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# Jewish-Christian Relations in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: The Conception of the Messiah

Richard Popkin

At the end of the seventeenth century there was concern amongst some Christian theologians to refute the views that there were to be two messiahs or that *the* Messiah could be a non-Jew.<sup>1</sup> The need to refute such views, and to refute them at length, of course, suggests that somebody actually held them. And in the refutations mention is made of people advancing these views. When one traces back the consideration of these messianic possibilities, one finds an interesting picture of how such theories came to the fore in the circumstances of the time.

It has been pointed out that as millenarian Christianity emerged in the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, its leaders became concerned to better understand Jewish views about the meanings of the prophecies about the messianic age, since these prophecies were expected to be fulfilled in the very near future. Jews and Jewish authorities were consulted on the nature of Jewish expectations about the reappearance and return of the Lost Tribes, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the return of the Jews to the Holy Land. It was widely believed that Jews had secret knowledge of God's message – in the *kabbalah*, and other esoteric sources.

In order to learn more about Judaism, what Jews knew, and what actual living Jews believed, it was proposed in 1640, by two leading millenarians, John Dury and Samuel Hartlib, that a college of Jewish studies be established in London. This college, whose staff would consist of one rabbi (Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam) and two Christian Hebraists, would, among other things, publish Jewish texts and make known Jewish mysteries. One of the purposes mentioned in Dury's pamphlet describing the proposed college was to make Judaism better known to Christians.<sup>2</sup>

There were also various expectations concerning the character of the Messiah, *since* the millenarians expected the appearance in the very near future of the Messiah as the King of the Jews, the Messiah as political leader of the world, the Messiah who would reign on earth for one thousand years. The Jews expected a political Messiah, while the millenarians were awaiting Jesus' return as political Messiah.

From the late sixteenth century onward millenarians were dating when the expected events would occur, and many came to the conclusion that they were imminent. The Cambridge scholar, Joseph Mede, in his *Clavis apocalyptica* (1629) worked out a correspondence between the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation, and a calculus that placed the onset of the Millennium 1260 years after the fall of the Roman Empire. On the basis of St. Augustine's dating of the fall to about 400 C.E., the great events should commence around 1660.<sup>3</sup> A more definite date was proposed by a millenarian, Mary Cary, and accepted by many of the leading English and Dutch millenarians – 1655 or 1656.<sup>4</sup> In view of such expectations, it was necessary to find out as much as possible about what was soon going to take place.<sup>5</sup>

In emphasizing the expectation that the Messiah would be a political leader, the question became one of determining which nation he would lead. Such a nation would, of course, be holy and elect. The Scots saw themselves as the obvious nation, and when their king, James, also became King of England, the joint kingdom was so seen.<sup>6</sup> A French millenarian, Isaac La Peyrère, the secretary of the Prince of Condé, predicted that the Messiah, i.e., the Jewish Messiah, would join forces with the King of France, and they together would rule the world.<sup>7</sup> A Portuguese Jesuit, Antonio Vieira, saw Portugal as the messianic kingdom, and urged the king to recall the Jews to prepare for the Portuguese Millennium.<sup>8</sup> And preachers in far off New England saw themselves at the frontier of the Millennium.<sup>9</sup> In fact, one can find nationalist views all over Europe, and prophecies and predictions that because of the historical and religious situation, country X will be the country holy and elect, where the Messiah will first appear. The importance of messianic nationalism was very great in the dynamics of seventeenth-century developments.

An ancient Jewish view that there would be two messiahs, one from the house of David and the other from the house of Joseph was put forth by the Christian Hebrew scholar, Guillaume Postel, in the latter part of the sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Postel, who studied kabbalistic texts, came to the conclusion that the restitution of the world, which was imminent, depended on the new Messiah, Messiah ben Joseph, who would bring the Jews and Christians together, and would rule the world with the King of France. There is some suggestion, or more than a suggestion, that Postel saw himself in the role of the Messiah ben Joseph.

