, the immortality of the soul, the validity of the prophetic message, and the democracy inherent in Judaism:

On these questions, there is agreement among all rabbis. On many other questions there is disagreement. Such disagreement is healthful. When such disagreement disappears in Judaism decay, degeneration and atrophy has set in.¹²⁹

One layman wrote directly to Witt in support of his article. Leon Schwarz was president of District #7 of B'nai Brith and twice mayor of Mobile, Alabama, when Witt had a congregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. Schwarz wrote that he was squarely on Witt's side regarding the article. He and his wife celebrated but did not observe religiously the Christmas season. They had sent and received 250 Christmas cards, had exchanged Christmas presents, and had given books to children in the Protestant Orphan Asylum, as well as other Christmas activities.

But we did not observe Christmas spiritually to the extent of attending a church service. We attended services as we usually do in our Jewish Temple the Friday evening before Christmas--also the Friday evening following our celebration of Christmas.

Hurrah for Christmas!--and forever live Judaism.¹³⁰

In his reply to Schwarz's letter Witt thanked him for his support. He stated:

I've been getting plenty of "h---" from my Rabbinical colleagues; my precious body is black and blue! Your letter was like balm of Gilead to my mutilated torso! My idea of a Jew and Christmas embraces not so much the lure of friendliness in Christian America on that day (for which I thank God) but goes much deeper to a partnership between Jew and Christian on the historic Jesus as a common heritage. Only the future can tell what will come of it.¹³¹

Charles Clayton Morrison, editor of the Christian Century wrote to Witt on January 10, 1940 to thank him for his letter of agreement with regard to the previously published editorial. Morrison commented upon the further reception of mail concerning the controversy.

One thing is quite inexplicable to me and that is the fact that we have received so little correspondence from our readers on this controversy. I may say truthfully that nothing of any importance has been received. There have been a few desultory contributions, but they add nothing to the discussion; therefore, we are not publishing anything. I think this is all to the good, however.¹³²

Though Witt received support from several important rabbis with regard to his right to his opinion, the criticisms built to the point where Witt commented on them to Schwarz. Yet, the Christian Century received few and inconsequential letters after the answer from Israel. Either

most of the critics wrote personally to Witt and the letters are not existant, or they did not publish their criticisms where they could be read by the average reader. In any case, the controversy died out within one month leaving little impact.

The shock of World War II, the inhumanity of man toward Jews, which came to light with the opening of the concentration camps, brought Jews a clear signal that the world through its inactivity and collusion was not ready to accept the Jew as an equal. There is little written about rabbis stressing Christmas immediately after the war during the decades of the forties and fifties of the twentieth century. Most Jewish reaction during these times will be found in other chapters of this thesis.

The Jewish Post and Opinion published an article on December 13, 1968 entitled "Rabbis Differ: Jews May, Nay Not Mark Christmas." The article did not explain the circumstances that led to the controversy between the two rabbis. They were Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine of the Birmingham Temple, Detroit, Michigan and Rabbi Hillel B. Silverman of Sinai Temple, Los Angeles, California. The Jewish Post began the article by stating that Wine urged Jews to celebrate Christmas in a humanistic way. Taking the classical negative Jewish stance, Silverman explained the Christological symbolism to prove that Christmas was not a non-secular holiday. Wine continued by answering the twin charges of

Christian contempt for Jews celebrating Christmas and of Jewish self-hate. He stated:

Jews who observe a secular Christmas are no more contemptible to the hords of Gentiles who are equally secular than Jews who indulge Halloween, Valentine's Day or Thanksgiving. Christmas trees are no more religiously compromising than painted eggs for Easter. The charge of self-hate is equally absurd. On the contrary, the desperate attempt to avoid 'contamination' with Christmas symbols is the sign of self-doubt. It is no affirmation of self-esteem. Unwilling to forgo the pleasure of assimilation, Jewish parents feebly protest their tribal loyalty every Chanukah by the vehemence with which they resist Christmas. A self-confident Jew has no fear that a secular Christmas will destroy his identity. He is terrified of no ceremonial trivia and is afraid of no cosmopolitan experiment. As a Jewish humanist, free to demythologize whatever is aesthetically indispensable, he feels no need to be restrictive. He can celebrate and enjoy both Chanukah and Christmas.¹³³

In regard to persecution of the Jews as a reason for rejecting Christmas, Wine stated that if the holiday retained its historical and theological significance this might be something to consider. However, Christmas, for Wine, was the official winter festival of a secular Western culture surviving as a ceremonial opportunity for good will. Wine was critical of the aggressiveness for Channukah which he observed. He felt this was a sign of ambivalence about assimilation and the drive for total integration in the Jew.

"His [the Jew's] aggressiveness for Chanukah and against Christmas," he [Wine] continued, "is an expression of self-delusion. It helps sustain the fantasy that he has preserved the religious uniqueness he has long since abandoned. It makes him feel terribly Jewish without any real effort--and without any real insight."¹³⁴

In 1976 Wine, founder of the Jewish Humanist newsletter, wrote an article about Christmas for the Jewish Humanist. In this article he reiterated ideas he had stated in previous newspaper articles.¹³⁵ He was very certain in the article that Chanukah was second rate in comparison to the Christmas festival. Thus, as long as Jews had to celebrate the festival, due to previously stated reasons for participation, the Jews might as well enjoy it. It would be important to prevent the "placing of Christ back into Christmas" for the Jews since this would remythologize the universal nature of the festival. American Jews could emulate the Japanese who have a Christless Christmas without guilt or anguish. The Jewish humanist then could enjoy Christmas and Chanukah as mutually exclusive but complementary holidays. Wine stated:

If he is a parent, he will not deny his child either opportunity and has no objection to the celebration of a secular Christmas within the framework of this Sunday School, temple, or public school. He even welcomes humanistic procedures for Christmas as he welcomes them for Thanksgiving. In short, he is aware that he is more than Jewish, and accepting that "more" makes him feel a more effective and more understanding person.¹³⁶

Echoes of the theme that acceptance of Christmas is permissible for Jews because it is universalized and will not harm a strongly identified Jew was found in other rabbinical writings.

Rabbi Hershel J. Matt, writing for the Jewish Post in 1973, wrote an article "Should Christmas Mean Anything To Jews." Matt wrote two pages explaining that Jesus does

not have meaning for Jews. However, Christmas can have meaning for Jews: as an extension and enlargement of what Jews stand and exist for. Christianity spread the Jewish perspective on life, through much of the world. Thereby, "Christianity is thus a denationalized, de-particularized form of Judaism; Judaism for the nations of the world."¹³⁷ Matt addressed himself only to the meaning of Christmas for the Jew and not how the Jew should observe or participate in that meaning.

Statistics

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) as early as the 1930's, supported social science research and its use in the practice of intergroup relations.¹³⁸ The original purpose of this research was to gauge public opinion concerning Jews in order to combat Nazi propoganda and anti-Semitism. By 1944 the AJC had established a Scientific Research Department which embarked on further important studies regarding Jewish identity and continuity in the United States.

In the decade after World War II the emphasis of the AJC shifted to the development of program activities which would make Jewish tradition relevant to the ethical and moral issues of the day. While the earlier studies had involved American attitudes toward Jews, the new research was aimed at providing information about American Jewry's internal life. The first such study was undertaken in 1952

by Marc Vosk and Marshall Sklare and dealt with a small eastern city known as "Riverton." The study interviewed 200 Jewish families with teenage children. In each family one parent and one teenager was interviewed. Of the parents interviewed two-thirds were American born and of the teenagers almost all were native Americans. The 200 families represented two-fifths of the eligible families with teenagers. The researchers were careful to note:

But, in our sample, there are more native-born Americans, college graduates, professionals, and Reform and Conservative Jews. Consequently, we may expect to find somewhat less "traditional" thinking in our sample than in the community as a whole.¹³⁹

While the Riverton research asked no direct questions regarding Christmas observance, several of the findings indirectly related to it. One finding, which would reoccur in other research, was that the Jewish rituals which survived the best were not those daily traditions which reminded the Jew he was Jewish. Instead, they were those that were occasional, joyous, involved the young, and marked a transition from one stage of life to another. This followed from responses recording High Holiday observance at 72 per cent, Bar Mitzvah at 47 per cent, and the observance of the Passover Sedar at 44 per cent.¹⁴⁰ Of the teenagers polled, 83 per cent favored the rituals and traditions which were practiced in their homes.¹⁴¹ This high percentage of positive response from the teenagers was explained on the basis of the mild observance in the home,

the less onerous demand placed on the teens, and the careful tailoring of the rituals and practices to involve the child's interest without restricting, isolating or embarrassing him.¹⁴² One well documented reason for Christmas observance, given by those parents that observed Christmas in the homes, was the desire to prevent trauma in their children. Besides the feeling that the Christmas holiday was non-secular, these persons did not want their children to feel different, deprived, or separate from the American community.

Another finding of the research was in the area of philanthropy. The Riverton study pointed out the fact that philanthropy is one universal characteristic found in religious and non-religious Jews. It is the means by which the non-religious participate in their Jewish culture. Statistics surrounding philanthropy showed that 74 per cent of the parents gave primarily to a Jewish charity while 46 per cent of the teenagers donated to Jewish charities. Of the parents, 11 per cent donated primarily to non-sectarian charities and 14 per cent had no preference at all for making donations.¹⁴³ Since 25 per cent of the adult Jews donated to non-Jewish charities primarily, this statistic indicated it would not be unusual for some Jews to donate to Christian charities or Christmas charities during the holiday season. The Riverton information was specific for one community at one point in time. It could not be generalized to include any other community of American Jews

during the 1950's. The importance of the study was that it showed trends to look for in other Jewish communities.

In December 1958, Milton Matz undertook and completed a study of the Christmas attitudes of 53 middle class South Side Chicago Reform Jewish parents. Once again this study was very limited. However, it, too, showed areas for further study and concern. Matz concluded that the Christmas tree had become a symbol of meaning to American Jews:

The results indicate that 79.2 per cent of them never have Christmas trees but that 37.5 per cent think that having a tree would 'make it easier for their children,' 34 per cent of them, regardless of whether they have a tree or not, are concerned with whether they should or should not have a tree. 58.3 per cent feel that their children want a tree. 21.4 per cent indicate that they do not know what they would tell their children where they to ask for a tree. 31.6 per cent would wish that the Christmas tree were acceptable to the Jewish religion.¹⁴⁴

When the data was correlated for a comparison between second and third generation Jews there were marked differences:

- A. 7.5 per cent always have a Christmas tree as a family custom: (5.3 per cent-2nd generation, 13.3 per cent-third generation);
- B. 13.3 per cent occasionally have a Christmas tree in the home: (8.9 per cent-2nd generation, 16.6 per cent-third generation);
- C. 79.2 per cent never have a Christmas tree in the home: (85.8 per cent-2nd generation, 60.1 per cent-third generation).¹⁴⁵

The second generation Jew found that he straddled two cultures: the American non-ethnic culture and his Jewish ethnic sub-culture. Most of the second generation Jews attempted to bridge both cultures. In regard to the Christmas tree, the second generation Jew indicated a strong need for ethnic solidarity.

In reply to the question, 'I think Jews are upset by a Jew who has a tree,' 78.4 per cent answered in the affirmative, in contrast to 57 per cent for the third generation group. In practice, 14.2 per cent second generation Jews always or occasionally have a Christmas tree in contrast to 39.9 per cent for the third generation. Regardless of their covert indecision, the second generation apparently maintain strong defences against the tree.¹⁴⁶

While the second generation Jew sought solidarity for himself regarding the tree, the conflict between his two cultures arose in regard to his feelings for his children.

The contrast between the low percentage of those who have trees [14.2 per cent] and the considerable percentage of those who feel their children need trees [54.5 per cent] mirrors the conflict within them between their desires for assimilation into the American fabric and their loyalties to their ethnic ties.¹⁴⁷

The meaning of the tree was found to be a religious custom for 71.4 per cent of the second generation Jews as opposed to 23.1 per cent of the third generation.¹⁴⁸

The reactions of the third generation were based on an ease and naturalness of being native born Americans. They no longer felt alien to the American culture. The problem then revolved around the lack of identity that the third generation felt. Marcus Hansen formulated what he called the 'principle of third-generation interest': What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember.¹⁴⁹ In order to answer the question "What kind of American are you?" the third generation Jew found his Jewish identity no longer based on ethnicity but on religion. He now began to affirm his Jewish identity. Clear evidence of the changes in the third generation were seen when 100 per cent agreed that the

Jewish religion does not sanction use of the Christmas tree.

Only 8 per cent of them are in doubt as to what to tell their children if they ask for a tree, in comparison with 26 per cent for the second generation. They feel that there is a rightness in the fact that a Jew should stay with his religious practices. 93.5 per cent responded that they felt that Gentiles admire the Jew who stays with his religion by not having a tree.¹⁵⁰

For this generation, because they have resolved many of their confusions and ambivalences, the Christmas tree became attractive. Thirty-nine per cent admitted to always or occasionally having a Christmas tree while 61.6 per cent would wish that the tree was accepted by Judaism.¹⁵¹ The third generation changed their opinion of the Christmas tree from religious symbol of the second generation to a social symbol. Only 28.6 per cent of the second generation considered it to be social compared to 76.9 per cent of the third generation.¹⁵² Thus, the third generation's search for meaning and identity once again took place within their reaffirmed faith. The social symbol of the Christmas tree took on added meaning:

26.6 per cent (as contrasted with 2.9 per cent for the second generation) responded affirmatively to the blunt statement 'By having a Christmas tree a Jew does his bit to bring all religions together.' 40 per cent of the third generation (we should remember, too, that 40 per cent admit to having trees) responded affirmatively to the statement that 'In a sense the Christmas tree symbolizes the unity of all Americans, through its emphasis on brotherhood and friendship.' Only 17 per cent of the second generation agreed with this view.¹⁵³

Matz analyzed his findings with regard to the future. Since the interpretation of the second generation became lost into the third, Matz considered the definition of the third generation as the more permanently viable one because it is supported by the attractive American Christian culture. Matz did not believe that the third generation definition would grow:

As religious lines of differentiation sharpen, the third generation Jew and his offspring will become more aware of the inner contradiction involved in using the divisive symbols of religious identity of another group as their symbol of American unity. He will turn to more appropriate symbols for expressing his at-homeness in America.¹⁵⁴

This was consonant with Herberg's statement that "Not to be a Catholic, a Protestant, or a Jew today is, for increasing numbers of American people, not to be anything, not to have a name."¹⁵⁵

In another study, Irving Cantor, National Program Director of the B'nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO) polled 868 Jewish teenagers throughout the U.S.A. in 1960, for their attitudes regarding Christmas observance at school and in their homes. The school results will be found in the chapter which deals with anti-Christmas reactions; attitudes regarding Chanukah will be found in the chapter which deals with the accommodation to Christmas.

The statistics provided by Carter regarding teenage assimilation and identity regarding Christmas were:

6 per cent attended Christmas parties sponsored by other Jews; 2 per cent were at Christmas parties attended only by Jews; 12 per cent sent Christmas

gifts to relatives and 9 per cent sent gifts to friends; 3 per cent sent Christmas cards to relatives and 7 per cent sent cards to friends.¹⁵⁶

The teenagers rejected Christmas symbols for intra-Jewish purposes. Of those receiving Christmas cards from other Jews, 32 per cent liked the idea while 48 per cent found it objectionable. Of the last statistic, 3 per cent felt "funny" about receiving Christmas cards from Jews; 19 per cent stated they felt contempt for the person sending the card; 26 per cent would rather have received Chanukah cards. About 40 per cent of the respondents stated they sang either Christmas religious or "non-sectarian" Christmas carols. Twenty per cent of the teenagers stated they had discussed Christmas with their parents; 40 per cent had discussed Christmas in their BBYO groups.¹⁵⁷ In regard to this the BBYA advisors magazine Advising Jewish Youth, January 1954, stated:

One cannot explore the holiday without coming face to face with the life of Jesus Christ, his Jewish roots, the Judaic background of his 'Christianity,' the traditional evaluation of his role in Jewish religious thought, and the reasons for the Jewish rejection of Christianity.¹⁵⁸

Canter warned not to evaluate the 9 per cent of the sample visiting churches for the Christmas Mass as a statistic indicating the loosening of their commitment to Judaism. This factor was following the trend in the culture for youths from different cultures to share their experiences.

In regard to Christmas observance in the home, Canter found:

Christmas decorations in the homes of some respondents does indicate an assimilation of the Christmas cultural symbols, if not the religious ones. Eleven per cent of the group reported some kind of decoration at home, and, of these, almost three-quarters said they had Christmas trees. The rest had wreaths, stockings, a display of cards, Santa Claus, candy canes, or lights. No one displayed any Christmas object representing a distinctly religious symbol.¹⁵⁹

In summary, Canter noted that even with the heavy emphasis on Christmas in the culture and in the schools there was little carry over activities into the daily life of the Jewish youth. Only a small minority of the respondents participated in all-Jewish Christmas parties, sent Christmas cards, or exchanged Christmas gifts. Conversely, 90 per cent of the teenagers observed Chanukah in their home, their BBYO group, or participated in their synagogue Chanukah celebration.¹⁶⁰ This study had a much broader sampling base extending across many communities. Therefore, more universal conclusions could be drawn regarding Jewish celebrations of Christmas.

In 1967 the AJC published the results of their "Lakeville" study. The town of "Lakeville" was chosen for its mid-western location, for its size of Jewish population of approximately 8,000 of 27,000 residents, and for its representative mixture of the many differing elements which made up the Jewish population of America at the time. Four hundred and thirty-two respondents, of which 10 per cent were under the age of 30 years, participated in the study. Almost all of the Jews in Lakeville were of the middle or upper

class income levels. Their value system was identified as suburbanite.¹⁶¹

In this study emphasis was placed on the attitudes of the third and fourth generation Jews, in an attempt to provide some insights into the future of American Jews in an increasingly open society. The second volume of the study, The Edge of Friendliness: A Study of Jewish-Gentile Relations, by Benjamin Ringer, examined the relations between the Gentiles and the Jews of Lakeville. It was within this part of the study that the value of integration of the Jews into the Lakeville community was studied. Integration was considered a central value among the Jews of Lakeville. One indicator of this value was found in the following:

The emphasis placed by both newcomers and longtimers on becoming part of the larger society is reflected by the fact that two out of three of our respondents say that to be a "good Jew" one must promote civic improvement in the community. Of the remaining Jewish respondents, all but 4 per cent consider civic involvement to be a desirable, if not essential, aspect of Jewishness. Along with participation in general community affairs, the good Jew, according to the majority opinion, is also obliged to build good personal relations with Gentiles, particularly those who are his neighbors, and to win their respect.¹⁶²

In terms of integration, 99 per cent of the respondents wanted a sizeable percentage of Gentiles to live in the community, some wanted 50 per cent as the minimum for their community:

It is thus apparent that the 50 per cent figure has assumed a deep symbolic significance for a majority of Lakeville Jews. It expresses their view of a model community, one which guarantees

the best opportunities for Jewish identity. In other words, it envisions a solid middle ground of pluralism that lies between ethnocentrism on the one hand, and assimilation on the other.¹⁶³

The Jews of Lakeville wanted at least a sizeable minority of Gentiles living together with them so that their children would benefit from the social learning between the two cultures. They wanted to educate their children in the reality of living in a mixed world.

Ringer found a direct correlation between those who wanted a majority of Gentiles in the neighborhood to those who had a high acceptance of Gentile values. "This is most clearly seen in the attitudes toward Christmas trees: respondents who prefer a majority of Gentiles are much more likely to approve of Jews having a tree or to have one themselves."¹⁶⁴ This issue became a highly charged one in Lakeville. It was an issue of principle and not of taste to those that objected to it. The acceptance of the Christmas tree became the boundary for acceptable accommodation to community mores.¹⁶⁵ Those celebrating with a tree argued for symbolic integration with the community, the non-secular nature of Christmas, the value of American customs, Christmas' pagan nature, and the universal moral meaning of Christmas and the tree. The statistics regarding Christmas trees can be found in the documents section of this thesis as appendix 26. The results of the Lakeville study concerning Christmas observance showed that the majority of respondents did not have Christmas trees. Those

that were the most integrated and had similar values to their Gentile neighbors tended toward limited Jewish identification, wanted more than 50 per cent Gentiles in their community, and participated in the Christmas season with a tree.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the organization of Reform temples, commissioned a research project through its Long Range Planning Committee to study Jewish beliefs, attitudes, behavior, and demography across the United States. Leonard J. Fein, ^{*}Professor of Politics and Social Policy at Brandeis University, was chosen to direct the project. It was completed in 1971.

The study concentrated on 12 congregations based on their geographical distribution. Using a random sample, depending on temple size, fifty per cent of the persons contacted responded to the questionnaire for a total sample of 864 respondents.

Using the data from this study, which included a question regarding the use of Christmas trees, Marden D. Paru statistically correlated the data to find answers for the following theoretical propositions concerning Christmas observance:

- a. Jewish Christmas tree consumers are ambivalent about their Jewish identity in relation to their American social status;
- b. Christmas tree owners are more assimilated into the American culture than Jews who do not buy trees (the melting pot ideology);
- c. Users of trees are less observant of home and other rituals; they are less worship oriented;

- d. Owning a Christmas tree is most prevalent among parents of young offspring; and
- e. Having a Christmas tree is a symbol of integration into a predominantly Christian milieu.¹⁶⁶

Of the 791 valid observations, 81 responded that they had Christmas trees in their home. This group of tree users was contrasted to the set of all non-tree users.

Paru found the following results:

1. Christmas tree users were younger than non-users. If they were young adults with young children they felt freer to have trees as an experiment with "the quest for the good life."
2. The younger tree using group had children generally under the age of 17. This group might justify having a tree "for the sake of the children."
3. The tree users were generally third generation Americans. This implied a greater proclivity for and opportunity to assimilate into the American culture. The tree served as a means and symbol for the assimilatory process.
4. A majority of tree users (83 per cent) wanted their children to attend a religious school on a one day basis, once each week. The Bar and Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation culminated this group's childrens' formal Jewish education. Fourteen per cent wanted more Jewish education for their children; some wanted less.
5. Tree users attended religious services only on the High Holy Days (48 per cent) while most Reform Jews attended services regularly with 25 per cent attending a few times per month.
6. Temple affiliation for tree users was 21 plus years while for non-users was 3 to 6 years. Paru concluded that the long affiliation of the tree users provided them with the freedom to depart from conventional Jewish practice. Also, length of affiliation to a synagogue did not correlate to a member's religiosity.
7. With regard to the lighting of Sabbath candles, 52 per cent of non-tree users lit candles while 21 per cent of the tree users lit Sabbath candles. The tree users reported they had Chanukah candelabras in their homes (76.3 per cent) less than the non-tree users (91.5 per cent).

8. On the issue of intermarriage, the tree users did not see intermarriage as bad for the Jewish people. The non-tree users sharply disagreed.
9. The data supported the conclusion that tree users belonged to Reform Judaism more as a sign of social status and social need than the non-tree users. "Being a reform Jew connotes certain opportunities to practice Judaism in whatever way one feels comfortable and to claim de facto recognition as a religionist by virtue of one's affiliation with a reform congregation."¹⁶⁷

Paru concluded in summary that the Christmas tree users were somewhat ambivalent about their Judaism. They had both Christmas trees and Chanukah menorahs. They would attend services in the synagogue for the High Holy Days. They were more assimilated into American culture. Probably both parents of the tree user were American born. They themselves wanted less Jewish education for their children. Intermarriage was in their eyes not a threat to Judaism. They were less observant of traditional rituals and less religious ideologically. They tended to be the younger parents of children under the age of 17. There was not enough evidence to support the hypothesis that the Christmas tree represented a symbol of integration into the Christian milieu.

Paru stated:

While Jews tend to be less religious, in the aggregate, than either Catholics or Protestants, a fact often cited by pollsters and other social researchers, it is my ardent feeling nonetheless that possession of Christmas trees by Jews is truly an anomaly. Like any social or spiritual movement that has ever reached maturity, Judaism has its own idiosyncratic minority who never quite fairly internalize the major ideologies.¹⁶⁸

In relation to the Matz study Paru stated that his data supported Matz's statement that the third generation would

have to find other symbols than the Christian Christmas tree to express his at-homeness in America. Since the third generation respondents had retained the same frequency of Christmas tree usage over the past 13 years from the Matz study to the UAHC study, he felt this was statistical support for Matz. Paru suggested that the researchers might have expected an increasing use of Christmas trees over the course of time. "The leveling off may be symptomatic of the dawning of a new era, particularly in light of historic Jewish events since 1967."¹⁶⁹

While the UAHC study used a large sample from 12 different temples in different parts of the country, the survey was completed in 1971. Many events have occurred in the world since then to have influenced Jewish opinions regarding the Christmas issue. Further assimilation, events in the Middle East, changing economic conditions, and political issues all have their effect on Jewish identity. Current surveys are needed to ascertain if the statistics of this chapter have remained stable, or are no longer representative of Jewish responses to Christmas.

CHAPTER III

REJECTION OF CHRISTMAS

Negative Responses

Previous to the nineteenth century if any person of the Jewish faith would have celebrated Christmas he would have been considered from that point onward no longer part of the Jewish community itself. The Jewish world until that time was highly insular and dependent upon its own means for survival. Often the national government, in which the Jews lived was allied with the church of that nation, so that they mutually support the persecutions and debilitations impressed upon the Jews. Jews had to be very careful not to bring down the wrath of either the government or the church, for problems with one usually meant problems with both. In this type of oppressive world Jews perceived of Christmas as a religious holiday to be feared. It was at Christmas time, though usually more fiercely at Easter, that Christian mobs would swarm through the ghettos beating, and killing hapless Jews. Whole Jewish communities in Europe would remain alert and awake on Christmas Eve playing cards to protect themselves against the mobs.

With the European Enlightenment and the secular freedoms of America influencing Jews, they began to imitate more and more the cultures in which they lived. The

Protestants of America had begun to accept Christmas in the nineteenth century. As Jews began to imitate them, Jewish leaders rose up in opposition. Criticisms generally centered on December 25th commemorating the birth date of Jesus as Savior, the relationship between Christmas' date and that of Chanukah, the inappropriateness of Jews celebrating non-Jewish holidays, the offense to Gentiles of making Christmas into a secular holiday, the destructive impact this practice had upon Judaism's survival, and the lack of education and concern displayed by Jews who participated or tolerated such celebrations. Another very important point stressed was the interpretation of Christmas as a national holiday. Accepting the fact that new immigrants to the United States wanted to Americanize as quickly as possible, it was important for Jewish leaders to educate these masses to the fact that Christmas was a religious holiday for Christians. Even though Congress had made Christmas a holiday for federal workers, and each state's legislation had enacted laws to make Christmas a holiday in each individual state, it was incumbent upon each Jew to realize that he would not be "un-patriotic" if he did not celebrate Christmas. Notwithstanding these efforts, Jewish participation in Christmas did grow, and so did attacks on such practices by Jewish leaders.

In 1854, the Israelite published its first mention of Christmas in a piece of fiction, "A Christmas Story."

Upon returning home from regular Friday night services at his synagogue on Christmas Eve, a father seats his children on his knee. His young daughter then mentions "a Christmas box." The father realizes that he could not show anger if he wanted to reason with his children. He then proceeds to explain that Jews are out of place celebrating Christian holidays.¹ The article began on December 22nd and was completed the next week on December 29, 1854. For the Israelite Christmas became a quiet issue except for occasional articles about the genesis of the holiday.

Isaac Leiser also remained generally oblivious to Christmas in the Occident. In February of 1867 he published Julius Eckman's article "Hannukah and Christmas" (see appendix 1). After discussing both Chanukah and Christmas, Eckman, then a rabbi in San Francisco, stated:

All good men, and those of enlightened views, both among Jews and gentiles, look benignly upon the coexisting systems, and with all their predilection for the one or the other, delight in the success of the neighboring creed (provided it be not too aggressive and overbearing), respect its institutions and treat its symbols with reverence. Still, for Jews to ignore their holy days and celebrate those of Christians, is perverse, and must meet with the condemnation of the sincere Jew and the contempt of the intelligent Christian. The latter can only look upon the Christmas tree, or the Christmas present in the house of the Jew, as an act of denial of identity--an attempt to appear to be what he is not. . . . Let, therefore, men who know little of Judaism and less of Christianity, not betray their littleness of mind and their misplacement by fortune, by playing such a ridiculous part as for a Jew to be aping Christians, and rendering himself contemptible in the eyes of his children, who, one day, will find out the imbecility of their parents and judge them accordingly. "Drink water from thine own cistern," and do not ape the stranger.²

Samuel Isaacs, in the editorial pages of his Jewish Messenger, New York, expressed the orthodox position of this subject. In his editorial of December 31, 1869 (see appendix 2) entitled "Christmas," he criticized the anti-ceremonialists [Reform Jews]. After accepting the fact that Christians have the right to celebrate their holidays in any manner they choose, he stated:

But why any person professing Judaism should observe Christmas as a holiday is an anomaly.

What use or purpose does a Christmas tree, lit up with its diminutive wax candles, and adorned with its other peculiar paraphernalia, serve in a Jewish house? And yet it is notorious that many anti-ceremonialists were very particular and precise in observing this ceremony last Friday evening.³

His tirade continued, criticizing the response of these people to criticism by others:

If a voice is lifted against this growing practice of introducing ceremonials of other religions, and the abandonment of those relating to Judaism, forthwith an outcry is raised about the spirit of the age, the dead past, social union, progress, bye-gone tradition all through to the end of the catalogue; but not a word is said against the adoption of any ceremony, however widely it may be removed from the Mosaic code, provided it is popular. Only one excuse is given, and that is, that it is a season of enjoyment for children and it is hard to deprive those who have not yet attained years of discretion of a reasonable pleasure.⁴

He suggested that the Jews give presents to each other on their appropriate holidays, that Judaism should teach self-denial, and that it was illogical and senseless to denounce Jewish customs and adopt Christian ones. He completed the editorial by stating:

Every reflective mind must, however, come to the conclusion, that setting apart Christmas, as a season of rejoicing and festivity, by Israelites is a hollow pretence--a mockery--if not an insult to two religions.⁵

In 1873, Wise, in the Israelite, published a short editorial regarding Christmas and its relation to the 32nd Congress. The unwritten inferences he left to the reader. It stated:

So easily is man imposed upon, that all Christendom celebrates Christmas on the 25th of December, as being the birthday of Jesus of Nazareth, when there is not one passage on record by which it can be proved as being a fact. The early Christians did not know it, and consequently had numerous birth-days of Jesus; and it is well established that the 25th of December was the birthday of the sun Mithra, Isis, Apollo, Bacchus, and etc., celebrated by 2/3 of all heathens of the Roman Empire. Nothing can be more certainly established than this, that the Christian traditions know not when Jesus was born, and Christmas is an ancient heathen feast imposed on Christendom by pope and council, and upon the United States by the 32nd Congress.⁶

Again, a few years later in 1877, Wise published another longer editorial including the history of Christmas with an all inclusive criticism of Jews and Christians and their Christmas celebration (see appendix 3). In the editorial he stated:

To make a public festival of the birthday of any man or demi-god is certainly not of Jewish origin. The Jewish festivals are memorials of events, in nature, history, or both, and the Christian, like the Pagan festivals are memorials of persons. There is no record in the New Testament or by the early fathers of the church of the time when Jesus was born. . . .

The Protestants still observe a day without any historical foundation and connected with most unbecoming recollections, doing homage to an edict

of the Emperor Justinian, is simply unprincipled, after they have rejected the authority of popes, councils, and imperial edicts. That Jews give Christmas gifts, have Christmas trees, and keep Christmas dinners, etc., in their families is ridiculous mockery by soft-brained individuals who live, on doing as others do and never having either an idea or a character of their own. That Congress of the United States have placed Christmas on our statute book as a holiday is a downright violation of rights and usurpation of power. That the public schools must be annually disturbed to keep a week of idleness in the best time for work is ridiculous. But most ridiculous are the Christmas sermons preached year after year on the text, "Christ was born."⁷

The Jewish Messenger printed a lengthy letter from its Baltimore correspondent, "Sulamith," [Henrietta Szold] in 1879. In the letter "Sulamith" described the New Years and then the Christmas holiday in glowing terms. She wrote that Jews were admiring and participating in them but were forgetting their own holidays. She drew the following analogy:

There is a most striking analogy. Then, the Greeks were introducing their licentious customs and pleasure into Israelitish homes, tainting even the names of our forefathers who were almost ashamed of their belief. Now, we are on the verge of being intoxicated by the glitter of our surroundings.⁸

"Observer," the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania correspondent to the Israelite, wrote in January 1880 about the efforts of the ministers to help the Jews return to Sabbath observance. They were using a two pronged method--the schools and sermons from the pulpit. The effect of the schools was reported in this incident involving Christmas celebrations:

The festivities of the season celebrated among our Gentile neighbors, are rarely forbidden in the Jewish home. There is a decided tendency to make Christmas as well as New Year a national observation upon the plea that many Christians do not take the cause of the holiday into consideration while participating in its enjoyment; presents are interchanged in Hebrew homes, and even trees decorated to please the children, who would otherwise be deprived of that which their neighbors enjoy. One little fellow--a Jewish lad--was noticed by his parents tearing down his tree. On inquiring the cause of the destruction of formerly so admired an object, he replied that his teacher at the Hebrew School had said that Jews ought to cry instead of being glad on Christmas, for in olden times many of our people were murdered on that day. Furthermore, he would take the candles off the tree and light them to keep Chanukah, as they did in the holy temple. Thus positive impressions fixed upon the forming intelligence will serve at least to counteract the tendencies of an atmosphere of indifference in which many of our offspring grow.⁹

In 1880, in New York, H. Abarbenel wrote to the American Hebrew about a problem he had been following for some years. He noted that the Jewish press had become excited over the fact that large numbers of Jewish children were attending a missionary school on 8th Street. He stated that this situation had occurred year after year because there was no Jewish school in the neighborhood, and congregations had so far refused to set up their own schools for the children. He was very critical of those who ignored this situation:

It is, moreover, an erroneous idea, and proves but a poor consolation to maintain that these children, are only during the winter and for the sake of Christmas, to be met with in this institution. . . .¹⁰

In January 1881, the Israelite published two very different letters from St. Louis, Missouri and Buffalo, New

York. The St. Louis letter, naming three of the city's rabbis (Sonneschein, Spitz and Messing) exulted in the synagogues' and Sabbath schools' celebrations:

These Chanukah celebrations have the wholesome effect of showing up the folly of some Israelites who do not blush at the apish imitation of giving Christmas trees. The number of Israelites celebrating Christmas is exceedingly small in St. Louis. You see we prefer keeping up our own institutions, instead of insinuating ourselves into such as have been foreign to us and our ancestors. The splendid little lights of Chanukah need not be supplanted by the Christmas lights and the Tannenbaum.¹¹

The Buffalo letter was highly critical of Christmas celebration with presents among the Jews. It stated:

Christmas passed quietly here and was observed as usual among the Israelites by plentiful presents to the children. If there is any practice to be condemned, I think it is this one. If there is so great a necessity for a day on which to give presents to the little ones, select one of our own holidays. Chanukah and Purim might well serve the purpose, and the celebrating of such a day with remembrances to our friends would soon bring back all the old significance of the festivals and raise them once more to the rank of real holidays.¹²

The American Hebrew reprinted the Buffalo letter one week later and made its own comments as follows:

This has a better ring to it than the wailing of despair at the "slipping from the consciousness of the people," of Sabbath and festivals and urging with weak-kneed vacillation that days of festive or sacred observance, be transferred or abolished.¹³

The American Hebrew gave tacit approval to the criticism of the Buffalo letter while supporting the suggestion of the correspondent.

The famous correspondent named "Maftir" wrote a letter describing the Christmas holiday in San Francisco to

the American Hebrew in New York. He wrote that the Jews had entered into the spirit of Christmas as much as the Christians did:

Business was not as bad as I imagined. Jewelers and dealers in sealskins and Japan goods did remarkably well but the poor people had to content themselves with a few bits worth of toys. The weather, which was very pleasant for the entire week was a godsend to our merchants, and many of them forgot the knout of the inquisition, and the "hep" while counting their receipts. . .¹⁴

The Boston Hebrew Observer printed an article entitled "The Jewish Christmas," on January 5, 1883 (see appendix 5). The article, written by "Horatius," contained a typical criticism of Jewish observance of Christmas:

It is difficult to conceive what motive impels a man to comply with forms and ceremonies which are entirely at variance with his own creed, and for which compliance there is no compulsion whatsoever. Some centuries ago, one might consider bigotry and fanatacism and their accompanying persecutions, a sufficient and even powerful incentive for the stifling of one's conscience. Yet such is the inconsistency of the human mind, that while our forefathers endured all the horrors and privations which religious tyranny aided by political avarice could devise, rather than give up one iota of their faith, their descendents need no further encouragement than their natural inclinations, tending by these attributes to substantiate the theory of the learned Darwin as to the origin of our race.¹⁵

Jacob Voorsanger's Sabbath Visitor, originally for children and then later a family paper, printed an editorial on December 21, 1883, critical of Jewish imitation of Christmas. It stated:

And now that the pleasant Chanukah days come around again, they are asking the same old silly question: "Under which kind, Bezonian?" Shall it be a Chanukah or a Christmas celebration? The answer to this question must be plain and direct.

We have no share nor heritage in the son of Joseph. The boastful pretense of his descent from the royal house of Jesse's son affects us not--and if good Christians, like the Presbyterians pay no attention to Christmas--except in so far as popular custom has made it a social holiday for them--why should Jews pay respect to a day that, of all other days, holds up the presumed truth of Christianity and the falsity of all other creeds? How Jews can swallow that is a mystery to us.¹⁶

One week after the Sabbath Visitor's editorial the Israelite published a long editorial on the same subject. It noted that Christmas was hardly known until a few years ago, that many still do not celebrate it even though Congress made it into a holiday, and that Chanukah is no holiday (holy day) because it was instituted long after the close of the Biblical Canon. It then went on to state that all businesses were open on Christmas except for government offices. After dismissing the Sonneschein incident (see chapter on Acceptance) it then criticized anyone that would believe the phrase "This day our God was born." Its advice to parents was:

Impress your children by words or deeds with rational thoughts and do not fool them with Santa Claus fables and the thought behind it, if Jesus was not God he was at least a great prophet, when you know he was neither. Let Christmas alone, let Chanukah alone. Have you no other Deiages?¹⁷

On January 11, 1884, the Israelite published a letter crying out for the Jews of Toledo, Ohio to turn away from Christmas pleasures and presents for the children:

Will the New Year coming have better prospects in store for Judaism in Toledo? Will the balance sheets of our Coreligionists here turn out so

favorable (and I do believe with the majority it will), that they will open their pockets and hearts (they are not so heartless after all) and show the spirit of progress, of faith in Israel, of love and care for their offspring, and fall in line with their sister cities of less importance of less capability and form a living monument to God and themselves, a congregation and Sabbath-school? Who will be the Moses in Toledo and bring his brethren from darkness to light? Who will make the start to organize.¹⁸

Once again the call is heard for an organized resistance to assimilation and the seductiveness of Christmas observance.