Although Postel does not seem to have convinced anyone, not even the King of France, of his prophetic views, a modified version of his theory was presented by

the aforementioned Isaac La Peyrère. La Peyrère, who was probably from a Marrano family in Bordeaux, published *Du rappel des Juifs* in 1643. In this work he foresaw the imminent coming of the Jewish Messiah. He explained that a Messiah, Jesus in the spirit, had come in the first century for the Gentiles. At that point the Jews were cast aside out of divine history. They were now about to be recalled, and their Messiah, Jesus in the flesh, would appear. The Jews therefore should be brought to France, treated well, placed in a Jewish Christian church (for Jews only) which would have no doctrines or practices repugnant to Jews. They would prepare for exactly what the Jews of the first century, including Mary, were expecting – the Messiah in the flesh. Said Messiah would lead the Jews to the Holy Land where Jerusalem would be rebuilt. The Jews would constitute the court of the Messiah, and the King of France, who had reassembled the Jews, would rule the world with the Messiah.<sup>11</sup> Apparently the role of regent for the Messiah was cast for the Prince of Condé who tried very hard to become the King of France. (Later on La Peyrère offered the post to Pope Alexander VII, who would be a new Alexander the Great, and then to Louis XIV).<sup>12</sup>

La Peyrère seems to have influenced the thinking of his boss, the Prince of Condé, and his sometime ally, Queen Christina of Sweden. His book was hardly disseminated, and Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, interested in all matters pertaining to Jews, and especially their relations with Christians, only came across the work when he went to visit Christina in Belgium in late 1654. She had abdicated the throne and was preparing for her official conversion to Catholicism when Menasseh came to see her. She was also living in the home of a leading Marrano merchant, and next door to Isaac La Peyrère who was there as Condé's agent, trying to arrange an alliance, and even a marriage between the Queen and the Prince. Christina had shipped her library from Stockholm to Belgium. In the inventory of books so shipped is her copy of *Du rappel des Juifs*, probably a gift from the author who had met her years earlier. We do not yet know what transpired when Christina, La Peyrère, Condé, and Menasseh were all there at the same time.<sup>13</sup> But we do know that Menasseh came rushing back to Amsterdam, and went to the home of a leading Protestant millenarian, Peter Serrarius, and told the group there that the coming of the Messiah was imminent.

This was the first time Menasseh, a fervent messianist, ever made such a claim. This was followed by a Czech millenarian writing *Good News for the Jews*, dedicated to Menasseh, in which Menasseh gave his reasons for believing the Messiah was about to appear. In his evidence he offered the testimony of some English and German millenarians who had written him letters with this kind of news, and the testimony of the author of *Du rappel des Juifs*. (This is the first time Menasseh mentioned the title).<sup>14</sup>

Menasseh then decided to commit himself to his voyage to England. He published his most messianic work, *Piedra gloriosa*, with the magnificent illustrations of Rembrandt. La Peyrère was in Amsterdam at the time and Menasseh had some

contact with him, and wrote a work, since disappeared, against La Peyrère's pre-Adamite theory.<sup>15</sup>

By the time Menasseh arrived in England he had accepted a version of La Peyrère's theory of two messianic occurrences. As Menasseh put it in his *Vindiciae Judaeorum*, the last work he published, the difference between Judaism and Christianity is only about a detail about what happened in the first century. But Jews and Christians expect the same event, the coming of the Messiah, to occur in the near future. So, they can agree to disagree about what happened sixteen centuries earlier. He then quoted the wise French author of *Du rappel des Juifs* as his authority for this two-messiah theory,

for, as a most learned Christian of our time hath written, in a French book, which he calleth the *Rappel of the Jewes* (in which he makes the King of France to be their leader, when they shall return to their country), the Jewes, saith he, shall be saved, for yet we expect a *second* coming of the same Messiah, and the Jewes believe that that coming is the *first* and not the second, and by that faith they shall be saved, for the difference consists onely in the circumstance of time.<sup>16</sup>

La Peyrère and Menasseh (as we shall see shortly) had joined the French nationalist messianic view and the Jewish one together. And they had found a way of cutting down the difference between the Jewish expectation and the Christian claim, so that both groups could join together in their future hopes, and could avoid quarreling about what happened in the past. By having one Messiah for the Jews and two for the Gentiles, everyone presumably could be happy.<sup>17</sup>

Menasseh apparently explained this two-messiah theory to English millenarians he corresponded with and met when he was in England in 1655-56, and presented it not just as La Peyrère's view, but as an ancient Jewish view. Ten years later, after Menasseh had passed away (he died in 1657), some of the millenarians, when told about the arrival of Sabbatai Şevi, the Jewish Messiah, were able to put this in the framework Menasseh had given them. Nathaniel Homes, for one, said that Menasseh had told him that there would be two messiahs, and here was the second one.<sup>18</sup> Other millenarians tried to recognize the importance of Sabbatai Şevi's coming without giving up their acceptance of a special status for Jesus. And some, like most of the Amsterdam Jews, did in fact accept Sabbatai Şevi as the expected Messiah, and became Christian followers of Sabbatai Şevi.<sup>19</sup> (It is not clear how long they remained followers after Sabbatai's conversion to Islam.)

A multiple-messiah theory was presented to the millenarians in Amsterdam in 1657 by Rabbi Nathan Shapira of Jerusalem. He was asked by some of them if he accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and startled them by saying "Yes," and then advancing the view that the Messiah comes in every generation but mankind is too wicked for him to stay. He then said that there had been instantiations of the Messiah over and over again, and Jesus was just one of them. Peter Serrarius sent a letter about this to John Dury, who immediately published a pamphlet on Rabbi

Shapira's view as an indication that the Jews were about to convert. Whether Shapira's view had any lasting effect on Christian messianic thinking I do not know.<sup>20</sup>

Another ancient Jewish view which seems to have played a great role in the middle and late seventeenth century was that the Messiah would be a world political leader, who, in this role, would redeem the Jews. Christian scholars of Judaism found that the Jews had used the term "Messiah" for great rulers who befriended or saved the Jews. Cyrus had been called "the Messiah" and so had many other great kings. Now, in the century in which the Millennium presumably would begin, quite a few rulers either set themselves up for the post, or were seen as candidates for messiahship. Perhaps the earliest modern form of this is the Portuguese view, Sebastianism. King Sebastian had vanished without a trace in a battle in North Africa. A hope began to build up that Sebastian would return to redeem Portugal, to give it back its freedom from Spain. Sebastianism went on to become a more universal view, that Sebastian, when he returned, would redeem everyone. The forcibly converted Jews in Portugal, the so-called New Christians, often were ardent supporters of Sebastianism, and saw Sebastian's return as first redeeming them, and then the world. This view blended into Antonio Vieira's *Esperanza do Portugal*, or the history of the future, in which he foresaw the Jews being recalled as Jews to Portugal, and the Messiah coming first to Portugal to take the Jews to the Holy Land. Portugal's role in having spread Christianity all over the planet would be rewarded by Portugal becoming the country holy and elect, where the Millennium would begin.<sup>21</sup>

Certain data make it appear that Queen Christina of Sweden, the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, the Prince of Condé, and Pope Alexander VII all saw themselves a messiah in the sense of becoming world leaders, whose role included saving the Jews. I think Christina, Condé, and Cromwell form a common group, so I will first briefly speak about Pope Alexander VII. He is supposed to have said when he became Pope that he would be the last Pope, presumably because Jesus would no longer need a vicar on earth once He returned. One of the first things Pope Alexander did was to order the translation of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas into Hebrew, so that when the Jews converted in the very near future, they would have an explanation of what they had converted to in their own language. Only one volume was produced, which has a long introduction in Latin explaining the purpose of the project.<sup>22</sup> Pope Alexander VII also accepted the conversions of Christina and La Peyrère, and apparently expected these to be followed by the reunion of Christendom. La Peyrère himself gave the Pope the role of the new Alexander the Great who would usher in the Millennium.<sup>23</sup> (Christina, presumably to play the same role, had changed her name to Christina Alexandra).

Recent studies have discussed the messianic expectations in Sweden forming first around Gustavus Adolphus and then around his daughter, Christina. The Book of Revelation spoke of a King of the North who would help usher in the Millennium.

After Gustavus Adolphus's great victory in 1619 which saved Protestantism, he was immediately seen in this role. When he died, there were many accounts of the role of Sweden, the most powerful Protestant country, in terms of the forthcoming apocalypse. Christina seems to have explored many versions of her possible role in this, and have come to the conclusion she had to leave the constraints of Swedish Lutheranism to be an unbounded world monarch.<sup>24</sup> Christina abdicated in 1654. Her first stop outside of Sweden was in Hamburg, at the home of her Jewish banker, Diego de Teixeira, where she stayed for a fortnight. It is interesting to note that she was greeted by the Jewish community of Hamburg as "the unhopd-for messiah of the female sex."<sup>25</sup>

In 1653, Cromwell had opened Parliament by telling its members that they were the Parliament of Saints who would usher in the Millennium. In the papers of his agent Thurloe, and the report of his spy Jean-Baptiste Stoupe, Cromwell saw himself as the potential head of a Holy Protestant Empire, which would include the Prince of Condé as the ruler of France, and Christina as ruler of the Spanish Netherlands. Theirs would be a messianic kingdom. The evidence suggests this was not just fantasy, but that in 1654-55 active steps were being taken to foment a rebellion in France to put the Prince of Condé on the throne, to start an invasion of southern Europe using English troops to rescue the Protestant Grisons who were being persecuted in Savoy, to arrange a "royal" marriage between Cromwell and one of Mazarin's nieces, and to unite Condé and Christina.<sup>26</sup>