In an all encompassing editorial, the Boston Hebrew Observer, in 1884 compared Chanukah and Christmas. The editorial was hard on the uninformed parents of Sunday school children who wanted to celebrate Chanukah but were put off by their parents who, fashionably, offered them Christmas instead, including decorating a tree with tapers. The editorial brought together the positions of the Jews of the Middle Ages with that of the Jews of Europe and Russia when it stated:

While thus illuminating the eyes of their offsprings, at the same time if the truth were to be told, their elders would be forced to confess that those blazing tapers were instrumental in extinguishing the light from thousands of Jewish lives and homes, when bigotry alias Christianity flourished during the Middle Ages.

Nay, even to-day in dark Russia at the approach of this season the Jew is awe-stricken, and his life is balancing between the danger of bigotry and alchololism in which the mob indulge [sic].

With all these bitter reminiscences, the Jew of the period is not awakened to the fact that by showing disrespect for his own religion it will not secure for him the respect from the religion of

others. How truly and wisely Rev. Dr. Kohler last Saturday remarked, "Anti-Semitism and Jew-baiting are not aimed at those Jews true to their ancestral inheritance, but at those false Jews who are the instigators of breeding anti-Semitism and Judenhetze." The only consolation left us is, that those Jews disgracing Judaism are fashionable Jews by heart.¹⁹

The attendance at the Chanukah service at the beautiful and attractive temple with its thousand dollar leader and well trained choir was so small, in Erie, Pennsylvania, that "Lebos" wrote to the Israelite to complain about the Chanukah celebration of 1885. If everyone ignored Chanukah, he was certain they were not planning to ignore Christmas. He wrote:

Must this continue in Erie? Will not our people arouse themselves to instruct the young of their own religious Feast? Will they only instill into their minds the holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and be contented? We trust not. And to begin properly, at the foundation, let your Sunday-school and your temple be visited more regularly, and when holidays like Chanuka come upon us, impress it upon the young people's mind, not alone by instruction and lectures, but by other agreeable methods, as a Sunday-school entertainment, a party or gathering of some kind, where enjoyment can be had, so they can understand that if a Christmas must be had that- Chanukah, the Feast of Lights, was given entirely for their celebration as Jewish children.²⁰

The Baltimore correspondent of the Israelite wrote about Rabbi David Philipson's sermon regarding Christmas in 1887:

After stating that the Israelites had displayed great imitativeness in assimilating to themselves the manners of surrounding nations, which characteristic still clung to them, the rabbi devoted his remarks to the fashionable habit of celebrating Christmas, and severely animadverted upon the ridiculous aping of foreign customs by people who no longer observe any of their own. . . . He did

not intend, however, to ridicule the religious ideas of others, but he did intend to show the folly of Israelites who observed the days appointed to illustrate ideas wholly irreconcilable with their own religious belief. To hang up a stocking, to entertain strangers, to have a tree, is not a crime, but the principle is certainly wrong, as it is founded upon a desire to cater to the fashion of the day. Children should not be brought up with the idea that Christmas is anything to them. . . . In all things political let us be one with our neighbors; but let us draw the mark at the subject of religion. We are different here, and it is our task to perpetuate this difference so long as the rest of mankind refuse to accept the universal principles of our faith.²¹

Philipson then implored the Jews to cling to their religion and not become hypocrites due to expediency or fashion.

Parental leniency toward Christmas trees became the target for the criticism of "Close Observer," the Omaha, Nebraska correspondent to the Israelite. In January 1888 he wrote:

Of course it is urged that the "Christmas tree" is but an innocent amusement, giving pleasure to the children, etc., but these little innocent amusements unfortunately recoil and become almost the vengeance of Providence upon the perpetrators. Hence the present increase of intermarriages. Hence the disrespect of parents so apparently noticed almost daily. Hence that disregard for religion because so-called Jewish(?) parents misguide their own offspring, and teach them to "rejoice on the day which proved their parents' death knell."²²

From Dallas, Texas, in 1889, "Mezuzoth" wrote to the Israelite about Christmas in Texas and her personal feelings regarding its celebration:

There will be joy for the little ones to-morrow. The Jewish, like the Gentile children, will manipulate carloads of toys and shoot thousands of fire-crackers. Would it not be more sensible, more appropriate, if those of our Israelites who are in

the habit of giving "Christmas presents" to their little ones would do so on any of our holidays, such as Rosh Hashonah, etc. In the merriment that generally prevails on Christmas, with our little as well as with a large number of our big ones, few stop to think what all this fuss is about, or our coreligionists would certainly abolish such a nonsensical custom. Forgive me, dear reader, if I stepped on your toe, such are my candid views on this question.²³

One year later in 1890, "Azmed," in New Orleans, wrote to the Israelite that he, too, wished that Jews would save their fireworks, turkeys, and celebrating for Jewish holidays and not for the Christian holiday of Christmas:

But willing as we are to concede that the general joyousness prevailing is contagious to all, and causes our people to celebrate a day or days that they should have nothing to do with, willing as we are to accept wishes extended by Jews to Jews of a "Merry Christmas" or "A Happy New Year," still we think that it should teach them a lesson to be more observant of our own great and glorious festivals.²⁴

"Azmed" stated that it would be appropriate to remain home from work and to honor Christians for their holiday, but Jews must refrain from taking any further part of the festivities. Christians would have greater respect for Jews if they saw them upholding their own festivals and not aping those of Christians.

The Israelite published a lengthy response to some of the reasons that Jews used to celebrate Christmas with a tree in an article entitled "Christmas and Chanukah," on December 24, 1891. In the editorial, three Jewish men discuss why they felt it was acceptable for Jews to have Christmas trees. The first stated that Jews can have trees because it added to the enjoyment of the season. He went

on to ask why Jewish children should be deprived since the victory of the Maccabees no longer affected them? The second stated that Jews could have trees because it would show the Christian world that Jews had become liberal and forgave them for all previous persecutions. The third stated Jews could have a tree because even the Christians no longer regarded it as religious. Thus, Jewish children could observe Christmas because they and the Christians didn't believe in it. The author of the article, "X," decried the hypocrisy of the three men. He implored Jewish parents to resist requests from their children for Christmas trees. Instead, they should explain the origin of Christmas and the religious nature of the holiday as the friends of the children would learn it in their Christian Sunday school. Then the significance of Chanukah should be taught. If the parents would follow through with this advice then their children would be proud to claim their Jewishness.²⁵ (see appendix 12.)

The next week the Israelite published accounts of Rabbi Messing in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Rabbi Jacobson, in Salt Lake City, Utah, both giving sermons which were critical of Jewish celebrations of Christmas.²⁶ In the first issue of the new year, January 7, 1892, the Israelite followed with another article on the front page, entitled "A Jewish Opinion of Christmas," written by Moses P. Jacobson. Jacobson began the article by stating that the government's right to proclaim the holiday of Christmas was

highly questionable. He found the holiday un-American and transgressing the Constitution. He next condemned the Christian holiday itself in regards to the merry making and mirth. He identified Christmas as originally the pagan Saturnalia. Thus, the only significance Christmas had for anyone was that which custom placed upon it. Again he criticized the "unholy" nature of the festival. He touched upon presents, commercialization, and the spending for luxuries. He compared the gift giving customs to those of Purim. He concluded with the statement that Christmas offered more evidence of pagan character and reflected no honor on Christianity.²⁷ (see appendix 13.)

In a call to abolish the word "Christmas" from every Jewish home, the Jewish Chronicle of Boston, Massachusetts, published the following on December 30, 1892:

Our forefathers thoughtfully provided us with a Jewish new year, to correspond to its Gentile namesake, but for obvious reasons they furnished no holyday to take the place of Christian Christmas. But a certain class of our co-religionists must have a Jewish substitute for every Christian festival, so, naturally, they took Channukkah, the festival coincident with Christmas, as a substitute for the latter. Now, Christmas is a purely Christian affair, commemorating an idea entirely contrary to Jewish precepts, and therefore the observance of its rite is wholly out of place in a Jewish family. Nevertheless, in homes where the Menorah is a curiosity, we see the Christmas tree in all its glory, Christmas cards and gifts freely exchanged, and the children know the story of the crucifixion better than that of the Maccabees.

Some argue that the idea of the brotherhood of man, as taught by the Christmas ceremonies, is a great universal truth, and deserves to be copied. Yes, it is a great truth, but why copy it? Is not that very doctrine the basis of Jewish thought? We

do not need to borrow what is our own, and we should not borrow ceremonies which teach beliefs contrary to our religion. Come, sacrifice something to Judaism; abolish the Christmas parties, and in short, the word Christmas from all Jewish homes.²⁸

For a time the Israelite published a children's section entitled "Children's Corner." In this column "Aunt Babette" would talk with the youthful readers of the paper each week. The first directive concerning Christmas aimed at the children was published on January 3, 1895. It emphasized two important points: 1) that Jewish children had no affair with Christmas, and 2) that it would be inappropriate to celebrate the natal day of the founder of a religion which had given so much trouble to the Jews. "Aunt Babette" suggested that the appropriate action for children to take would be to use Christmas money for charity to relieve the distress that they saw about them daily. She then wished the children health and happiness in the new year.²⁹ (see appendix 14.)

Though Reform Judaism was making inroads toward the magnification of Chanukah into a major Jewish holiday through the use of the Sunday school festivals, orthodox critics continually blamed them for the decline of Chanukah and the rising of Christmas. On January 14, 1898, the Emanu-el Newspaper of San Francisco, published a letter-to-the-editor which not only said this but went on to proclaim, "My opinion is if Reformed Judaism would have started one hundred years ago there wouldn't have been a sign of Judaism by this day."³⁰ In the very next issue, Voorsanger addressed

the issues presented by the letter. He began by stating that Reform Judaism never condoned Christmas observance. He suggested that denunciations could not obviate the problem because it was the "times" which were responsible for Christmas acceptance among the Jews. Environment and associations have much to do with Christmas observance. Critics of Reform still pressed for political and social openness and advantage, homogeneity, and for the right of their children to freely and fully associate with their neighbors. They sent their children to the same schools as their neighbors, and wanted to do business with Christian fellows. These were all major factors embellishing Christmas in Jewish eyes. He concluded with:

It is very probable that the Christmas trees will continue to flourish in many Jewish homes, but we hope to have convinced our correspondent that no system can be held responsible for something that is purely resultant from association and environment. Personally and officially we have condemned the practice and will continue to do so, but we must insist at the same time that such condemnation does not cure the root of the evil. The sensible teachings of religion must ultimately influence a greater number than heretofore, and until then we can wait. Is not a thousand years but as one of God's yesterday's.³¹

One of Reform Judaism's most liberal rabbis was Emil G. Hirsch of Zion Temple in Chicago, Illinois. On January 7, 1897 the Israelite published a letter which it duplicated from the Chicago Israelite (see appendix). The author of the article, "Nickerdown," stated that Hirsch pleaded with his congregation for one and one half hours to observe Christmas as the greatest of holidays.

"Nickerdown" wrote that Hirsch said the following: Jewish businessmen were not asked to close their doors on the holiday for they could not do business on it anyway; if this were the birthday of Jesus, there never lived a better Jew; the Jews as a people did not crucify Jesus, maybe some traitors did, but not the people; Jews may celebrate his birthday for none has revolutionized humanity as much as Jesus. For "Nickerdown" this was a natural step for Hirsch to have taken, since he had earlier disenfranchised many Christians as well as all Jews who maintained the Sabbath, declaring all of them to be untrue Americans. "Nickerdown" continued:

But not satisfied with the assassin like blow at the good citizenship of the Jews, Dr. Hirsch now comes out with a warning equivalent to a statement, that the Jews make a mock and scoff of a day sacred to their Christian fellow-citizens. How untrue this is can be seen by the extent to which the Jews participate in the festivities of the Christmas season, and by the necessity felt by the entire Jewish press of warning its readers that danger to their own religion lies in their willingness to forget that Christmas is not a Jewish holiday.³²

"Nickerdown" found that some of the other statements which Hirsch made were so absurd that they should receive no consideration. For this reason he felt, out of kindness to the rabbi, that it should be assumed that the rabbi was incorrectly quoted. He stated that when the Christians began to think of Christmas as a day of holiness, then Jews might consider doing the same. However, Jews could not be expected to respect the holiday more than the majority of Christians do themselves.

Harris wrote a three page article, entitled "The Attitude of the Jew towards the Festivals of Christendom," for the American Hebrew, of January 8, 1899. He began the article by discussing the natural processes by which something is influenced by its environment. Judaism was no exception. He related that historically it was a sin to accept anything from the Gentile world and was a virtue to resist them. He felt that this attitude, which was almost the doctrine of Chukkat Hagoyim (rejection of the customs of non-Jews), was immoral. It prevented spontaneous worship for fear of copying anything non-Jewish. Harris considered it Jews' right to accept anything wherever it may be found if it was the best way for Jews to worship. But with regard to Christmas, Harris felt that Jews could not celebrate it because whatever the origin of the holiday, it had subsequently become a distinctly religious festival indissolubly linked with trinitarian theology, vicarious atonement, and abrogation of Mosaic law.

On the editorial page of the Israelite, on January 26, 1899, Wise took to task the learned rabbi who said from the pulpit that he had had a merry Christmas. Wise stated that he couldn't have celebrated Christmas for he did not believe that Christ was the messiah, so how could he have been "merry." Wise concluded that there must have been a mistake in the report regarding the rabbi.³⁴

By the end of the nineteenth century the major Jewish newspapers and rabbis with the exception of Sonnenschein in

St. Louis (see chapter on Acceptance) had clearly preached against the acceptance or the celebration of Christmas by Jews. While the Orthodox and Conservative movements sermonized against Christmas in favor of Chanukah, it was the Reform movement which was actively searching for a means of combating Christmas through synagogue Sunday school festivals. Jewish leaders decried the apathy toward Jewish festivals and the decline of Chanukah home observances. These trends continued into the twentieth century.

In a regular article, entitled "Random Thoughts," Rabbi Voorspan's Emanu-El printed the following paragraph on December 25, 1903:

Christmas rejoicings are but the fleeting passions of a people that in the period of rest turns to its cups; the true monotheist feels like discouraging such festivities, having no religious significance to the majority of people, not because he desires to rob them of their pleasure, but because he feels that the main issues of life dare not for the fraction of a moment be forgotten, lest the world, nodding like Jove slumbering after its orgy, misses valuable opportunities for enhancing its own happiness. And yet--the world will feast and slumber. History more often is the record of what humanity omitted to do for itself. For all that people will wish each other a Merry Christmas, and the monotheistic Jew leads the procession, his hands laden with gifts.³⁵

Jewish celebration of Christmas was recognized once more in the new century.

Annette Kohn, writing for the Israelite in 1904, wrote the following about Jewish observance of Christmas:

The pulpit can not find words to denounce too strongly this absurd thoughtless following of fashion, which is indulged in because it is easier to fall in with the practices of others than to trouble about a little originality, but which does not absolve the conscience or leave the heart free of guilt.³⁶

She repeated the criticism of Jewish Christmas observance in 1921 when she laid blame upon Jewish parents for the practice:

And now, we have the spectacle in modern Jewish homes of Jewish mothers and fathers neglecting the Chanukah lamps for themselves and their offspring and letting their children light the candles on the Christian Christmas trees in their own Jewish homes. At this point a Chanukah story naturally comes to an end--sadly to an end.³⁷

Kohn was supporting the magnification of Chanukah (see chapter on Accommodation).

Reacting to the increased European anti-Semitism, especially in Russia after the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903 and the recurring pogroms initiated by the government, the Israelite published an editorial regarding prejudice immediately after Christmas. It blamed Jewish lethargy and indifference for the abuses which were occurring in the United States. The editorial pinpointed two areas of concern--the Jewish businessman and the public school (see section on church and state in this chapter). In regard to the Jewish businessman it stated:

Unfortunately there is a flare up of prejudice, a revival of the sectarian spirit which comes unavoidably in the train of such a festival as Christmas. Here is one of the numerous occasions when it is well nigh impossible to draw a rigid line between outward assimilation and religious invasion. As the Jewish businessman over emphasizes Christmas to stimulate trade, he incurs dislike for the undignified role he plays; either he is using religious symbols in which he has no faith for the better filling of his pocket or else he is trying to degenerate a religious festival into a secular jollification; in both cases he antagonized sincere and genuine religiousness. These are some of the inevitable embarrassments of assimilation.³⁸

The Jewish press remained negative toward Jews celebrating Christmas. However, some of the papers would publish greetings for the season to its non-Jewish readers and advertisers. In an article entitled "A Jewish 'Merry Christmas,'" published in the December 25, 1908 issue of the American Hebrew, the author severely criticized the publishing of a card reading:

Jewish Review and Observer
Wishes its Readers
a
Merry Christmas and
Happy New Year

in a box in the Jewish Review and Observer Newspaper, Cleveland, Ohio. The writer stated:

The publication of such a card in a Jewish paper is more than outrageous, it is incomprehensible, and the Jewish daily press has rightly enough, and already entered a vigorous protest against this act. But I should like to absolve the young lady from guilt in the matter.³⁹

The lady in the article was the lady editor of the newspaper, Miss Jessie Cohen. The author felt that she had better sense than to write such an article, so he blamed an editing error caused by a copy boy. It was quite clear in the article that the author thought it inappropriate for a Jewish paper to wish Jews "A Merry Christmas." In comparison, in 1915 the Israelite published the following editorial:

While the religious significance and Christological background of Christmas and even New Years are at variance with Jewish doctrines, these festivals are so almost universally observed that while it would be inconsistent with their doctrines and faith for Jews to take part in them, still they can pass the compliments of the season with their non-Jewish neighbors and wish them a happy

new year. This the Israelite does to one and all, and more especially to its readers and advertisers, the majority of the latter being not of the Jewish faith.⁴⁰

While the Israelite changed its editorial policy, after Wise's death in 1900, and stopped publishing news of Chanukah festivals around the country, it continued publishing articles regarding Jews and Christmas. On December 30, 1915, during World War I, the Israelite defended Rabbi Joseph Silverman, of Temple Emanu-El, New York, when during his sermon he criticized Christianity for observing Christmas during the horror of the present war. The Israelite agreed that religion, as a restraining force for human passions, had been totally ineffectual during this war.⁴¹

When Christmas competed against Zionism it often lost the battle for observance. In 1886 Irma Lindheim was born into an assimilated German-Jewish family with anti-Zionist feelings. After 1917 she became strongly Jewish and Zionist. She was a first Lieutenant in the Motor Corps of America during the First World War; she was elected president of the Seventh District of the Zionist Organization in New York in 1919. In 1922 she entered the Jewish Institute of Religion as a rabbinical candidate but did not become a rabbi. In 1928 she went to live in Israel on Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek.

Previous to 1917 Lindheim had provided a Christmas tree for her children. She had believed, at the time, in celebrating Christmas as Americans do. She was bothered by the commercialization of the holiday and its religious

meaning. Her ten year old son, Norvin, Jr., had grown up with the tree and her other three children liked the tree as well. In 1918, as her Jewish identity expanded and she wished to enhance her childrens' as well, she substituted Chanukah for Christmas. Encouraged by her son Norvin, Christmas was no longer celebrated in their home.⁴²

Rabbi Samuel M. Gup, of Congregation Sons of Israel and David, Providence, Rhode Island in 1920, wrote his sermon for Chanukah 1920 which was published by the CCAR-UAHC in their yearly set of holiday sermons. Within the text of his sermon he noted the religious apathy and dullness of the day:

The consequence is that the progressive Jew thinks that religious freedom means not freedom to hold fast to his faith, but freedom to forsake it. In the Ghetto it was easy to observe; in the world at large, it is easier to let go. Residing as we do in the world at large amid surroundings uncongenial to the continuity of our religious loyalty, we Jews often drift into the adoption of those ideas and the practice of those customs which spring from the major denominations in our land. So current are the influences of Christian missionary activities, so subtly dominating are Christian interests in schools, clubs, colleges, politics, and social life, so penetrating are Christian attitudes into the view of the religious minorities of our land, that we Jews have too often taken these foreign concepts for granted and have inclined to regard them as our own. Our children are drawn into the participation in Christian festivities, especially at the Christmas season.⁴³

He continued his sermon with an attempt to relight the fires of enthusiasm in Judaism to combat these influences.

In 1925 the Israelite published an editorial regarding Jews and Christmas which downplayed the number of Jews

involved in the activity and the quality of their observance:

Christmas is not entirely without significance to the Jews of the United States. While it is not in any sense a holy day to them, it is more or less of a holiday and to a certain extent the giving of Christmas presents, which is a general custom among the non-Jewish population, prevails among the Jews to the limited extent of giving gifts to servants, children, and employees. In a very few Jewish families, where there are children, there are even Christmas trees, absurd as this may seem. Generally speaking, these people have not the remotest idea of the significance of the Christmas tree and are merely aping a Christian custom and giving their children the same enjoyment as is enjoyed by their non-Jewish associates. The Israelite has among its readers a number of non-Jewish readers and advertisers and to them it wishes a Merry Christmas and trusts they will enjoy the day to the fullest possible extent.⁴⁴

By 1930 little had changed with regard to criticism of Jews celebrating Christmas. In the Journal Union Tidings, published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon, Professor of Theology at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio would answer questions regarding the practices and beliefs of Judaism. In January 1930 the question he answered concerned the extent to which a Jew should become involved in Christmas. He answered that Christmas, though greatly commercialized and secularized, was still a major religious holiday for Christians. He wrote that Jews have to discipline themselves to stand their own ground because the character and origin of this holy day represented ideas and traditions diametrically opposed to those of Judaism. Besides, Judaism had plenty of holidays to celebrate and there was no need to borrow a Christian

festival. In regard to gifts he wrote:

In case Jews receive gifts for Christmas from Christians they have to accept them as tokens of friendship. Jews in turn may extend good wishes to their Christian neighbors and even send them gifts in honor of their Holy Days. But under no conditions have Jews any consistent ground for giving and receiving Christmas or Easter gifts among themselves, or for decorating their homes with the symbols of these seasons. Rather than seek justifications for celebrating Christian festivals, let us observe our own sacred seasons in cheer and joy, and thus strengthen our loyalty to our own faith.⁴⁵

Through the "thirties" and into the "forties" the same questions regarding assimilation and Jewish survival plagued the Jewish community. In 1941, Rabbi Theodore H. Gordon, of B'Nai B'rith Hillel Foundation of the University of California, challenged parents on the question of Christmas:

At the very outset it should be made clear that this is a problem of Jewish parents, not Jewish children. . . . The same mother who insists upon her child's eating spinach and washing behind the ears is somehow helpless to oppose his whims in the matter of a Christmas tree. The father, who, through the year, is not too concerned with giving his children a full and rich folk experience, becomes suddenly worried lest they "miss out on something beautiful and worthwhile."⁴⁶

The answer to Gordon's criticism lay in the establishment of strong celebrations of Jewish holidays such as Chanukah. The Jewish child cannot and should not be shielded from Christmas in the major culture, but with a strong Jewish commitment in the family there will be no need to celebrate Christmas.

During the Second World War editorials compared the Maccabees' struggle for freedom of religion with the fight

against the Axis powers as a struggle for freedom of the free world. There was little criticism of Christmas or Christianity at this time; everyone needed to support each other in the titanic fight overseas. However, the Christmas tree was still a target for Chaplain David I. Cedarbaum in his Chanukah sermon of 1944. After discussing Hellenism in ancient Israel as a force which undermined the Jews and led to the Hasmonean revolt, he discussed the erroneous patriotism of those Americans who would have accepted what they considered as constructive Nazi methods for dealing with problems. This unquestioning type of Hellenization made it harder to begin fighting the war because there existed a fifth column to fight as well. Drawing an analogy, Cedarbaum stated that the modern Hellenizing Jew was prepared to accept the major superficial culture of the day. Meanwhile, Judaism was fighting its war of survival. He then stated:

One of the most blatant forms of Hellenism, at this time of year, is the spectacle of Christmas trees in Jewish homes. You are familiar with the arguments offered in favor of such practices. "The tree is beautiful"; "we do it to amuse the children"; or, "so that our children may not get the feeling that they are different"; there is nothing wrong in our having a tree--we can still be good Jews."

This business of Christmas trees in Jewish homes is not only a desecration of Judaism. It is an insult to Christians and to Christianity. This tree is a sacred symbol to the Christians. Why should a Jew dare to regard it as a mere toy?⁴⁷

He continued by expressing his feeling that the right of a nation to freedom can only be expressed if the nation is

willing to fight for it. Consequently, Jews must fight for Judaism and discard Christmas and its trees in favor of Jewish holidays.

The formidable Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, of the Free Synagogue of New York City, founder of the Jewish Institute of Religion, wrote a letter in answer to an inquiry about Christmas from David Matas in 1944:

To David Matas, Brooklyn

December 13, 1944

In regard to your question concerning the Jewish celebration of Christmas, I must answer, as I have a thousand times, that Christmas is the very beautiful festival of Christians and that Jews, as Jews, should not, in loyalty to our own faith, celebrate the religious festival of a sister religion. I do not say that Jews are to attend Christmas functions to which their non-Jewish friends invite them; but I do insist that Hanukkah is so full of meaning for us. . . that we should celebrate it, particularly at this time, with all the fervor that characterized our fathers. The Menorah and the kindling of the lights are a vital part of Jewish tradition and are symbols at least as beautiful as the Christmas tree.⁴⁸

The American Jewish Congress came out strongly in 1946 in the Congress Weekly with this statement:

Whatever the manner in which Americans of various classes celebrate Christmas, the observance of the day which marks the birth of the Savior is nothing and can be nothing but a Christian religious holiday. The Christmas tree with all the folklore of songs, legends and customs that have developed around it is a product of the Christian religious civilization. The adoption of this Christian holiday under the pretense of being secular is one of the most conspicuous lies which Jewish confusion employs to justify the loss of its faculty to differentiate between what is Jewish and what is not.⁴⁹

The Congress Weekly republished the statement in 1948 after World War II, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the post-Holocaust revival of Jewish identity in the United

States. Parents were again criticized for their influence or lack thereof in the Christmas celebration dilemma:

Parents who seek to shield their children in their early years from a consciousness of their difference as Jews by introducing them at home or in school to Christian and Christmas symbolism or ceremony, are thus unwittingly rendering them a grave and lifetime disservice. For they are attempting to protect them from a consciousness at the same time denying them the equipment with which to meet its impact.

Nor is the problem met by introducing the child simultaneously to both sets of symbols by having both a Christmas tree and Chanukah lights in the home or by joint celebrations in the school. The child is more than likely to accept both equally. Having accepted the symbolism of the Christian world, he is later unable to understand why, as a Jew, he remains different. Symbols have meaning only to the degree to which by their incisiveness they are able to evoke a sense of tradition and a set of values. An admixture of religious ceremonies does not make⁵⁰ for common understanding but for common confusion.

The editorial continued with admonishments to parents warning them not to allow their children to participate in Christmas, neither at home nor in school. It was after World War II that many schools began to inject Jewish programs into their Christmas celebrations. The American Jewish Congress, one of many Jewish organizations attending to the problems inherent in the separation of church and state, had been fighting Christmas observances in the public schools for some time. In this editorial the parents were criticized for allowing matters to continue as they had in the past in their homes and in the schools.

At times the usual criticism becomes an overworked strategy. Jews have read this type of literature for years. It made hardly an impression. In 1952 Rabbi Stanley R. Brav,

of Rockdale Ave. Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio, wrote and published an article entitled "Yuletide Vignette, A Study in Irony" in the November 1952 issue of the Synagogue Service Bulletin of the UAHC (see appendix 18.) Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman, Director of Synagogue Activities, directed the various letters of protest to the article back to Brav. One complaint regarding the sardonic article came from Mrs. Hugo Dalshimer, who was elected president of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods at the Reform biennial which came after the publication. Mrs. Dalshimer found the article in the worst possible taste as a "Study Sarcasm." She hoped, in her letter to Lipman, that this article would not "fall into the hands of 'Our Neighbors,' who I feel would have just cause for resentment, and Criticism. It seems self-condemnation to me that we resort to such tactics to drive home a point."⁵¹ (see appendix 20.) A second complaint came from Rabbi Norman Goldberg, of Temple Children of Israel, Augusta, Georgia, who said in his undated letter (see appendix 19.)

Never in all my years in the Reform Rabbinate have I witnessed writing so vulgar, so calculated to promote division between Jew and Gentile and so vengeful in its intentions.⁵²

Lipman answered both Dalshimer and Goldberg with personal letters supporting the publishing of the article, which was written under the pseudonym of S. Rush Barkton. This was Lipman's and not Brav's idea (see appendix 21 and 23.) In his letter to Dalshimer he commented:

This article is an important one because it points up effectively a problem which Reform Jews have permitted to reach dangerous and non-sensical proportions. Rabbis all over the United States are plagued for two months each year with irrational arguments about this new "national" holiday of Christmas. In too many cases, I am sorry to say, our congregational leadership has not been backing the rabbi in his insistence that Christmas is a Christian holiday and that it is disrespectful for Jews to observe it.⁵³

In regard to the problem of Christian's misunderstanding the intent of the article, Lipman wrote a short paragraph to both Dalshimer and to Goldberg. In the letter to Goldberg he stated:

Since Synagogue Service Bulletin is published for the leadership of the Reform movement in the United States, "Yuletide Vignette" is a valid article to appear in its pages. All too frequently the officers and board members of our congregations, who are the sole recipients of this magazine along with rabbis, do not support their spiritual leaders in our campaign to promote Jewish observance by Jews. For me at least it is a far more serious breach of good taste for Jews to have such little self-respect and such little respect for their Christian neighbors that they observe Christian holidays, than for us to use the medium of irony in discussing this problem. I am deeply aware of the need for promoting good relations with our Christian neighbors. It is my considered opinion that this article, far from having the effect you visualize, tends to the right direction.⁵⁴

Brav wrote directly to Dalshimer to clarify some of the statements which she made in her letter to Lipman. (see appendix 24) Brav had submitted the article to G. Barrett Rich III, who was pastor of Cincinnati's First United Church but later became the pastor of the new Fourth Presbyterian Church of New York City. He wanted the Christian view of the article. Rich wrote to Brav and stated the following (see appendix 22):

As a Christian minister I can see nothing to which a member of my faith can object in the article. Whether Jews observe Christmas or not is to my mind a purely Jewish question.⁵⁵

Brav sent Rich's answer to Dalshimer. In an attempt to explain the reasons for his article, which were the frustrations he had met at trying to educate Jews about the genesis and significance of Christmas, he wrote:

Our preachments in serious vein have been greeted by deaf ears, on this issue. Possibly we stand just as good a chance of success, if not better, by trying to laugh this ridiculous idea out of court. Furthermore, we evidently have considerable education still to effect among our top ranking lay leadership. All this requires at least a few rabbis with strong feelings on the subject.⁵⁶

This exchange showed the strong differences of opinion regarding the handling of the Christmas problem, both in the rabbinate and between rabbis and lay leaders in the early 1950's.

Rabbi Samuel Glasner, of the Board of Jewish Education, Baltimore, Maryland, in 1954, published an article entitled "A Jewish Attitude Towards Christmas-A Letter To Parents" in The Jewish Teacher magazine of the UAHC. The "letter" was part of a larger unit for Jewish teachers entitled "Teachers' Outline for Discussion on a Jewish Attitude toward Christmas." Teachers, ever since the beginning of Jewish schools, have had much of the brunt of attempting to stem the tide of Christmas observance. This unit was an attempt to help them meet the challenge; the letter was attempting to sensitize the parents to the

problem. Glasner was quite specific about the outcome of Christmas observance when he wrote in "the letter":

Unfortunately, there are some who delude themselves into believing that Christmas is not a religious holiday, but an American folk holiday. "After all," they say, "the Christmas symbols are only harmless folkways that have no real importance." Our Christian friends would hardly welcome this cavalier attitude toward their holy season. And from a Jewish standpoint it is likewise deceptive. For it is just such "harmless" things which may draw your child from his Jewish interests, and even from the Jewish people. It is not so much what a person thinks or believes that determines the character of his life, whether it is a Jewish life he is leading or a non-Jewish one. It is what he does, the customs he keeps or neglects, the stimuli which evoke in him a thrill of appreciation or leave him cold and unmoved, if not antagonistic.⁵⁷

Glasner stated that parents who allow their children to have Christmas trees or observances in their homes are doing their children great harm. In essence, they are raising their children with a sense of escapism from Judaism. They must openly and consistently identify with Judaism and with Jews not with Santa Claus and trees. It was not necessary to dwell on the negative aspects of the Christmas holiday, the persecutions and pogroms, but children should be made aware of them. With this solid identification with Judaism, Glasner stated, "the Jewish child need not hesitate to participate in the Christmas activities of his school, his club, his Scout troop, or the like. He should be governed, however, by some standards of good taste."⁵⁸ The child would not be expected to act as the "Christmas Angel," to kneel before the cross, or to proclaim anything about Christ. He would be able to sing carols, if they fit in with his

sensibilities, to give-and receive Christmas gifts and to send cards to his Christian friends. It would be important for the parents to accentuate the positive in the Jewish holiday of Chanukah. Magnification of the Chanukah holiday would help his mental health and stability.

The question of participation in Christmas programs in the public schools by Jewish children will be discussed in this chapter in the section regarding the Separation of Church and State.

The December 24, 1954 issue of the Reconstructionist contained an editorial claiming that Christians resented Jewish secular observance of Christmas. The editorial began by negating the argument that Christmas was no longer a religious holiday and that the symbols, such as the tree, no longer held religious meaning. Then the editorial stated:

If Jews think that Christians want them to appropriate Christmas, they are mistaken. Christians resent any attempt to secularize the festival. For them that is a profanation of something holy. The papers, these days, are full of appeals to "put Christ back into Christmas." For Jews, whose forefathers rejected the divinity and messianic role of Jesus while he lived, and who themselves still reject the Christ myth, whatever respect they may have for Jesus of Nazareth as a man, it is an intrusion and impertinence to want to share in the celebration of Christmas. Far from making for good interfaith relations, the observance of Christmas by Jews as a holiday and the parading of its symbols are likely to arouse resentment.⁵⁹

Rabbi Herbert Weiner, in his Chanukah sermon of 1956, criticized many of the previously discussed topics: participation in Christmas because it is popular, the

inability of parents to say "no" to their children, the ill feelings of Christians. In his reply to the problem, Weiner discussed the magnification of Chanukah. For Weiner, the magnification of Chanukah was a great mistake because it became a cheap imitation of Christmas. The chief meaning of Chanukah is the well known "truth" that it is not the big but rather the small and not the multitude but rather the few in which true greatness will be found. Chanukah warned the Jews against imitation, the worst form of which was the type which kept the name but wasted the essence. This was exactly what was happening at that time with Christmas and the Jews.

In 1958 the Conservative Movement printed a pamphlet entitled Our December Dilemma by Rabbi Abraham J. Karp, of Temple Beth El, Rochester, New York.⁶⁰ The pamphlet was one of a series entitled "Your Child and You-A Pamphlet Series for Jewish Parents." It was a guide in handling the many questions concerning what Jewish parents could do to help their children understand Christmas and its inappropriateness for Jewish celebration. Within the pamphlet Karp provided a series of questions and answers about the many topics concerning the Christmas season. The answers were the expected negative ones toward the tree and Santa Claus. Karp gave positive answers toward a Jewish child attending the Christmas party of a friend or the giving of a Christmas present to a non-Jewish friend. The importance of the pamphlet was the organized approach and the ready answers which parents could

use to support the rejection of Christmas celebrations for their children. Karp's questions and answers have been copied in many different forms and have been reprinted and copied by very many synagogues, rabbis, and organizations since their publication. One other important feature of the pamphlet was the postscript on the last page, entitled "POSTSCRIPT: A Letter From A Christian - To one of my best friends--a Jew."⁶¹ The letter expressed the sorrow a Christian felt when a Jewish friend showed him a Christmas tree in his house (see appendix 25). This letter has become widely copied in many synagogue bulletins since the time of the pamphlet's printing.⁶²

Milton Matz studied a group of 53 middle class South Side Chicago Jewish parents for their attitudes towards Christmas in 1958 (see the section on Statistics in the chapter on Acceptance). They were second and third generation Reform Jews affiliated with local Reform Temples. He published an article entitled "The Meaning of the Christmas Tree to the American Jew" in the June 1961 issue of the Jewish Journal of Sociology. In the limited study he found that the third generation Jew was interested in maintaining a Jewish identity because he felt at home in America. Following Will Herberg's work in Protestant-Catholic-Jew, the third generation Jew knew if he did not have a religious identity he would be considered as not having a name. This identity however found the non-religious universal American symbolism of the Christmas tree very attractive. Matz

concluded that the third generation would eventually give up the Christmas tree and seek other means of symbolizing their at-homeness in America once they realized that appropriating the religious symbols of another group is divisive.⁶³ Further research would be needed to prove whether Matz's judgment was correct.

Another research project, in 1960, with the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, by Irving Canter (see the section on statistics in the chapter on Acceptance) polled 868 Jewish teenagers on their attitudes regarding Christmas. Canter found that instead of assimilating, the teenagers were actually evidencing selective acculturation, a strategy which would defeat the outright acceptance of Christmas. This was proven by the teenager's great interest in the development of Chanukah and the incorporation of Christmas symbols in Chanukah terms, such as "Chanukah Bush" and "Uncle Sam, the Chanukah Man."⁶⁴

While Matz and Canter were finding encouraging conclusions regarding the struggle against Christmas observance, Rabbi Julius Mark, the senior rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, New York called, in 1961, for Jews not to contribute to the secularization of Christmas. Cardinal Cushing was pleading with modern pagans to leave Christmas to the Christians, when Rabbi Mark made this statement which was published in the New York Times:

"I sympathize wholeheartedly with my colleagues of the Christian faith--both Catholics and Protestants--who have been protesting against

the commercialization and the paganization of Christmas. . . ."

"Some Jews say that it's a national holiday," Rabbi Mark commented. "Well, it isn't. It's a religious holiday, a solemn occasion, not a time for the rejuvenation of the Roman saturnalia."

Jewish families, he said, should not adopt the Christmas parties and the Christmas trees--cultural trappings of the day. Some Jews excuse the trimming of a Christmas tree on the ground that it had a pagan origin, the rabbi said.

"It's wrong for us to tell our neighbors that their religious celebration is pagan," he asserted. "The Christmas tree today, regardless of its origin, has a specific religious significance."65

Cantor Joseph L. Portnoy, of Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco, designed a program for the Religious School in reaction to the approach of the Christmas-Chanukah season of 1962. His goal was to eradicate or minimize the introduction of Christmas symbols in the homes of his students. During a Chanukah chapel service for the 5th and 6th grades Portnoy gave a visual presentation and explanation of some of the Christmas symbols such as the tree, mistletoe, holly, angels' hair, and Christmas gifts. After the presentation one of the children asked him directly if this meant he should not have a Christmas tree in his home. Portnoy responded with a question in return, asking the child to draw a conclusion based on what he had just learned. At the conclusion of this short article Portnoy recommended that only courageous principals and teachers should use this approach as it brought many complaints from parents who celebrated Christmas. Yet, Portnoy explained that he had merely presented factual information without attempting to indoctrinate, coerce, or

judge any person's observance of any holiday. If this meant that there were problems within the family then the family should deal with them as a unit. Portnoy commented that "here was one example of religious education that lent itself to the principle of education considered as a vital, ongoing process."⁶⁶

Another frequently reproduced article to help with Christmas problems is that of Roland B. Gittelsohn, rabbi of Temple Israel, Boston, Massachusetts, in 1965, entitled "The Menorah Or The Tree?". Gittelsohn countered the argument that Christmas was a secular, national holiday by explaining each of the Christmas symbols, showing them to have religious significance. His final comment answered the question whether Jews, understanding the religious symbols, could celebrate Christmas as a secular occasion without accepting the theology behind the symbols. His reply was to ask if Jews had the moral right to? The answer was negative. He concluded:

If the season of Chanukah and Christmas is always to be one of peace and goodwill, let both Jew and Christian remember that they have a right to perpetuate and preserve their particular cultural and religious mores and that any attempt at reckless and superficial 'assimilation' are as stupid as they are bound to be futile.⁶⁷

On December 25, 1965, Rabbi Julius Mark, of Temple Emanu-El, New York, delivered the sermon "Why Hanukah is no 'Jewish Christmas.'" Mark commented:

Many misguided people have the idea that Hanukah might be reshaped into some kind of "Jewish Christmas." All such efforts are

ultimately an exercise in futility, since these festivals have entirely different meanings and arouse entirely different memories in the minds and hearts of those who observe them.⁶⁸

Mark mentioned the coincidence in time of the two holidays; both Judaism and Christianity adopted a holiday of light. The significances of each are very different. What really mattered was what the symbols meant to each of the celebrants today and not what the origins were. Because they were so different, the Jew could not accept Christmas nor turn Chanukah into a Jewish Christmas.

The church's annual campaign to bring Christ back into Christmas was enthusiastically supported by the rabbis of Louisville, Kentucky in 1968. Rabbi Martin M. Perley, who was rabbi of B'rith Sholom Temple in Louisville, commented, "It is an offense to Christmas for Jews to celebrate it as a secular holiday without accepting its religious significance."⁶⁹ The rabbis of Louisville recommended magnification of Chanukah to replace Christmas celebration.

The theme that "it is an offense to Christians if Jews turn Christmas into a non-religious universal holiday" was reiterated in 1968, by Rabbi Harold D. Hahn, of Ohef Sholom Temple, Norfolk, Virginia. In the congregational bulletin of December 13th, he wrote:

And this is really the basis of my objection. It is not that the tree is pagan, un-Jewish, or who-needs-it-anyhow-since-we-have-Hanukkah-for-Eight-Nights, but that, increasingly the Christian world will come to resent the Jew who mocks at deeply held Christian beliefs by

imitating them without the conviction of their truth. This is really the meaning of the phrase, "Let's put Christ back into Christmas." The Christian knows that Christmas is--or should be--holy to Christians and he will have no respect for the Jew who is confused or unhappy about his own faith.

Parents tell me they find it hard to refuse their children when they demand a tree or don't want to deprive them of the glitter and excitement of Christmas. Others over-react, saying that "Christmas doesn't hold a candle to Hanukkah" and do up Hanukkah so enticingly and dramatically that even Judah the Maccabee wouldn't recognize it.

Hanukkah should be observed in a simple and reverent way; it should not compete with Christmas. And parents if they are truly convinced of the rightness of their decision should not find it any more difficult to meet their children's demand for a tree than their desire to burn down the house; the answer is "NO."⁷⁰

Another short guide for the Jewish parent, to help with the Christmas problems in the month of December, was written by Rabbi Manuel Gold, Education Director of the Jewish Community Center in White Plains, New York, in 1969. He acknowledged the beauty and seductive quality of Christmas for Jews but made the distinction that Jews were not participants in Christmas, but observers of Christmas:

To participate in these symbols, by having them in our homes, is not compatible with Judaism. It is not a realistic justification to say, "We have them in our homes as winter symbols, not Christmas symbols." In fact, that belittles these sacred Christian symbols by turning them into mere decorations. It would be sufficient cause to offend a devout Christian.⁷¹

Though it is difficult for parents to deny their children's desires, that is the realistic role for the American Jew when it comes to the celebration of Christmas. In 1970, Rabbi

Joseph R. Rosenbloom, of Temple Emanuel, St. Louis, Missouri published his book, A Living Faith, a compilation of those sermons which he thought were most meaningful. Among those sermons was one entitled "A Christmas Sermon for Chanukah." Rosenbloom stated that it was sad that Jews would identify with the majority and celebrate a holiday which had no meaning for them while Christians were failing to respond to the religious aspect of Christmas. He felt there was no reason why Jews could not share in the spirit of the season without giving up any of their Jewish identity. Without accepting the symbols of Christmas the Jew could feel the friendliness and kindness offered by Christians.⁷² His concept of "sharing," predating Gold by 6 years, comes quite close to Gold's concept of "observing."

Rabbi William Sajowitz, of Temple Beth El, Flint, Michigan, wrote Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof, noted Talmud scholar and Reform rabbi, asking if Jews can join together to worship with Christians, and more specifically can Jewish children participate in Christmas celebrations. Freehof, after citing several legal traditions, noted that it was permissible (even in the Shulchan Aruch) for Jews to participate and rejoice with Christians on the day of their festivals. This was in order to maintain friendly relations between the Gentile and Jewish communities. While it was not forbidden for Christians to participate in Jewish worship, it was forbidden for Jews to participate in any trinitarian worship. Therefore, Freehof determined that Jews could participate in

festival rejoicing with Gentiles, but if there was any trinitarian element involved then the Jew would be forbidden to participate in the worship or celebration. For public school children this would permit them to participate in seasonal programs as long as Christian symbols and Christological programming were not part of the festivities. Freehof published this response (responsum) in 1973.⁷³ The date of the original question is unknown.

The daily newspaper Newsday, Long Island, New York, has a readership made up of a great many Jews. On December 24, 1972, Newsday published an article by Rabbi Harold I. Saperstein, which was later published in the December 1974 issue of the Jewish Digest. The article, entitled "When Children Ask 'Why No Christmas Tree?'" , attempted to help parents with their perennially recurring problem of what to say to their children regarding Christmas trees. Saperstein wrote that it was insensitive and improper for Jews to observe Christmas. Parents should tell their children frankly that the holiday does not belong to them. Though Christmas is a lovely holiday Jews can only be guests of Christians at their parties; Jews do not have Christmas parties of their own. Saperstein impressed the point that the Jewish heritage must be present in such a way that the child will understand the beauty of his own culture. In order to maintain that heritage the Jewish child must sacrifice something--Christian holidays. It was imperative to help children understand that they can be different from

their neighbors without apology and live side by side in peace.⁷⁴

In 1978 the Womens League for Conservative Judaism published the Guide for the Jewish Homemaker. In the section entitled "Patriotic Holidays," the book discussed Christmas and Easter. It very specifically stated:

Jews should recognize and respect the religious quality of their friends' and neighbors' holidays. Although they may respond to the season's greetings of their non-Jewish friends and associates, it is quite out of place for Jews to introduce the spirit of Christmas or Easter into their own homes. The use of Christmas or Easter symbols, even secularized ones like the Christmas tree or lights, or the Easter eggs or bunny, are absolutely out of place in a Jewish home.⁷⁵

It was permissible, according to the book, for Jewish children to accept home invitations, even to parties, at Christmastime or Easter.

Warren and Rebecca Boroson wrote about Jewish reactions to Christmas in 1979 for the magazine Jewish Living.⁷⁶ In the article, they wrote about the Jews that ignore Chanukah and choose Christmas, the orthodox or traditional Jews that choose Chanukah and ignore Christmas, and the third category, Jews who took parts of both holidays and combined them. Rabbi Martin Freedman of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in Paterson, New Jersey coined a phrase for this type--"Christmanukah." Freedman felt that "Christmanukah" doesn't work and leads to family friction and individual confusion, especially among the children. The article ended with the many options available to Jews to become active in

their own heritage rather than to celebrate a holiday which is not a part of it.

Though many articles have been written in the 1980's regarding personal Jewish experiences during the Christmas-Chanukah season, including popular "ladies magazines" which began publishing them in the 1970's, very few have suggested that parents and children meet together in dialog to confront the issues together. One article which approached this subject was written by Rabbi Cary Kozberg in the Fall/Winter 1980 issue of Compass Magazine, the educational magazine published by the UAHC. At Temple Sholom in Springfield, Ohio, he designed and implemented a program of family participation during one night of Chanukah. The family context of a Chanukah celebration encouraged the entire family to participate. The families brought their chanukiyah, the Chanukah menorah, candles, and a box supper. The temple supplied drinks, dessert, and latkes (potato pancakes which are a traditional food for Chanukah). The program was called "The MENORAH Caught in a Tree." The varied program consisted of lectures and film strips on the historical significance of Christmas and Chanukah, discussions divided by age group, discussions together, and values clarification exercises. In regard to the success of the program Kozberg stated:

To be sure, the problems were not "solved" and much of the program needs to be reviewed and revamped. But the issues were now seen by the participants with the perspective that comes from sharing with, and listening to other individuals confronting the same dilemma. It was "successful"

in some ways and "unsuccessful" in other ways. But I do know of at least two families in attendance who did not put up Christmas trees this year.⁷⁷

One of the "seasonal" articles appearing in a popular magazine, which approached the Christmas-Chanukah problem with more than a wistful nostalgic look upon past or future Chanukah's, was an article entitled "A Jewish Mother Copes with Christmas" published in the November-December 1981 issue of Mothers' Manual Magazine. Lynne Friedlander, the author, wrote about her assimilated Jewish family which celebrated Christmas but did not bring a tree into the house. At the birth of her daughter she found the excuse to bring the Christmas tree, denied her all these years, into her home. Her Jewish husband, who had Christmas trees as a child, accepted the tree with little interest. Perhaps, she felt, that one of the major reasons she could celebrate with the tree was that she moved from California to Honolulu and felt separated from mainstream Judaism. But a magazine article on whether Jewish children should celebrate Christmas bothered her greatly. She began to have doubts. When a Jewish friend was about to drop by to pick up a book, Friedlander felt embarrassed by the presence of the tree and arranged to deliver the book instead. She finally made the decision to discontinue the Christmas tree. Her daughter was 6 and 1/2 years old and had been going to Sunday school for two years. She allowed her daughter to keep a few ornaments to help the transition period and disposed of the

rest. From that point onward the family would admire the decorations and participate at other people's parties. Friedlander became an active participant in her own religion.⁷⁸

Rabbi Moshe A. Birnbaum, of Temple Shaare Tefilah, Norwood, Massachusetts, offered his thoughts on maintaining Jewish identity in his "December Dilemma: Challenge to Creative Jewish Living," published by the Jewish Advocate of Botson on December 17, 1981. To Birnbaum, one is a Jew when one lives "Jewishly." The motivation to live Jewishly especially in times of adversity was the feeling that Jews were a "chosen people." Modern Jewish thinkers have felt that the concept of "chosen people" was troublesome because in this day and age Jews lived in a democracy. If Jews were chosen then others were not. This would play into the hands of anti-Semites. Consequently, some have discarded the concept of the chosen people. However, Birnbaum stated that no matter what Jews do, some will still hate the Jews. He recommended that this special feeling of chosenness be once more revitalized and transmitted to Jewish children. Then they will feel special, different, and positive. It did not mean that there was any genetic superiority or special monopoly on religious truth. It did mean warm, familial feelings, group solidarity, and the sense of self-worth. He concluded the article with familiar arguments about enhancing Jewish life, keeping the celebration of Chanukah, and rejecting the celebration of Christmas.⁷⁹

One group where the potentiality for problems with Christmas would seem to be high is that of converts to Judaism from Christianity. A lifetime of Christmas observance would conflict with the values and traditions of their newly chosen faith. An article, entitled "Why No Christmas Tree: A Letter from a Jewish Convert to Her Christian Mother" appeared in the December 28, 1951 issue of the Reconstructionist journal. The name of the author of the article was withheld "for obvious reasons" by the editors. The letter began with the author's reasoning regarding her rejection of Christmas:

I have found that, as long as you are not sure what you believe, it doesn't seem to matter too much; but when you begin to know what you believe, it begins to matter a great deal. And then, to act at variance with that belief becomes a thing that is bound directly to your whole feeling of personal integrity. . . .

To be Jews all year except at Christmas time is the sort of a compromise of which I could not be proud; it is the sort of action that would symbolically nullify the meanings of both Judaism and Christianity.⁸⁰

"Deborah," the name given to the author by the editors, repeated many of the usual answers to questions such as secular-versus-religious holiday, denial of childrens' feelings, meanings of holiday symbols, and parental answers to children. After a short history and significance of Chanukah, "Deborah" then stated:

Please do not imagine that I intend to ban Christmas from the lives of the children as if it did not exist. After all, Christmas is in the very air we breathe for over a month. They have it at school, over the radio, downtown, everywhere

They will inevitably participate in the mood of Christmas, and enjoy the mood that it engenders among people; and perhaps they will begin to learn that it is possible in life to appreciate many things that are not claimed as one's very own. But what is most personal and basic and fundamental in their own home, what is most essentially the expression of their own spirit will be the Feast of Lights. The acts of faith will be Jewish acts of faith, because they are Jews.⁸¹

By 1978 converts to Judaism were no longer using pseudonyms. Jane Goldstein grew up in the same town as her husband, Jan. Because Jan's Judaism was important to him, Jane began to talk about and learn about Judaism. One month before their wedding Jane converted to Judaism. Jan eventually became more motivated and entered the rabbinical program of Hebrew Union College. One year after they were married, in 1970, Jaffa was born. They made the decision that in order to help develop their child's Jewish identity they would not visit Jane's parents during the Christmas season, at least not while the children were at a young age. They found that Jane's parents were very supportive and sent Chanukah gifts and "gelt" (Money). Jane stated that even after Elisha (next after Batsheva) was born they had never had a problem with their children regarding Christmas or a tree. She attributed this to their conscious effort to maintain a Jewish lifestyle in the United States.⁸²

Linda Byard approached the subject of converts and Christmas in her article "Is There Anything After Conversion? Two Views" in the December 1979 issue of The Reconstructionist. One of the topics Byard discussed was that of Christmas

observance. She felt that Christmas observances were not appropriate in a Jewish home. This became problematic when the time came to explain it to the family of the convert.

She suggested:

When the non-Jewish relatives celebrate Christmas, they are likely to invite the Jewish couple to partake in the festivities. It is appropriate for this couple to participate in much the same way that any other Jewish couple might, if invited to spend a non-Jewish holiday with close, gentile friends. In other words, exchanging presents, eating holiday foods, possibly even attending a religious service, all may be appropriate acts with one important qualification. One participates as a Jewish visitor, not as a Christian. Reciprocation might be in the form of sharing a Jewish holiday at the Jewish home.⁸³

Since children always complicated matters, they should be told early on that either Mother or Dad was not always Jewish and that Grandma and Grandpa from that side are not Jewish, too. However, everyone still loved and accepted everyone else. Byard commented:

It is permissible to take children to their grandparents for Christmas, as long as they understand that it is their grandparents' holiday which is being celebrated. And if they receive gifts, which they almost inevitably will, it must be explained clearly that it is a Christmas custom to exchange presents, and that there is no link with their Jewishness and especially not with Chanukah.⁸⁴

Though children may become confused about Christmas and its relationship to Judaism, Byard found that they can understand simple explanations at an early age.

—The "People Today" Section of The Cincinnati Enquirer, Cincinnati, Ohio, contained an article on December 20, 1981, entitled "Jews By Choice Find Unexpected in Hanukkah,"

written by Ben L. Kaufman. Kaufman wrote about Mary K. Bogot, a Jew by choice who edits the newsletter "Reaching Out" from her Ridgefield, Connecticut, home for other Jews by choice. Bogot found that Chanukah, of all the Jewish holidays, took the most conscious effort from her. She had celebrated Christmas all her life and found the whole world oriented to Santa Claus during this season:

My first impulse was to substitute. It didn't work because Jewish holidays are simply not dressed in the commercial finery that I had been accustomed to.

I was feeling both strange and displaced. My home looked bare and empty with only a cardboard 'Happy Hanukkah' sign, a menorah in the window and some paper chains across the doorways.

I went in search of any literature I could find trying to capture the 'Christmas spirit' in Hanukkah. Because I was also worrying about the reaction of my young, school-age children, I purchased extravagant gifts for every single one of the eight nights.

Guilt seemed to engulf me; the look on my mother's face the day I told her I had to break my promise to her; that I was going to raise the children in the Jewish tradition.⁸⁵

She also found confusion since her Jewish father-in-law, who celebrated Christmas with trees, kept telling her she was depriving her children of the joys of Christmas. She felt strange, alone, and displaced. She learned that being Jewish was a lifetime process; she learned that Chanukah meant "dedication." Since her conversion Bogot had divorced her first husband and married Rabbi Howard Bogot.

With a new direction towards helping persons seeking to choose Judaism as their religion, the Union of American

Hebrew Congregations published Choosing Judaism by Lydia Kukoff, in 1981. Kukoff, herself a Jew by choice, wrote the book with the aim of helping potential or new Jews by choice with their entrance into the Jewish world. In the chapter entitled "Your Non-Jewish Family" Kukoff discussed the problems Jews by choice have with Christmas. She realized that it would be difficult for her parents at Christmas time, also. She stated that it was necessary to make her parents understand that she could be with them for the holidays but it was no longer her holiday. She related that the happiest memories of her life were bound up with Christmas and its celebration. At first she felt resentful at having to give it up; later she came to realize that the Christmas tree had no place in her Jewish home:

At first I felt a void and a sense of sadness, which intensified when the annual Christmas advertising and selling blitz began. As December 25th drew nearer, I felt deprived. I was a sudden outsider in my own culture. Suddenly, I understood what it meant to be a minority. Where was "my" holiday? Where were the blazing signs that said "Happy Chanukah?" Every once in a while I would see a little one somewhere and I would silently rejoice. I became angry at this majority culture which pushed Christmas so relentlessly and profitably. I wanted equal time, space, and recognition for "my" holiday, Chanukah. But Chanukah didn't yet feel like my holiday. I felt in limbo between the two, not belonging anywhere and feeling guilty about feeling like that.⁸⁶

As she immersed herself in her Judaism and into Chanukah she eventually began to lose these feelings. She felt more Jewish and began to celebrate Chanukah for its own sake rather than as a substitute for a past holiday. As these

examples show, Jews by chance face personal and family problems when they reject Christmas. Once they have learned more and experienced their Judaism more fully, they become more comfortable with their decision and appreciate Jewish holidays, not just as substitutes for something lost, but as unique values unto themselves.

Separation Of Church And State

While some Jews were condemning Christmas observances, others were actively involved in resisting efforts to force Christmas upon them. Some Jewish communities brought pressure to bear on elected officials to remove public displays of nativity scenes (creches) and religious or other holiday decorations. Some individuals and Jewish organizations developed and implemented strategies to prevent public schools from forcing Jewish children to attend celebrations, decorate, sing carols, or participate in plays. Jewish opinion concerning how far this process should be pushed was not unanimous. Some felt that, except in extreme circumstances, it was not worth antagonizing the Christian community and possibly fomenting a severe backlash against Jews. Others felt that as long as Chanukah received mention, that would be enough to demand. Some would not remove Christmas because it was a traditional American holiday. The majority, including the major Jewish organizations, took the position that there should be neither Christmas nor any other type of religious observance in the schools or on public property.

The basic defense for the Jewish position stemmed from the "no establishment" clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution. This clause, possibly based on James Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments" in 1785,⁸⁷ established the separation of church and state when it declared that: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."⁸⁸

Sam Rabinove, Director of the Discrimination Division of the American Jewish Committee, in his article entitled "Why We Need Church-State Separation," published in the February 1980 Reform Judaism, emphasized:

Yet, the Supreme Court and the First Amendment notwithstanding, there has never been in this country absolute separation of church and state. Actually, there have been quite a few accommodations between church and state in America--including government aid to religion such as military chaplaincies, tax exemption for religious property, and tax deductibility of contributions to churches and synagogues--which are widely accepted as proper. There are other issues of church-state separation, however, which are in sharp dispute and where the question often is where the line shall be drawn. In these controversies, most Jews tend to align themselves with those who support separation of church and state.⁸⁹

While Jews have battled to have Christmas decorations of the manger scene removed from public property and have fought the public expenditure of money to support such decorations, these fights have not been considered major ones in Jewish communities.⁹⁰ The law regarding this particular issue is open to interpretation. Even the President of the United States annually lights a "national" Christmas tree on

the White House lawn, which is most certainly a government official participating in a Christmas observance on public property at taxpayers expense.

Rabinove stated:

A Nativity scene on a public school lawn, however, is quite another matter, particularly if it were coupled with a beautiful, deeply Christological Christmas program. Jews do not seek to undermine Christianity, but neither do they wish their impressionable young children to be enticed into what may appear to be the official state religion. In general, it is probably fair to say that while most Jews are not happy with the placement of religious symbols on public property, including a menorah in celebration of Chanukah, neither are they inclined to do battle over this issue.⁹¹

Rabbi Hillel E. Silverman, delivered a sermon in 1960 in which he analyzed church-state separation, not from Jewish perspectives, but from American convictions. He stated:

In our country, the public school is one of the powerful forces for democracy. This is the veritable melting-pot where our sons and daughters for the first time meet together with children of varying religions, ethnic backgrounds, and economic circumstances. The public school serves as the great laboratory of unity in diversity. It therefore behooves us, not as Jews, but as Americans, to keep the public school free of religious observance which may prove to be divisive.

It logically follows that, on the basis of democratic principle, the public schools should sponsor neither Christmas nor Chanukah, neither Passover nor Easter. Adherence to the legal precedent of the First Amendment, all prayers and devotional services, Bible readings, "released time," "common core," or the renting of school facilities by religious institutions during public-school hours are ipso facto violations of the separation of church and state.⁹²

The first recorded case of Jewish resistance to religion in the public schools occurred in 1843 in New York

City. A group of Jewish parents protested the content of a textbook, entitled American Popular Lessons. The Board of Education Committee, which was appointed to examine the complaint and textbook, rejected the Jewish protest and commented:

Your committee has examined the several passages and lessons alluded to by the said trustees, and they are unable to discover any possible ground of objection, even by the Jews, except what may arise from the fact that they are chiefly derived from the New Testament and inculcate the general principles of Christianity.⁹³

Leo Pfeffer, professor of constitutional law at Long Island University, New York, in 1981, stated that Jews were one hundred years behind the Catholics in protesting about religion in the public schools. However, the Jewish protest was different in that the Catholics were merely protesting the King James version of the Bible which was used by the public schools but not by Catholics.⁹⁴ Jews were breaking new ground in their protests.

New York was not alone in its insensitivity to Jewish and non-Christian children in the public schools. A Philadelphia correspondent wrote to the Israelite in 1890:

We are wont to point with pride to the non-sectarian character of our public schools. It may be so theoretically, practically, it is well known that the fundamental principles of our constitution, the absolute divorce of Church and State and the freedom of religious opinion are almost daily violated by the teachings and practices of our public schools.

This violation is most flagrantly apparent in the exercises and entertainments held in the different schools here and elsewhere in commemoration of Christmas. I will not argue the point whether

a celebration of such a distinctly sectarian character is admissible into our public schools, which, at least in my estimation, it most decidedly is not. I will only speak of recent attempt to force our children to participate in these exercises. . . .

In one of our schools, largely visited by Jewish children, the Jewish pupils of the Girl's Grammar refused to join in singing this ditty [a Christmas carol] and, with few exceptions, did not yield, although the lady principal told them "it was not the question of what they liked or what they wanted or not wanted to do, but what they had to." The young girls showed by their conduct in this matter more religious principle, at least more religious feeling, than many of our Jewish public school teachers, who in most cases are ever willing to assist zealously in the arrangements of such celebrations. One of these young ladies told me, she did not see any harm in Jewish children joining such songs as the one quoted above. I did not agree with her.⁹⁵

In response to a Miss M. Louise Pellet, of Indianapolis, Indiana, the Israelite wrote an editorial regarding the Christmas of 1904. Miss Pellet had asked why the Jews would want to "rob" the schools of the Christmas celebration when they numbered merely one of fifty in the schools. She commented that it would be necessary to sing songs about the person and his deeds who was to be commemorated by Christmas. Thus, she asked, "How can we celebrate Christmas without teaching the history of Christ?"⁹⁶ The editorial, in return, commented:

By all means let us teach the history of "Christ," though how we shall teach the coming of the Messiah without turning the public school, for the nonce, into a Christian Sabbath-school--there's the rub. But Miss Pellett pleads for the Jewish child:

"Let us not persecute the Jewish child by robbing him of Christmas love and pleasure."

In other words let the light of Christianity shine upon the poor blind soul once a year.⁹⁷

The Israelite published another editorial in December 1905 regarding the Russian flareup of anti-Semitism and its connection with Christmas observance. The editorial commented on one embarrassment of assimilation, Jewish businessmen's undignified role in the degeneration of Christmas into a secular jollification. It then turned its attention to other areas of concern:

Others [embarrassments of assimilation] are met with in the school where the Christmas exercise and the Christmas entertainment are masked as Santa Claus merriment wherever Christian sentiment is not allowed to come [sic-come] frankly to the surface. It is here that the Central Conference [of American Rabbis] Committee on Unsectarianism may become very useful by collating all the state laws which prohibit sectarian instruction or exercise of any kind in the public schools; and by formulating laws for adoption by any states whose civilization has not yet reached that point. It is our own lethargy and indifference which are to blame for many of these abuses.⁹⁸

The Christmas of 1904 was quite eventful for the Jews of New York City. Principal Fred F. Harding, of Public School 144 in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, addressed a Christmas assembly where he exhorted the children to be more like Christ. The American Hebrew of January 5, 1905, reported that 100 parents had signed a petition to present to the school board to dismiss Harding. Brownsville was a particularly Jewish populated section of Brooklyn. On April 6, 1905 the American Hebrew published an editorial on page two reporting that the local school board had exonerated Harding by deciding in his favor. It was obvious to the

paper that Harding was guilty of no less than a technical violation of the school law. Albert Lucas, Secretary of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America wrote a letter to the American Hebrew stating that the trial had ended only so far as the concern with the local school board. The matter would be pressed with the Board of Education. After eleven postponements the Harding Case was finally discussed by the Board of Education. After hearing the Jewish side of the argument and studying the documents from the local school board, the Elementary School Committee criticized the judgment of the local board and reversed its findings. The Committee sent a unanimous resolution to the Board of Education with the report of findings. The resolution stated: "Resolved, That the Board of Education modifies the report of the Local School Board in that it cannot fully exonerate the principal, but records its disapproval of his action on this occasion."⁹⁹ The complete report was published in the June 22, 1906 issue of the American Hebrew under the headline "The Harding Case Decided."

Lucas, who had been very involved in the Harding Case process renewed his involvement to abolish Christmas religious ceremonies from the schools:

As early as December, 1904 and probably earlier still, Lucas was warning Jewish parents about the dangers of Christian religious ceremonies in the public schools. In a letter signed by Lucas and H. P. Mendes which appeared in the American Israelite of December 22, 1904 parents were informed that, "the season of the year is upon us when the most subtle attacks are made by those who call themselves our friends . . . in honor of the Christian Christmas

festival." In December, 1906, one year following the Harding incident, Lucas requested that the Board of Education issue a directive to its staff to eliminate all Christmas ceremonies.¹⁰⁰

Lucas' demands were published in the New York Times of December 7, 1906. The Elementary School Committee held another meeting with Jewish leaders on December 11, 1906, which was reported on by the New York Times the next day. The Board of Education continued to delay a decision regarding the cancellation of Christmas observances in the public schools. On December 15, 1906 the American Hebrew printed an editorial on page one which:

. . . praised Lucas' initiative against the "pernicious activity" in schools, urged Jewish parents to support him and attacked the school authorities for failing to "avoid inflicting repugnant religious convictions on the school children." In its next issues, the same weekly printed a letter from the Union [of Orthodox Jewish Congregations] signed by Mendes, Lucas and Isadore Hershfield requesting that Jewish parents demand of their children that they not participate in any way in school religious ceremonies, "to respectfully but firmly decline to sing any Christian hymns, etc." The idea of a pupil strike had apparently not yet occurred to anyone.¹⁰¹

Matters erupted the next week when teachers told the children to wear their best clothes for the Christmas celebrations in school on the next Monday, which preceded immediately the school recess. That very weekend the strike call went out and was publicized by the Sunday editions of the Yiddishes Tageblatt and the Morgen Journal of December 23, 1906. The Morgen Journal commented that many parents had deluged the offices asking for advice of what to tell their children regarding the incident. Both papers, in emotional

terms, accused the Board of Education for attempting conversionary methods. Both papers also assured the parents that since there would be no formal schoolwork that day, the children would miss no education.

The New York Times, on December 25, 1906, in a two column story, reported that one third of the school population of Brownsville, between 20,000 and 25,000 children, remained home during the one day strike. It had received wide coverage in the American and Jewish press. The American Hebrew, on December 28, 1906 covered the strike and editorially condemned it as "well intentioned" but carried out in a poor manner.¹⁰²

The Elementary School Committee came to a compromise due to the pressure of the strike. While they found previous programs unobjectionable, they recommended to the Board of Education that:

the signing of hymns be forbidden, that reading from any distinctive religious treatise or book, other than the Bible, be forbidden . . . that assigning of essays upon any distinctive religious topic be forbidden . . . and that the City Superintendent of Schools issue a circular letter annually cautioning the principals and teaching staff in this respect [elimination of religious content in pre-winter vacation exercises].¹⁰³

The Committee specifically excluded the Lord's Prayer, the Christmas tree, and the exhibition of pictures from its recommended prohibitions. The result was shown in the New York Times report of December 25, 1907 which reported that sectarianism in the schools was avoided but that Santa Claus and Christmas trees were seen everywhere.¹⁰⁴ Lucas, responding

to an increased effort of Christian missionizing attempted in the schools at this time of year, used the Harding case as a means to block further Christian doctrine and religiously oriented Christmas programs out of the schools of New York City.

Across the continent, at San Francisco, the Emanu-El published an editorial on December 20, 1907, very critical of Christmas carols being sung in public schools. The editorial related that Jewish resistance to the carols was very strong in San Francisco, that few would argue that theological opinions are out of place in public schools, but that when it came to the topic of carols, there seemed to be some resentment involved. The editorial stated that it would not bring up (and consequently did) that the singing of English Christmas carols was probably more of a literary revival; that Christmas consciousness was an Anglo-Saxon element and not necessarily Christian; and that the Protestant denominations had fought against celebrations of non-Biblically ordained holidays. The editorial continued:

Now the public school is only safe not called upon to decide whether Christian children shall, or Jewish children shall not, sing Christmas carols. It ought not to be the medium for deciding sectarian questions, nor the forum for religious debates. The public school is a political institution, and, like all political institutions, must be safeguarded against religious interference. Hence the Christmas carol has no place in the curriculum. Its place is at home and in the Sunday school, or in private association where Christian culture is promoted. On the contrary, we love to hear it and cordially approve it for Christians and in its proper place. In the public schools we

object to it, because we must protect the rights of our own children and because we deny the competency of any public school teacher with the whole church behind her to dictate the elements by which the spirit of our own children shall be moulded.¹⁰⁵

The editorial then asked if the Jewish parents had something to take the place of Christmas for their children. It was important to defend Jewish rights and not just to vent Jewish prejudices.

In 1911 Rabbi David Philipson, of Rockdale Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio, went to a meeting of the Temple's new men's club, the Temple Club. Some parents of children who attended the Avondale School were concerned about their children singing sectarian hymns in the public school. Philipson went to the superintendent of schools and learned that this was at the discretion of individual teachers. The superintendent stated that he was in sympathy with the Temple Club and would look into the matter. When the issue became public in the newspapers it aroused great excitement. Several ministers withdrew from the upcoming joint Thanksgiving Day service in protest to Philipson's action.

The editorial in the December 24, 1914 issue of the Israelite took issue with Rabbi Alexander Lyons of Brooklyn with regard to celebrations in public schools at Christmas. Lyons had been asked by the kindergarten system of New York about Christmas celebrations for the children. In his reply, he stated that any observance of Christmas in a theological or religious sense was totally out of the question either for Jews or for the public schools. He continued:

As a celebration at Christmas time to mark the close of a school term it may and should [do] whatever contributes to a spirit of seasonable jollity, of fraternity, and of communal solidarity. Oud [sic-our] public schools should welcome every opportunity that may be utilized for moral influence.¹⁰⁷

The Israelite editorial commented that the purposes of the schools have always been to teach the secular subjects and thus, they should be kept free from outside influences. They should not be asked to participate in any celebrations nor make any collections for any [religious] purpose. Lyons wrote immediately to the Israelite and was published in the January 21, 1915 issue. After complementing the Israelite for its evenhanded reporting, he stated:

You have given the impression by discussing me adversely that I favor an observance of Christmas. Other Jewish journals have made the same mistake. I have said clearly and emphatically that I am adverse to any form of observance of Christmas in the public schools, or of any other sectarian practice or custom. What I did say is entirely different and that in as much as the schools close for a midwinter vacation at Christmas time it would be appropriate to close them with exercises which would not only keep but strengthen in the schools that spirit of cheer, generosity, good will, and fraternity that has been steadily developing in American life at Christmas time. It seems to me that it would take a willful perversion of the imagination to find in this a celebration of Christmas. A celebration at Christmas is not the same as a celebration of Christmas.¹⁰⁸

Due to the size of the New York Jewish community, it often was considered the leader of Jewish causes. It is ironic that the Jewish community that could lead a successful strike of the school system in Brooklyn in 1906 was unable to remove or modify school celebrations of Christmas during the 1920's and 1930's:

But by the 1920's Jewish religious leaders could not agree on the significance of Christmas. Without a consensus on the holiday's meaning, they could not develop a programmatic response to its celebration in the public schools. Some, like Stephen Wise, reform rabbi of the Free Synagogue, thought Christmas had "become a secular rather than a religious festival." He saw no point in asking "my fellow-Jews to refrain from the notice or observance in a secular and non-religious fashion of Christmas. . . ." Wise only objected to those Jews "who overdue Christmas and leave Chanukah undone." Others, like Israel Chipkin, argued that Christmas was not at all a national holiday like Thanksgiving but a sectarian one. He felt Jewish children should not participate in Christmas celebrations. An editorial in the Jewish Forum, an Orthodox monthly, agreed with Chipkin and urged Jews to complain to public school principals about Christmas celebrations. Additionally, the Jewish Forum suggested Jews substitute Chanukah celebrations in public schools where Jewish pupils were a majority. Isaac Bildersee, a district superintendent of schools in Brownsville, objected vehemently to both Chanukah and Christmas celebrations. . . . Advocating a rigorous separation of church and state, Bildersee wanted to eliminate both.¹⁰⁹

Though they fought any issue in which they thought religion was opening a wedge in the school system, the second generation Jews, reacting to their minority status and their ambivalence to the gentiles in the public schools, were unable to generate a consensus on Christmas.¹¹⁰ As changes in personnel and Jewish middle-class status began to affect the public schools in the Jewish neighborhoods, slowly changes in school policies became more responsive to Jewish concerns. Jewish parents challenged the schools on Jewish values, social mobility, and discarding Americanization seen as Anglicanization:

Finally, the confrontation with the public schools over the Christian character of their public piety

spurred second generation Jews to develop Jewish religious practices to parallel Christian ones. But in the 1920s and 1930s Jews found it difficult to promote Chanukah with Christmas, especially at the expense of the latter. Indeed, Christmas remained the biggest stumbling block to the synthesis second generation Jews evolved.¹¹¹

Mordecai Kaplan, in 1934, made the following observation:

Jews remember what church-ridden states formerly did to their ancestors, and in their effort to keep the public educational institutions free from all sectarian influences, appeal continually to the fundamental law of the United States, which demands the complete separation of state from church. The resistance which Jews everywhere display to the introduction of Bible reading into the schools is perfectly understandable and justified, because the spirit in which those who seek to make Bible reading a part of the school curriculum is sectarian. It is strange, however, that those who are so violently opposed to having the Bible read in the school should be so complacent about the fact that the public schools make churchly religion so prominent a part of the school curriculum on Christmas and Easter.¹¹²

As America emerged from World War II, in 1945, the Executive Council of the Rabbinical Assembly of America published a statement regarding religious observance in the public schools. The Executive Council, representing Conservative Jewry, foresaw a danger to the traditional American educational system arising out of an American backlash to the assault on freedom and liberty which the United States had just experienced in the war. In an effort to strengthen human values great pressure had been used to introduce religious content into the public school curriculum across the country. The Executive Council opposed, not only formal religious instruction, but also, the celebration of religious

festivals in the schools. The "Statement" called upon Christians to recognize Christmas as a purely Christian religious holiday having no place in the public schools. It strongly stated:

The practice of calling on Jewish children to join in the singing of Christmas carols, to partake in Christmas plays or to work on Christmas motifs in various art-craft projects must be regarded as an infringement of their rights as Americans. It is to ask them to associate themselves with experiences that are alien to their religious tradition. Such practices, however well-meaning in intent, are a coercion of conscience, and a denial of religious freedom, one of the most priceless freedoms to which this country is dedicated.¹¹³

Christian children would have no difficulty in participating in the Exodus story or the Maccabean story because both are parts of the Old Testament which is an integral part of Christianity. However, Jewish children cannot participate in Christian festivals which are not part of their heritage. Thus, even joint-programs do not answer the problem of religious festivals in the schools. The Executive Council recognized the need, especially after World War II, for revitalizing the moral aspects of life, particularly through religion. But it pointed out that even the religion taught in the schools in Germany did not prevent Nazi barbarism. The Executive Council therefore concluded by calling upon Americans to maintain the traditional separation of church and state in the schools.

To wage the battle for the separation of church and state, Jews and others turned to the Supreme Court. Though

the first real case concerning Christmas itself did not occur until 1977 the preliminary cases served as important building blocks.

The Supreme Court interpreted the 'establishment of religion clause' of the First Amendment to the Constitution in the 1947 Everson vs. Board of Education case. The State of New Jersey wanted to know if they could spend money to bus children to parochial schools as well as public schools. The Court denied permission by means of this interpretation:

"The 'establishment of religion' clause of the First Amendment means at least this," wrote the Court. "Neither a State nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions. Neither a State nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect a 'wall of separation between church and state.'" 114

The Supreme Court supported the "wall of separation" in 1948 in the case of McCormack vs. Board of Education. Here a child could not be released from secular studies to attend religious instruction within the public school. In 1952, in Zorach vs. Clawson, the Supreme Court allowed the release of students from secular studies to attend religious instruction but only if they went outside of the school building. The government could not "finance religious groups, undertake religious instruction, blend secular and sectarian education

or use secular instructions to impose religious values."¹¹⁵ In 1962 the Supreme Court heard Engel v. Vitale and determined that even though the New York State Regents' prayer was "neutral," it could not be used in public schools. The Abington School District vs. Schempp decision in 1963 by the Supreme Court, ruled out reading the Bible in classrooms as a prayer. "In religion, the Court was insisting only strict government neutrality would satisfy the Constitution."¹¹⁶

In 1977 Roger Florey, an atheist, complained to the Souix Falls School District (South Dakota) that the Christmas celebrations in the schools were blatantly religious. A committee was appointed to study the problem and develop guidelines. The committee recommended:

The schools should not, the guidelines acknowledged, promote religious belief but should encourage students and teachers "to appreciate and be tolerant of each other's religious views." Students or staff who objected to practices in the school would be excused. Only holidays which had both "a religious and secular basis" would be observed. Holiday origins would be explained in an "unbiased and objective manner" and "music, art, literature and drama having religious themes" would be permitted "if presented in a prudent and objective manner and as a traditional part of the culture and religious heritage of the particular holiday."¹¹⁷

Florey and five other plaintiffs (none Jewish) with the aid of the American Civil Liberties Union sued the District for violating the First Amendment clause. Friend-of-the-court briefs were filed by the Unitarian Church and American Jewish Congress. The District and Circuit Courts upheld the School District's guidelines. When the Roger Florey vs. Sioux Falls School District case reached the State Supreme Court it found

that the School Board's guidelines did not violate the First Amendment because they were not "unquestionably religious in nature, did not attempt to establish a state religion, and were not motivated by an attempt to advance or inhibit religion in violation of the First Amendment."¹¹⁸ Judge McMillian dissented. In 1980, the U. S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case, thus affirming the lower Court's ruling.