In the Swedish diplomatic dispatches from London just before Menasseh ben Israel arrived, one learns that people in the city were saying that all of the prophecies in Daniel would be fulfilled in a few days (and the Fifth Monarchy, the Messianic Kingdom would be established).<sup>27</sup> Cromwell would only discuss theology, and not business. As soon as Menasseh arrived as the self-appointed agent of the entire Jewish world, (and the English millenarians had been very active in convincing him to come in order to start the Millennium),<sup>28</sup> Menasseh was met by a wild Welsh millenarian with the improbable name Arise Evans. Evans had read Menasseh's *Hope of Israel*, which set forth Menasseh's messianic expectations, and had written a lengthy letter to Menasseh which he apparently had not mailed. Instead he rushed to meet and greet the rabbi, and to inform him that Charles Stuart, the son of the beheaded Charles I, was the Messiah.<sup>29</sup> Since Evans and Menasseh did not have a common language, someone wrote down their conversation. We are told Menasseh, the famous rabbi of Amsterdam, said,

That the time wherein their Messiah should appear was come, but that King *Charles Steward* was he, he could not believe, for he could not believe that ever King *Charles* should rise again and be restored to his Empire, *but said he*, Oliver, Protector, or the King of Swedland is more liken to do it than he, and specially the King of *France* is the most likest to be our Messiah. If he be a Gentile, and be in this part of the world; for he had, *as he said*, a great deal of confidence in the words of an Ancient French Author, that declares much to that purpose.<sup>30</sup> [emphasis added; the author, presumably, is La Peyrère].

So, both Evans and Menasseh were willing to consider that a non-Jew could be the Messiah, and the later part of the conversation makes it clear that the Messiah, in this context, would be the Viceroy of the Messiah ben David (that is Evans's formulation).<sup>31</sup> The content of this conversation fits with a rumor of the time that when Menasseh arrived along with some other rabbis, they immediately checked the birth records to see if Cromwell had any Jewish ancestry.<sup>32</sup>

So, by the mid-seventeenth century it was not strange to find people talking about two messiahs, or about the forthcoming Messiah not being a Jew. In the wild expectations of 1655-56 all sorts of views were advanced, and serious people like John Dury really expected the conversion of the Jews would occur, followed by the Second Coming and the Millennium. One amazing development that did occur after the failure of Menasseh's mission, was the messianic movement of James Nayler, a leading Quaker. In October 1656, Nayler raised a woman from the dead, rode into Bristol on the back of an ass, while his followers sang "hosanna in the highest" and proclaimed him "King of the Jews." When questioned about this, Nayler pointed out that since Christ is in each of us, he is in James Nayler. When further questioned, Nayler just gave the exact replies that Jesus had done. He was tried for blasphemy by the House of Parliament, and although Cromwell tried to defend him, he was convicted and brutally punished.<sup>33</sup>

Nayler, a Gentile, was considered a or the Messiah by many at the time. (He appears in a popular German illustration from 1666 as co-equal to Sabbatai Şevi as a false messiah). His followers fled to Holland, to parts of America, to the Levant, and elsewhere, and apparently kept up a messianic movement for quite a while. (In fact I have actually met a Naylerite in London who is still a believer). Nayler was not a crack-pot, and could be taken seriously by the Quakers and lots of other radical Protestants of the time. And he was considered a messiah not in the sense of a military adjutant to the Messiah-in-chief, but as the expected Messiah who would transform the world. Nayler never became an apostate, and was a very forceful spiritual figure in his last years.

The Sabbatai Şevi episode created much more excitement among both Jews and Christians. In the West the news about Sabbatai Şevi was coupled with all sorts of messianic signs occurring in places like Aberdeen, where a ship is supposed to have appeared with silken sails, whose crew spoke only Hebrew, and with the words, "The Twelve Tribes of Israel" written on the sails. The Lost Tribes were, pamphlets said, besieging Mecca. Letters purporting to be from the Levant, or based on Levantine sources, were published and distributed in England, Holland, France, Germany, Austria, and Poland.<sup>34</sup> A recently discovered Polish pamphlet of 1666 calls Sabbatai Şevi a "Quaker-Jew," and reports the excitement about his appearance in Bristol, where Nayler had enacted his messianic moment.<sup>35</sup>

Christian millenarians tried to decide what to make of Sabbatai Şevi. The great preacher, Jean de Labadie, preached to one thousand people in The Netherlands, announcing that the King of the Jews had arrived. John Dury could not decide



whether Sabbatai was just a local monarch, or a pre-messianic figure announcing the coming of Jesus, or something else entirely. His friend and correspondent, Peter Serrarius, became a Sabbatian, set off to greet the Messiah, and died en route.<sup>36</sup> Henry Oldenburg, the secretary of the Royal Society of England, was so concerned that he wrote to his friend, Benedictus de Spinoza, to find out if the King of the Jews had in fact arrived, since it would make all the difference in the world. Unfortunately we do not have Spinoza's answer, if he did answer.<sup>37</sup>

After the apostasy of Sabbatai Şevi, Christians could look at the whole episode as just a Jewish mistake. John Evelyn could publish Paul Rycout's account under the title, *Three Famous Impostors*. Either Sabbatai, or the Jews, or both could be blamed for having falsely or foolishly created all the tumult.<sup>38</sup>

It did not take long for people to see that the whole affair could be used to try to create a scepticism among the Jews about their ability to ascertain who, in fact, is the Messiah. Once they developed a scepticism about this, they would see that the Christians do not have the same problem, and supposedly the Jews would see the light and convert.<sup>39</sup>

From the Jewish side, an interesting argument, probably only known to a few, was advanced by Abraham Cardoso, who remained a follower of Sabbatai Şevi to the end of his life. He challenged Isaac Orobio de Castro, the leading intellectual of the Jewish community of Amsterdam, who had initially accepted Sabbatai as the Messiah, and then became doubtful and finally antagonistic, after Sabbatai's conversion to Islam. Cardoso told Orobio that either he should believe anyone could be the Messiah, or he did not believe in the possibility of a messiah. If he believed that anyone could be the Messiah, then he should believe that Sabbatai Şevi could be the Messiah, no matter what he does. To deny Sabbatai as a possible messiah is, Cardoso contended, to deny the possibility of a messiah.<sup>40</sup>

On Cardoso's grounds anyone could be the Messiah. In fact after Sabbatai Şevi, some other contenders appeared, such as Oligier Pauli of Denmark, who had a court of rabbis, claimed to have a Jewish grandfather and to be a distant descendant of Abraham, and had the convert rabbi, Moses Germanus, as his apostle.<sup>41</sup> And, of course, it could be argued that if one did not consider Oligier Pauli as a possible messiah, then one did not really believe in the possibility of a messiah.

In the period when all of this was being discussed, another critical challenge to messianism came from the edition of Philostratus's *life of Apollonius Tyaneus* put out by the English deist, Charles Blount. This work had been known since ancient times. It is the purported life of a pagan contemporary of Jesus, Apollonius of Tyana, who lived the same kind of life, and whose career, from birth to death, was accompanied by miracles. A religion grew up about him. Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius* was printed several times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries without causing much of a stir. The book was a curiosity and was used for information by Jews and Christians about what was going on in various parts of

Europe and Asia in the early centuries. Blount, the first of the English deists, saw Apollonius's case as a crucial challenge to Christianity. How could one tell whether Apollonius or Jesus was the true Messiah, if they lived approximately the same lives? Blount's edition is more notes and questions than text, and includes a fascinating dialogue between a Jew and a Moslem about the merits of considering Apollonius as a messiah or as an imposter.<sup>42</sup>

After Blount, a real need developed among Christian intellectuals to refute the possible scepticism about messianism, and to show that it made sense to classify Apollonius (and Sabbatai Sevi) as imposters, while insisting that Jesus' case was entirely different, and should not be placed in doubt because of these other cases. The *Biographia Britannica* article on Blount, says,

In 1680, he [Blount] printed that work which hath made him most known to the world, *The Life of Apollonius Tyaneus*, which was soon after suppressed, and only a few copies sent abroad. It was held to be the most dangerous attempt that had been ever made against Revealed religion in this country, and was justly thought so, as bringing to the eyes of every English reader a multitude of facts and reasonings, plausible in themselves, and of the fallacy of which none but men of parts and learning can be proper judges.<sup>43</sup>