Samuel Rabinove, Director of the Discrimination Division of the American Jewish Committee, stated: "There's no question we have a divided court."¹¹⁹ He continued: "As it becomes better known, many people are going to construe the Florey case as a green light for Christmas observances."¹²⁰ He was worried that the Supreme Court's refusal to hear the case gave Christmas promoters tacit approval.

In the non-legal area, Jules Cohen published an article entitled "Some Non-Legal Arguments Against Chanukah Programs in the Public Schools, in 1958 in Jewish Life, the journal of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. By relating to the religious nature of Chanukah and its use as a counter program to Christmas, Cohen stated that the schools were ill equipped to, nor should they, teach religion to Jewish and Christian children. It was inappropriate for the Christian teachers and children to be pressured into teaching and learning about this Jewish festival. Conversely, there would be no need for Chanukah in

the schools if there were no Christmas programs. Cohen concluded that "It is recognized that the anniversary of an event is the best time to take note of it. However, when the anniversary is that of a religious occasion, as is the case of Chanukah or Christmas, its religious significance cannot be bypassed. Of necessity, such programs are sectarian and have no place in the public schools."¹²¹

The Jewish Teachers Association of the City of New York, Inc., composed of public school educators, published their guidelines regarding Christmas observance in public schools in 1959, in The Synagogue Light, an orthodox Jewish publication. The Association recommended: no religious celebrations of any kind should be part of the public school program; wherever, or whenever, the school found it necessary to have an educational program regarding a holiday, they should avoid doctrinal themes, religious symbols or ceremonies, and devotional practices; if songs were to be used as part of a holiday program, religious hymns or carols were to be avoided.¹²²

Jewish resistance to Christmas led to controversy and sometimes heated confrontations in many communities. Rabbi Arthur Gilbert, in his article "The Season of Good Will and Interreligious Tension," published in the November 14, 1959 Reconstructionist reviewed controversies of the 1957 Chanukah-Christmas season in Valley Stream, Long Island; Ross, California; Delaware Township, New Jersey, and elsewhere. He concluded that the American Jewish position of no

religious celebration of holidays in the schools was out of phase with the overwhelming conviction of American parents, educators, and lawyers. He thought that many Jewish parents were opposed to this rigid policy, and suggested that the Jewish community might call for a change. Gilbert was quite worried about the anti-Semitic overtones of the controversies. He felt that tensions could be lessened if the cultural aspects of the Christmas holiday, such as Santa Claus, the Christmas tree without the Star of Bethlehem, carols such as "Jingle Bells" were used instead of the clearly sectarian nativity play, church hymns, and recitation of the Christmas story. The confusing issue of Chanukah in the schools resulted because parents wanted its inclusion for enhancement of the self respect of their children.¹²³

Jules Cohen answered this article in the December 25, 1959 issue of the Reconstructionist. Cohen felt that Gilbert's fears and conclusions were unwarranted. Cohen stated that Jewish agencies may attempt to remove Christmas programs but the reality of the situation is that they cannot be this inflexible. The Jews should "strive for the removal of the more extreme christological aspects of public school Christmas programs, not to eliminate the programs entirely."¹²⁴ The anti-Semitic incidents were as disturbing and embarrassing to thoughtful Christians as they were to the Jews. This kind of pressure cannot be used to prevent the Jewish community from attempting to live with the highest of Jewish values in America. One of those values is

religious liberty which must be protected even at the expense of controversy. Cohen stated:

There is no proof that interreligious tensions which arise in community controversies over the Christmas programs in the public schools issue have lasting effects on interreligious relationships. The evidence points the other way. And it is not true that Jews stand alone. There is a substantial measure of support in the Christian community for the separationist position to which we adhere.¹²⁵

Cohen continued by stating that there were benefits to community controversy. The situations in Valley Stream, Long Island and Delaware Township, New Jersey had improved due to the controversy; the anti-Semitic element had no lasting impact or weight in the community. Thus, Jews were helping to mold their communities in a democratic way. They had no cause, he said, to be fearful or defensive about their actions.

Resistance to Christmas continued to arouse conflict from the Christian majority. In 1959 in Sierra Madre, California, crosses were burned at the home of a parent that had asked the Board of Education whether a Nativity play violated the State Education code and at the home of the Jewish board member who joined in the majority vote against the program. The same year, in Chelsea, Massachusetts, a Jewish parent met with such fiercely adverse reaction after petitioning the Board of Education to review the school program at Christmas, that the family left town. Also in 1959, in White Plains, New York, a crowd of 1200 people intimidated the Superintendent of Schools to reinstate the

Nativity play after he had cancelled it, fearing embarrassment to non-Christian children.¹²⁶

Why have disputes about Christmas in public schools been on the rise recently?

Some observers attribute them to a heightened sensitivity on the part of American Jews to Christian sectarian influence in the schools. A second explanation is that the large-scale movement of Jewish families from cities to suburbs has brought many Jews into predominantly Christian neighborhoods where Christmas programs are a long-accepted feature of the school curriculum.

"We can expect this type of conflict to become more frequent as the suburbs come more and more to reflect this type of interfaith situation," predicts Dr. John C. Bennett, dean of Union Theological Seminary. "The issue is not isolated; it illustrates the much broader problem created by our religious pluralism in communities that have been accustomed to think of themselves as Christians or even as Protestant communities."¹²⁷

In response to this conflict the National Conference of Christians and Jews published a booklet entitled "If Christmas Brings Conflict-Handle The Situation With Care And Understanding," in July 1962. The pamphlet analyzed the roots of the problem, and suggested ameliorative steps, including advise on every step of the process from first gathering of facts to taking the problem to court. The pamphlet concluded with advice regarding "prevention as better than a cure" and with the final paragraph as "Conflict Can Be Creative."¹²⁸

In the 1970's the American Jewish Committee had developed a set of guidelines for schools to help them avoid conflict. Ray Ruppert, the Religion Editor of the Seattle

Times, reported in December 9, 1972, that the AJC guidelines were helping the Seattle and Mercer Island School Districts successfully. The guidelines were based on the philosophy that pertinent religious references were permitted in the school classroom lesson; teachers should not undertake religious instruction, indoctrination, or observances; schools should abstain from any display, program, or activity that would influence or undermine the faith of a child or question the absence of religion of a child; opposition to religious festivities and celebrations in the schools subjecting children to pressure to engage in religious activities inconsistent with their beliefs; no child would be asked to absent himself from his classmates and stand alone during a program. The AJC guidelines listed certain practices as sectarian in nature, and therefore to be avoided:

1. Nativity scenes, displays, pageants and performances of religious plays in school.
2. Religious songs.
3. Involvement of clergymen in religious functions in the schools.
4. Asking children to do homework assignments related to religious holidays, asking children to bring religious objects to the classroom, classroom activities with religious content and initiation of religious instruction.¹²⁹

Ruppert also noted that the success of the AJC guidelines may have been due in part to the small Jewish community in Seattle, resulting in a different experience than might be found in New York or Chicago.

The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council published a booklet entitled "Joint Program Plan for Jewish Community Relations 1980-81." Under the chapter entitled "Religious Freedom and Church-State Separation" it wrote:

In urban areas, no significant increase in religious observances and practices were noted in public schools during the 1979-80 period. This was especially true of major metropolitan areas with significant Jewish population. However, in some cities of the South and Southwest, and some smaller communities and rural areas, both a slight increase in incidence of such practices and intensification of resistance to suggestions for their modification of removal were noted. Efforts continued to devise approaches that would circumvent previous Supreme Court decisions protecting the wall of separation between Church and State.¹³⁰

Whether or not the recent Supreme Court decision of Florey vs. Sioux Falls (South Dakota) School District will create added pressure upon school districts to support and produce Christmas programs can not be determined presently. If, however, it should occur the major Jewish organizations which have fought such programs in the past will continue to do so in the future.

From time to time a few Jews have proposed that Jewish children could participate in Christmas programs in the schools. Their reasons include that Christmas is an American holiday and part of the folk culture, that the minority will not be able to enforce a restrictive right over the majority, that the Jewish child, who has a strong Jewish identification will not be hurt by the Christmas programs, and that the absolute separation of church and state is merely a legal

fiction and cannot be totally enforced. These opinions have by far been in the minority, at least as expressed in the available documents.¹³¹

While the struggle to prevent Christmas and other religious programs in the public schools continues, another battle has been waged since 1966 against the United States Postal Service and its annual issuance of Christmas postage stamps depicting religious themes. In 1966 the Post Office issued a Christmas stamp picturing the "Madonna and Child with Angels":

Prior to the official announcement of this stamp, the Post Office proclaimed with great fanfare the issuance of a Polish commemorative stamp--vehemently protested by the Polish Government--honoring the one-thousandth anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in Poland. Conspicuous on this stamp is the Cross.¹³²

Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld, president of the American Jewish Congress, sent a strong letter of protest against the Christmas stamp to the Postmaster-General John A. Gronouski, raising the issue of church and state separation. He turned it over to his Jewish deputy Ira Kapenstein, who then attempted to justify the Post Office's action.

Through the years, the Post Office has continued to issue Christmas stamps. In 1968 when the Post Office printed Jan van Eyck's "The Annunciation," depicting the angel Gabriel telling the Virgin Mary she was chosen to bear Jesus, the American Jewish Congress protested that the Post Office was depicting the Christian dogma of the "Virgin Birth."¹³³

In 1971 the Post Office printed Lorenzo Lotto's "The Nativity." Once again major Jewish organizations protested including the Joint Advisory Committee of the Synagogue Council of America and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

These organizations argued that the issuance of Christmas stamps violated the First Amendment to the Constitution's guarantee of church-state separation. The effect of this action placed the power, prestige and financial support of government behind a particular religious belief. The protests have been futile; to date the Post Office annually prints Christmas issues.

CHAPTER IV

ACCOMMODATION TO CHRISTMAS

Various Responses

If Jews did not totally accept or reject Christmas they had another form of response available: accommodation. In accommodating to Christmas, the Jew took cognizance of the fact that Christmas and the Yuletide season was upon him. However, he reacted to those parts of the season and to those values which were meaningful to his particular needs. He neither wanted to accept the theological and Christological elements of the holiday, nor did he want to reject the spirit of good will and peace that he found expressed in the major culture around him. He shaped his reaction to meet these aims.

The great emphasis on social life during the Christmas season affected Jews. They reacted by also scheduling dinners, balls and dances, entertainments, and social events during this season--though whether to celebrate Chanukah or Christmas is often unclear.

Organizations especially presented entertainments at this time. In Cincinnati a grand masquerade ball was given on Christmas Eve in 1876 at the Bellevue House.¹ In 1881 the Progress Club of New York gave a Christmas Eve entertainment

which also happened to fall on Shabat.² In 1881 the Young Mens Hebrew Association of Philadelphia gave a Chanukah entertainment on Christmas at the Mercantile Hall.³ In St. Louis, Congregation B'Nei El held a Chanukah Ball to celebrate the holiday and to raise funds to reduce the debt of the newly built school house.⁴ The younger classes of Hebrew Union College put on a dramatic performance of Longfellow's Maccabees at Silverman's in honor of Chanukah, in 1882.⁵ In New York that year the Y.M.H.A. celebrated Chanukah with a promenade concert and dance at the Terrace Garden.⁶ In Houston, Texas, the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Association held their 10th annual Chanukah Ball in 1883.⁷ Also in 1883, the Apollo Club of Minneapolis, Minnesota, gave its opening ball on December 25th.

In 1884 the Philadelphia correspondent "Shaia" of the Israelite reported that the next monthly entertainment would be given on December 25th. The correspondent did not make clear which organization was giving the entertainment. However he did include an apology for the date:

It was with no ulterior motive that this evening was chosen. The original date was altered to accommodate the Fair committee whose programmes could not have been carried out without this assistance, and the 25th was chosen as the next convenient evening for the entertainment.⁸

In 1885 the West Chicago Club held a Christmas Hop (dance) at Martine's Hall on December 25th.⁹ The Jewish community of San Antonio, Texas had a Chanukah Ball in 1885.¹⁰ In Kansas City, Missouri, in 1885, the Progress Club

invited all the children of the religious school whose parents were not members of the club, to attend, along with the members' children, the upcoming Progress Club Children's Matinee Ball to celebrate Chanukah. This followed the rabbi's home reception for all the children of the religious school.¹¹

Also in 1885 the Y.M.H.A. of St. Louis held a promenade, hop and concert with supper for Chanukah. The Israelite recorded the previous entertainment then went on to report that at Prof. Mahler's Annual Fancy Dress Christmas Carnival there will be calcium lights, Punch and Judy for the little ones, souvenir programs, refreshments, bon-bons, and a visit from Santa Claus.¹² In 1887 Mr. Jacob Mahler directed the Christmas Carnival for the children at the Harmonie.¹³ By 1888 Jacob Mahler's childrens' carnival was no longer reported as a "Christmas Carnival."¹⁴

In 1888 Thanksgiving Day and Chanukah fell together (November 29th). Consequently, newspaper reports recorded the conjoint celebration of Thanksgiving Day and Chanukah.¹⁵ Other examples of activities held in 1888 were the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Concordia club's "Christmas Soiree"¹⁶ and the B'nai Brith Chapter of Grand Rapids, Michigan's ball at the Armory Hall.¹⁷ In 1889 the Progress Club of Evansville, Indiana, gave "another of its delightful dances on the evening of the 25th."¹⁸ In 1890 two Chanukah balls were given, one each for the adults and the children in San Antonio, Texas.¹⁹

Not only were organizations providing seasonal entertainments, individuals were also involved in the "social scene." While the newspapers would report on Jewish society happenings in many cities across the country it was rare to find the citation that identified the socializing with Christmas or Chanukah. Some examples which did specifically designate either Christmas or December 25th are the following: Mr. and Mrs. Charles Rosenthal invited a number of their friends for a Christmas Dinner in Las Vegas, New Mexico in 1888 and in Trinidad, Colorado, Mr. and Mrs. Louis Marcus gave a Christmas dinner to a party of friends on December 25th;²⁰ in 1889, in Winfield, Kansas, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Schessenger, of Newton, spent Christmas with their friends Mr. and Mrs. Burgauer;²¹ in San Antonio, Texas, also in 1889, Mrs. Hexter and daughter Minna spent Chanukah and Christmas with her sister, Mrs. Halff;²² Christmas evening 1890, was spent at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Julius Weil of St. Louis with a celebration raffling off a doll donated to the Cleveland Orphan Asylum Manual Training School Fund;²³ on Christmas eve 1891, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Miss Birdie Bernstein entertained 30 friends in honor of the arrival of Miss Lena Rich, of Milwaukee, and Miss Harris, of St. Paul. "The rooms were prettily festooned with holly and flowers."²⁴

Decorations were one way in which Jews could participate in the "season" without participating directly in Christmas. Sometimes this led to confusion since Christmas

decorations such as holly, wreaths, and evergreen boughs were used. At other times the decorations seemed to be accepted as normal non-religious expression of beauty, the purpose for which they were designed. In the Philadelphia letter of "Observer," in the January 3, 1879 issue of the Israelite, he reported that the ladies of Congregation Beth El Emeth had given a Chanukah festival, in 1878, complete with silk banners reading "Maccabee" and "Chanukah 5639" in Hebrew. They also decorated their refreshment tables with arches of evergreens.²⁵ In 1879 Temple Emanuel, New York City, had a Chanukah celebration for the religious school:

The Lecture room was decorated with a profusion of evergreens. Dr. Gottheil explained the festival, after which the children sang the Chanukah song. Recitations by Mrs. Louis, Miss Judith Dittenhoefer, Messrs. May and Sanger closed the pleasant celebration. Some of the children having remarked that "It looked just like Christmas," Mr. Sanger addressed a few words to them pertinent to the occasion and told the children that Christmas was not an event that should interest them.²⁶

The confusion of the children regarding the symbolic use of evergreens by Christian America during the Christmas season and the use of evergreens by Jews was encouraged by at least one popular publication for Jewish children, the Sabbath Visitor. A story entitled "On Last Christmas" in the January 9, 1880 issue described a Jewish family that celebrated Chanukah. Along with their home decorations, pictures of Moses and George Washington, and the Menorah covered with flowers, they also decorated with wreaths and evergreens.²⁷ There was no Christmas tree. In another story entitled

"Christmas at the Cedars," in the December 1888 issue, the children are excited when their mother allows them to have a masquerade ball on Christmas Eve. The child makes an announcement holding an armful of evergreens with which they will make garlands and wreaths to decorate the house.²⁸

Closely allied to the decoration of the house with evergreens was the establishment of the Christmas tree in Jewish homes. The erection and retention of a Christmas tree was discussed in the chapter about the acceptance of Christmas. In this chapter, we deal with trees and ornaments used to enhance the Chanukah celebration, though they were clearly an accommodation to Christmas.

In the Baltimore correspondent "Sulamith's" [Henrietta Szold's] letter to the Jewish Messenger of January 10, 1879, she asked the paper to examine the facts about the New Year's celebrations among Baltimore's Jews. Then she moved to discuss Christmas:

Why need we adopt the Christmas tree, ridiculously baptized a Chanukah bush? Have we not the Menorah, connected so closely with the visions of the prophets and the allegories of the Bible?²⁹

The Christmas tree had been renamed the Chanukah bush and the name had become well enough known that Szold responded to it. In this case she was writing about the Christmas of 1878. There was another instance of a "seasonal" tree used that year.

The Jewish Advance in Chicago published in its December 27, 1878 issue the following item of local news:

The Sinai Congregation celebrated the Chanukah festival on last Wednesday evening in a very interesting manner. The fine Temple was crowded with grown people and children. The Chanukah Tree was brilliantly illuminated with wax candles. The services commenced with the singing of the first stanza of the Chanukah hymn by the Sabbath-school children.³⁰

The Sabbath Visitor, the children's paper which later became a family paper for Jews, published an editorial on November 12, 1880. It clearly recognized the upcoming Chanukah season and made the following statements:

We are now in the Hebrew month of Kislev. On Sunday, the 28th day of November, corresponding with the 25th day of Kislev, our Chanukah Festival will begin to be celebrated for eight days. Enjoy it young friends from the bottom of your hearts. Make preparations for Chanukah festivals and let us hear by letters and reports how you have celebrated them. No Christmas trees in Jewish houses; but Chanukah-lights and Chanukah trees, and Chanukah presents.³¹

The fact that trees continued to be used by Jews into the twentieth century was shown in the statistics section of the chapter on acceptance of Christmas. Most of the statistics were taken in a manner which did not differentiate between those Jews who brought Christmas trees into their homes but did not participate in Chanukah, those that had trees and did participate in Chanukah, or those that were using the trees as Chanukah decorations, and labeled them "Chanukah Bushes." One study which did was the B'nai Brith Youth Organization study done by Irving Canter in 1959. Using data from this study Canter wrote the article "Uncle Sam, the Hanukkah Man," published in the Reconstructionist in December of 1961.

In the article, Canter began by discussing the "crusade" by the Jewish community against "Uncle Sam, the Hanukkah Man" and the "Hanukkah Bush." Jews, fearing assimilation, were trapped by two alternatives which were equally undesirable. They could accept the Christian cultural symbols, such as the tree, wreaths, Santa Claus, and carols, or they could accept the undeserved growth of Chanukah, infused with Yuletide spirit, with the new symbols of greeting cards, home decorations, gift wrapping, and ribbons. Canter stated:

This fear of the "Hanukkah Man" has no basis in the Jewish historic process which reveals that time and again Jews have accepted the cultural symbols and patterns of those around them and that on countless occasions the "borrowed" folkways and values represented the Jewish response to the situations and cultures in which they found themselves. Fear of the "Hanukkah Man" is based upon an over-simplification of the assimilation and acculturation processes and a lack of faith in the genius of the Jewish People for group maintenance--their unique capacity for adjustment, adaptation and survival which has baffled all students of history.³²

Canter continued with a discussion of the types of reactions a minority culture uses toward the folkways of the majority culture with which it has contact. He listed them as selective borrowing of cultural traits, borrowing without meaning, reinterpreting of culture elements, rejection of cultural patterns, and contra-culturation or the development of countervalues or traits.

Using his study, Canter stated that "Uncle Sam, the Hanukkah Man," or the use of a "Chanukah Bush," showed the selective and contra-culturation processes at work within

the Jewish Community towards Christmas and the Christian culture. It was selective borrowing, in which there was resistance and rejection of the Christian elements and theology, and contra-culturative, in that a new refurbished Chanukah was being established with a series of counter values.

Contra-culturation involves several parts: role ambiguity, conflict, resentment, and the development of a competing in-group cultural pattern. In Canter's study, the teenagers were clearly ambiguous and uncertain how they should react to Christmas symbols which were considered non-secular; there was conflict between the two competing holiday celebrations; the teenagers resented being forced to participate in clearly Christological celebration; and they developed strategies of resistance such as bringing menorahs to school or establishing new symbols. Though the study indicated that 1 in 10 of the teenage respondents indicated they had at least one Christmas decoration in the home, such as Christmas trees (Chanukah Bushes), wreaths, stockings, candy canes, lights, or Santa Claus, none of them were considered "religious" by the respondents. This together with the other evidence of the study led Canter to determine that:

It should be clear from our analysis that the approach of Jewish youth to Christmas is one of selection acculturation rather than assimilation, and that the dilemma of ambiguity, conflict and resentment results in a contra-cultural reaction expressed through a heightened interest in Hanukkah.³³

The statistics showed that 9 out of 10 of the respondents participated in some Chanukah program. This demonstrated counter-assimilation in Canter's view. The teenagers had not given up Chanukah for Christmas.

Canter then stated:

In conclusion, it would seem as though the incorporation of Christmas symbols in Hanukkah terms--such as the "Hanukkah Bush" and "Uncle Sam, the Hanukkah Man" is a sign of resistance to deculturation, and the use of these symbols may appear 500 years from now the equivalent of the pagan lights of the days of the Maccabees--and perhaps these symbols may be infused with Jewish spiritual values.³⁴

The terms "Chanukah Bush" and "Uncle Sam, the Hanukkah Man" waned during the late 1950's and 1960's as Jewish identity began to resurge through the communities. However, Jews continued to bring trees into their homes. The data of the survey conducted by the UAHC found that over ten per cent of the reporting respondents had a "Christmas tree" in their home in 1971.³⁵

A decline in tree usage probably occurred during the decades of the 1940's and 1950's. Leonard Gross, in an article of Look magazine (where he served as senior editor), attempted to answer some of the questions surrounding the paradox of the Jewish celebration of Christmas:

Sure of themselves as their parents never were, the Jews of the new generation now tend to reject Christmas celebrations in Jewish homes as unseemly. "Twenty years ago, there was hardly a Jewish home that didn't have a tree," a Beverly Hills, California, religious-school director remembers. "Today, there are few that do." Says a New York Jewish leader: "The Hanukkah bush used to be a big joke. Now it has a kind of derogatory sound." Complaints by rabbis have diminished strikingly in the last five years.³⁶

He then quoted the Jospe study of B'nai Brith Hillel, pre-1965, which showed that 78 per cent of the college students polled disapproved of Christmas trees in Jewish homes. His impression was:

Among organized Jewry, at least, it is the overwhelming impression of their leaders that the Christmas paradox is being resolved.³⁷

In order to understand how Jews were accommodating to the Christmas problem, Walter Gerson, of the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota in 1965, gave unstructured interviews to 29 Jewish college students and their families in the urban areas of Seattle, Washington and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Gerson made several generalizations from his observations, though he recognized that the nature of the interviews made statistical analysis impossible. The object of his research was to describe some mechanisms which operated to reduce potential role-strain of Jews during Christmas.

Strain evolved for Jews at Christmas from social pressures, business pressures, children's needs for growth, development, and security, and children's self-concepts. Mechanisms of accommodation which reduced the role-strain were:

1. Jewish value hierarchies concerning Jewish behavior at this time of year. Cultural persistence impeded social change. Some parents began socializing their children at a very early age regarding Chanukah and Christmas in order to reduce role conflict;
2. Insulation. Families moved from old neighborhoods to new Jewish ones to escape Christmas observance.

Third and fourth generation Jews, however, were increasingly living in gentile neighborhoods. Some families left their city for the Christmas season. Vacation centers developed with sub-culture structures and returning friends from previous vacations. An example of this was Miami Beach, Florida. For those who could not travel, they insulated themselves from Christmas by selective socializing with friends;

3. Compartmentalization. The disparate norms are tied to distinct roles which are then separated from each other. A Jewish business man could participate in Christmas without guilt while maintaining Chanukah at home;
4. Re-definition. Jews redefine secular and non-secular aspects of Christmas. They can participate in the non-secular aspects such as Santa Claus, stockings, winter carol singing. This distinction became favored by third generation Jews who perceived of Christmas trees as social rather than religious symbols;
5. Patterned evasions. These are planned activities such as Chanukah-Christmas social programs and combined holiday parties. Thus, Jewish children could participate in some Christmas symbols without feeling guilty;
6. Chanukah. Jews used the magnification of Chanukah as a functional alternative for Christmas to lessen strain.³⁸

The continued use of trees to celebrate Chanukah died down to such a point that in the latter decades of the twentieth century it was considered a joke. As Jews searched for their identity during this period many chose to magnify Chanukah without the tree; others chose to keep the "Christmas Tree" as a non-secular decoration of the season but not tied in with Chanukah. It was to the latter that many rabbis addressed their annual "December" messages in congregational bulletins, messages that informed readers that trees held no significance for Jews.

The ultimate recognition that Christmas was totally non-secular found expression in those Jewish families who strongly identified with Jewish culture and celebrated Chanukah, yet continued to have a Christmas tree each year. Until the mid-twentieth century these families remained silent. Now, they have begun to appear and to voice their response to Christmas in the media, too.

Author Judith Viorst wrote an article for Redbook Magazine, entitled "The 16.5 Days of Christmas," in 1970. She stated:

Over the years the season to be jolly has continued to be, in our house, the season for the annual yuletide conflict. I keep saying that I'm not denying my proud heritage, that I simply have an innocent, pagan fondness for the fun and frolic of Christmastime. My husband keeps saying, 'There she is again with her damn tree. . . .' That tree was decorated with both five-pointed stars and Star of David symbols.³⁹

In 1972 Elliot Bernstein, ABC special events producer stated:

My kids wanted a Christmas tree, we bought it, and enjoyed it. There is after all a certain universality to the Christmas season, and we don't celebrate the birth of the savior. We celebrate Hanukkah, too, and I think the kids can understand the difference.⁴⁰

In New York City, where the greatest number of Jews in the United States live, the New York Times prints from year to year an article regarding Jews and Christmas. In 1973 the article dealt in part with Jewish families that accommodated to Christmas by celebrating both holidays. Nadine Brozan, the author of the article, quoted three families that celebrated this way:

"We observe Christmas with a tree and presents, and we light the Hanukkah menorah and give gifts every night [of the eight day holiday, which began Wednesday evening]," said Gail Levenstein, who has two daughters, 8 and 5, and a son, nearly 2. "My children feel no confusion whatsoever. There is simply no Christ in our Christmas."

"It's far more than a religious holiday, it's a custom," agreed Jane Kaufman, whose son, John, 6, sent a change-of-address letter to Santa Claus noting that he would be in Palm Beach for Christmas this year."

"My son is aware that he's Jewish and knows what that means, but he would feel deprived if we didn't have Christmas," Mrs. Kaufman said, adding, "Santa is one of the few fantasy ideas left children today."

"I don't think you have to wear your religion on your sleeve," her husband, James, remarked.⁴¹

The third family, the Bobers, approached the holiday in this manner:

"We live in this country, not in Israel," she said [Julie Bober]. "It would be a shame to deprive my children [three daughters ranging in age from 3 1/2 to 10 1/2] and say, 'You can't have a Christmas tree because you're Jewish.'"⁴²

Bober continued that she didn't think her children should have a religious identity but should identify as human beings. For Bober, Judaism was not a race but a way people worship. She stated that she would never deny that she was Jewish.

One other area of co-celebration is that of the family of an intermarried Jew. The Jew celebrates the Christmas of the non-Jewish spouse and vice versa. The children of this couple celebrate both. One such child became widely publicized as the model for the cover of the December 1980 Ladies Home Journal Magazine. Jeannine Costigan, the cover

girl, aged 5 1/2, posed with Christmas symbols on the cover. On the page marked "Editor's Diary" the magazine editorialized about a new "sense of tolerance and unity." It wrote that since the child was half Jewish and half Irish, she celebrated both Chanukah and Christmas.⁴³

A major form of accommodation to Christmas, the magnification of Chanukah, is found in the following section.

Magnification of Chanukah

In 1960, Commentary Magazine published an article entitled "The Magnification of Chanukah" by Jakob J. Petuchowski. This article described the process by which the minor Jewish holiday of Chanukah was becoming transformed into a major Jewish festival of the day. Petuchowski began the article with a description of the New Moon festival losing its importance. Then he stated:

But just as it is possible for an important festival to lose its importance, so it is possible for a minor festival to gain in esteem. Chanukah is a case in point. For modern American Jews, Chanukah ranks next in importance to the High Holy Days and the Passover.⁴⁴

The annual exchange of presents for Jews took place traditionally at Purim. This was now superceded by Chanukah.

Petuchowski analyzed the factors which helped the magnification of the holiday. These factors took shape in the 19th and 20th centuries. Modern "rationalism" did away with the "cruse of oil" legend and opened the door to the study of the Apocrypha which contained the two Books of the Maccabees. Within these two books the new significance,

which had been existant all along but not central, became a festival for political freedom and religious emancipation. Reform Judaism found it easy to redefine the holiday; its opposing element, the Jewish Nationalists or Zionists, found the holiday provided their movement with Jewish heroes to motivate the young. The Maccabees were to become an inspiration for rising Jewish nationalistic causes in the 19th century.

A further factor which supported the rise of Chanukah was the proximity of and importance of the major Christian festival of Christmas:

Yuletide, in Christian civilization, is the traditional season for "peace on earth, good will to men." And it is this Yuletide "spirit" which is made to live also in the American Jewish Chanukah observance. From the exchange of gifts, to home decorations, to greeting cards, to specially imprinted gift wrapping paper, Chanukah matches Christmas. If, because of religious scruples, the "Chanukah bush" has as yet fallen short of universal acceptance, the candelabrum can be made to enter the competition against the Christmas tree; and cut-out paper Maccabees can console the Hebrew infant for the absence of a creche. Moreover, if everything else fails, one is fortified by the knowledge that Chanukah lasts for eight long days with gifts every single night.⁴⁵

After Petuchowski examined the Talmudic and Halachic antecedents of Chanukah, and discussed the irony of the Hasmonean assimilation to Greek ways of life, he next turned to Professor Elias Bickerman's analyses of the motivation for the Hasmonean revolt and what it commemorated:

What the Festival of Chanukah commemorates, therefore, is not the struggle of Jewish faith and culture against Hellenism and Greek culture. Rather is it the commemoration of a struggle

between those who were ready to assimilate their Judaism to Hellenism, and those who were ready to assimilate valuable aspects of Hellenism to their Judaism⁴⁶

Taking into consideration Ahad Ha'am and Hermann Cohen's definitions of assimilation, Petuchowski dismissed sloganeering attempts at the word "assimilation":

In its negative aspect, it is pursued as much by the Zionist radical who wants the Jews to be "a nation like unto all the other nations" as it is by the more conventional "assimilationist" who is eager to lose all traces of his Judaism, and to merge in the crowd. In its positive aspect, it is something that has gone on in Judaism since time immemorial, and something that is going on as long as Judaism desires to remain alive. The Maccabees were neither the first nor the last to enrich Judaism with borrowings from Hellas. But it takes study and much thought--and also taste--to know where to draw the line.⁴⁷

Petuchowski's general analysis of the magnification of Chanukah described, with the advantage of historical longitude, a process which was just beginning to form in the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1857, the year of its first publication, the Jewish Messenger of New York began an annual exhortation, in an editorial or article, for Jews to put aside their apathy and to celebrate Chanukah. Some examples are:

1858 - And when we reflect that there are some who seem to evince no pride in the exploits of the Maccabees, how sad we feel that they should be so forgotten. Signed M.⁴⁸

1860 - The ritual [of Chanukah] is still being observed in every synagogue and in many of Israel's dwelling houses; but we regret to state, that with a number it has fallen into disuse.⁴⁹

1863 - How self abasing is the thought that here in these shores of freedom, where we have every right guaranteed us by the constitution, where we have every reason to thank God for His goodness to us, and where we have every cause to manifest by our acts that we are Israelites, observing the commandments delegated to us - how humiliating is the idea that the most sacred ordinances are totally disregarded.⁵⁰

The Jewish Messenger encouraged the parents to involve themselves in the education of their children:

The history of the Maccabees is too well known to require a word; yet it should be studied by our children in order to kindle in them the sparks of patriotism latent in the hearts of their parents.⁵¹

Until the December 31, 1869 issue of the paper there was no mention of Christmas in the Chanukah exhortations to parents. In the last issue of the year the editorial fully came to grips with the Christmas influence upon Chanukah (see appendix 2). The editorial "Christmas" suggested that Purim, the New Year, and Hanuca [sic] would be acceptable substitute days upon which to give presents to children:

"And let us not weaken the slight hold our children yet have on our festivals by making them look forward with anticipations of joy, to the memorable days of other faiths and ignore those their own."⁵²

The editorial once again put faith in the parental education in the home for the continuance of Jewish traditions.

In the Israelite, Wise also provided an editorial on Chanukah in 1857, which was the second mention of the holiday in his newspaper since he began publication. Along with the editorial the paper published a translation of the "Book of Antiochus."⁵³ Wise published several Chanukah

related articles and several about the historical development of Christmas from 1858 to 1867 but never mentioned both together.⁵⁴

Wise stressed the importance of Chanukah by placing an article entitled "First of the Maccabees" on the front page of the November 11, 1859 issue of the Israelite. Written by Wise, this fictionalized account of the Maccabees ran for 39 issues at a total of 174 columns of type.

The Chanukah editorial of 1868 in the Israelite told of the significance of the holiday, compared Cromwell and the Maccabees, and ended with an exhortation imploring parents to teach history to their children, since they don't learn it in school:

We can not close this article without referring to a radical error in our American system of education. Our young people learn no history. They are not acquainted with the previous experience of the human family. Worse than this, however, is the lamentable truth, that they are not pointed to those great patterns, those noble types of humanity of which history is so rich, they are not taught to imitate the sublime virtues of classic men. Their pantheon of great men is limited to one century, and to the narrow spots on which the history of the United States was enacted. Every feast in Israel admonished you, "Remember the days of old, understand the years of past generations."⁵⁵

While both the Israelite and the Messenger were recommending that parents should be educating their children to the beautiful festivals of Judaism, including especially Chanukah, another source for Jewish education was developing a means to magnify and keep Chanukah as a viable holiday.

This was the development of the Jewish Sunday school's Chanukah festival.

The first Chanukah festival in a Sunday school or Sabbath school is not known. However, in 1870 the Israelite published its first recognition of the phenomenon in an article entitled "Hanukah Festivals."⁵⁶ The Mound Street Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio, held an annual festival for 200 pupils of the Sabbath School in the vestry rooms. The custom had been established a few years before. They had a prayer from Dr. Lilienthal, lighting of the candles, addresses by members of the school committee, music from the choir, and the teachers were presented with gifts from their classes. The children were given "eatables" and at ten o'clock were sent home. Then the choir, school committee, trustees, and audience had an entertainment planned by the ladies of the congregation which lasted late into the night. At the Plum Street Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio, The Board of Talmud Yelodim, the congregational school, voted to give their pupils a festival, also. Wise spoke to an audience the next Sunday night of 250 pupils. Dr. Kraus, the Hazan, lit the candles and led the hymn singing. The children then said grace, ate all of the delicacies, and went home at 10 P.M.

Once the Israelite began publishing news of Chanukah programs, other newspapers began to publish reports, also. Programmatically, many of the festivals followed the Mound St. Temple's model, which was a copy of the current Christian Sunday school entertainment for Christmas. Occasionally

tableaux, dramatic readings, plays, balls, poetry, and Chanukah hymn singing would be added. The children would have their festival, retire to bed at home, and the adults would then continue with the festivities. As the custom spread across the country schools and organizations would adapt the festival for children in different ways.⁵⁷

Generally ice cream, cake, candy, and fruit were the refreshments unless a dinner was served. Then it would range from turkey and duck, to oysters.⁵⁸ Foods fried in oil, such as potato latkes (pancakes) did not become popular until after the Eastern European immigration of Jews to America in the 1880's and beyond.

Some of the entertainment portions of the Chanukah programs had little correspondence with the holiday. In Rochester, New York, the children of Brit Kodesh, in 1880 presented "The Oratorio of Esther" as a foreshadow of the Purim Feast.⁵⁹ The children of Beth-El Sabbath School in Detroit, Michigan, in 1880, rendered the operetta "Red Riding Hood's Rescue."⁶⁰ In 1881 the Jewish Orphan Asylum of New York City had a stereopticon exhibition, jugglery, and marionettes with Punch and Judy.⁶¹ In Bloomington, Illinois, in 1884 the children of the congregation put on the play "The Grand Dress Rehearsal of a Purim Play."⁶² Congregation Brit Kodesh of Rochester, New York, invited a magician to perform at their festival.⁶³ At the Denver, Colorado Chanukah festival in 1890, 28 girls did a broom drill and "40 boys gave a sword drill which would have done genuine soldiers credit."⁶⁴

The candlelighting ceremony was important to both children's and adult's festivals. Almost all of the early reports of children's celebrations state that a candlelighting took place. Sometimes this candlelighting was quite inventive. The Sabbath school of the Louisville congregation reported in 1884 that 36 little girls and boys entered the Temple led by their teachers, walked up to the alter and kindled the lights of freedom to commemorate Judas Maccabaeus, hero of Chanukah.⁶⁵ Temple Emanu-El of Denver, Colorado, reported in 1884, that eight children formed a living menorah holding candles and bouquets of flowers in their hands.⁶⁶ In 1885 at a surprise Chanukah party, Rabbi Messing of Indianapolis, Indiana, led eight of the smallest children as they became a menorah carrying tapers and told stories about their candles as they lit them.⁶⁷ Also in 1885, the Louisville congregation, not to be outdone by previous programs, had a children's service at which 40 children marched down the isle with lit tapers. After the benediction from Dr. Moses more than 200 candles were lit.⁶⁸

At times the candlelighting took on "grand" proportions in the program. In 1888 the Columbus, Ohio correspondent wrote the following report to the Israelite:

Our ladies (God bless them) presented the B'nai Israel Congregation with a very beautiful and costly illuminated "Menorah" for the celebration of our Chanukah feast. Last Friday evening I observed one of the largest audiences that ever assembled in our temple to witness the kindling of the lights of this masterpiece of art. Among the audience were a large number of Gentiles. The word "Chanukah" was plainly visible through

the little holes of the pipes, and eight artificial candlesticks were seen below with an additional light representing the "Shamus."⁶⁹

In New York, in 1890, Temple Beth El had Friday night services and above the ark gas jets spelled out "Chanukah, Feast of Lights."⁷⁰

With regard to gifts, the children usually received boxes of candy, fruit, or nuts, and sometimes a small toy.⁷¹ The tradition of giving the teachers or the rabbi a present from their class or the school spread across the country. One unique present did not become repeated in other Sunday schools, though its purpose was certainly later revitalized by American Jewish customs. At the Northern Branch of the Hebrew Sunday-school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the children celebrated Chanukah, in 1882, under beautiful banners. The synagogue presented each child with candy and a specially printed commemorative card which contained the words "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the mighty."⁷² The custom of Chanukah card giving would not take hold until later in the twentieth century.

Once the Jewish newspapers began publishing accounts of Chanukah celebrations the revival of the holiday mushroomed across the country in Sunday schools, congregations, institutions, and organizations. In 1876, Congregation Beth El, of Detroit, Michigan, held its first Chanukah celebration for the children of the religious school. In 1880, the YMHA of Baltimore, Maryland, held its first festival. New Orleans also had its first Chanukah celebration at the Rampart

Street Synagogue in 1880.⁷³ The incoming reports of Chanukah festivals to the Israelite became so tremendous that in the January 6, 1882, issue under the "Local and Domestic" column, the paper wrote:

Want of space has forced us to hold over a number of accounts of Chanukah celebrations until it is too late to publish them. We trust the writers will excuse us.⁷⁴

The following organizations or cities began their Chanukah celebrations on the dates following: Beth Israel Congregation of San Francisco in 1883; Evansville, Indiana in 1883; Ahawath Chesed Temple, New York City, in 1885; Toledo, Ohio in 1885; Columbia, Tennessee, in 1885; Vincennes, Indiana in 1887; Knoxville, Tennessee in 1888; Buffalo, New York in 1890; and Spokane, Washington in 1892.⁷⁵ These are but representative of the groundswell to begin a Chanukah commemoration.

The upsurge to celebrate Chanukah was well documented. But what was the result and the reaction? Why was the need so strong to magnify Chanukah in religious schools, organizations and institutions? In 1886 the Erie, Pennsylvania correspondent wrote to the Israelite:

. . . and what is more, Chanuka will be observed somewhat different than heretofore-- it will not be all Christmas trees and Santa Claus. We are to have a Chanuka School exhibition, and instead of looking forward for Christmas, the children are awaiting their own holiday, Chanuka, so they speak their pieces and get their presents.⁷⁶

Wise, in an editorial on December 7, 1888, in the Israelite drew a direct correspondence between the Chanukah festival and Christmas:

The Chanukah festival for the Sabbath-school children has become an American institution with our co-religionists, largely imitated in Europe, partly because of the ideas of liberty and heroism which underlie this annual celebration of the Maccabean valorous and patriotic deeds in behalf of downtrodden Israel, and partly as a substitute for the children's Christmas celebration which latitudinarians aped in their families. As the confirmation rejuvenated the Shebuoth feast, so did the children's festival reanimate the Chanukah⁷⁷ itself. They will not be neglected again.

In 1892, Dr. David Philipson discussed the Sabbath-school Chanukah celebration and its relevance to American Judaism in an editorial in the Sabbath Visitor, where he stated:

Of late years the celebration of the feast has come to form a feature in our Sabbath-schools, all over the land Chanukkah festivals are in vogue and the little ones look forward to the feast with eager interest and delight; not one of them but can tell the story of Judah; not one of them but can recount the marvelous tale of Jewish bravery. It has been a wise step this to engage the attention of the little ones; for reasons which we can not stop to set forth now, the beautiful home celebration of the Chanukkah, the lighting of the lights for eight continuous evenings in every Jewish house has for the most part fallen into neglect, but the Sabbath-schools have stepped into the breach, and have saved this glorious reminiscence from passing out of Jewish life altogether.⁷⁸

After the firm establishment of the Chanukah festival the newspapers began to lessen the amount of coverage about them. Upon Wise's death in 1900 the editorial policy of the Israelite almost eliminated all but the least mention of them in published articles. Attention switched to more social news. However the Sunday-school festival was flourishing in the twentieth century. On December 2, 1915 the Israelite published:

The Hanukkah Festival is one of the favorites in the Jewish calendar. Besides its high significance for me and women, it is also a Children's Holiday and the religious schools celebrate it with elaborate festivals and great heartiness. In the homes songs accompany the kindling of the lights and the ritual of the synagog is enhanced by the recital of selected Psalms. The social amenities of the week are happy and cheerful, and in accordance with the genial spirit of the festival, comprise entertainment and benevolence in the home and community.⁷⁹

As the religious schools and some organizations began their successful Chanukah programming the hue and cry from others to keep and magnify Chanukah to counter apathy and Christmas assimilation continued to occur. Joseph Cohen, writing to the Israelite in 1876, reported on the Louisville Chanukah celebration with the Rev. Dr. Kleeberg and the religious school. He stated:

In conclusion I would recommend to the teachers of our Jewish Sabbath school, that they would try and make the feasts of Chanukah and Purim a feast of joy for our children to which both teachers and children would look forward with longing and delight.⁸⁰

In her correspondence to the Jewish Messenger in January 1879, the Baltimore representative "Sulamith" [Henrietta Szold], wrote about the Christmas-Chanukah season of 1878. She sounded a call for magnification of Chanukah when she wrote:

Christmas truly fulfills its mission of bringing peace and good will to men. All this and more, Chanucka should be to us, but, unfortunately, we do not make it the messenger of all these good things. Our writers may not sing its praise, as the poets and writers of fiction, inspired by it to their most masterly efforts, have of Christmas. You may interpose that, because the celebrants of

these festivals are in the majority, so much attention is paid to them. That may be true of public demonstrations, but were the adherents of the faith suddenly to fall off, leaving only a small number, they would celebrate them with equally as much spirit and inspiration. Gifted, as we are, with strong social instincts, these features attract us, and, perhaps secretly, we harbor the desire to feast with them. In the meantime, we forget that we possess a holiday in commemoration of one of the most wonderful deeds in history, founded upon a much nobler basis.⁸¹

In 1879 Dr. Max Lilienthal, upon observing the New York Y.M.H.A. Chanukah celebration, was duly impressed and stated:

Let all imitate such festivals, if not on so grand a scale (for who can rival our great metropolis?), let us do so according to our means, and let us all assert: We need no Christmas trees in our Jewish houses; our Chanukah can be celebrated to the delight of old and young.⁸²

The correspondent for the Israelite in Buffalo, New York, in 1881 was critical that the parents of Jewish children were giving them Christmas presents in 1880. He wrote:

Christmas passed quietly here and was observed as usual among the Israelites by plentiful presents to the children. If there is any practice to be condemned, I think it is this one. If there is so great a necessity for a day on which to give presents to the little ones, select one of our own holidays. Chanukah or Purim might well serve the purpose, and the celebrating of such a day with remembrances to our friends would soon bring all the old significance of the festivals and raise them once more to the rank of real holidays.⁸³

While the Buffalo correspondent had nine years to wait for a Chanukah celebration, the Rochester, New York celebration

in 1881 drew the following criticism because it was not appropriate to the holiday:

Our Chanuka Feast was celebrated last Wednesday evening at the Phoenix Club rooms. It was a success in as far as the Terpsichorean privileges permitted; but the "mummeries" were, to use a mild expression, disgusting. We do not wish to be hard on the ladies who were on the committees, and therefore we had rather not give names, but we would say to them that we expected better taste of persons who hold foremost positions in so-called society. The interest of children requires something that is for their interest even in play.⁸⁴

The criticism of inappropriate behavior, either that of Jews celebrating Christmas through trees or presents, repeated itself many times in Jewish periodicals both in editorials and letters-to-the-editor. Writing in 1883 of the Boston, Massachusetts, holiday season of 1882, "Horatius" criticized the Jewish community's acceptance of Christmas customs. His answer in reply to his own criticisms was to magnify Chanukah:

Surely, surely, if we want an opportunity to engage in merriment and festivity, to exchange presents and congratulations, we need not draw upon the resources of an alien faith. There are many glorious events in Jewish history worthy of commemoration, which if not entirely neglected, do not receive that recognition which they deserve. The feasts of Chanukah and Purim recall events of which no Israelite need be ashamed. When a child questions his parent concerning their significance, his conscious will not smite him as he recalls the noble deeds of his ancestors, and unfolds the pages whereon are inscribed the past glory and renown of his race. It will surely be of more value to him than Christmas presents.⁸⁵

The revival and accompanying magnification of Chanukah in the religious schools and organizations in the 1880's brought to light several related and concurrent

issues in the Jewish community: those of continued neglect and ignorance in the home regarding Chanukah, and the tension between reform, and orthodox Jewish philosophy concerning the holiday. While orthodoxy emphasized the minor religious nature over the nationalistic, Reform Judaism noted the religious nature of Chanukah but placed central importance upon the political and national issues of freedom. The orthodox did not favor the magnification of Chanukah, preferring to maintain its observance as a minor festival with a simple home service and candlelighting with appropriate prayers in the synagogue. The reformers saw the magnified Chanukah celebration as a means of maintaining the holiday as a buttress against Christmas.

In the San Francisco report of January 11, 1884 in the Israelite, the correspondent made several historical statements relating to the development of Chanukah:

This feast seems to cut quite a figure this year. When the spirit of reform went abroad to cut loose many of the customs of Jewish practice, this historical feast suffered first. Perhaps because it was deemed unimportant in the calendar of festivals, it was never-the-less true that it was neglected, and our young men and young ladies who pride themselves on their ignorance of Judaism, make it a special point to know nothing whatever of the Maccabean feast, and make merry over their inability even to pronounce the funny name. But this year Chanukah seems to have bounded into prominence and claims notice. Dr. Sonneshein [sic] is in a large measure responsible for this (though he has treated the festival rather shabbily), but I notice also that in the Eastern cities there is a revival in its celebration.⁸⁶

Reform Judaism was credited with the Chanukah revival in correspondence from Denver, Colorado to the Israelite in 1885:

Although the celebration of this feast has been regenerated and rejuvenated by Reform Judaism-- at the Rabbinical Conference at Braunschweig in 1844, a resolution concerning a more suitable and solemn celebration of Chanukah was unanimously carried--and much neglected by so-called conservative Judaism, we often hear from orthodox pupils and read in the orthodox press on this and on the other side of the ocean, that the few orthodox "Jehudim" are nowadays the "Maccabees," while we poor reformers are the Philo-Hellenists, the traitors, the supporters of the modern Antiochus, Haman, Stoecker, Bismarck, etc. . . . In due consideration of these facts the Rev. Dr. E. Schreiber took the right standpoint in his sermon on Schabbes Chanuccah, on the "Old and Modern Maccabees." The Doctor attributed the cause of the want of interest taken so far in this festival to the widely-spread ignorance concerning its origin and significance.⁸⁷

He went on in his sermon to say that the books where this history was stored was declared either profane or secular reading by the rabbis, which was never done to the Declaration of Independence. The ignorant Polish or Russian Jew would quote the Talmud as the reason for celebrating the holiday but the enlightened Jew knew its true significance as the fight for freedom and independence. In the nineteenth century when Jewish survival was threatened by secular freedoms and science, Reform Judaism as the modern Maccabee, stepped in with a religion of the heart keeping Jews away from proselytizers.

Kaufman Kohler, in his Sabbath of Chanukah sermon of 1885 (see appendix 9) reiterated the humble origins of

the Chanukah festival "in the dark, narrow home circle" of the medieval Jew. Kohler questioned whether or not Judaism was to remain forever repressed among the world's religions. He then stated:

Orthodoxy renders Judaism a museum full of old curiosities to be glanced at with an air of reverence by inquisitive passers by. Reform Judaism wishes to render it a perennial fountain of inspiration, an ever living, ever progressive, ever vigorous power of life underlying and re-fashioning the world's civilization.⁸⁸

His sermon continued with the call for a magnified Chanukah.

The Israelite published several editorials by Wise during the 1880's which touched on these issues. In 1886, after noting the decline of Chanukah celebration in the home and the continuation of the festivals in the Sabbath-schools, Wise wrote:

Like the Passover, the Chanukah partakes more of a political than a purely religious character, they commemorate the independence of the nation, somewhat like the Fourth of July; although among the Hebrews the political was not separated from the religious element.⁸⁹

In 1887 Wise wrote in another Chanukah editorial:

We celebrate our Chanukah days in our style, and next week; you will find in the AMERICAN ISRAELITE accounts from all parts of the land of Chanukah festivals for the children, parties and balls for the adults, extra sermons, lectures and select music in the synagogues, and family reunions in the houses, which we think is all good enough as it is. There is any how more of patriotism and love of liberty and independence than purely religious ideas connected with it, and that also is good enough as it is.⁹⁰

In a note from New York on January 7, 1887, came a critical appraisal of the efficacy of the Chanukah festivals.

The report by "Excelsior," in the Israelite, noted also the difference between New Yorkers and their observance in 1886 when it stated:

Chanukah has come and gone, but, outside of the extreme orthodox circles, one would hardly have known that there was such a festival on the calendar. Of course, the children in the various Sunday-schools connected with the congregations had their receptions, but I am inclined to think that the little ones were thinking more of the cakes and cream than of the heroic deeds of the Maccabees about which the ministers tell them every year. In few Jewish homes was any attention paid to the festival. In the lower portion of the city, in the Russian districts, Chanukah candles and candlesticks were disposed of in large quantities, and in the meanest and most squalid rooms in the tenement houses the lights were lit regularly during the week. But not so up town. In fact, to use the language of an intelligent Americanized co-religionist "We have no time, nowadays, to bother with such foolishness." Last Saturday, however, our places of worship were better attended than usual, as no business was done on account of Christmas.⁹¹

The correspondent's bias was clearly evident toward the home festival of the orthodox and away from, in his opinion, the less than educational festival of the reformers. He also noted the religious differences of practice between the "uptown Reform," mostly from German heritage, and the "downtown" Russian immigrants.

In response, on January 28, 1887, the Israelite published an editorial which was very critical of the superstitious "orthodox" and Russian immigrants living in the south of New York City. The editorial blamed the "ghetto" mentality of these Jews for preventing their Americanization. The American reformers were totally different types of Jews

than these newcomers with different aspirations and goals.

In regard to their religious customs the editorial intimated:

We appeal to reason and they (the European orthodox) appeal to their grandparents' habits. We are Israelites of the nineteenth century and a free country, and they gnaw the dead bones of past centuries. Besides the name we have very little in common with them.⁹²

The editorial even threatened that the "American Israelites" should withdraw their identification with these people for the honor of American Judaism. For the complete citation see appendix 10. Thus the ideological lines were drawn in the 1880's between the reform and orthodox perspectives. The battle carried over into the twentieth century with little movement from either direction.

The magnification of Chanukah continued to roll on. So too did reports of apathy. In 1894 a report from New York to the Israelite stated:

Never was the Feast of Chanukah so generally celebrated as this year. Whether or not the propinquity of Christmas had anything to do with it I cannot say; but there can be no doubt that occasion has been generally taken to emphasize the impropriety of celebrating the natal day of the Christian savior, when we ourselves have so fitting a festival, commemorative of Jewish valor, that can be celebrated with joyousness by all, regardless of ritualistic differences.⁹³

In Cincinnati the Israelite published an editorial in 1896 that stated:

This is the middle of Chanukah week and the children of the Sabbath schools and charitable institutions are being given a happy day in commemoration of a grand event and of the heroes that brought it about. Outside of this there is but little account of the old festal week taken

by modern Jews; practically none at all in the home circle. It is a great pity, for the feast was to teach a great lesson of fidelity to faith, steadfastness to truth and heroic self-sacrifice for country and liberty. We need the Maccabean spirit as much to-day as we did so many centuries ago and it would be well to seek it by communion with history and history's God.⁹⁴

To show the rapid spread of the revival of Chanukah it can be noted that in 1885 in New York the following editorial was written in the American Hebrew:

That the Feast of Dedication will be celebrated in house and synagogue, there can be no question. The beautiful ceremony connected with the celebration, and the glowing memories with it, awakens in the minds and hearts of those who know the story in its beauty and grandeur, have tended to give the feast a firm hold on our people, which cannot be loosened by the influence of the reform movement which has done so much to weaken the attachment towards Jewish festivals. But besides this private celebration in the household, and the semi-private celebration in the synagogue there should be some demonstratively public tribute to the heroes and the heroic epoch.

It is to be regretted that Chanuka has not some established annual public festivity such as the Purim Association provides for the Feast of Esther.⁹⁵

The editorial writer in the American Hebrew once again echoed the sentiments of the orthodox majority of New York in placing less than full value upon the festival work and magnification which the Reform Movement was attempting in the religious schools.

By the turn of the century Chanukah had become so magnified in New York that the American Hebrew published the following editorial in 1908:

There is a distinct revival in the popularity of Chanukah. Congregations that have hitherto made but little of it have emphasized its ceremonial side this year more than ever. The New York Section of the Council of Jewish Women have had the happy thought of having a representation of Handel's "Judas Maccabeus," which is a most appropriate combination of religion and music. The Society of Jewish Art has made its annual meeting in the Chanukah week. Altogether, this fine festival, appealing to the best sentiments in the Jewish heart, has once again found its way to the hearts of Jewish New York.⁹⁶

Though more and more organizations were beginning and continuing Chanukah celebrations the same criticism rose again regarding the lack of celebration in the home with renewed calls for revival of the Chanukah holiday. American secularism pressured not only the original immigrants of the 1880's it also had a great effect upon the second generation with regard to religious observance. The second generation was intent on becoming part of the "melting pot" of America as quickly as possible. This meant shedding the Old World mores of their ethnic group. Second generation Jews were helped in the process by the Americanized German Jews who had preceded them and had become established. To facilitate this Americanization process the German Jews contributed greatly toward the establishment of Young Men's Hebrew Associations and Educational Alliances. The German Jews were very much interested in avoiding any criticism or anti-Semitism reflecting back upon them generating from a reaction to their inundation by these 3,000,000 new "green-horns." There also was a genuine effort on the part of some to alleviate many of the problems that the new Americans

were facing. This would help them to become Americans faster. Thus the "melting pot" secularism of America and the support of the established Jewish community placed great pressure upon the new immigrants to accept American ways of doing things and thinking.

In a climate where group affiliation, religious education, and synagogue attendance were entirely voluntary matters, Orthodox Jews floundered hopelessly in search of solid cultural and religious expression. The impact of American secular life, the preoccupation with economic advancement, the opportunities offered by an attractive and friendly non-Jewish civilization, made it progressively inconvenient to maintain intact the full spectrum of Jewish traditions and observances.⁹⁷

For these reasons the criticisms of the neglect of Chanukah and the acceptance of Christmas customs were repeated during these years. Reform had disassociated with a large measure of traditions and ceremonials while many of the orthodox were neglecting minor holiday observances. Therefore, the criticisms of neglect of Chanukah and the calls for its magnification were not aimed at one group or the other in the Jewish community--they were meant for all.

Between 1904 and 1921 Annette Kohn wrote editorials for the Israelite. In her 1904 editorial she made a plea to raise "to the level of Christmas, as bright as beautiful-a festival of equal importance."⁹⁸ Her exhortation placed major emphasis upon the rabbinate to move toward motivating the apathetic parents to celebrate Chanukah for their children and not follow fashion and practice the celebrations of their Christian neighbors. She stated:

Yes, out of place as it seems for rabbis to use their pulpits to discourse upon the festivals and holidays of a stranger church, the need is imperative, in order that they may quicken the hearts and souls of their own people to wake from the criminal negligence of which they are guilty to their children, to themselves, and to the claims of their ancient faith.

The Pulpit can not find words to denounce too strongly this absurd, thoughtless following of fashion, which is indulged in because it is easier to fall in with the practices of others than to trouble about a little originality, but which does not absolve the conscience or leave the heart free of guilt.⁹⁹

In her World War I editorial of December 21, 1921, after noting the victories of Pershing and Foch, Kohn once again declared that Jewish homes were ignoring their own menorah while lighting the candles on Christmas trees. When that happened, it spelled the end of Chanukah for the Jewish people according to Kohn. Despite these dour observations she stated:

A revival is growing slowly year by year lately, through the religious schools and "synagog extension work" of the more significant olden ceremonials of the Jewish faith. . . . Let us hope Chanukah will be restored to its olden place. It occurs at about the same time as the Christmas winter church festival and conduces to the same joys and hilarity for the children and can be made to appeal to old and young.¹⁰⁰

The first revival which Kohn wrote about fitfully continued after the First World War, when organized religion, in general, in the United States, observed a diminution of strength.

In 1927 the Israelite published an editorial stating, "For a while among Reform Jews more especially Chanukah did

not receive the attention it deserved, but more recently it became what might be called the 'Jewish Christmas,' the festival of the little ones and now after a fashion more generally observed."¹⁰¹ The editorial provided the significance of Chanukah and mentioned that Jewish children were now lighting menorahs instead of Christmas trees.

Fanny Goldstein, then a branch librarian of the Boston Public Library, prepared a modest exhibit of Jewish books during the week of Chanukah 1925 for her neighborhood branch in the Jewish community. Each year she repeated the exhibit and each year it drew more attention. In 1927, Rabbi S. Felix Mendelsohn wrote an article for the Chicago Jewish Sentinel suggesting and urging that the entire country should observe a Jewish Book Week. Chanukah was the suggested appropriate time because it was hoped that books would be given as gifts.

In the 1930s the National Jewish Welfare Board, an organization formed in 1917 to care for Jewish service men but later expanding its activities to include cultural affairs, became active in furthering the program of an annual Jewish book month.¹⁰²

The program became popular and has remained current until the present time when Jewish Book Month is celebrated immediately before Chanukah.

Mordecai Kaplan, founder of Reconstructionist philosophy and the movement in Judaism, published in 1934 his major work Judaism as a Civilization. In his book Kaplan called for a reorientation in Jewish thinking

regarding Purim and Chanukah. Chanukah should replace Purim as the major gift-giving holiday. He wrote:

The Hanukkah and Purim festivals should be observed with more eclat than at present. Since Hanukkah falls so near the Christmas season, it must be made as interesting and joyful for the Jewish child as Christmas is made for the Christian child. The Hanukkah festival should be the season for gifts. The children should look forward to gifts from their parents, and parents from their children. Receiving and giving gifts contributes to the festal air of the home. It should be the season for paying social calls, playing home games, and holding communal entertainments. Purim gifts, though prescribed by custom, will naturally grow rare as Hanukkah gifts will come more and more into vogue. But with masking, dancing, social entertainment, and the seudah (feast), Purim can generate Jewish atmosphere in the home. 103

During World War II grand celebrations were kept to a minimum as stress was placed upon all Americans acting together to defeat the enemy in Europe. Chanukah editorials, sermons, and articles generally compared the fight of the Allies to the fight of the Maccabees. The same type of editorials, articles, and sermons made during World War I recurred. There was no stress upon magnifying Chanukah during war years.

After World War II the different movements within Judaism moved closer toward consensus about the celebration of Chanukah. Many factors contributed to a resurgence of Jewish identity in American Jews. The struggle against American and European anti-Semitism, the emergence of Russian immigrant leadership in the Jewish community, the development of B'nai B'rith Hillels on college campuses, the increased attention to Jewish education, including day schools, the

horrifying evidence of Jewish genocide in the Nazi concentration camps, Zionism, and the establishment of the State of Israel were major developments leading up to the resurgence in identity for the third generation Jew. The third generation Jew was very different from his second and first generation Jewish relatives. He had faced little alienation; he did not feel inferior to native-born Americans because he, too, was native born:

While the need for respectability had frequently led to a deliberate rejection of Jewish religious and cultural values a generation earlier, most Americans, the fate of German Jewry yet fresh in their minds, recognized that assimilation was not the answer. One's origins, whatever they were, would have to be re-examined and, if possible, invested with respectability. And this was exactly what many thousands of third-generation American Jews set about to do.¹⁰⁴

They accomplished this by turning to their "family" religion and moving from "melting pot" to cultural pluralism.

In the 1940s the Jewish Welfare Board commissioned Salo W. Baron to make a study of the changing Jewish leadership and current situation of Jewish life:

In his report Professor Baron stated that the shift has of necessity taken place "even in those areas of Jewish culture which had long been entrusted to the older centers of Jewish life in central Europe." He further indicated that American Jews were readily assuming their new responsibility. "There are incontestable signs not only of a general cultural awakening but of a certain eagerness of the Jewish public to pioneer in the unexploited realms of a modern culture, which would be both Jewish and American."¹⁰⁵

In Albert I. Gordon's book Jews in Transition, a Jewish woman in Minneapolis, Minnesota, told of her childhood

growing up in pre-World War II America. She included in her experiences that her father and brothers were engaged in Christmas business, that Chanukah was a minor drab holiday in comparison to Christmas, and that she missed what the Christian children had. After she married and had children her situation changed. By 1949 she and her family attended a synagogue which no longer ignored Chanukah and how to keep the children happy on the holiday. The Sunday school and Talmud Torah classes made the festival fun for the children and even had Chanukah plays. Some of the rabbis arranged that the Chanukah story would be told along with the Christmas play in some schools. Chanukah songs were added together with the Christmas carols being sung in the schools. She continued:

Two Conservative synagogues in the city began to urge a greater degree of special home decoration for Chanukah and actually conducted home lighting and home decoration contests for which special prizes were awarded.¹⁰⁶

The women received special pamphlets in their congregational sisterhoods on "How to Observe Chanukah in the Home." Numbers of them made each night of Chanukah into a major party. The children received beautiful gifts each night of the festival from all the members of the family. They had family dinners and good times during the holiday season:

The candles are lighted and the songs are sung and I think that there is a greater awareness of the beauty and meaning of Chanukah today than when I was a girl. It just goes to show that if you work away at it, you can revive a holiday.¹⁰⁷

Despite some Jews decorating trees, imitating Santa Claus and not bothering to light Chanukah candles, the Chanukah conditions in Minneapolis were better than they had been in the past.

In 1950, Grace Goldin described her family's celebrations of Chanukah. In her self analyzation she was critical that they had put Chanukah into italics, where it didn't belong. They had overdone the magnification. To prove her point she wrote:

If Chanukah comes earlier than Christmas, it's an inoculation; if later, an antidote; either way, we in our town violently amplify it, so great has become our need. The character of the holiday has been transfigured by an accident of timing: what used to be a festival of freedom becomes a festival of refuge. We put off red-and-green to put on blue-and-white--that's about the size of it.

This past year our children practiced Chanukah hymns, played Chanukah records, of which there are more on the market every year, dressed up for the Hadassah program as a candle, a dredle, a latke. They mounted cardboard Jews and Syrians in Maccabean creches, or pasted together paper chains of cream-colored menorahs, orange stars of David, pink dredels, purple elephants.¹⁰⁸

The completion of the article told of her personal experience educating her children and providing significance to them for the holiday.

Members of the orthodox Jewish community participated in the magnification process. In 1953 Stephen Klein, President of the Barton's Bonbonniere candy stores, declared November 27th through December 3rd as "I AM A Maccabee" Week which would be celebrated in all the stores.

Each child visiting any of the 57 Barton's stores accompanied by an adult will be given, free, a Maccabee Gift Bag, containing an "I AM A Maccabee" button, a Judah Maccabee Pledge Card, the story of Chanukah and candy. The button, designed by Barton's to be worn by the child, shows a likeness of Judah Maccabee and carries the slogan "I AM A Maccabee." The Card, listing pledges on such important qualities as Action, Courage, Allegiance, and Belief, gives Jewish children a measuring stick for patterning their lives after the famed hero.¹⁰⁹

Klein was the chairman of the Tenth annual dinner of Torah Umesorah, the orthodox Hebrew day school movement. Barton's Chanukah concept received approval from the orthodox community because the announcement for "I AM A Maccabee" Week was advertised in the orthodox journal The Synagogue Light.

The popular Jewish writer Herman Wouk juxtaposed the two celebrations of Chanukah, the old and the new, in 1959, in his book This Is My God. The picture he described of the old celebration of Chanukah painted: a simple home ceremony in the bleakest part of winter, few presents or gifts, sometimes Chanukah "geld" (money) was given to the children, no festivities in the synagogue where Chanukah was barely mentioned, possibly a recognition of Chanukah in the Hebrew school with a play, the giving of dreidels (tops), nuts and raisens. Chanukah was recognizable year to year but could not compare to the attention paid to other Jewish holidays and the Sabbath.

It was natural, Wouk felt, that the new Jewish generation growing up in America would feel left out of the

Christmas holiday with its hoopla and presents. The American second generation Jews were poorly trained religiously. It was difficult for them to understand why the Christians had a beautiful mid-winter festival and they did not. Thusly, the Jews attempted various types of compromises ranging from bringing Christmas trees and presents into the home to pressuring school systems to include Chanukah plays and hymns together with their Christmas programs. Even the most liberal minded rabbis inveighed against this hodge-podge but it continued to occur, nevertheless:

The aggrandizement of Hanuka itself is a fortunate accident. The level of knowledge of all Judaism must rise when any part of it happens, for whatever reason, to gain attention. The son of my skeptical friend is not likely to stop after learning about Hanuka. A lack of clear and satisfying religious identity hurts American Jews most in December. That is why the apparently trifling issue of the Christmas tree generates such obduracy and such resentment. It rasps an exposed nerve. It is a good thing that Hanuka is then at hand. If the old custom of Hanuka money has become the new custom of Hanuka gifts, that is a minor shift in manner. The tale of the Feast of Lights, with its all-too-sharp comment on our life nowadays, is very colorful. It is of the greatest use in giving the young a quick grasp of the Jewish historic situation. The gifts win their attention. The little candles stimulate their questions. The observance seems tooled to the needs of self-discovery.¹¹⁰

The decade of the 1960s brought with it a new Jewish awareness and a heightened spirit in Chanukah. Rabbis Solomon Bernardo and David Greenberg wrote the following in 1965:

What was Hanukkah forty years ago?--The recitation of For the Miracles, Psalms, a short prayer in the synagogue, the kindling of small thin lights of wax or oil; and in the house, pancakes and cards for the adults and a spinning top for the children.

And what is Hanukkah today? The festival of the Hasmoneans--a festival filled with salvation. It is a great national holiday celebrated throughout the land with parties, orations, songs, and hymns, pilgrimages and parades. It is as if a new soul had been breathed into the ancient festival, and a spirit renewed within it.¹¹¹

In an article about Jewish identity in 1965 published by Look Magazine, entitled "The Jew and Christmas--To Observe or Not? From A New Generation, A New Answer," Leonard Gross, Look's senior editor, described the general attitudes of Jews in his day to Christmas. He felt the 1960s saw a rebirth of Jewish identity for several reasons. These included "Hansen's Law," that what the second-generation wishes to forget the third-generation wishes to remember; more and more having become known about the "final solution" of the Nazi's; Israel continued to act as a source of pride for American Jews; Jewish authors writing more books; Christian liberals and clergymen leading the fight to discard their inherited anti-Semitism; and finally Protestant and Catholic theologians beginning to discover the relevance of Jewish theologians, especially Martin Buber. "Says Robert Katz of Cincinnati, 'The feedback from the non Jewish world is such as to compel the Jew to rediscover what he has tried to forget.'¹¹² Much of this new identity has to do with the reversal or lack of self hate:

'You don't see as much self-hatred now as you did in our generation; says Rabbi Henry Skirball, associate director of youth affairs for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. We're a whole generation removed from the Eastern European Jew who was proving his Americanism. We're at the crest of an organizational surge. Our kids don't feel out of it. They can affiliate. They don't feel square. Between 1925 and 1930, it was something if 50 percent of the college kids would put down 'Jewish' if they were asked to state their religious affiliation. Today, they all do.'113

This rebirth of identity supported a revival of ethnic, cultural, and religious customs and practices. The magnification of Chanukah from its minor status of festival to a major role in Jewish cultural and religious practice picked up momentum.

As Chanukah became more accepted as a festival and as it began to rival in scope its calendar neighbor Christmas many of the similar situations which occurred for Christmas also transpired for Chanukah. Chanukah greetings cards were published, sold, purchased and mailed. Chanukah gift wrapping paper and specially printed ribbons and streamers became available for the Jewish shoppers. Chanukah became the major gift giving holiday with American Jews. All the problems of the commercialization of Christmas, to a smaller degree, began to manifest themselves onto the Chanukah holiday as well.

In 1977 the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization began to react to results that the magnification of Chanukah had reached.

Now, the national office of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization is leading a movement "to take all signs of Christmas out of Hanukkah," according to Rabbi Mordecai Schreiber, of Washington, D. C.

Schreiber, the youth organization's Jewish educational director, said the group would also seek to establish Hanukkah as a "major Jewish holiday" recognizing the original religious importance.¹¹⁴

The B.B.Y.O. was searching for a means of expressing the importance of the Jewish heritage. They wanted that expression to be more than a substitute for the glamour and tinsel of Christmas. Schreiber stated: "It is not really a campaign," he said. "We are just trying to get youngsters to find a more serious way of celebrating Hanukkah."¹¹⁵ Writing in the Shofar, the youth organization's newspaper, he called upon the 40,000 members in 1977, to develop programming during Chanukah which would attempt to meet some of the assimilatory and other problems.

Two Louisville, Kentucky, rabbis perceived of the development of Chanukah in 1977 with different emphasis. Dr. Herbert Waller, rabbi at Adath Israel-B'rith Sholom Congregation (reform) felt that Jews, in 1977, were very concerned that the holiday be celebrated as a victory of the Maccabees and rededication of the temple:

Waller said it is true that Hanukkah has grown in importance over the years. But he said the growth has been because Jews have come to realize the religious importance of the festival and not because of any wish to use the festival as a substitute for Christmas.

He added, however, that Christians and Jews "Have an adversary in commercial religion" because members of both faiths in recent years have tended

to go overboard in spending money on gifts, decorations and having a good time "instead of sticking to the religious traditions.

"I think the money could be put to better use and given to charity," Waller said. "But I think it would be a misinterpretation to think of Hanukkah as a response to another (Christmas) situation."116

Rabbi Irving Glickman of Keneseth Israel Congregation (orthodox) had a different opinion, believing that many Jews privately admit that they use Chanukah as a substitute for Christmas:

He said because Jews are a minority in a predominantly Christian nation, Jewish people have built up Hanukkah "as a defense to make it as meaningful as Christmas to Christians."

"It is a minor holiday that has become a major one because we live in a Christian society," Glickman said. "Another problem is that Christians have begun to look upon Hanukkah as a kind of Christmas for Jews and that doesn't help either," he said.117

Chanukah did not grow to become a major American festival for Jews without criticism. Orthodox Jews have resisted the magnification from the beginning. In 1977, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin published his book To Raise A Jewish Child. The purpose of the book was to fill gaps in parent's Jewish education and to offer advice regarding the raising of children from the orthodox Jewish standpoint. In one section Donin replied to major problems facing Jewish parents. One of the problems was entitled "What to Do About Christmas." Donin's answer was:

Absolutely nothing! Jewish parents would do well not to get so upset at the very real holiday spirit that pervades all of America

during the month of December. Recognize it for what it is--an important Christian holiday. Since most Americans identify with Christianity, the penetration of the holiday into the secular domain is inevitable. Don't try to fight it by going overboard on Hanukah, or by trying to imitate Christmas within the Hanukah framework. You don't have to harbor a sense of guilt about enjoying the holiday spirit of a neighbor. Feel free to extend wishes to your non-Jewish friends and neighbors so that they may have an enjoyable Christmas holiday. But, as for your own family, it's simply not yours to observe.¹¹⁸

Donin suggested that the answer for parental fear of the impact of Christmas is to make the other Jewish holidays as meaningful for their children as possible. Chanukah is a pale minor holiday in comparison to the Christian major holiday of Christmas. Thus, they can't be compared. Even the giving of gifts for eight nights is not necessary, according to Donin. He suggested that parents can have their children excused from public school Christmas programs if they wish.

Though major emphasis for the magnification process came from the Reform Movement, beginning with heavy newspaper support of Sunday school programs and festivals at Chanukah, with the resurgence of Jewish identity in the 1950's and 1960's, criticism came from reform leadership as well. In 1956 Rabbi Dudley Weinberg wrote an article entitled "The Revival of The Festivals" for the Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal. After stating the position that Jewish festivals were generally being ignored, Weinberg questioned whether the exceptions to the rule--Chanukah and the Passover Seder--were genuine. Weinberg stated:

Thus, for example, there appears to have been an enormous resurgence of interest in Hanukah. Large numbers of otherwise unobservant Jewish homes have latterly been adorned with kindled menorahs during the eight nights of Hanukah. But when one observes the orgy of Hanukah gift giving to which Jewish children have grown so demandingly accustomed and the suspicious resemblance of the increasingly elaborate Hanukah decorations to the adornments which have become characteristic of the Christmas season, one may be pardoned a certain cynicism about the revival of interest in Hanukah. One may even go so far as to inquire whether the occasion for all this busyness is not so much Hanukah as a substitute for Christmas.¹¹⁹

The problem of Jewish celebration of festivals did not merely effect Reform Jews.

Reform rabbis and lay leaders have tended to assume rather too large a burden of personal guilt for this unhappy state of affairs. They have been acting as though Reform Jews were exclusively culpable in this matter. While we can take no comfort from the knowledge that we are not alone in sin, our perspective might be somewhat altered for the better if we realized that the mass of more traditionally oriented Jews does not embrace the discipline of the festivals with any more ardor or understanding than does the mass of Reform Jews. The problem is not peculiar to Reform. It is the problem of American Jewry, if not of "klal Yisrael".¹²⁰

Weinberg disagreed with those who claimed that in order to revive interest in the festivals it was necessary to adjust the ceremonies and traditions to meet contemporary needs. He suggested that it was more important to make Jews cognizant of the relevance of Judaism itself.