In *A Dissertation on the Life of Apollonius Tyanaeus*, the abbé C.F. d'Houtteville said, "It is to be lamented that when the Learned of all other Nations had given up *Apollonius*, England only should be found to afford him Protection – and among all the Translations that this Work had undergone, no one but the *English Version* is taxed with a Design against Christianity."<sup>44</sup> Apollonius's case was discussed and debated all through the eighteenth century by deists and believers.<sup>45</sup>

While Blount was causing philosopher-theologians to rethink the grounds of their messianic views, another challenge was being offered by Isaac Vossius, the some-time librarian of Queen Christina, friend and ally of Menasseh ben Israel, acquaintance of Spinoza, and leading figure in Anglican circles for the last years of his life when he was canon of Windsor. He is usually described as having ended up a free-thinker, but his late works do not indicate this.<sup>46</sup> He got very excited about the Sibylline Oracles as the key texts for understanding messianism and for converting the Jews. Based on the Sibylline texts, which he came across in a manuscript in Christina's library, he claimed the Jews had misrepresented what a messiah was supposed to be, and who could be the Messiah. When the Jews added vowels to their texts, Vossius claimed, they then got things mixed up. If they would look at the Greek text, the Septuagint, they would see that the expected Messiah is supposed to be a non-Jew, a proselyte and a stranger, and that there will be many messiahs.<sup>47</sup> Vossius ended his work with an exhortation to the Jews, in which he said that if they approached the question of messianism via the Greek text instead of their vowelised Hebrew, they would recognize the Messiah and convert.<sup>48</sup>

The man who was probably the most learned Christian scholar of Judaica at the time, Father Richard Simon, angrily answered Vossius in a work published in English in 1684, *Animadversions upon a Small Treatise of Dr. I. Vossius Concerning the Oracles of the Sibylls, and his Answer to the Objections in a Late Treatise Entitled Critica sacra*.<sup>49</sup> Simon pointed out that no matter what Vossius had found in the Sibylline oracles, the biblical prophecies and Jewish historical writings, “as Men well know,” show that “the Jews expect one Messiah above all the rest.”<sup>50</sup> There may be many messiahs, but there is one chief one who really counts. Simon pointed out that this one is to be from the Jewish Nation, and from one of the Jewish Tribes. He continued:

But they expect other messiahs besides, and for that reason they give the Title to some kings who were well affected towards them. And therefore *Cyrus* is called the *Messiah* of the *Jews*, so also *Herod* and *Mahomet* might have the Title *Messiah* from the *Jews*. And in our age they are ready to salute that Prince or King, whoever he be, with the Title of *Messiah*, that will but take unto his protection their Affairs and the Ceremonies of their Country.<sup>51</sup>

It is interesting that in this discussion, where Simon was trying to make clear what the Jews meant by “Messiah,” he included the notion of the “anointed one,” and of the protectors of the Jews. He made no mention of Sabbatai Sevi, although Simon was very friendly with the leader of the French Jewish followers of the latter, and was working on translating the Talmud into French with him.<sup>52</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, Father Simon notwithstanding, the notion of what the expected Messiah was like, or would be like, in Christian eyes, was becoming extremely confused and murky, partly because of the many different Jewish ideas that had been introduced into Christian understandings of the matter. The Reverend John Bradley’s *An Impartial view of the Truth of Christianity* which dealt with, among other things, the life of Apollonius Tyanaeus, the Testimonium Flavianum, the Sibylline Oracles, the Messiah ben Joseph and a book called the *Oracles of Reason*, by Charles Blount, is a sign of this state of affairs. In the “advertisement,” the author said that the work was just part of a far larger discourse, that included an account of the origins of polytheism and idolatry.<sup>53</sup>

Considering all the confusions the Rev. Bradley was trying to clear up, it is fitting that he began it all by refuting philosophical scepticism. He argued that unless it is possible to find some kind of truth, we cannot assess any particular truth claims. We do, in fact, manage to find truths, so “*the absolute Sceptick that doubts of every thing ought to be taken for a Mad-Man*.”<sup>54</sup> But that does not mean that we can find a “perfect Account of every thing.” We can find “proof” that justifies our believing certain kinds of things. Bradley then assessed the kinds of proof one can have about matters of fact, especially historical facts. He then developed the kind of common sense answer that one finds in the apologetics of Bishops Stillingfleet and Wilkins. Matters can be discussed in terms of probabilities, instead of searching for complete certainty.