The Commission on Information about Judaism for the UAHC and CCAR jointly published sets of holiday sermons for many years. In 1956 Rabbi Herbert Weiner's sermon "The Small Lights of Chanuko" was selected for publishing. In the

sermon Weiner examined the lavish celebration of Chanukah which was beginning to rival the High Holy Days in its celebration. He recognized that the pressure to elaborate upon Chanukah was coming from the major Christian culture. He understood the needs and drives which would bring Jews to wish to celebrate Christmas with its decorations and gift exchanges. His answer to these pressures was to recognize that Christmas was inherently a Christian holiday which the Jew could not observe. The Jew had to learn to say "no" to this non-faith celebration, for the sake of Jewish survival:

Chanuko is a festival which warns us against imitation. And in the days of the Maccabees as today, the most dangerous form of imitation was that which kept the original label while spilling out the essence. It is possible to lose the essence of the message of Chanuko even while decorating our synagogues with large menorahs and our homes with glittering lights. For our world still worships and indeed might respond more than ever, to the essential message of our Chanuko--the holiday on which we read, "Not by power, and not by might, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Amen!¹²¹

The essence of the holiday lay not in the victory of the Maccabees or soldier heroes. Jews could not hear the significance of Chanukah by celebrating a military victory nor by competing with Christmas:

We will hear it if we allow the festival to be itself and not a cheap imitation of the Christmas holidays with which it is juxtaposed in time. If we stop bribing our children by telling them that we have "eight days of gifts--not only one," and stop trying to gain their allegiance by promising them more. If we cease our attempt to attract their attention from the brilliant lights of the Christmas season by building bigger and brighter

menorahs; if we will pause for a moment in our frantic haste to conform and imitate and compete by making Chanuko bigger and brighter than Christmas, and let the true significance of the festival into our hearts.

For Chanuko does not deal with that which is "more" or brighter. Its message is the very opposite. Look at the small Chanuko light, and know that it tells a truth--the truth that it is in the small rather than the big, and in the few rather than in the multitude that true greatness is found.¹²²

Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, in 1963 when he was president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform), wrote an article entitled "Hanukah Misconceptions." Two misconceptions bothered him particularly: 1) the idea that Chanukah was the Jewish Christmas and 2) the idea that Jews should worship power and might. In his addressing the first misconception regarding Chanukah he stated:

The first misconception centers around misguided if well-meaning efforts to convert Hanukah into a Jewish equivalent of Christmas. There has been an attempt, for example, to balance Christmas and Hanukah in the public schools. There also has been a tendency to glamorize Hanukah as though to counteract the attractiveness of the Christmas celebrations. These efforts have led in one sense to an over-emphasis on the materialistic getting-and-giving side of the holiday. Gifts are ladled out in many families on each of the eight nights of the observance, as though to win the competition by sheer weight of lavishness--as though emotional security and religious values could be delivered on a silver platter, and if the handsome gift-wrapping is white and blue instead of green and red, a sufficient distinction between Hanukah and Christmas thereby has been demonstrated. As in the case of Christmas and the Christians the real meaning of Hanukah for the Jew is in increasing danger of being swamped in an annual carnival of gifts and parties.¹²³

The glamorization of Chanukah and the worship of power sacrificed all the important Jewish values inherent in the holiday such as the power of the spirit, the effectiveness of moral courage, the hatred of bloodspilling, the tender respect of the individual child of God, and the Jew's passion for peace.

The respect and admiration of power came as an outgrowth of World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel. Chanukah was magnified because its significance changed in the minds of some American Jews as Zionism took hold in America. With the fulfillment of the Zionist goals, Jewish nationalism became respectable and a source of support for the magnification of the holiday that celebrates Jewish nationalism. Rabbis down through the centuries had limited Chanukah and downplayed its military aspect. They raised instead the religious legend of the "cruse of oil" that lasted for eight days. Now nationalism was changing Chanukah's meaning again.

Simon Glustrom published When Your Child Asks-A Handbook for Jewish Parents in 1956. In the section regarding holidays and festivals, Glustrom acknowledged the traditional minor nature of the holiday, the importance of the holiday as the first battle for religious freedom and the sages concern with the spiritual rather than military and nationalistic nature of the holiday. Regarding the modern aspects of the holiday Glustrom stated:

In recent years the national aspect of the holiday has assumed renewed importance. The battle for Israel's independence in 1949 against the overwhelming Arab armies seemed to indicate that Jewish history was repeating itself once again. The Jews mustered courage and hope from the Maccabean struggle. Victory would ultimately come to the modern Maccabees and they too would reclaim the land that was rightfully theirs.¹²⁴

Then Glustrom stated that Christmas also forced an added meaning onto Chanukah in recent years stimulating new songs, games and pageants, much of which was superficial.

Rabbi Allen S. Maller placed greater emphasis upon the Jewish national struggle for survival inherent in the Maccabean victory than upon competition with Christmas as a cause of Chanukah's revival. The religious legend of the "cruse of oil" had, until the twentieth century, received rabbinical support as the basis for the holiday. Then the significance of the holiday took on a change. Maller stated:

In the twentieth century Jewish leaders, especially those influenced by Zionism, began to emphasize a more activist and at times even militant ideology. . . . The mood of modern Jewry, especially since the Second World War, has been much more sympathetic to the original national liberation aspect of Hanukkah than to the rabbinical miracle of the oil. Thus, the most significant reason why Hanukkah is a much more important holiday today than it was in the Middle Ages is due to the fact that its relevance is much greater now than it was then. It may be that Hanukkah is today one of the most relevant of Jewish holidays.¹²⁵

He also noted that a house decorated with blue and white lights could be interpreted as the Talmudic injunction to place the Chanukah lamp nearest the street. The modern Jew in America reversed the Talmudic injunction that one doesn't

have to display it in times of danger. This was reversed such that the Jew proudly showed he was militantly Jewish even if the holiday should fall on his Christian neighbor's Christmas. Maller noted as most significant that contemporary rabbis have begun to interpret the eight days of Chanukah as representing the Maccabees who were eventually victorious though outnumbered eight to one, as is present day Israel. The switching back and forth between the pacifism of the rabbis and the militancy of the Zionists had a parallel in the shifts of American moods of isolationism and militant proponent of democracy within the century. Finally, Maller noted in 1978, that neither militancy nor pacificism was the ultimate answer for all times. It was the dedication of the people which insured Jewish survival.¹²⁶

Magnification of the holiday continued into the decades of the 1970's and 80's. Informative books were published to aid Jews in their holiday observance and knowledge. The Jewish Publication Society published The Hanukkah Anthology by Philip Goodman in 1976.¹²⁷ This book covered a great many different aspects of Chanukah. It expanded many earlier topics covered in Emily Solis-Cohen, Jr.'s Hanukkah: The Feast of Lights (1937). The Anthology contained everything needed to embellish Chanukah at the will of the observer--including arts and crafts, prose, poetry, recipes, special programs, and religious services with music and song. In addition to this book, in 1975 Mae Shafter Rockland published The Hanukkah Book. This book also was

a treasury of Chanukah programs, crafts, party ideas-- everything needed to embellish the holiday. Rockland gave the following reasons for writing the book:

In Israel as well as in the United States Hanukkah has changed in recent years from a minor holiday characterized by simple domestic and synagogue celebrations to a major means of expressing Jewish identity. Many Jews are appalled by the changes in Hannukah observation, seeing in them only sellouts to commercialism and competition with Christmas. We no longer have the choice of approving or disapproving of what has happened to Hanukkah in the United States. And I can no longer comfortably retreat behind the plea that Hanukkah decorations are "not traditional." Things cannot be traditional as they are first developing and happening. Only after the event do they become invested with that special aura we associate with tradition. Changes in the celebration of Hanukkah have already occurred. The option now open to us is to make certain that the new and great significance of Hanukkah is understood in Jewish terms rather than to let our holiday become just another part of the midwinter Christmas carnival celebrations. Thus this book is in part an attempt to counter the pernicious effects of Christmas celebration on the American Jewish mentality. I'm not ashamed of that--I don't want to make a Jewish Christmas. I want to encourage and help Jews to look more deeply into Judaic source material in order to enrich Hanukkah in an authentically Jewish way.¹²⁸

Opinion with regard to the celebrations of Chanukah in the 1980's followed the same pattern as found in the 1970's--some thought embellishing Chanukah was a natural and important thing to do, while others emphasize the spiritual aims downplaying the magnification of the holiday. Rabbi Robert Kirzner, of Temple Beth-El, St. Petersburg, Florida, wrote the following message to congregants in his congregational newsletter (see appendix 27 for full message):

Sadly, mixed in with all this Christmas rush, is the attempt to assuage our Jewish feelings by placing our celebration of Chanuka on the same plane.

The end result is that many have come to think of Chanukah as the Jewish answer to Christmas. Nothing could be further from the truth.¹²⁹

Kirzner de-emphasized the attempt to place Chanukah on the level of Christmas. Rather he counseled the rededication of each individual to the precepts and principles of Judaism.

Rabbi John Friedman, of Judea Reform Congregation, Durham, North Carolina, agreed in his annual Chanukah message that Chanukah was no match for Christmas. Where he differed from Kirzner was in the active program which he and his congregation undertook to augment the Chanukah celebration. In his congregational newsletter Friedman stated (see appendix 28 for the complete citation):

However, we ought not believe that our augmentation of Hanukkah and its observance is something inauthentic or wrong. It seems to me that, through creativity and determination, our greater emphasis on Hanukkah can make "swimming upstream" a little easier.¹³⁰

Friedman continued in his message with an announcement of a family workshop for Chanukah including music, cuisine, games, and customs. He also recommended two books which would help the congregant with his own celebration.

He finally stated:

In augmenting our celebration of Hanukkah, the most important ground rule is authenticity. It is lovely to beautify and embellish our major winter celebration. Those embellishments can be found in the storehouse of Jewish history and practice if we but look there.¹³¹

For a personal experience there is the story of Rabbi Irwin M. Blank, director of the Commission on Adult Jewish Education of B'nai B'rith International. In an

autobiographical sketch of his Chanukah experiences, published in 1981, Blank began with his boyhood Chanukah in Brooklyn, New York in the 1930's. He remembered that Chanukah was not festive in his Talmud Torah (religious school). In his Young Israel youth group (orthodox) they would put on plays but did not emphasize Judah the Maccabee because nice Jewish boys didn't fight. This was before the Holocaust. His home celebration consisted of lighting candles, singing the Chanukah hymn Maoz Tzur (Rock of Ages), eating latkes, and receiving a few pennies as Chanukah gelt. Christmas played no part in his particular neighborhood of Brooklyn. However, his mother would take him downtown to see the department store displays each year. When he was nine he asked for a Christmas tree; that year the tree was denied and the trips to the stores ended. He hung a bough and stocking on the kitchen wall. His parents allowed it to remain hanging and it was empty Christmas morning when he removed it. He finally learned more about Chanukah in Hebrew high school and rabbinical school.

When he and his wife had children they decided they didn't want their children growing up with "Christmas envy." He stated:

We approached Chanukah with the philosophy of "Aren't you lucky to be Jewish! You have eight nights of presents, singing and lighting the menorah, but Christians have only one night of Christmas."¹³²

They lit a lovely oil burning menorah each night and presented "meaningful gifts" to the children each night. They

invited friends over with their children for dinner, gift giving and dreidel playing. One year he didn't have time to look for presents to buy so he picked up practical wooden spoons for his daughter and electrical tape for his son. The children were less than thrilled with the unwrapped gifts. From that time onward Chanukah became casual with gift giving and they no longer decorated for the holiday. He renounced his previous philosophy of "Chanukah is better than Christmas." From then on, the home celebration focused on lighting the candles, the nobility of Judah the Maccabee and Hannah and her sons, and the family togetherness which the holiday engenders.

From the quiet home ceremony to the Sunday school festival, Chanukah progressed from a minor to a major holiday. As synagogues and Jewish organizations celebrated among themselves, others began to plan community wide programs which would become visible to the Gentile world as well. In 1978 the merchants of West 72nd Street, Manhattan, New York, strung strings of Christmas decorations across the street. Included were several Stars of David, a Jewish symbol. Rabbi Steven Riskin, of the Lincoln Square Synagogue around the corner, approached the Community Planning Board with a proposal to build and maintain a 13 foot high electric menorah. He argued that since the Christmas decorations were religious in nature it would be undemocratic not to allow the menorah.¹³³ Some of the merchants objected to the

menorah on the grounds that it would violate "separation of church and state" rules.

While the Lincoln Square Synagogue fought for its menorah, elsewhere the Chabad Lubavitcher orthodox Jewish movement was lighting Chanukah menorahs around the country in public places. In 1978 they began the lighting of the menorah at Fairfax Avenue in Los Angeles, California, at the community public celebration of the holiday.¹³⁴ In New York City a three story menorah was lit and latkes were publicly distributed in 1981 by the Lubavitchers on 5th Avenue and 50th Street; in Washington, Reagan administration officials shunned the annual lighting of the "national menorah" in Lafayette Square directly across from the White House though they had been represented in previous years.¹³⁵ In 1981, Chabad erected a giant menorah in Union Square, San Francisco, California, and Governor Brown was in attendance for the first night's lighting.¹³⁶

While some supported the magnification of Chanukah, no one had suggested changing the date of the holiday until Rabbi Alvin J. Reines, National Chairman of the Institute of Creative Judaism (Polydox), did so in the Winter 1975 issue of Polydoxy. At that time Reines suggested developing the Chanukah celebration into the Festival of Affirmation which would be celebrated for eight days beginning on the date of the winter solstice, December 21/22nd. It was necessary to change the date of Chanukah from the lunar

calendrical date of Kislev 25th to the Gregorian date of December 21st because Chanukah was out of basic rhythm for Jews living in the American society which was based on a Gregorian calendar. Reines stated:

There seems little reason to doubt that one of the fundamental reasons for the American Jewish decline is that the dates of Jewish festivals are seriously out of harmony with the basic rhythms of American Jewish experience, interlocked as these rhythms inevitably must be with those of the general American environment. It is difficult, probably impossible, to conceive of a workable solution to the current crisis of American Jewish survival that does not involve to some degree changing the dates of Jewish festivals so that they are brought into harmony with the natural, ideological, economic and cultural rhythms of the American environment.¹³⁷

If the Chanukah dates were changed in this fashion, Christmas would fall within the dates of Chanukah each year. Reines commented:

This final point is stated with great emphasis. The special enrichment Chanukah receives when the first day begins on December 22/23, the winter solstice, is not to be attributed to the fact that Christmas falls during this period. The same integrated feeling of joy would be present if there were no Christian holiday of Christmas at this time. The enrichment Chanukah receives from its winter solstice date derives from the fact that in late December, our commercial, technological, and industrial society comes to a natural, economic and cultural climax. Christmas, itself, has the special meaning it has for most Christians primarily because it is in harmony with the basic rhythms of the general American environment. Proof of this may be found in the fact that for many Christian theologians, Epiphany which falls on January 6, is a more significant day than is Christmas. Yet for most American Christians, Epiphany goes largely unnoticed. The reason is clearly that Epiphany has no relation to the general American environment, and is thereby drained of life.¹³⁸

Reines' Festival of Affirmation would become a major Jewish holiday with the following symbols: the solstice light over

dark theme giving humankind grounds for hope and confidence, the menorah and candles, the change of seasons from fall to winter, the victory of the Maccabees and the rededication of the Temple, the "Sabra" cactus as the indomitable human spirit to triumph over the limitations of life and find pleasure in existence, and gift giving as the benevolent, supportive, and mutualistic forces that enrich human life providing assistance in coping with finity.¹³⁹ Reines argued that since the first Chanukah took place on the winter solstice, and since holidays have changed dates in the past in order to accommodate the needs of Judaism, Chanukah can once again change its date in the twentieth century.¹⁴⁰

Chanukah has progressed a long way from the first attempts at magnification in the Sunday schools, to the great community and public celebrations of today. From a double pronged attempt to educate young Jews about their heritage and culture and to combat, to some degree, the spread of the celebration and acceptance of Christmas customs among the Jews, Jewish communities developed a whole range of Chanukah programs. Whatever their views of the original significance of the holiday, all wings of Judaism, joined in the process of magnification. While some leaders criticized this, most Jews continued to embellish even their home ceremonies with decorations, games, food, gifts, and parties. As America became more open to the Jew in the mid-twentieth century the rising pride of American Jews added other significant meanings to the holiday beside mere accommodation to

Christmas. Zionism and the State of Israel provided the American Jew with greater Jewish identity. The American Jew felt he could now compete equally with Christmas in terms of gift giving, decorations, and celebrations. He no longer needed to borrow cultural symbols such as the Christmas tree and Santa Claus. Gradually Chanukah began to assume some of the problems of Christmas, such as commercialization. Rabbis and leaders began to signal it was time to take a more religious and Jewish look at the holiday.

Today, most American Jews are very comfortable with the major significance in their holiday schedule that Chanukah has assumed. A few continue to celebrate Christmas with trees; most do not. Where Chanukah will go in the future depends upon what Christians may do with Christmas. If history is a guide, Jews will continue to model their responses to some degree after Christian actions. Should Christians become more religious and less commercial regarding Christmas, Jews would follow suit. If, on the other hand, Christians continue to magnify Christmas, then Jews will continue to magnify Chanukah. Even if American Jews no longer imitate Christmas as once they did, they are still subject to its influence.

Tzedaka

The Yule season is couched in terms of "Joy to the World" and "Good Will Towards Men." The Christian concern with the poor and needy especially during this season

manifests itself with many organizations and individuals giving charity and doing good works for them. Articles abound in newspapers about the "100 Neediest Families" and drives from different organizations, such as the Marine Corps drive for toys for children. The value of charity, good works, and righteous treatment in Judaism is known by the name tzedaka. It is a primary value which has been inherent in Judaism since the founding of the people and Torah itself. Jews, who constantly give money and do charitable and philanthropic projects during the year, will reach for even higher goals during the Jewish holidays. It is not rare to find articles about Jews involving themselves in such activities for Jewish causes and especially for children and orphans.¹⁴¹ Some Jews even play "Santa" around Christmas. Many Jews provide funds or give of their time and energy to help non-Jews in the Christmas season.

A prime example was the wagonload of presents donated to the poor children of Washington by the Washington Hebrew Congregation in December 1884. Hy. King, Jr., President of the synagogue sent a letter to the chairman of the Christmas collection expressing great support from the synagogue members. In reply to this magnanimous gesture, the press printed a thank you and special mention of the Jews as the most munificent contributors.¹⁴² (See appendix 8 for full citation)

The Israelite reported in 1887 that the Chicago ex-Alderman J. Jonas distributed food from his store to the

poor, for the thirteenth Christmas. Six hundred people received baskets containing a roast of beef and a couple of chickens.¹⁴³ "Azmed," corresponding from New Orleans in 1891, wrote about the beautiful and free spending season of 1890. He then stated:

The poor of the city were well remembered and at many of the charitable institutions presents and inviting dinners were provided, in several instances the benefactors being Israelites, a noteable case being that of Mr. Isador Newman, Sr., who generously furnished holiday dinners to a prominent Catholic asylum.¹⁴⁴

Often the benefactors wanted no personal recognition. In the twentieth century three businessmen had a "good-will" meeting accidentally during the Christmas season of 1928. The one Jewish member of the trio suggested that the three provide shoes for several hundred children of an orphanage in the country as a Christmas gift. The other two agreed and offered to supply stockings as well. The trio asked only one request in return for their gift, that they remain anonymous.¹⁴⁵

Individual acts of tzedaka might never reach newspapers or official sources of recognition. The only notice of such activity might be found in a letter between friends. Such a case occurred in a letter written by Leon Schwarz, twice mayor of Mobile, Alabama and ex-president of Congregation Shaarai Shomayim, to Rabbi Witt of Dayton, Ohio, during the Christmas of 1939. In his letter Schwarz wrote:

. . . My wife (a staunch Jewess) and I sent out 250 Christmas cards to Christian friends. Received about the same number. We exchanged many Christmas

gifts and gave books to the children in the Protestant Orphan Asylum. Attended a Christmas tree for children in the Tuberculosis Hospital.¹⁴⁶

At times the largess of the donor was even more impressive. The San Francisco Chronicle published an article it had picked up from the United Press on December 24, 1977. The article related plans that Minneapolis millionaire Percy Ross was developing for Christmas. Ross planned to provide 1050 bicycles to the city's neediest children, as well as dolls, purses filled with money, and food. To entertain the children he had hired Darth Vader of the Star Wars movie, David Soul from the "Starsky and Hutch" television show, Mickey Mouse characters from Disneyland, and Rod Carew, the Minnesota Twin's Baseball Team's first baseman. The amount Ross planned to spend on his philanthropic work was \$180,000. The article stated:

For 61-year-old Percy Ross, who once hawked popcorn outside the scene of his Christmas party, it is another of his far-out farewells to the poverty that he knew as a "poor Jewish kid" in the copper mining town of Laurium in Michigan's upper peninsula.¹⁴⁷

It did not always require a private fortune for a Jew to make his contribution for Christmas very meaningful. Jay Frankston literally played Santa Clause in New York for twelve years from 1960 to 1972. In 1958 he decided to provide a Christmas tree with all the ornaments for his family, something which he felt was denied him as a child. He began playing Santa with his children. However, after two years he wanted to play Santa Claus for orphanages and childrens'

hospitals. When this was denied to him he searched for other means to fulfill his fantasy and do good work besides. He noticed a young girl mailing a letter to Santa Claus one day in late November. Wondering what happened to all these letters he inquired at the Post Office and found the entire third floor of New York's main post office was reserved for letters marked North Pole. That year, 1960, he read some of the letters and chose eight letters, budgeted \$150, sent each child a telegram that Santa was coming, then he fulfilled his promise. Twelve years later he was reading 10,000 letters and bringing presents to as many as 150 children. Once word spread of his work he received many donations. Those which he did not deliver he donated to charitable organizations for their use. Though he ended his Santa Claus work when he moved to California he intended to set up a foundation to continue similar work using royalties on a small book he wrote entitled A Christmas Story. Frankston said, "The rewards were built into the thing itself, not in hearing you are a wonderful guy. I looked forward to it every year. Christmas didn't belong to me. Please understand--now Christmas belongs to me."¹⁴⁸

In the spirit of "good will to all men" Jewish organizations have recognized the need for Christians to spend Christmas with their families. An Israelite editorial reported on December 29, 1927:

It is quite a long while since the old sometime familiar "reciprocity" has greeted the ear, but it can be applied appropriately to the clerks in

the New York City post office. Those of the Jewish faith worked on the Christmas Eve for their Christian fellow employees so that the latter might be free to celebrate the holiday and have the day off. This was a favor in return for Christians working on the Jewish holidays. And that is the real "practical religion" that so many of the modern school are urging.¹⁴⁹

It was not only civil servants that appreciated their fellow men during the Christmas season. During the Second World War Jewish servicemen volunteered to work for Christian soldiers. On the first page of the December 28, 1944 Israelite appeared an article entitled "Jews Ask Extra Duty so Christian Buddies May Observe Christmas." The article stated:

For the fourth American wartime Christmas Jewish servicemen and women at military and naval establishments throughout the United States and overseas posts wherever feasible relinquished passes and furloughs extending over the holiday season and volunteered as well for extra duty to permit more of their Christian comrades to celebrate the holiday as fully as possible.¹⁵⁰

Chaplain David I. Cedarbaum, in his Hanukkah sermon for 1944, also wrote about this phenomenon:

On the other hand, how commendable is the spirit which motivates those Jewish soldiers--enlisted men, WACS, officers--who have tonight remained at their posts. They have voluntarily taken over the chores and the dirty work--CQ, KP, OD. They have said to their Christian buddies: "This is your sacred day. We esteem your beliefs and your customs. We will help you observe them."¹⁵¹

After the War the veterans continued their good work. In the mid-fifties the Jewish War Veterans of St. Louis began their program to take over volunteer organizational work at Jefferson Barracks and Cochran hospitals in St. Louis,

Missouri, on Christmas so that the Christian volunteers could observe Christmas with their families. The JWV also provided parties for several sections of the hospitals. They have continued their program each year until the present.¹⁵²

In 1964 Bernard Korzennik of Hartford, Connecticut, appealed to his Temple Beth El for volunteers to help with menial tasks at hospitals in Hartford, Connecticut, so that volunteer and some paid workers could remain at home for Christmas. Korzennik had volunteered himself for the past 30 years. As a result 80 men, women, and children from Temple Beth El and Beth Israel worked in five hospitals feeding patients, pushing meal carts, manning telephone and desks in the wards.¹⁵³ Across the country in Grand Forks, North Dakota, members of B'nai B'rith relieved policemen for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day duties.¹⁵⁴

In 1974, in Cincinnati, Ohio, a pilot project began with 16 members of the brotherhoods of Rockdale Temple, Temple Sholom and Isaac M. Wise Temple replacing Christian workers at Bethesda North Hospital so they could spend the holiday with their families. Ed Rosenthal, brotherhood co-ordinator, stated that this was the first organized effort of which he was aware in Cincinnati. He was aware of 900 Jews from 13 brotherhoods helping to staff 16 hospitals in Philadelphia at Christmas. Also, some Jews in Anniston, Alabama took over some police duties during Christmas.¹⁵⁵ This program was still viable in 1981.

Rabbi Kalman Dubov wrote a letter to his congregation in his congregational bulletin in Longview, Texas asking for the Jewish community of Longview to volunteer to take over police duties on Christmas Day 1981. 156

Whether it is the individual Jew, for whatever his reasons, or the organized Jewish group--both are responding to the Christmas ambience of good will, the felt need to provide for the less fortunate, and the opportunity to show respect for non-Jewish culture and traditions.

CONCLUSION

Many variables were active in shaping the American Jewish response to Christmas. Whether the Jew decided to accept, reject, or accommodate to Christmas, however, depended upon two factors: Jewish identity and relations with the Gentile majority. America afforded the Jew, perhaps for the first time since the destruction of the ancient Temple, complete freedom to determine the Jewish content of his life. There were no church-state enforced disabilities or ghettos. For the most part religion in America was a voluntary institution.

There were advantages for Jews in celebrating Christmas. It displayed their assimilation and demonstrated their acceptance of American customs. As the Protestant majority in America began to accept Christmas as an "American" holiday after the Revolutionary War, pressure was exerted upon Jews to celebrate Christmas as well.

The developing customs of Christmas were congruent with Jewish values. What Jew would argue with "peace on earth, good will to all men, joy to the world?" The Jew was also attracted to the decorations of Christmas, such as the Christmas tree, and the presents. By accepting the Christmas holiday, the Jew could help himself and his children feel part of America. At times, especially during crises, a

patriotic note entered the celebration of Christmas. That made the holiday even more difficult for loyal Jews to ignore.

When Christmas became popular to the majority culture in the mid nineteenth century, pressures upon Jews to accept Christmas grew. Increasingly, Jewish leaders viewed Christmas and its magnification as a threat to Jewish survival. In response to the introduction of Christmas into the Christian Sunday schools, the newly formed Reform Jewish Sunday schools began to enlarge and magnify the nearby calendrical holiday of Chanukah.

Chanukah hit a responsive chord in American Jews. Though it was an old and neglected holiday, it soon rose to become a major American Jewish festival. There was enough similarity between the two holidays of Chanukah and Christmas in their symbolic lights, and child-centeredness that American Jews were able to transfer their "American holiday energies" into Chanukah. As the holiday grew in importance traditionalists began to worry that it was imitating Christmas too closely. They complained that Chanukah was growing into a spectacle out of all proportion to its traditional role.

But most American Jews viewed a magnified Chanukah as a valuable compromise between Jewish acceptance of Christmas, and total rejection of the whole holiday season. It permitted assimilation without loss of Jewish identity. While not the ideal solution to the Christmas problem, it

has, in the late twentieth century, become the solution that the majority of American Jews have embraced.

ABBREVIATIONS

AHB	American Hebrew [Newspaper] (New York)
AJA	American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio
AMIS	American Israelite [Newspaper] (Cincinnati, Ohio)
BHO	Boston Hebrew Observer [Newspaper] (Boston, Massachusetts)
CCAR	Central Conference of American Rabbis
COW	Congress Weekly [Newspaper] (New York)
EMN	Emanu-El [Newspaper] (San Francisco, California)
JCR	Jewish Chronicle [Newspaper] (Boston, Massachusetts)
JDI	Jewish Digest Magazine
JMS	Jewish Messenger [Newspaper] (New York)
JTR	Jewish Tribune [Newspaper] (St. Louis, Missouri)
REC	Reconstructionist Journal
SVI	Sabbath Visitor [Newspaper] (Cincinnati, Ohio)
OCC	Occident and American Jewish Advocate [Newspaper] (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
UAHC	Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, New York.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹Ruth Cole Kainen, America's Christmas Heritage (New York: Funk & Wagnells, 1969), p. 16.

²Ibid., p. 144.

³Ibid., p. 143.

⁴Ibid., p. 16. Part of Aztec religious observances included a ceremony strikingly like the Eucharist performed with wine and wafers.

⁵Ibid., p. 17.

⁶James H. Barnett, The American Christmas (New York: MacMillan Co., 1954), p. 2.

⁷Ibid., p. 3.

⁸Katharine Lambert Richards, How Christmas Came to the Sunday Schools (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1934), p. 48.

⁹Kainen, America's Christmas Heritage, p. 98.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 101.

¹¹Richards, Sunday Schools, p. 49.

¹²Barnett, American Christmas, p. 3.

¹³Richards, Sunday Schools, p. 52.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Barnett, American Christmas, p. 6.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Jacob Rader Marcus, The Colonial American Jew, 1492-1776, 3 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 2:982-983.

²¹Jonathan D. Sarna, Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), p. 1.

²²Marcus, Colonial American Jew, p. 34.

²³In 1658, fifteen families from Holland arrived in Newport, Rhode Island. They began their synagogue and community and by 1768 they erected Jeshuat Israel (Salvation of Israel). Jews had lived in South Carolina long before they erected Beth Elohim (House of God) in 1750. In July 1733, forty Sephardic families arrived in Savannah, Georgia. One year later they were joined by German families. Together they established Mikveh Israel (Hope of Israel).

²⁴Rufus Lears, The Jews in America: A History (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1972), p. 34.

²⁵Marcus, Colonial American Jew, p. 1224.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Doris Groshen Daniels, "Colonial Jewry: Religion, Domestic and Social Relations," American Jewish Historical Quarterly '66 (March 1977):385.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Marcus, Colonial American Jew, p. 1232.

³⁰Ibid., p. 1225.

³¹By the 1880's Christmas was even taken for granted by the Sunday schools. See Richards, How Christmas Came to the Sunday Schools, p. 145.

³²Richards, Sunday Schools, p. 146.

³³Barnett, American Christmas, p. 57.

³⁴Ibid., p. 21.

³⁵Ibid., p. 29.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 17.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹Melvin Landsberg, "That Christmas Problem - Some Prickles on the Holly," Commentary 18 (December 1954):559.

²Ibid.

³OCC 24 (February 1867):510.

⁴Eli Evans, The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 140.

⁵AMIS 52 (16 January 1880):3.

⁶AMIS 27 (7 January 1881):222.

⁷AMIS 28 (30 December 1881):210.

⁸AMIS 28 (13 January 1882):229.

⁹AMIS 29 (5 January 1883):227.

¹⁰AMIS 30 (18 January 1884):2.

¹¹BHO 1 (5 January 1883):2.

¹²AMIS 37 (25 December 1890):5.

¹³Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁴AMIS 38 (31 December 1891):2.

¹⁵AMIS 37 (8 January 1891):1.

¹⁶AMIS 62 (2 December 1915):4.

¹⁷AMIS 62 (30 December 1915):4.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹AMIS 63 (14 December 1916):4.

²⁰AMIS 63 (21 December 1916):4.

²¹Samuel Gup, "The Spirit of God," A Set of Holiday Sermons (Cincinnati: The Tract Commission, CCAR-UAHC, 1920), p. 45.

²²AMIS 68 (22 December 1921):4.

²³AMIS 72 (24 December 1925):4.

²⁴AMIS 72 (31 December 1925):4.

²⁵AMIS 74 (22 December 1927):4.

²⁶For examples of editorials: AMIS 81 (29 November 1934):4; AMIS -all December 1935 editorials; AMIS 83 (3 December 1936):4.

²⁷For examples, see: REC for the following dates- 27 December 1940; 11 December 1942; 24 December 1943; 15 December 1944; 30 November 1945. Also see: AMIS for the following dates- 2 December 1943; 16 December 1943; 7 December 1944.

²⁸David I. Cedarbaum, "Beware of Hellenism in the Ranks," A Set of Holiday Sermons - 1944 (Cincinnati: Commission on Information about Judaism, CCAR-UAHC, 1944), p. 37.

²⁹Albert I. Gordon, Jews in Transition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), p. 117.

³⁰For examples see: REC 20 (24 December 1954):3. "A Jewish Reaction to Christmas and New Years"; COW 22 (12 December 1955):9. "A View of the 'Christian Problem'" by Laura Pienkny Zakin.

³¹Leonard Gross, "The Jew and Christmas - To Observe or Not? From a New Generation, A New Answer," Look Magazine, 28 December 1965, p. 23.

³²Michael Pousner, "Deck the Halls with Loaves of Challah!", Daily News (New York City), 21 December 1972, p. 60.

³³Jonathan D. Sarna, Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), p. 142.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Daniel De Leon, "Correspondence," (New York) Reformer and Jewish Times 10 (14 February 1879):5.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹AHB 5 (31 December 1880):77.

⁴⁰Robert A. Burlison, "Samuel Fox, Merchant and Civic Leader in San Diego 1886-1939," Journal of San Diego History 26 (Winter 1980):5.

⁴¹Ibid. In 1948 the Samuel F. Fox Lodge No. 1747, the second B'nai Brith Lodge of San Diego, was founded in recognition of his work.

⁴²Frances Bransten Rothman, The Haas Sisters of Franklin Street (Berkeley, California: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 1979), p. 71.

⁴³Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁵Harpo Marx, Harpo Speaks! (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1961), p. 45.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 454.

⁴⁸Warren Borosan and Rebecca Borosan, "Coping with Santa Claus," Jewish Living, November/December 1979, p. 32.

⁴⁹Andrew Tobias, Fire and Ice (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1976), p. 85.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 100.

⁵¹Anne Roiphe, "Christmas Comes to a Jewish Home," New York Times, 21 December 1978, p. C6.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Anne Roiphe, Generation Without Memory: A Jewish Journey in Christian America (New York: The Linden Press, 1981), p. 126.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 194.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 171.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 214.

⁶⁰Nancy Pappas, "Fancier of Food and Christmas Shares Her Wealth," Louisville Times, 16 December 1981, p. E4. Her cookbook Visions of Sugarplums was published in 1968.

⁶¹AMIS 30 (11 December 1883):6.

⁶²JTR New Series 1 (14 December 1883):498.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷JTR New Series 1 (21 December 1883):513.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 514.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²AMIS 30 (21 December 1883):6. The Israelite copied the reaction from the Jewish Tribune, 14 December 1883, on page 497.

⁷³JTR New Series 1 (28 December 1883):529. See "A New Controversy."

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶BHO 5 (28 December 1883):4.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸AMIS 30 (28 December 1883):3.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰BHO 6 (4 January 1884):4. Spelling is exactly as found in article.

⁸¹JTR 2 (28 December 1883):529.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

- ⁸⁴AMIS 30 (28 December 1883):4.
- ⁸⁵AMIS 30 (4 January 1884):4.
- ⁸⁶Ibid.
- ⁸⁷JTB 2 (4 January 1884):9.
- ⁸⁸Ibid.
- ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 6.
- ⁹⁰Ibid.
- ⁹¹Ibid.
- ⁹²JTR 2 (11 January 1884):21.
- ⁹³AMIS 30 (11 January 1884):5.
- ⁹⁴AMIS 33 (31 December 1886):4.
- ⁹⁵AMIS 34 (13 January 1888):4.
- ⁹⁶The actual date was not given in the Israelite article. It came from "Christmas and the Jews," AHB 60 (8 January 1897):272.
- ⁹⁷AMIS 43 (7 January 1897):5. See "Notes and Comments."
- ⁹⁸"Good Will is Beyond Class or Cleavage, Rabbi Richmond Says," Wichita (Kansas) Eagle, 23 December 1938, no page. Found in AJA, Louis Witt Collection, Box 2625, Christmas file.
- ⁹⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰Louis Witt, "The Jew Celebrates Christmas," Christian Century 56 (6 December 1939):1497.
- ¹⁰¹Ibid.
- ¹⁰²Ibid.
- ¹⁰³Ibid.
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- ¹⁰⁵Ibid.
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- ¹¹AMIS 28 (7 January 1881):221.
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- ¹⁷AMIS 30 (11 December 1883):4.
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- ²⁵AMIS 38 (24 December 1891):5.
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⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶²One of the latest to copy the letter was Rabbi Jerald Brown of Congregation Anshai Emeth of Peoria, Illinois, in the congregational Bulletin of 11 December 1981.

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- ⁴AMIS 29 (17 November 1882):172.
- ⁵AMIS 29 (8 December 1882):194.
- ⁶AMIS 29 (15 December 1882):201.
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- ⁸AMIS 31 (19 December 1884):2. This correspondence is from "Shaia." Note that the YMHA gave an entertainment in 1881 on Christmas with no apology.
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- ¹⁰AMIS 32 (11 December 1885):7.
- ¹¹AMIS 32 (18 December 1885):8.
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- ¹³AMIS 34 (23 December 1887):3.
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- ¹⁸AMIS 36 (26 December 1889):2.
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- ²⁰AMIS 35 (3 January 1889):5.

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- ²⁹Henrietta Szold [Sulamith], "Our Baltimore Letter," JMS 45 (10 January 1879):5.
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⁴³"Editor's Diary," Ladies Home Journal, December 1980, p. 2 and Cover.

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⁴⁶Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁷Ibid.

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⁴⁹JMS 8 (7 December 1860):172.

⁵⁰JMS 14 (4 December 1863):21.

⁵¹JMS 2 (18 December 1857):100.

⁵²JMS 26 (31 December 1869):4.

⁵³AMIS 4 (18 December 1857):188.

⁵⁴For Chanukah see: "Hanukkah-The Feast of Dedication," AMIS 5 (3 December 1858):172. For Christmas see: AMIS 10 (25 December 1863):202.; "A Tribute To Christmas," AMIS 13 (11 January 1867):5.; "An Ancient Holiday," AMIS 14 (13 December 1867):5.

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⁵⁶AMIS 17 (30 December 1870):9.

⁵⁷For a complete ceremony from Wise's Talmud Yelodim, Cincinnati, see appendix 11.

⁵⁸A complete menu will be found in the festival of the United Hebrew Congregation in AMIS 33 (31 December 1886):7.

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⁶⁰AMIS 27 (10 December 1880):191.

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⁷¹The following is a representative sample of the many citations of children receiving candy, nuts, fruit and small toys for Chnukah: Food gifts: AMIS 29 (22 December 1882):208, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; AMIS 32 (25 December 1885):3, Montgomery, Alabama; AMIS 35 (14 December 1888):7, Trinidad, Colorado; AMIS 37 (18 December 1890):2, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. For toys and other gifts: AMIS 28 (6 January 1882):222, Denver, Colorado; AMIS 30 (11 January 1884):2, Kansas City, Missouri; AMIS 32 (8 January 1886):7, Portland, Oregon; AMIS 36 (2 January 1890):7, Touro Synagogue, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁷²AMIS 29 (22 December 1882):208.

⁷³AMIS 27 (5 December 1876):5; AMIS 52 (2 January 1880):2; Sabbath Visitor 7 (2 January 1880):4.

⁷⁴AMIS 28 (6 January 1882):223.

⁷⁵AMIS 29 (5 January 1883):226, San Francisco, California; AMIS 30 (4 January 1884):6, Evansville, Illinois; AHB 25 (4 December 1885):50, "A Worthy Rival"; AMIS 32 (18 December 1885):3, Toledo, Ohio; AMIS 32 (25 December 1885):3, Columbia, Tennessee; AMIS 33 (7 January 1887):6, Wincennes, Indiana; AMIS 35 (21 December 1888):5, Knoxville, Tennessee; AMIS 37 (25 December 1890):1, Buffalo, New York; AMIS 38 (21 January 1892):1, Spokane, Washington.

⁷⁶AMIS 33 (24 December 1886):8.

⁷⁷See appendix 11.

⁷⁸Sabbath Visitor 18 (9 December 1892):252.

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- ⁸³AMIS 27 (7 January 1881):222.
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- ⁸⁵See appendix 5 . From "The Jewish Christmas,"
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- ⁸⁶AMIS 30 (11 January 1884):5-6.
- ⁸⁷AMIS 31 (2 January 1885):2.
- ⁸⁸AMIS 32 (11 December 1885):7.
- ⁸⁹AMIS 33 (24 December 1886):4.
- ⁹⁰AMIS 34 (16 December 1887):4.
- ⁹¹AMIS 33 (7 January 1887):6.
- ⁹²AMIS 33 (28 January 1887):4.
- ⁹³AMIS 41 (27 December 1894):2.
- ⁹⁴AMIS 43 (3 December 1896):4.
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- ¹⁰²Charles A. Madison, Jewish Publishing in America (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1976), p. 64.
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¹³²Irwin M. Blank, "My Chanukah," Jewish Monthly 96 (December 1981), p. 35.

¹³³"Hanukah-Light Dispute on W. 72d St. Waits Rule," New York Times, 20 November 1978, p. 2:10.

¹³⁴"Festival of Lights Celebration Set," B'nai B'rith Messenger, 18 December 1981, p. 1. See also "Chabad to Feature Hanukah Festivities" on page 18.

¹³⁵"Hot Latkes To Be Distributed at World's Largest Chanukah Menorah," The Jewish Press (New York) 31 (25 December 1981):12, and "Administration Officials Shun Annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony" on p. 60.

¹³⁶"Menorah Lighting, Concert," San Francisco Jewish Bulletin, 18 December 1981, p. 2.

¹³⁷Alvin J. Reines, A Concise Guide to the Celebration and Understanding of Chanukah The Festival of Affirmation, Creative Symbolism Series (Cincinnati: Institute of Creative Judaism, 1980), p. 19. See also Polidoxy 1 (Winter 1975).

- 138 Ibid., p. 20.
- 139 Ibid., p. 8.
- 140 Ibid., p. 2.
- 141 Some examples of Jews involved with tzedaka for the poor during the Chanukah season:
 Call to remember the poor: AMIS 14 (20 December 1867):5.
 Chanukah story for children where boys provide poor sick mother with coal, dresses, groceries: Sabbath Visitor 6 (10 January 1879):13.
 Six girls sell handiworks to buy presents for orphans in San Francisco: AMIS 30 (11 January 1884):5.
 Messers. Bloomingdale Brothers gave presents to Ladies Deborah Nursery and children of the Sheltering Guardian Society: AHB 21 (2 January 1886):123.
 First Chanukah Festival for poor Jewish children held at Plum St. Temple; Cincinnati, Ohio: AMIS 36 (2 January 1890):6.
 Formation of Committee for Chanukah Festival for Poor Jewish children in Cincinnati, Ohio: AMIS 37 (11 December 1890):6.
 Jewish donations to the poor in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: AMIS 38 (31 December 1891):7.
 Jewish Women's Council appeals for donations for Free Religious School for Chanukah: EMN 21 (24 November 1905):15.
- 142 AMIS 32 (8 January 1885):6.
- 143 AMIS 34 (6 January 1888):8.
- 144 AMIS 37 (8 January 1891):3.
- 145 AMIS 75 (4 January 1929):4.
- 146 Leon Schwarz to Louis Witt, 16 January 1940, AJA, Louis Witt Collection, Box 2625, Christmas file.
- 147 "Gifts to Poor: Rich Man's Christmas," San Francisco Chronicle, 24 December 1977, no page. This article was found in AJA, Jewish-Christian Relations Nearprint file.
- 148 Harriet Stix, "Memoirs of a Jewish Santa," Los Angeles Times, 24 December 1978, no page. This article was found in AJA, Jewish-Christian Relations Nearprint file.
- 149 AMIS 74 (29 December 1927):4.

150 AMIS 91 (28 December 1944):1.

151 David I. Cedarbaum, "Beware of Hellenism in the Ranks," A set of Holiday Sermons 5705-1944 (Cincinnati: Commission on Information about Judaism UAHF & CCAR, 1944), p. 37.

152, "JWV [Jewish War Veterans] to Entertain on Christmas," St. Louis Jewish Light 34 (16 December 1951):19.

153, "80 Jews Do Menial Tasks in Christmas Project," Albuquerque (New Mexico) Journal, 26 December 1964, no page. This article was found in AJA, Jewish Christian Relations Nearprint file.

154, "Police Relieved by Jewish Group," Albuquerque Journal, 24 December 1964, no page. This article was found in AJA, Jewish-Christian Relations Nearprint file.

155, "Jews Volunteer for Hospital Work," Cincinnati Enquirer, 20 December 1974, p. 1.

156 Kalman Dubrov, Letter to Longview Jewish community. Found in Rabbinical Resource Center, Hebrew Union College.

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APPENDIX 1

"Hannucah and Christmas"
[by Julius Eckman]

Source: OCC 24 (February 1867):510.

HANNUCAH AND CHRISTMAS.

"Drink water from thine own cistern." Prov. v. 16.

It so happens that Hannucah falls about Christmas time, and that in many Jewish families in which their own festival is scarce noticed, Christmas is celebrated with presents to their children and illuminations in their parlors. What is the meaning of such a forgetfulness of what concerns us immediately, and such an injudicious celebration of what concerns us but distantly? We do not mean to assert that such a want of taste is frequent in families of education and refinement. The cases that we know are generally of ignorant fathers, who by such manifestations—and they have no other way to show their "bildung"—think to show that they do not belong to the prejudiced vulgar, and of mothers whom nature intended to fill positions as honorable housewives in the kitchen, but whom fortune, by her freaks, has misplaced into the parlor, where, being out of place, they do what is quite improper, and in the eyes of sensible Christians, ridiculous.

These remarks are by no means intended in disparagement of Christianity. It would be narrow-minded to ignore and unjust to deny the great benefit Christianity has proved to a portion of our race—the gentile world. Our best men and writers of this age, even of the most conservative type, highly respect both Christianity and Mahomedanism as two huge powers for aiding in the redemption of our race; and though we cannot be blind to the obvious errors propagated by those systems, and which we sometimes, in self-defence, must expose: we still cannot help admiring the great preponderance of the truths taught, and the benefits conferred, by those systems above the errors which are the universal concomitant of all sublunary systems and existences. All good men, and those of enlightened views, both among Jews and gentiles, look benignly upon the coexisting systems, and with all their predilection for the one or the other, delight in the success of the neighboring creed, (provided it be not too aggressive and overbearing,) respect its institutions and treat its symbols with reverence. Still, for Jews to ignore their holy days and celebrate those of Christians, is perverse, and must meet with the condemnation of the sincere Jew and the contempt of the intelli-

gent Christian. The latter can only look upon the Christmas tree, or the Christmas present in the house of the Jew, as an act of denial of identity—an attempt to appear to be what he is not. And the Christian will not believe that the Jew thus celebrates the birth of the Christian God in consideration of the great benefit which that birth conferred on the gentile world, when he considers with what evils that event was fraught for Israel for almost nineteen centuries! Such self-negation to be practised by those who make young Israel dance around the Christmas tree as ancient Israel did around the golden calf—the god of his Egyptian oppressor—must appear of a very questionable nature to any sensible man, who must look with disdain on the man who plays the pigmy while he ought to prove himself a giant. Let, therefore, men who know little of Judaism and less of Christianity, not betray their littleness of mind and their misplacement by fortune, by playing such a ridiculous part as for a Jew to be aping Christians, and rendering himself contemptible in the eyes of his children, who, one day, will find out the imbecility of their parents and judge them accordingly. “Drink water from thine own cistern,” and do not ape the stranger.

San Francisco, December, 1864.

APPENDIX 2

"Christmas"

Source: Jewish Messenger (New York) 26 (31 December 1869):4.

Last Saturday was Christmas, a holiday no one will dispute having special and sole reference to the Christian religion.

The only secular significance it has at all is that it is recognized generally in commercial circles as a dies non.

That those of the communion to which this holiday pertains should celebrate it as they think desirable, is meet and proper; we would not if we could nor could not if we would, interfere with their manner of treating it, either as a sacred or a festive day. But why any person professing Judaism should observe Christmas as a holiday is an anomaly.

What use or purpose does a Christmas tree, lit up with its diminutive wax candles, and adorned with its other peculiar paraphernalia, serve in a Jewish house? And yet it is notorious that many anti-ceremonialists were very particular and precise in observing this ceremony last Friday evening.

The Sabbath Lamp is obsolete, the Hanuca lights commemorating an interesting epoch of our history are voted humbugs, idle & meaningless stories, by the very same people who give special attention to their Christmas tree and candles.

If a voice is lifted against this growing practice of introducing ceremonials of other religions, and the abandonment of those relating to Judaism, forth with an outcry is raised about the spirit of the age, the dead past social union, progress, bye gone tradition, all through to the end of the catalogue; but not a word is said against the adoption of any ceremony, however widely it may be removed from the Mosaic code, provided it is popular. Only one excuse is given, and that is, that it is a season of enjoyment for children and it is hard to deprive those who have not yet attained years of discretion of a reasonable pleasure.

The answer is its own refutation.

Youth is the age of susceptibility, and its sympathies ought not to be enlisted in any direction from which it is proposed to withdraw it in after years; lasting impressions made from youthful observations, and, we frankly ask, is it intended to progress so far as to engraft Christmas into the Jewish Calendar?

As to giving presents we have our New Year, Purim, Hanuca [sic] and numerous other occasions for this purpose; if we want to impress on the mind of our rising generation, whatever import it may be thought necessary to attach to seasons of festivity, let our celebrations and our mutual exchange of compliments, and presents of ceremony be on those days. And let us not weaken the slight hold our children yet have on our festivals by making them look forward with anticipations of joy, to the memorable days of other faiths and ignore those their own.

Every religion assumes to teach and practice self denial as a virtue, a little wholesome lesson to a wayward or obdurate child, even so far as withholding a Christmas present or party might prove salutary; a well disposed child would soon know how to value and appreciate the reasoning of its guardians. Have we progressed so far that already, however, that indulgences must be granted to our children even at the expense of proper education? This is the very refinement of liberty. It was long the boast and pride of our people that Judaism is the religion of the home. If it remains so all will be safe, in spite of synagogue, temple, ritual or cabal, and no one can fail to be anxious when any step is made to invade the sanctuary of the household, and disturb the connection between the religion and the family.

Much might be said from a theological point of view, and senseless practice of denouncing and disclaiming Jewish customs and the adoption of those of other creeds.

Business having been suspended last Saturday, our places of worship had more than their usual compliment of attendance - in this respect no objection would be made if Christmas came once a week, and always on Saturday. Every reflective mind must, however, come to the conclusion that setting apart Christmas, as a season of rejoicing and festivity by Israelites is a hollow pretence - a mockery - if not an insult to two religions.

APPENDIX 3

"Origin of Christmas"
Editorial

Source: AMIS 28 (5 January 1877):4.

Ask any church member and he will tell you that Christmas, the twenty fifth day of December, is celebrated in Christendom (the Puritans excepted) because it is the birthday of Jesus of Nazareth; and New Year because it is the day when 1877 years ago that same Jesus was circumcized. The latter point is not so much spoken of, because it does not sound so agreeably altogether to Christian ears that god number two was a Jew, and like every Jewish boy was circumcized on being eight days old. That Jesus was born either in Nazareth or Bethlehem, is doubtful; that he was circumcized if born of a Jewish mother is certain.

To make a public festival of the birthday of any man or demi-god is certainly not of Jewish origin. The Jewish festivals are memorials of events, in nature, history, or both, and the Christian, like the Pagan festivals are memorials of persons. There is no record in the New Testament or by the early fathers of the church of the time when Jesus was born.

According to Luke II:8, this even certainly did take place in winter, for in that season of the year no shepherds with their flocks stay out in the pasture all night. The Saturnalia, Juvenalia and Brumalia, Jablonski said, three heathen feasts about the time of the winter solstice were transformed into the Christmas cycle of holidays. He thinks the Basilidians in Egypt celebrated Christmas; and Baronius tells a story, now generally discredited, that the Eastern Christians in the time of the Emperor Diocletian celebrated Christmas, but it is now almost certain that this feast originated among the western Christians and not among Eastern; and that it was imposed on the church by an edict of the Emperor Justinian, who reigned from 527 to 565 A.C. Before that time Christmas was not considered a religious festival, even where it was observed. It was a time of amusement, of sending and receiving gifts and presents and of boisterous festivities, of which the Melten is yet in some places a reminder. Prynne says: "our Christmas players, and such other Christmas disorders now in use with Christians, were derived from these Roman Saturnalia and Bacchanalian festivals, which should cause all pious Christians eternally to abominate them." So Christmas was celebrated in England and much worse elsewhere.

That Protestants still observe a day without any historical foundation and connected with most unbecoming recollections, doing homage to an edict of the Emperor Justinian, is simply unprincipled, after they have rejected the authority of popes, councils, and imperial edicts. That Jews give Christmas gifts, have Christmas trees, and keep Christmas dinners, etc., in their families is ridiculous mockery by softbrained individuals, who live on, doing as others do and never having either an idea or a character of their own. That Congress of the United States have placed Christmas on our statute book as a holiday is a downright violation of rights and usurpation of power. That the public schools must be annually disturbed to keep a week of idleness in the best time for work is ridiculous. But most ridiculous are the Christmas sermons preached year after year on the text, "Christ was born." Not one of the preachers will stand up and prove satisfactorily to any fair schoolboy that Jesus was born on that day, or to establish what day of the year this even occurred. Yet they preach on as though the thing was true, and the masses listen as though their preachers were honest. Supremely ridiculous, however, are the Christmas articles of our political daily papers. They sound too farcical for anything. An American editor of a political paper doing homage to an edict of Emperor Justinian, and calling it religion looks like a cat in a mourning gown, like a goat in the ermine, or like a monkey in a tiara.

APPENDIX 4
 "Should the Jews Celebrate Christmas"
 by Daniel De Leon

Source: Reformer and Jewish Times (New York) 10 (14 February 1879):5.

Correspondence.

(We do not hold ourselves responsible for the opinion of our correspondents.)

SHOULD THE JEWS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?

To the Editor of the REFORMER:

DEAR SIR:—Accidentally looking over one of the last numbers of your interesting publication I read to my astonishment the article about "Christmas," an unphilosophical treatise of the matter written by the otherwise philosophically thinking Felix Adler.

Two are, as I understand it, the premises established by the able essayist with a view to support his proposition that, so far from celebrating, the Jews should abstain from joining in the Christmas festivities, those two premises being, first: That Christmas commemorates the suffering of the Jews, and secondly, that Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ.

My criticism must, as a matter of course, be first directed against Mr. Adler's two postulates and accordingly I begin by asking whether, as a matter of fact, either of the intended premises is true; whether the first statement is of necessity so, and whether the second is exact.

Referring to the tell-tale pages of history I can nowhere find evidence sufficient to support the assertion that the wail of the Jew constituted a factor inseparable from the joyous anthem at the celebration of Christmas. It is painfully true that the shrieks of the mothers, the groans of the aged and the cry of the babes but too frequently mingled on that occasion with the swelling notes of the choir from some neighboring church. Yet, the pyre on which those devoted victims, those stalwart pioneers of a spiritual creed were placed, often blazed on other occasions as well; it was not only on the eve of the twenty-fifth of December that, amidst eloquent tongues of fire, the Jew asserted the superiority of his convictions and of his race above the brutalized masses among which he sojourned, and with his ashes and his own heart-blood recorded his protest against the surrounding surges of heathenism. Pretexts and incidents were numerous to give a color for such perverse practices; Christmas would at times answer the purpose; at other times it would be Easter; then again it would be a maniacal revival, that, too cowardly to spend itself against the armed Saracens, vented its petulant, bigoted rage against the unarmed, the defenceless Jew. The miseries inflicted upon that heroic handful of the world's civilizers can therefore hardly be considered as an

indispensable ingredient to be mentioned in connection with the definition of a Christmas celebration, they constitute rather a historic, an occasional incident illustrative only of the spirit of the times, of the barbarism of the age in which they were perpetrated; and only as such are they entitled to our notice.

No more is it exact to say, on the other hand, that Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ. In Aryan mythology the Solar Hero, the Giant Sun, disports himself in all the waywardness of his character and his strength, making himself extremely disagreeable when he has touched the full meridian of his power about the time of the summer solstice; the fairy witch then hurls her curse against him, a curse that, though feeble, is strong enough to curb his pranks; from that moment the giant's potency seems to be affected, it decays perceptibly; dwindles at last almost into insignificance when, just after the winter solstice, about the time of Christmas, the spell of the witch is broken, and the dwarfed giant begins to grow apace, promising to again assume his pristine size and vigor, when the hero shall return to the arms of his bride. That annually recurring phenomenon was the signal, the occasion for universal festivities among all the Aryan nations. The houses were then gaily decorated with evergreens, lights were lit, and good cheer was bountifully lavished in honor of the resurrection; the new birth of the heavenly hero. When the plan was set on foot to un-barbarize Europe, and especially those hordes of immigrants that disputed for the possession of the soil, the missionaries of Christianity found that, in order to render their system acceptable, it was not sufficient to clothe the biography of their God with the hovering myths of their times, as for instance to make him appear on two significant occasions on an ass's back, thus squaring him with the Aryan mythologic conception that the sun hero was borne during the night by an ass, but that it was further necessary to have his and the saints' whole careers adapted to the then prevalent and deep rooted heathen, infantine, poetic fantasy. Thus the orgies of the Saturnalia were remodeled, and were Christened with the name of St. Valentine; thus the Agnus Dei perpetuates the fancy of the mythic sheep; thus the black and white bean of mythology survives in the cake eaten at Epiphany; thus the superstition in the prophylactic qualities of a goat's blood still finds its acceptance on St. James' day; thus the maiden's dream on St. John's has retained its significance, etc., and thus, lastly, the birth of Jesus, though certainly not coinciding with the day on which it is generally celebrated, has been molded to the heathen solemnities of the resurgent sun.

At this stage of the analysis I think it will not be out of place to digress for a moment from the matter under consideration, in order to turn our attention to a certain objection that might be thrown in against the statements immediately preceding, which only negate the birth of Jesus to have been on the twenty-fifth day of December without establishing on what day he was actually born. This objection alluded to is an argument of late somewhat frequently used by the rabid orthodox or by shallow thinkers of imperfect information, to wit, that a certain conjecture *only breaks down but builds not up again*. Though true and worn out to utter dullness this expression has become the cheap thunderbolt constantly hurled at the head of the reformer; it is the Pecksniffian arrogance that with one swoop removes any difficulty by simply pushing it aside. This phrase on a former occasion used oppositely and in a restricted meaning by an eminent man, has of late, in the hands of inferior men, been stretched into a broader sense of quite a different purport, conveying the idea that no man has a right to break down a notion if he is not able to immediately substitute another. The strength of this principle lies in its seeming plausibility yet it is a fallacy in every word, every letter it utters. Let me illustrate. The birthday of Shakespeare, for instance, has not been ascertained; were now a person to frame an elaborate story in which the bard's birthday is fixed, say on February 3rd, 1103, the student of history and literature will very rightly demur, he will protest that Shakespeare lived under the reign of Queen Elizabeth, that that reign is chronicled in the middle of the sixteenth century, and that consequently Shakespeare could not have been born in the twelfth century. "But," will be Pecksniff's reply, "on what day was he then born?" the answer is "I don't know!" And the rejoinder follows like a flash, "Why, you only break down, but you build not up!" It is undeniable that the student did break down, and though not able to build up again his action is commendable: error must be fought for its own sake, and wherever met, without stopping to consider if we have positive truth to substitute for it. There is still another horn to the fallacious phrase. The reformer, principally of religion, does not combat only chronological mis-statements, he very often directs his strength against abstract principles or against institutions, and in that case also the same anathema is slung at him. I would ask: Is the pioneer who cuts down trees to the right and to the left to clear a path through the woods, or the blaster who opens a tunnel under the Housatonic to facilitate travel, is either of them expected to fill up again the open space they have created? They have broken down with the deliberate purpose not to build up again. And no more is it the case with the reformer. His time is too precious to undo what he has done, and when he upsets institutions that have outlived the purpose for which

they were created, he removes those obstructions in the path of progress, and he takes a care not to build up new ones, but to leave the highways free and unobstructed for the onward march of civilization.

Returning now to Mr. Adler's article it is plain that his two premises not being accurate his concluding proposition will lose much of its strength. The day has come when the advance guards of the Jews and Gentiles join hands together both agreeing upon the sublimity of the character of Jesus of Nazareth, and, while both repudiate the idea of his Jehovahship, still they do not object to designate him by the usual epitheton of *Christ*. Once arrived at this degree of culture, when we keep a name, making at the same abstraction of the religio-sectarian meaning once, and even now commonly, attached to it, what should prevent those foremost ranks of both Jews and Gentiles from participating in a festivity like that of Christmas, making likewise abstraction of the once, and even now, religio-sectarian significance commonly attached to it: when we have learned from scientific dissertations on the mythology of Aryan, Semitic and Turanian nations, that after all the whole celebration is but a relic—a very attractive relic, it is true—yet still a relic of heathen practices? The religious element is imperceptibly more and more lost sight of on the eve of Christmas; the strict holiness of the occasion was first crowded out by the allegoric representation of the old year by an old man covered all over with snow flakes, and by tacking on him of late the Dutch legend of Sinterclaus the character of the whole matter has been turned essentially into a children's festival, around which all sorts of nursery tales are clustering thick and fast. Nor do these facts constitute the only recommendation for the celebration of Christmas eve. Living as we do in a climate where nature provides for the yearly renewal of the same phenomenal scenes before our eyes, the new birth of the the dwarfed giant, the beauty of the infantine, mythologic conception speaks convincingly to the soul; we can not help admitting that at about the winter solstice, when the wintry wind beats the snow flakes against our window-panes, and out-of-doors everything looks bleak and dreary there must be a natural tendency to create mirth, cheerfulness and laughter and glee in the hearts of all and especially of the little ones within doors. Accordingly, the

proposition to stay away from such a climatic festivity sounds untrue to the principles to which the admirers of Mr. Adler believe that gentleman has consecrated his life, his efforts and his talent. The sudden abstinence from a festival of which the perpetuity is guaranteed by nature herself, and the suggestion of substituting in its place the feast of Esther, a fastidious, and consequently a precarious feast, a feast of dubious origin and of questionable morality could hardly tend to anything else than to keep alive painful reminiscences, and to foment the unworthy, uncivilized mutual hatred of races among the narrowminded, and stubbornly disposed on both sides.

Because the Jew, I speak of the race, is not a Teuton it might be a very good reason why he should not join the Teutonic Freischütz Verein; because he is not a Swiss he need feel no enthusiasm on the day of William Tell; because he is not Irish or Celt he is fully excused from parading on St. Patrick's day under the green flag; because he is not Scotch he may dispense with exhibiting his knees and calves on Broadway in the Highland costume on some Highland festival; because he is of Jewish descent it will be fully accounted for his pompously and exclusively celebrating the Passover in commemoration of an all-important epoch in the annals of his race; but, because he with all these various races is one of the elements out of which the future American type is to be formed, because he, together with all these different races lives in a country, has immigrated into a country, where nature takes it in charge to instinctively render the victory of the Solar Hero over the witch's curse a climatic festival delightful to the inhabitants of this zone, because of all these several reasons he, so far from abstaining, should cheerfully seek to perpetuate this attractive heathen principle in Christianity, thus contributing his share toward ushering in that longed for era when hostility between race and race shall cease, and the amalgamation between them shall be accomplished.

"As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

DANIEL DE LEON.

APPENDIX 5

"The Jewish Christmas"

Source: BHO 1 (5 January 1883):2.

"There is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out."- Hamlet.

It is remarkable with what readiness Shakespeare can be drawn upon for an opinion on any subject, of whatever nature. Even down to modern times nothing in the world of philosophy, science, or art has escaped the observation of his prophetic pen.

The speculative mind turns to him with a feeling of confidence for the solution of the most perplexing questions; and the quotation at the head of this article is especially applicable to that under discussion, namely, the Jewish Christmas.

This title appears on its face as meaningless and paradoxical. But the absurd and constantly increasing participation of many Israelites in the celebration of the Birth of Jesus, would almost warrant its adoption in all sincerity and not in sarcasm.

It is difficult to conceive what motive impels a man to comply with forms and ceremonies which are entirely at variance with his own creed, and for which compliance there is no compulsion whatsoever. Some centuries ago, one might consider bigotry and fanaticism, and their accompanying persecutions, a sufficient and even powerful incentive for the stifling of one's conscience. Yet such is the inconsistency of the human mind, that while our forefathers endured all the horrors and privations which religious tyranny aided by political avarice could devise, rather than give up one iota of their faith, their descendents need no further encouragement than their natural inclinations, tending by these attributes to substantiate the theory of the learned Darwin as to the origin of our race.

It is repugnant to every one having any respect for the tenets of his faith to be accosted, as was the repeated experience of the writer on last Christmas, by people of the same persuasion as himself, with the hearty and congratulatory salutation of "A Merry Christmas!" and "What are you going to give me for a Christmas present?" What is Christmas to them? What right has a Jew to such expressions? Is not the very name typical of the misfortunes of his race? Yet

there are those who foolishly and enthusiastically yielding to the momentary influences that surround them, surrender their sober judgment, and participate freely and unreservedly in the pleasures of the day and celebrate the anniversary of an event which resulted in a revolution antagonistic to their faith, by making a holiday of it!

It is now quite a common occurrence for numerous Jewish families to exchange Christmas presents. Nay, some even go further, and the writer is aware of several instances of Christmas trees being erected in Jewish houses, and grand jollifications made for the little ones. I would like to ask some of those fathers and mothers, who thus contribute to their own moral degradation, if perchance some miniature Maccabee or Esther, should inquire the reason of this feasting and merrymaking, what their explanations would be? Of course, all these things seem very trivial in their eyes; yet the greatest effects spring from the tiniest causes. These little trivialities betray a gradual undermining and crumbling away of the foundations of Judaism.

Surely, surely, if we want an opportunity to engage in merriment and festivity, to exchange presents and congratulations, we need not draw upon the resources of an alien faith. There are many glorious events in Jewish history worthy of commemoration, which, if not entirely neglected, do not receive that recognition which they deserve. The feasts of Chanukah and Purim recall events of which no Israelite need be ashamed. When a child questions his parent concerning their significance, his conscious will not smite him as he recalls the noble deeds of his ancestors, and unfolds the pages whereon are inscribed the past glory and renown of his race. It will surely be of more value to him than Christmas presents.

In conclusion, let me say, that while it is always incumbent upon everybody to exhibit a due respect for the religious beliefs of others, there is no necessity for apeing them to the extent I have described.

In this land of freedom and enlightenment, where persecution and religious intolerance are defied, our brethren ought to maintain a steadfast hold upon their religion, instead of gradually slipping away from it. While discarding the mummeries of their own, it is worse than folly to fly to others of another faith. There is something radically wrong when Christmas day is celebrated by Jews; and I hope that my voice of protest, feeble though it be, will not be without its effect.

Horatius

APPENDIX 6

Editorial

Source: AMIS 30 (4 January 1884):4.

Our friend, Dr. Sonneschein is wrong with his Chanukah-Christmas proposition, not because he proposed it. Every man in Israel has the right to propose and advocate any measure or doctrine he considers true, right and proper. Rabbi Jehuda ben Nassi proposed to abolish the Fast of the ninth day of Ab, to abolish the "Purim," the tithe laws and other things, and was considered an orthodox man, although by the opposition of Rabbi Phineas ben Yair, those measures were not adopted in Israel. The Doctor is wrong in supposing that Christmas is a national holiday, which it is not; that the Jews are particular admirers of Jesus, which they are not, not even the learned Jews who can find nothing new which is true in the supposed teachings of Jesus; that the Jews will ever barter even their historical recollections for the Christian assumption of facts. Besides this, the wrong consists in going "to do" on his own personal authority that which all Israel has opposed these many centuries. Still I know that this latter point is not on the programme of radicalism. When, however, a noise is made in the camp over the Chanukah-Christmas proposition, as though some horrible wrong had been committed, it appears to us as if those friends did not know that Chanukah is no Biblical commandment, and that Dr. Sonneschein, like several other gentlemen, does not consider himself very tightly bound by rabbinical laws and institutions. We can find no sense in those confused outcries of horror. If a gentleman says of himself, I am so much better than Sonneschein, because I do not agree with him on this point, at the same time, however, rejects the authority of the traditions, both the divinity and veracity of the Bible, we cannot see where the point comes in.

APPENDIX 7

"A New Controversy"

Source: JTR 2 (4 January 1884):6.

After responding to Rabbi Spitz's letter Rabbi Sonneschein continued:

Let us resume, then, the chief features of the discussion.

1. We suggested the possibility of keeping Chanuccah on the 25th of December, thus celebrating the "Feast of Lights" on a day when the whole nation enjoys a holiday. We did not recommend such a Reform to take place in our congregation. On the contrary, we emphatically declared its present impracticability and fully acknowledged the great and natural difficulties in the way of such a movement.
2. We did not say, that the Jew shall keep Christmas. We clearly and unequivocally demonstrated the idea, that such a thing would be diametrically opposed to the very foundation and spirit of Judaism. We simply declared that the so-called Christmas is not and cannot be the natal day of the Nazarene, and that by celebrating Chanuccah as such on the 25th of December there can be no offence whatsoever to the historic sensitiveness of Judaism.
3. We maintained, that not a single item in the popular and beautiful Ritual of Chanuccah is to be sacrificed in this change of the lunar to the solar date. The natural objection which the Jew, as a Religionist, must have against the word Christmas--we said--finds its alleviating counterpart in the curious fact that a word, certainly more obnoxious to the Jewish ear and mind, the name of the Heathen God Thammuz was, already in the biblical era identified with the Jewish calendar and Ritual.

We sought to impress upon the mind of our hearers, that there can be no special reason for even the slightest abhorrence on the part of the Jew against keeping a festival of a mere post-biblical character, at the same day that our good Christian neighbors celebrate the imaginary birthday of their Savior. I argued, that by doing so, we would largely dissipate existing and fearful prejudices against us, inasmuch as we would prove thereby the fact: that we, the Jews, do not despise the memory of the Nazarene as the mobs of all the churches fully believe. I quoted the greatest unchallenged Jewish authorities as in favor of this high esteem in which the carpenter's son is held by the synagogue, and I thought that in this, our liberal country and age we could have the boldness to enter practically upon a new track of reconciliation and common brotherhood.

APPENDIX 8

"Our Washington Letter"

Source: AMIS 32 (8 January 1885):6.

Christmas Festivals

It is the custom here, as in other cities, to provide a hearty meal for all the poor children of the vicinity during the Christmas holidays, also to give each child presents, in the shape of toys, candies, books, etc. Some of our leading citizens form themselves into a club to manage the affair. . . . Many of our Hebrew families, recognizing that the movement was to make children happy, set aside all questions of faith and doctrine and contributed very liberally in money and material. In fact, so bountifully did they subscribe, that public notice had to be given that no more gifts could be received from any quarter. The following letter was sent, with a wagon load of presents: "December 22, 1885" "Mrs. Perry, Dear Madam:--As President of the Washington Hebrew Congregation, permit me to tender you a donation of Christmas presents to gladden the hearts of the poor little ones. Your noble charitable work should appeal to all creeds. I shall not only deem it a duty, but also a pleasure, to assist in all your charitable works. Wishing you success in your noble cause, I have the honor to be, yours most respectfully, "Hy. King, Jr." President Washington Hebrew Congregation.

Upon receipt of this letter and its accompaniments the anomalous announcement was made through the press that the largest and most munificent contributors to the Christmas Club had been the Jews, and public thanks were tendered to them.

APPENDIX 9

"New York" from Excelsior
December 6, 1885

Source: AMIS 32 (11 December 1885):7.

The Rev. Dr. Kohler took the Chanuckah festival for the subject of his lecture on Sabbath last. He said that the Jewish Chanuckah light shows its humble origin in the dark narrow home circle in which alone the medieval Jew felt happy and contented among the members of his household, in his abode of rare virtue and bliss. In its modest garb it represents the Jews' unswerving faith, unfaltering hope and inexhaustive treasury of comfort. It reminds us of the wonderous oil cruse, which nourished the Jewish mind with world enlightening truths, which made the Jews a people of thinkers and scholars in ages wrapped in darkness and barbarity. It is a perfect emblem of the Jew's everburning lamp of light in the night of the Middle-Ages.

But the question at issue today is whether Judaism is destined forever to remain a little light, telling a tale that is past, and refreshing only the memory of events transacted long ago, or whether it should brighten up the world by its splendor, whether it should forever be confined to a tribe and to a narrow sphere of life; to a people secluded from the world by insurmountable barriers, or whether it should hail the new era of human enlightenment as filled with cheering rays from its own luminous orbit and declare itself ready to enter upon the great arena to compete with the world's great religions. Orthodoxy renders Judaism a museum full of old curiosities to be glanced at with an air of reverence by inquisitive passers by. Reform Judaism wishes to render it a perennial fountain of inspiration, an ever living, ever progressive, ever vigorous power of life underlying and refashioning the world's civilization.

I want the old Chanuckah festival to be rendered the joy and pride of every Jewish household. I want to see it transformed into the bright winter festival, radiant with bliss and peace and the beauty of love and holiness of our youth for our poor and foresaken ones, young and old. I want the Jewish Chanuckah to become as dear and as near to every Jewish soul as Christmas to the Christian, and caring not which of the two is older, but which excels the other by bright, philanthropic deeds, full of grace and sweetness. I simply plead for the Chanuckah light saying, "More light!"

APPENDIX 10

Editorial

Source: AMIS 33 (38 January 1887):4.

As far as American Judaism is concerned, New York and Philadelphia are outlying stations. Only a portion of their populations are Americans, indeed, the bulk is as yet English, Polish, Roumanian, Galician, Hungarian, German or French, old style Europeans, with the same notions and superstitions which their great grandparents brought out of the Ghettoes. They have never been in America, they have been in New York or Philadelphia, which they look upon as being all there is of America. North of the Harlem River and on the other side of Germantown begins America, what they call there the West; there begins another life, other views prevail, and another spirit of the age is dominant. If it were not for the reform congregations of New York and Philadelphia, there would be as much difference between the Hebrew population of those cities and of this great country as between us and the inhabitants of North Africa. It is next to an impossibility to associate or identify ourselves with that half civilized orthodoxy which constitutes the bulk of population in those cities. We are Americans, and they are not. We are liberal, humane, cosmopolitan and broad in principles, and they are not. We are emancipated men and women, free, firm and fraternizing, and they are not. We unite and they break up. We enlighten and they obscure. We appeal to reason and they appeal to their grandparents' habits. We are Israelites of the nineteenth century and a free country, and they gnaw the dead bones of past centuries. Besides the name we have very little in common with them. For the honor of American Judaism and our defense opposite the enlightened word, we do not want to have even that in common; we let them be Jews and we are the American Israelites. Write this to the Jeshurun.

APPENDIX 11

Editorial

Source: AMIS 35 (7 December 1888):4.

The Chanukah festival for the Sabbath-school children has become an American institution with our co-religionists, largely imitated in Europe, partly because of the ideas of liberty and heroism which underlie this annual celebration of the Maccabean valorous and patriotic deeds in behalf of downtrodden Israel, and partly as a substitute for the children's Christmas celebration which latitudinarians aped in their families. As the confirmation rejuvenated the Shebuoth feast, so did the children's festival reanimate the Chanukah itself. They will not be neglected again. However, if the Chanukah festival is stripped of its historical and religious mementoes, like the Purim balls, the silver weddings, the golden weddings and other occasions for feasting and amusement, its main object is missed, it flattens down to a vulgar carnival, without any identity. Therefore, as a sort of a lesson to managers we will describe how Talmud Yelodim Institute celebrated its Chanukah festival last Sunday, as it does almost every year. Half-past four P.M., about 300 pupils of the said institute, together with their teachers, the officers of the association and a numerous congregation filled the spacious hall of the Bene Yeshurun Temple in Cincinnati. Cantor Kraus, supported by the choir and organ, conducted the usual evening service, and the whole school in chorus recited the Hebrew responses, Boruch, the whole section of Shema, Mi Chomosho. This closed, some juvenile orators narrated the Maccabean story, after which the whole class in one chorus recited the Berachoth, while some of them kindled the lights, then the whole school, led by the organ, sang loudly, melodiously and cheerfully, the whole Mooz Tzur Yeshuoth, that it reverberated in every beating heart within that temple. Now followed the declamations, mostly of Chanukah poetry, English and German, and other appropriate psalms, hymns, and poetical gems appropriate for the young. The whole was concluded with the grand Chanukah hymns from the congregational hymn-book by the choir and organ. After this purely intellectual feast, closed by the rabbi with a few remarks and the benediction, a sumptuous repast was served to three hundred children in the spacious school-rooms and lecture-room under the temple with some of the most aristocratic ladies of this community doing the honors. The merriment of the happy children up to 8 P.M. was too beautiful and cheering for description. When all the little ones had left, carrying their loads of gifts given them by the ladies, the officers, teachers, and invited

guests partook of a Chanukah supper, made the inevitable post prandial speeches, and the celebration was closed in due form. We recommend these proceedings as a pattern for celebrating the Chanukah Festival for Sabbath-school children.

APPENDIX 12

"Christmas and Chanukah"

Source: AMIS 38 (24 December 1891):5.

As the columns of the Israelite are always open for the consideration of all questions pertaining to Judaism, I would request space for these few lines, hoping it will develop further sentiments on this interesting subject.

In one of our literary organizations (the presiding officer of which was absent owing to sickness), composed entirely of Jewish members, there took place recently a discussion on the timely subject of "Christmas and Chanukah," said discussion being based upon an article by Dr. Kohler, of New York, written about a year ago.

In this article Dr. Kohler after giving the history (sic) of the origin of each festival, deplored the fact that the Jews were introducing into their homes, each year in greater number, the Christmas tree, while the Chanukah lights were entirely forgotten. The discussion that followed the reading of the two papers developed so many remarkable statements that I reproduce a few of them here, as briefly as possible, for the benefit of those who are interested in curiosities. These opinions, however, must not be taken as an index of the opinion of the majority present, as they were met by many protests of indignation.

The three leading participants, whose views I give here, are men of exceptional educational advantages, belong to leading Jewish families (and when I say leading I mean families who lead in all questions pertaining to the welfare of Judaism), and might be considered excellent representatives of that "Young America" in whom our hope and our pride are embodied.