Having set the parameters of his discussion, Bradley then tried to plough through the fields of doubt sown by seventeenth-century philosophers, notably Hobbes, Spinoza, and Blount, and confusions resulting from Jewish interpretations and misinterpretations. Based on his standard of proof, Bradley contended that there is all the reason in the world why we should believe in the Divinity of Jesus and not in the Divinity of Apollonius.<sup>55</sup> "It will appear beyond all contradiction, that the pretended Wonders of *Apollonius* deserve no credit, if we consider the vast number of notorious Untruths that swarm every where in his Relation."<sup>56</sup>

He further argued that, based on the standards for judging and interpreting texts, we can see that the Jewish way of reading biblical statements about the nature of the Messiah is not credible.<sup>57</sup> Some Jewish writers, Bradley claimed, not knowing what to do with the plain evidence for the Christian reading of the texts, have gone contrary to their own tradition, and "have two *Messias's*: one the Son of David...the other *Messias*, the Son of *Joseph*."<sup>58</sup> These interpreters suppose whatever they please about the texts. Bradley then showed the implausibility of the two-messiah theory in terms of the over-all history of the reading of Jewish texts. He next did the same with the Jewish reading of the texts that indicated the Messiah was yet to come.<sup>59</sup> Later on he attacked the implausibility of Blount's readings of the Scriptures.<sup>60</sup> Finally, Bradley sought to show that it was most implausible that the Jews ever believed that the Messiah could or would be a non-Jew, and that the evidence that they ever called various kings "Messiahs" had a political but not a theological explanation.<sup>61</sup>

The Rev. Bradley's attempt to explain the confusions and doubts that had arisen during the seventeenth century about the nature of the Messiah, on the basis of limited certitude and plausibility, indicates the state of the problem at the beginning of the Enlightenment. However, instead of resolving all the doubts, the sort of analysis offered by Bradley had the effect of opening the door to greater sceptical questions as indicated by Voltaire's article on "Messie" in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*. Blount's questioning developed into a full-scale Enlightenment rejection of messianism as anything but religious fantasy and political fraud, to be explained in purely secular terms. The underground work, *Les Trois Imposteurs: Moses, Jesus, Mahomet*, surfaced, and was printed in 1719, offering a Hobbesian and Spinozistic account of religion in general, and of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in particular.

The development of great millenarian and messianic expectations and movements in the seventeenth century, the mixing of certain Jewish views with Christian ones, and the confrontation of the Christian story with that of Apollonius of Tyaneus, all, when put into the general sceptical discussions of the time, contributed to preparing the ground for Enlightenment religious scepticism. The religious ferment from the Reformation to the end of the seventeenth century produced, among other fruits, some of the seeds for the questioning of Judeo-Christian religion itself. Furthermore, it is curious to see how the interweaving of some unusual Jewish

ideas into the Christian ones, helped to produce bases for the nationalist messianism of the time, and for the questioning by avant-garde figures of messianism itself.

## NOTES

1. See, for instance, Richard Simon, *Critical Enquiries into the various Editions of the Bible... Together with Animadversions upon a Small Treatise of Dr. I. Vossius Concerning the Oracles of the Sibylls, and his Answer to the Objections in a Late Treatise Entitled Critica Sacra*, translated into English by N.S. (London, 1684); and John Bradley, *An Impartial View of the Truth of Christianity with the History of the Life and Miracles of Apollonius Tyanaeus, containing an Account of the Testimony of Josephus concerning Christ, of the Oracles of the Sibylls, and Messias Ben Joseph so much spoken of by the later Jews...* (London, 1699). Both of these works will be discussed later on in this paper.
2. On this college, see R.H. Popkin, "The First College of Jewish Studies," *Revue des études juives* 143(1984): 351-364.
3. On Joseph Mede, see Katherine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530-1645* (Oxford, 1979), chap. 7; and R.H. Popkin, "The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought: Skepticism, Science and Millenarianism," in *The Prism of Science*, ed. Edna Ullmann-Margalit (Dordrecht, 1986), 21-50.
4. Mary Cary, *The Little Horn's Doom & Downfall* (London, 1651). See David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603-1655* (Oxford, 1982), chap. 3, "The Calling of the Jews."
5. This may have been the motivation for the project financed by the Dutch Christian Hebraist, Adam Boreel, to edit and translate the Mishnah. On this, see R.H. Popkin, "Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Theological Interchanges in Holland and England, 1640-1700," in *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. J.J van den Berg and E.G.E. van der Wall (Dordrecht, 1988), 3-32.
6. See Arthur H. Williamson, "The Jewish Dimension of the Scottish Apocalypse: Climate, Covenant and World Renewal," in *Menasseh ben Israel and his World*, ed. Yosef Kaplan, Henry Mechoulan and R.H. Popkin (Leiden, 1989), 7-30.
7. Cf. R.H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden, 1987), esp. chaps. 2, 5 and 6.
8. See A.J. Saraiva, "Antonio Vieira, Menasseh ben Israel et le Cinquième Empire," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 6(1972): 25-56.
9. See R.H. Popkin, "The Lost Tribes and the Caraites," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37(1986): 213-227.
10. On Postel, see Marion L. Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel: The Prophet of the Restitution of all Things* (The Hague, 1981). On the Messiah ben Joseph, see the entries in Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel* (Boston, 1959), and Joseph Sarachek, *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (New York, 1968). Sarachek states that "The Messiah son of Joseph is a mere figment of the imagination, an aberration from Biblical Messianism" (p.16). Its history in Jewish literature is given in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* s.vv. "Messiah," and "Zerubbabel, Book of." As we shall see, the Messiah ben Joseph played an important role in seventeenth-century thought.
11. See Isaac La Peyrère, *Du rappel des Juifs* ([Paris], 1643), and Popkin, *La Peyrère*.