The first gentlemen, in opening the discussion, stated that he could see no harm in Jewish children joining the Christmas festivities and having a Christmas tree in their homes, as it added greatly to their pleasure; as they looked forward to their Christmas present, why should they be deprived of that harmless rejoicing? Furthermore, as to turning it into a Chanukah feast, he did not see why that need be done, as the children did not care about the victory of the Maccabees, and anyhow, that event occurred so long ago that it did not affect us at this day, and need not be impressed upon the minds of our children.

He was followed by a number two, who stated that he could see no harm in Jews having Christmas trees in their homes and Jewish children gathering around its candles, as that would show our Christian neighbors that we Jews have become liberal enough to rejoice with them in the birth of their Savior, and magnanimous enough to forgive them for the years of persecution we have suffered through them.

When number two concluded his remarks, number three arose and stated that he could see no harm in planting the Christmas tree by the Jewish fireside, as he did not believe it was regarded as a religious feast by the Christians any longer, and gave as an example the family of an agnostic or unbeliever, who had a Christmas tree yearly, but did not invest it with any religious significance, from which he concluded that the children of all our non-Jewish neighbors looked upon it in like fashion, and the Jewish children might do likewise. In other words, Jewish children may keep the Christmas festival because they do not believe in it.

Fie upon our hypocrisy! Shame upon our insincerity!

Upon all occasions that offer we indulge in high flown bombast upon our pride in our Jewish ancestry and religion--upon our glory in being Jews with Disraeli, Moses, Mendelssohn, Spinoza, Cremieux, Lasker and a host of others. We laud ourselves to the skies because we are Jews in our sympathies, because we are Jews in our hearts; we boast proudly that we are Jews, everywhere and all the time; yet, when the time for action comes we trail our beautiful banners in the dust, and treacherous deserters that we are, make haste to shield ourselves behind the colors of the enemy! Is this the stuff of which the Jew is made?

Fathers and mothers, when you rejoice with your little ones about the Christmas tree, do you do it because you believe the history of the Maccabees affects us no more--the victory they won with blood and death that Judaism might live, need be taught to your children no longer;--the tale is oldfashioned, out of date, and like an old garment may be thrown aside useless or do you do it because you wish to show yourself liberal enough and magnanimous enough to deprive them of that glorious heritage that has descended to them through the centuries, that heritage that has so enriched and enobled the Jews as to make him envied by most and feared by all his enemies?

Oh tear away the disguise from your heart, do you do it because there is no spirit of Judaism there? In you the Chanukah story awakens no thrill, you cast aside the real, the substance founded upon a basis as solid as the eternal hills--you adopt that which has the origin in a myth, is shrouded in darkness, and will exist only as long as minds weak as yours exist.

Fathers and mothers, shame upon you that the glorious heritage of ages should be polluted by you!

Be Jews! Teach your children the beauty, the glory of the Chanukah lights. Do not let them grow up in the belief that they are Jews only in the Temple and in the Sabbath-school. Teach them to be proud as Jews everywhere.

If your child comes home from school this year begging for a Christmas tree, give him its signification as it is taught to his Christian playmate in his Sunday-school-- then tell him of the Chanukah feast and what the Chanukah lights commemorate.

His innocent heart will throb with sympathy at the sufferings of his ancestors and with pride that he shares in their glory. How proudly will he claim the privilege of lighting the Chanukah candles, his face beaming with a joy that, taking root in the heart, will become the germ of that noble manhood that can proudly proclaim to the honor of his family and race: "I am a Jew!"

(signed) X

Cincinnati, December 1891

APPENDIX 13

"A Jewish Opinion of Christmas"

Source: AMIS 38 (7 January 1892):1.

A candid consideration of Christmas from a Jewish point of view, as I am requested to write, would require a discussive treatment under three heads, which in the space allotted, I can but lightly touch.

In this country Christmas confronts the Jew mainly, perhaps only--for what has one's religion to do with the festivities of a wholly unkindred church?--in its national aspect, as a holiday sanctioned, and, I might say, enforced by law--in the dismissal of the public schools, in the non-delivery of mails, in the effect upon legal documents, etc. A government, especially a democracy, can have by no stretch of logic--unless it professedly combine the function of a theocracy--right or reason, or even excuse to stamp as a legal holiday any day that is not prominently connected with its national weal or woe. The right to legalize even such a day of patriotic import, so that thereon the business of one citizen with another becomes hampered, if not wholly impeded, may likewise seriously be questioned. It is against its spirit, most emphatically so to distinguish the natal day of any one of its sons, no matter how deservedly esteemed. Washington's birthday as a legal holiday is a slap at our fundamental doctrine, the equal regard of every citizen. What possible pretext can justify the legal recognition of Christmas as a national occasion, so that even court sittings are thereon interfered with, is beyond my patriotic logic; nay, does violence to it, for I am forced to look upon the countenance of this day as a denominational and church favoritism, un-American in spirit and transgressive of the letter of the constitution, which should therefore evoke the protest of every unbiased and true American, whether Christian or Jew.

From an historical standpoint, Christmas is not only not justified, but should be condemned as a Christian holiday. It is universally admitted that if the New Testament account of Jesus be correct, Christ was never born on the day held in honor as the anniversary of his birth. In Palestine December belongs to the wet season, when shepherds are not wont to tend their flocks at night in the open fields. Therefore, even while admitting the veracity and genuineness of the Gospels, to assume that some day should be held in honor of "Christ's" nativity, and that the season of Christmas is most appropriate to the merriment provoked by the occasion of its mirth, is to confess that Jesus made a

serious mistake in selecting the time of year of his birth, or else there can be no sense in celebrating as his birth day wholly at variance with the possibility of the circumstances coloring his paturieny. As a matter of fact, however, Christmas was not originally Christian. It is the heathen Saturnalia and was Christianized about a century and a half to two centuries after the reputed crucifixion of Jesus, and merely to throw a bait to the Pagans to obtain by the countenance of their festivities that desired conversion.

The only justification that Christmas can therefore have as any kind of a holiday must be sought in whatever spiritual significance or virtue custom has breathed into or wreathed around its observance. But even this last resort fails to vindicate its honor. It requires not the formal coronation of the "Lord of Misrule" or the "Abbot of Unreason" to set agoing Christmas revelry. They take their thrones on this day with appropriate naturalness. The day is their offspring or native subject, And the old Christian preachers who inveighed against Christmas carousals--I hate to use their word licentiousness--are about as consistent as would be some ancient Roman priest were he to protest against Proserpine, the Queen of Pluto and the Nether regions, appearing on earth during the six months that his mythology gives her divine right to embrace her mother, Ceres, the goddess of earthly abundance. Whatever moral conduct this day is used as the pretext for, in the way of charity, etc. is not inherent or characteristic in the day itself, but merely incidental to it and characteristic solely of a few individuals; it is but an exceptional observance. A soul exaltation, a spiritual joy, the day can not possibly stimulate whatever soulful food or impulse lies in the tale of Jesus' incarnation is contained in Easter, the festival of the so-held resurrection, wherein the sacrifice of His divinity, the martyrdom of His humanity and His resublimification have in their trifoliate beauty, if not religious, yet poetic spiritual work. But Christmas devoted simply and directly to the debasement, represented otherwise how ever so nobly voluntary of the "Son of God," into the pulling form of vulgar infantile humanity, is constrained for want of spiritual power to make use of its mask as a holiday--which means holy day--as a disguise of what it really is, a flashy day, a carnival of luxury, extravagance, gluttony, drinking bouts, etc., which in their grossness, to my infinite regret, have power to attract some misguided and superficial Jews into the observance, especially of the vulgar extravagance of presents that not depth of soul or holy gratitude to God for family blessings, etc., has called forth. The extravagance of presents among the Christians on this day is, as an almost invariable rule which the exceptions above allowed for emphasize the more strongly, but between men and women, between families of the same social and financial status; seldom from the rich to the poor even

among relatives. The day thus is not only the excuse for, but the encourager of extravagance, as any of the retail stores in this and any other city, which look largely for the year's profits to the "holiday" trade, will readily testify. The display of wares evidences that the expenditures of the holiday season are not for necessities. And a little investigation will establish the fact that his holiday trade locally everywhere comes mainly from the poor who are encouraged by the luxuries which the rich import from abroad, here in this city from the East, in the East probably from Europe, and in Europe probably from Asia or Africa or foolishly from us again, into spend thrifty emulation at home. Contrast this with the Jewish Purim, on which day it is enjoined that we should send presents to friends, to relatives and to the poor, and whereon to this day it is the custom among the Jews to give large donations of charity in all forms, by formal subscription or private alms, to the poor of all classes, independent of social, consanguine, or other ties, whereas among friends and relatives of the same standing nothing is exchanged unless it be some slight complimentary cake, and it will be understood what I mean when I say that days, like men, have their natural, instinctive characteristics and hereditary proclivities which all protest, force, persuasion and training will prove inefficacious to eradicate; and that the persistent carnal tendencies of Christmas evidence its base changeling character, point to its pagan parent and reflect no honor upon its foster mother, Christianity.

Moses P. Jacobson.

APPENDIX 14

"Children's Corner"

Source: AMIS 41 (3 January 1895):7.

Dear Nieces and Nephews:

As the year has once more drawn to its close, and you are again in full enjoyment of the holiday season, a word would not come amiss. Do not forget in this time of general rejoicing that you are Jewish children, and that although sympathy with the happiness of your neighbors is not out of place, it is not for you to make a holiday of Christmas. The birth of Christ has done much for the world in one way, it has civilized barbarians, who otherwise would never have been civilized, but our people have suffered so much through Christianity ever since its era, that a celebration of the natal day of its founder does not seem exactly appropriate. It may be an act of great self-denial to do without a Christmas tree or the exchange of gifts, but using the same money to relieve the distress we see and hear of about us daily, will be more in keeping with the spirit of Judaism. It gives us all pleasure, or should, to make others happy; we can do this and have the due regard for the religious scruples of our forefathers. We can be like the people about us without going to extremes and thus better maintain our self respect and the good opinion of others. That the New Year bring to you and yours health and happiness is a wish of Aunt Babette.

APPENDIX 15

"Notes and Comments"
(Chicago Israelite)

Source: AMIS 43 (7 January 1897):5.

Dr. Emile G. Hirsch stood before a congregation in Zion Temple last night and for nearly an hour and a half pleaded with them to observe Christmas Day as the greatest of holidays. Among his hearers were men and women who had grown gray in the belief that it was their religious duty to scoff at the celebration of Christmas Day and to consider it merely as the anniversary of one of the greatest Jewish persecutions in history. Dr. Hirsch, among other things, said:

We rabbis have never asked you business men to close your stores on Christmas Day. We did not need to ask you, for on this day you could not do business. We live under new conditions. Today is a universal holiday, and is neither Christian nor Jewish. Suppose this is the birthday of Jesus. There never lived a better Jew than Jesus.

The Jews did not crucify Jesus--at least, the Jews of the people did not. They had no reason to crucify him. Rome had him crucified as a conspirator against her dominion over Jerusalem. There may have been Jews who took part in his crucifixion, but there are bad and tritorous (sic) men among all peoples.

So we may also celebrate his birthday. No one has revolutionized humanity as much as Jesus. We of the liberal church of Jews have no reason to protest at the name of Jesus. The name of him made it possible for a daughter religion to conquer the world. We Jews are religion poor and race proud.

I would have the Jews enter into the spirit of this day as a day of peace on earth and good will toward man. The birthnight of Jesus was a night of persecution to the Jews, and the fact has caused us not to celebrate Christmas Day. But woe to a generation of Jews which turns that night to a night of frivolity and scoffing. If we cannot welcome, let us at least be silent on a day so sancted to others. It is a human day to men. It is the dawn of union among men--Times Herald.

Rabbi Hirsch is certainly progressing. A few weeks ago he informed the world that no one who kept the Jewish Sabbath could be a true American citizen, thus disfranchising the Jews and a very considerable part of the Christian

population of the country. That Jews cannot be patriots has been one of the loudest claims of their enemies, who will only be too glad to have the support of so eminent a rabbi in their contention. It can be safely stated that a more deadly blow than this was never aimed at the Jewish citizens of any country. Of course, the Jews deny the accusation, and I, for one, repudiate it with scorn and loathing, but it is not difficult to imagine whose side of the case the non-Jewish world will look upon with most favor. But not satisfied with the assassin like blow at the good citizenship of the Jews, Dr. Hirsch now comes out with a warning equivalent to a statement, that the Jews make a mock and scoff of a day sacred to their Christian fellow-citizens. How untrue this is can be seen by the extent to which the Jews participate in the festivities of the Christmas season, and by the necessity felt by the entire Jewish press of warning its readers that danger to their own religion lies in their willingness to forget that Christmas is not a Jewish holiday. The Jews know that Christmas has long since lost all significance as a Christian holiday to the vast majority of Christians. Like the descendants of the Puritans, whose forefathers were the greatest enemies Christmas ever had, the Jews in every country have practically accepted it as a secular season of rejoicing; and like millions to whom there is no sanctity in the day, they cannot help being influenced by the kindly sentiments which have come to be connected with it. As for Dr. Hirsch's other suggestions, they are too absurd for consideration at a time in the world's history when Christianity itself has almost ceased to insist upon its mysteries and miraculous features; in kindness to the Rabbi it is best to presume he has not been correctly reported. When the Christians sanctify Christmas as a day of holiness, it will be time enough for the Jews to think of doing the same; but in the meanwhile it cannot be expected of the Jews to be better Christians than are the vast majority of Christians themselves.

APPENDIX 16

Letter; Solomon B. Freehof to Louis Witt

Source: AJA, Louis Witt Collection,
Box 2625, Christmas file.

RABBI SOLOMON B. FREEHOF, D.D.
RODEF SHALOM TEMPLE
FIFTH AND MOREWOOD AVENUES
PITTSBURGH, PA.

December fifth

1939

Rabbi Louis Witt
Temple Israel
Dayton, Ohio

Dear Louis:

A few years ago Harper's published a book of mine entitled *STORERS OF HEAVEN*. The book was a series of short biographies of the great religious leaders. When I came to the discussion of Jesus, I said that all human beings are children of God, but that in him the sense of childhood to God must have been very strong and he certainly brought the sense of God nearer to millions. That is why so much love has been directed towards him. No one speaks of Moses, lover of my soul, or Mohammed, lover of my soul, etc. I believe that the statement while warm and appreciative was justifiable and could be spoken by any rabbi. Yet the Christian missionaries grabbed hold of it; they quoted it and capitalized every pronoun. Where I said "him" and "his", they said "Him" and "His". Thus they made my friendly and appreciative statement sound like religious adoration of a man-God.

We are never safe from misunderstanding whenever we say friendly words about Jesus. In fact, a man named Mangeson or Hermanson (I forget which), a Scandinavian theologian in a book *LITTLE JEW, THAT NOW?* misquoted me in the way I have indicated and said, "How can the rabbi remain a Jew?" He felt that it was my duty now openly to avow the divinity of Jesus.

I am writing to you of this uncomfortable experience in reference to your magnificent article in the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*. Everything you say is just and any intelligent Jew can agree with it. But I fear that Christians will treat you as they treated me. Especially will they delight in the statement at the bottom of page 1498 "...in a Christmas that welcomes the Jew and in a Jew that welcomes Christmas and in a Christ that is claimed by both." If at least you had said, "a Jesus that is claimed by both", it might not have been so bad. I can only hope that the evangelical Christians will treat you more kindly than they treated me.

As ever,

Sol

SBF:OK

APPENDIX 17

"Jesus for Jews?"

Source: Time Magazine, January 1, 1940, pp. 32-33.

Jesus for Jews?

This week, as Christendom celebrated what it dearly believed to be the 1,943rd anniversary of the birth of Jesus, the Jews of the world still awaited their promised Messiah, and the ingathering of them, the chosen people, in Palestine. Yet in the U. S., perhaps half of the Jews gave their friends Christmas presents, told their children about Santa Claus; some even put Christmas trees in their living rooms and wreaths in their windows. So widespread is their celebration—purely social—of the Christian feast, that few rabbis bother any more to inveigh against it. Indeed, one rabbi last fortnight ardently defended Christmas-for-Jews, in the influential Protestant *Christian Century*. He was Louis Witt of Dayton, Ohio, leader in the Central Conference of American Rabbis, chief Reform Jewish body. Said Rabbi Witt:

"For years I, as a rabbi, like all rabbis, denounced with all the oratorical fervor and fury at my command this celebration of Christmas by my own people. . . . 'Christmas,' I pleaded, 'is for the Christian—for him it is a happy, beautiful, holy day. It is not for the Jew—for him it is at best alien, at worst fraught with bloody memories and immemorial terrors!'" . . .

"Wandering through many lands, touched by many cultures, facing an ever new 'spirit of the age' in his duration through the ages, the Jew has survived in part by virtue of the force and logic of syncretism.* Judaism is an amalgam of countless creeds and cultures held together by the cement of its own native genius. . . . The rabbi, in opposing the Christmas-Jew, may be opposing not him but a vast tide of psychic coercion, a veritable *Zeitgeist*, that flows through him and that renders all pleading and thundering . . . futile. . . .

* Meaning: absorption of alien religious concepts.

"Christmas in liberal America is no longer the dogmatic, denominational, ecclesiastical institution it used to be and, alas, still is in many lands that are drenched with bigotry and blood. An amazing and increasing number of Christians no longer believe in the supernaturalness of Jesus' birth or in the divinity of his person. . . . I say then, as a rabbi, thank God for Christmas! . . . A Jew celebrating Christmas! Who knows what is back of it, what will come of it? . . . Is it neither treason of Jew nor triumph of Christian but partnership of Jew and Christian in the making of a better world . . .?"

Passionately Rabbi Witt was answered in last week's *Christian Century* by another rabbi, Edward L. Israel of Baltimore. Said he:

"Does Rabbi Witt intend to maintain that Christmas is just a pagan thing which needs syncretism with Judaism for purposes of spiritualization? I think that Christianity will bitterly resent the gratuitous inference. . . . Dr. Witt pursues his blundering and ill-considered way by gratuitously imitarianizing most of Christendom [i.e., by remarking that Christians no longer believe Jesus divine]. As a Jew, I unqualifiedly condemn Rabbi Witt for this affront. . . . The truly devout Christian of whatever denomination has far more respect for the Jew who, conscientious to his own religious loyalties, does not observe Christmas, than for the Witt type of Jew who tries to crawl into Christmas observance, salvaging what remains of his Jewish conscience by endeavoring to water down and compromise sound Christian doctrine. . . . What do



Associated Press

RABBI WITT

"Thank God for Christmas!"

these Christmas-observing Jews really want with Christmas? Witt and other Jews suffering spiritual hernia rationalize about 'good will.' The real reason is their inability to give their whining children a positive Jewish compensation for the superficially alluring trappings which have nothing really to do with the spiritual significance of Christmas. . . ."

Having furnished a battleground in which Jews could toss grenades at each other, the *Christian Century* last week dropped an editorial bomb of its own. On the touchiest subject in Christian-Jewish relations it said:

"The most obvious common possession of Jew and Christian is nothing less than Jesus himself. . . . The entire furnishing of his mind was the gift to him of his Jewish heritage. . . . Jesus was a Jew—in blood, in loyalty, in mental outlook, in his criticism of Jewry, in his positive message. . . . Why should not Judaism do much more than [celebrate Christmas]? Why should it not make a place for Jesus in its own faith . . . a place fully consistent with the nobler ideals of the Jewish tradition. . . . If the religion of Judaism is good for Jews it is also good for Gentiles. . . . If it is not good for Gentiles, it is not the best religion for Jews. To cherish it in withdrawal from the rest of society may be defended in a hostile environment . . . but in the environment of American tolerance . . . it is not fair to democracy to cherish a religious faith which provides a sanction for racial or cultural or any other form of separatism."

"Yuletide Vignette"

Source: Synagogue Service Bulletin,
November 1952, p. 9.

MUCH ADO? YULETIDE VIGNETTE

A Study in Irony

by S. RUSH BARKTON

OUR Jewish observance of Christmas is definitely in need of a spiritual shot in the arm. As long as we insist on usurping the holiday let's do it up thoroughly.

I should like to propose a Yule morning service in our synagogues, say from 11:30 A.M. to 12:15. The earlier hours must be held sacred for lounging "after the night before," for frolic about the home tree, and for opening presents. Reserving the time just prior to high noon will provide amply for a return home in time for ceremonial Christmas dinner and/or a brunch-cocktail party.

At first thought, a magnificent tree in the temple would seem essential to the proper observance of the festival. But, it occurs to me, it might have the same effect as the congregational sulko has had and eliminate this fascinating phase of *home* observance. No, we dare not repeat old mistakes. The Christmas tree belongs in the home.

Nevertheless, the festival atmosphere can fill every nook and cranny of the temple. We may start with red candles in the seven-branched menorahs. A neon star should be placed in front of the Two Tablets, and strings of glittering tinsel must be everywhere. The use of mistletoe can be left to the decision of the local Ritual Committee. But a special committee of artistic congregants should be selected to devise miniature manger scenes in front of the pulpit.

S. Rush Barkton is the pseudonym of the rabbi of a large midwestern Reform temple.

The worship service itself requires the meticulous attention of the national Joint Committee on Ceremonies. Though I refrain even from the appearance of encroaching upon their prerogatives, I humbly ask: Why not resurrect litanies from those medieval church services Jews were forced to attend for the sake of their souls?

A word of caution must here be proffered. Our respect for tradition must not blind us to the needs of the moment. We must have prayers that reflect the contemporary mood. The spirit of thankfulness for the reaping of the Christmas shopping harvest must somehow be captured. The minds of our people must be elevated gradually from celebration by carol and gluttony to gratitude. We must indicate that, though we are not unmindful of the financial rewards of the season, our paramount appreciation goes out to our Christian neighbors for what they have added to our religious experience by graciously leading us—involuntarily—this religious observance. They have taught us its significance through our public schools, radio and television, and of course in the market-place.

Our musical service should eschew the "Jingle Bells" and "White Christmas" sort of thing. Lovely cantatas by Bach are available for presentation, and our composers need not create anything original, even though the familiar En Keloheinu melody and the Mogen-Ovos mode could be adapted to the occasion.

Congregational singing will be at its best if only we can select the most solemn of popular carols.

Then, of course, there is the sermonette. It dare not exceed ten minutes, if young and old are to approach this annual observance with the eager anticipation we contemplate. But within this limitation, the preacher must not fail to persuade his listeners of the national significance of the holiday's message, and the magic appeal of the story, the mysteries of which cry out in late December for gladsome acceptance.

The synagogue might well sponsor an Oneg Christmas party during the late afternoon, possibly in the home of the rabbi. There the children of the congregation, gathered around the rabbi's own tree, may see him and his

family enact the opening scenes of the Passion Play. The guests, transfixed by the dramatic beauty and historic accuracy of this pogrom-inspiring play, might then join in consuming traditionally-prepared egg-og and other delicacies of the season.

Something of this nature on Christmas Day is sorely needed in our age of emancipation. Unless the synagogue takes the lead, our neighbors will hardly notice what a splendid influence they have exerted on our homes, how we have turned from coveting to copying their *Joyeux Noël*, how we revel in concealing our own unique Jewish values and our self-respect in the happy anonymity of the herd. Here is an opportunity for the synagogue to intensify the service it renders its adherents.

APPENDIX 19

Letter: Norman M. Goldberg to
Maurice N. Eisendrath

Source: AJA, Stanley R. Brav Collection,
Correspondence file on "Yuletide Vignette."

C
O
P
Y

TEMPLE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL
AUGUSTA, GEORGIA

Rabbi Norman M. Goldberg

Home Address;
1739 Holly Hill Road

Dear Eisy: [Maurice N. Eisendrath]

I am writing this letter to you since you are the "boss man" up there. I have just finished reading a nasty, sarcastic and vicious little piece in the Synagogue Service Bulletin. I cannot understand how this bitter, mean and nasty little article ever got past Lipman. I know Schwartz would never have admitted it to the pages of a Union publication.

Perhaps, it is this kind of envenomed thinking which motivates some of the boys in the administrative positions up there. I don't know. This is a pretty vulgar exhibition for a publication of Reform to sponsor with its accent on "pogroms" - its sarcastic reference to public school observances etc., its snide comments.

Eisy, who is this author of the piece who goes by the name of S. Rush Barkton. Let us know so that we can deal with him directly.

Never in all my years in the Reform Rabbinate have I witnessed writing so vulgar, so calculated to promote division between Jew and Gentile and so vengeful in its intentions.

I consider this a very serious matter, indeed, a serious breach against good taste. If this type of business is to be encouraged in our national publication, Eisy, those of us who are working in harmony and in good will with our Christian neighbors had better stop trying to cement the good neighbor policy.

I hope you will show this to Lipman. You won't have to show it to Schwarz. I hope that dear Louis Egelson will get a look at it, too.

I am not only greatly angered but deeply hurt by this article. At the same time - I am simply amazed at the thought that this sort of thing should have the imprimatur of the Union, my Union.

With best personal wishes, Eisy to you and Rosa.

signed
Norman

APPENDIX 20

Letter: (Mrs. Hugo) Helen M.
Dalshimer to Eugene J. Lipman

Source: AJA, Stanley R. Brav Collection, Correspondence
file on "Yuletide Vignette."

MRS. HUGO DALSHIMER
Leisure Hill
Pikesville 8, Maryland

Dear Rabbi Lipman,-

The article in the last issue of the Synagogue
Service Bulletin entitled "Yuletide Vignette"-
by S. Rush Barkton, in my judgement was not only
"A Study In Irony" - but a shocking "Study Sarcasm".
For Jews to print such material is in bad taste,
and the worst sort of "Good public relations".
I personally hope that this Bulletin does not fall
into the hands of "Our Neighbors", who I feel
would have just cause for resentment, and Criticism.
It seems self - condemnation to me that we resort
to such tactics to drive home a point.

Sincerely,

(Mrs. Hugo) Helen M. Dalshimer

Thursday November the Nineteenth. [1952]

APPENDIX 21

Letter: Eugene J. Lipman to
Mrs. Hugo Dalshimer

Source: AJA, Stanley R. Brav Collection,
Correspondence file on "Yuletide Vignette."

November 24, 1952

Mrs. Hugo Dalshimer
Leisure Hill
Pikesville 8, Md.

Dear Mrs. Dalshimer:

I have just received your note about "Yuletide Vignette". When I agreed to publish the article I knew that there would be reactions to it and that it might be considered a bit too strong. Let me say first that Synagogue Service Bulletin is not an inter-faith publication. It reaches 9,000 leaders of the Reform movement in the United States.

This article is an important one because it points up effectively a problem which Reform Jews have permitted to reach dangerous and nonsensical proportions. Rabbis all over the United States are plagued for two months each year with irrational arguments about this new "national" holiday of Christmas. In too many cases, I am sorry to say, our congregational leadership has not been backing the rabbi in his insistence that Christmas is a Christian holiday and that it is disrespectful for Jews to observe it.

One of the things I have learned from Jake Schwarz is that irony is frequently more effective a weapon than argument.

What constitutes good taste is frequently debatable. I can only respectfully disagree with your opinion that this article was in bad taste. I have, by the way, sent a copy of your letter to the author of the article. He may choose to unmask himself and write you personally about it.

With kindest regards and all good wishes,

Cordially,

EJL:mv

Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman
Director of Synagogue Activities

APPENDIX 22

Letter: G. Barrett Rich III
to Stanley R. Brav

Source: AJA, Stanley R. Brav Collection,
Correspondence file on "Yuletide Vignette."

First United Church

Congregational - Presbyterian

3549 Reading Road

Sturtevant 28, Ohio

REV. G. BARRETT RICH, III, MINISTER

December 4, 1952

I have read with a good deal of interest the article, "Yuletide Vignette", in the November issue of "Synagogue Service Bulletin", by S. Rush Barkton.

As a Christian minister I can see nothing to which a member of my faith can object in the article. Whether Jews observe Christmas or not is to my mind a purely Jewish question. I can understand the position of both groups in Judaism. However, it is a purely Jewish problem and I do not see how it affects Christians.

However, it is a most interesting and ironical article.

G. Barrett Rich III

Letter: Eugene J. Lipman
to Norman M. Goldberg

Source: AJA, Stanley R. Brav Collection,
Correspondence file on "Yuletide Vignette."

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 21, N. Y.

Rabbi Norman M. Goldberg
1739 Holly Hill Road
Augusta, Ga.

December 8, 1952

Dear Rabbi Goldberg:

Rabbi Eisendrath has transmitted to me your undated letter on the subject of "Yuletide Vignette". I am forwarding a copy of your letter to the author who will, if he chooses, communicate with you directly about the matter. I want to assure you, first of all, that the use of a pseudonym by this rabbi was my idea and not his. He was perfectly willing to have the article appear under his by-line, but I preferred it this way.

I have read your letter very carefully. I regret deeply that nowhere in it can I find any real basis for discussion, since at no point do you give reasons for your feeling that the article was "bitter, mean and nasty". You do mention that you take exception to the reference to pogroms in connection with the Passion Play. You also note that you do not agree with the author's point of view on public school observance.

I have no objection to your latter disagreement. In it you are not alone. But I am sure you know that there are thousands of decent, loyal American Jews, including the heads of almost every national Jewish organization, who feel rather strongly that the current emphasis in our public schools upon a Christian religious observance is an unhealthy contravention of the Constitution of the United States. You may or may not agree that the introduction of Chanukah observance into the schools ameliorates this problem. From the standpoint of the article under discussion, that is irrelevant. The fact is that Christmas observance in our schools is a serious problem.

I more than justify the reference to pogroms made in the article. I find it impossible, in my own thinking, to divorce Christmas observance from Christianity. The Christians whom I respect take Christmas seriously as a religious observance. They accept full responsibility for their convictions as Christians. They hate Passion Plays too. These Christians do not like or enjoy the spectacle of non-Christians appropriating their holiday. When Jews do so it seems to me they merit not only irony but contempt as well.

The above are rather strong words, I know, but I feel strongly about this matter. Each year of my rabbinate, during the months of November and December I have been plagued with the problem, not only in trying to educate the members of my congregations to be Jews, but also in my relationships with self-respecting Christians.

Since Synagogue Service Bulletin is published for the leadership of the Reform movement in the United States, "Yuletide Vignette" is a valid article to appear in its pages. All too frequently the officers and board members of our congregations, who are the sole recipients of this magazine along with rabbis, do not support their spiritual leaders in our campaign to promote Jewish observance by Jews. For me at least it is a far more

- 2 -

Dr. Norman M. Goldberg
Atlanta, Ga.

December 8, 1952

serious breach of good taste for Jews to have such little self-respect and such little respect for their Christian neighbors that they observe Christian holidays, than for us to use the medium of irony in discussing this problem. I am deeply aware of the need for promoting good relations with our Christian neighbors. It is my considered opinion that this article, far from having the effect you visualize, tends to the right direction.

I must tell you, in all honesty, that the article submitted by you from your friend Patrick McGillisuddy, on the subject of Christmas observance by Jews, concerned me much more from the standpoint of Judaism than "Tuletide Vignette". Though obviously we do not agree on this matter, I know from long experience that you, more than most of our colleagues, understand and appreciate the value of both irony and humor.

I repeat that I am sending a copy of your letter to the author of the article. He may choose to communicate with you.

With all good wishes,

Cordially,

EJL:sm

Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman
Director of Synagogue Activities

APPENDIX 24

Letter: Stanley R. Brav to
Mrs. Hugo Dalshimer

Source: AJA, Stanley R. Brav Collection,
Correspondence file on "Yuletide Vignette."

December 14, 1952

Mrs. Hugo Dalshimer
Leisure Hill
Pikesville 8, Maryland

Dear Mrs. Dalshimer:

Not less shocking to me than my little piece about our "amateur gentiles" was the copy I received of your note to Rabbi Lipman. Of course *De gustibus non disputandum est*, and I would defend with my life your freedom to protest.

However since you were worried about Christian reaction something to which I am probably equally sensitive, I requested one of the best Christians in our community, G. Barrett Rich III of Cincinnati's First United Church recently named pastor of the new Fourth Presbyterian Church of New York City to submit in writing his completely candid views concerning "Yuletide Vignette." He says,

"As a Christian minister I can see nothing in this most interesting and ironical article to which members of my faith can object. Whether Jews observe Christmas or not is to my mind a purely Jewish question."

I trust this will allay your fears. Genuine Christians protest and rightly against the de-religionizing of their most sacred holy day—to which process, unhappily, numbers of so-called "enlightened" Jews contribute. I prefer to stand with my religious Christian brothers.

Our preachments in serious vein have been greeted by deaf ears, on this issue. Possibly we stand just as good a chance of success, if not better, by trying to laugh this ridiculous idea out of court. Furthermore we evidently have considerable education still to effect among our top ranking lay leadership. All this requires at least a few rabbis with strong feelings on the subject.

That some of my best friends also need enlightening only indicates the sign of the tasks ahead. As you know the impossible is that which is difficult to do.

May I thank you for the candor of your criticism and wish you the happiest of Hanukkahs.

Mrs. Hugo Dalahimer

-2-

December 14, 1942

Sincerely,

Rabbi Stanley R. Brav

SRB/s

cc Rabbi Maurice Lieberman
7401 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore 8, Maryland

Rabbi Eugene Lipman
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York

APPENDIX 25

POSTSCRIPT: A Letter From A Christian
To one of my best friends--a Jew

Source: Abraham J. Karp, Our December Dilemma (New York: United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, 1958), p. 8.

"You showed me the Christmas Tree you placed in your home. You thought I would be flattered and pleased. It is a beautiful tree carefully set up and painstakingly decorated, but I am neither flattered nor pleased. I am somewhat resentful, a little ashamed, and deeply sorry.

To me, a Christian, the tree is a symbol of my most sacred religious holiday. During the Christmas season it is a constant reminder of the birth of our Lord and Savior. It has become, in our home, the mark of our Christianity during the season of the year when we celebrate the birth of our Christ.

I ask myself what meaning the tree has for you? It cannot be a Christian religious symbol, since you have told me often that as a Jew you do not accept Christ. For you, it must then be no more than a pretty decoration. How can I help feeling resentful when you take my sacred religious symbol and make it a mere "decoration?" And when I hear you refer to it jokingly as a "Hanukah Bush" I am both resentful and ashamed for you. For your nervous laugh when you say it! For the look in your eyes that cannot quite hide your hope that I will "understand"--and your fear that I might not.

But most of all I'm sorry. Sorry for you. You mentioned "Hanukah." I'm learning a good deal about this holiday. I see some of my Jewish neighbors decorate their homes so beautifully in its honor. I hear their children sing pretty songs and tell the exciting and significant story. I just love latkes!

I am sorry that all this is so strange and foreign to you. That you do not give your children an opportunity to partake of its joy and share in its celebration. The Menorah is a wonderful symbol of the light that your people has brought to mankind. Why are you so ashamed of it?

Many thanks for wishing me a Merry Christmas. As a really good friend, one of your best, I wish you a Happy Hanukah."

APPENDIX 26

"Christmas Tree Statistics"

Source: Benjamin Ringer, The Edge of Friendliness: A Study of Jewish-Gentile Relations (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1967), p. 131.

TABLE 7-1 RESPONSE OF JEWS TO CHRISTMAS TREES
BY NEIGHBORHOOD PREFERENCES

<i>Response to Christmas trees*</i>	Percentage of Gentiles that Jewish respondent would prefer in his neighborhood		
	Less Than 50%	50%	More Than 50%
Approves of Jews having Christmas trees in their homes and has one in his own home	23%	32%	46%
Either approves or has tree in home	7	13	12
Doesn't approve and doesn't have tree in home	70	55	42
	100%	100%	100%
	(86)	(216)	(97)

* These items were used: (1) "In general how do you feel about a Jewish family having a Christmas tree?" (2) "What about yourself? Did you have one last year?"

APPENDIX 27

"From The Rabbi's Desk"

Source: Robert P. Kirzner, Temple Beth-El Scroll (St. Petersburg, Florida), 18 December 1981, p. 2.

Chanukah, a holiday all of us look forward to and enjoy, is rapidly approaching. But at this time of year we are inundated with the sights and sounds of Christmas. To be sure, most of what we see and hear relegates Christmas to a commercial level and this deeply distresses many of our Christian friends. Sadly, mixed in with all this Christmas rush, is the attempt to assuage our Jewish feelings by placing our celebration of Chanukah on the same plane. The end result is that many have come to think of Chanukah as the Jewish answer to Christmas. Nothing could be further from the truth.

To imply that Chanukah is merely the "Jewish Christmas" is to completely misunderstand the concept of Chanukah and its importance. Ours is a celebration that is not centered around the giving of gifts. Rather, Chanukah commemorates the triumph of our ancestors, the Maccabees. The second blessing over the Chanukah candles concludes with the words: "bayamim hahem bazman hazeh." We recall the ponderous events that occurred "in those days at this season." We remember the rededication (Chanukah) of the Temple on the 25th day of Kislev in the year 165 B.C.E. In their struggle against the Syrians, the Maccabees waged the first war in recorded history fought for religious freedom.

In our age we may celebrate Chanukah as the opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the precepts and principles of Judaism which we hold dear. In this way we may add new meaning to our joyous celebration. All of us at Temple Beth El wish all of our congregants and friends a happy and meaningful Chanukah season.

With best regards,
- Rabbi Robert P. Kirzner

APPENDIX 28

Untitled Rabbi's Letter

Source: John Friedman, The Journal (Judea Reform Congregation, Durham, North Carolina), December 1981, p. 2.

Dear Friends,

Winter's coming gives rise to a great many feelings. Not the least of these is sparked by the knowledge that larger society is gearing up for Christmas observances in the religious, secular, and mercantile sectors. Each year the theme of the season tests both our Jewish identity and our inclination to mute the theme of materialism so omnipresent in our daily lives anyway.

Recently, a member of our congregation rightly pointed out that Hanukkah is simply no match for Christmas. First of all, the larger society in which we move incorporates Christmas into its rhythm. It takes a little swimming upstream to ignore Christmas and observe Hanukkah. Second, Hanukkah was not meant to be observed as a major holiday. However, we ought not believe that our augmentation of Hanukkah and its observance is something inauthentic or wrong. It seems to me that, through creativity and determination, our greater emphasis on Hanukkah can make "swimming upstream" a little easier.

On December 20th, our Religious School will conduct a workshop for families on the celebration of Hanukkah. Here is an opportunity to increase your repertoire of celebration. Music, cuisine, games, and customs for Hanukkah will be the fare. More details about the morning are found under School News.

If you have not seen the wonderful volume, The Hanukkah Book by Mae Shafter Rockland, take some time to look at our library copy. This slim volume is full of wonderfully creative and authentic party, decoration, story, and holiday ideas. A more comprehensive volume is The Hanukkah Anthology by Philip Goodman. While not as practical as The Hanukkah Book, the Anthology contains a greater number of stories, poetry, theology, and lore. These volumes are on reserve in the temple library. A few copies are also available in our Judaica Shop.

In augmenting our celebration of Hanukkah, the most important ground rule is authenticity. It is lovely to beautify and embellish our major winter celebration. Those embellishments can be found in the storehouse of Jewish history and practice if we but look there. Incidentally, our December family service falls on the 25th. Help us make that Shabbat an especially joyous and uplifting one.

Warmly,
John Friedman
Rabbi

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