12. Cf. Popkin, *La Peyrère*, 68, and 192, #40. The conception of an emperor messiah, an eschatological messiah, appears in the Sibylline Oracles, and in medieval literature.
13. *Ibid.*, 12-13 and 98-99. A recent article by Adrian K. Offenbergh, "Menasseh ben Israel's Visit to Christina of Sweden at Antwerp 1654," *Lias* 6(1989): 265-74, gives what details are known about this episode.
14. Popkin, *La Peyrère*, 99-100.
15. *Ibid.*, 100, and Popkin, "Menasseh ben Israel and Isaac La Peyrère," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 8(1974): 59-63.
16. Menasseh ben Israel, *Vindiciae Judaeorum, or a Letter in Answer to Certain Questions propounded by a Noble and Learned Gentleman, touching the Reproaches cast on the Nation of the Jews, wherein all objections are candidly, and yet fully, cleared* (London, 1656), 18.
17. Popkin, *La Peyrère*, 102-103.
18. See Nathaniel Homes, "Some Glimpses of Israel's Call approaching," in *Miscellanea* (London, 1666).
19. See the articles by Popkin, John Drury and E. H. van der Wall on Petrus Serrarius and Jean de Labadie in *Chiliasmus in Deutschland und England im 17. Jahrhundert*, published in *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 14(1988). Serrarius remained a follower after Sabbatai's conversion, and died on his way to meet him in 1669. See E.G.E. van der Wall, *De Mystieke Chiliast Petrus Serrarius (1600-1669) en zijn Wereld* (Leiden 1987), esp. chap. 11.
20. See R.H. Popkin, "Rabbi Shapira's Visit to Amsterdam," in *Dutch Jewish History*, ed. Jozeph Michman and Tirtsah Levie (Jerusalem, 1984), 185-205. Moshe Idel has told me that there are unpublished sermons by Shapira that are very anti-Christian.
21. See João Lucio d'Azevedo, *A evolução do Sebastianismo*, 2d ed. (Lisbon, 1947); Raymond Cantel, *Prophétisme et messianisme dans l'oeuvre d'Antonio Vieira*, (Paris, 1960); and Saraiva, "Antonio Vieira," (above, n. 8).
22. A copy of this rare work is in the library of Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
23. See Isaac La Peyrère, *Lettre à Philotime* (Paris, 1658), 157-162.
24. All of this is discussed at length in the amazing study by Susanna Akerman of the intellectual world of Queen Christina that has just been published by E.J. Brill of Leiden, under the title: *Queen Christina of Sweden: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-Century Libertine*.
25. On this see Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford, 1989), 128. The remark about Christina as the female messiah appears in a poem by the Spanish ambassador in Copenhagen, Conde Bernadino de Rebolledo, to the Marrano exile, Dr. Juan de Prado in Hamburg, which was published in Antwerp in 1660 in his *Ocios*.
26. Materials in the *Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, vol. 3 (London 1742), in Henri d'Aumale, *Histoire des Princes de Condé pendant les XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1863-96), and in Gilbert Burnet, *History of my own Time*, 2 vols. (London, 1724-34) describe the plans being developed. Burnet spent quite a bit of time with Stoupe, who told him of his conversations with Cromwell in 1654-55. Letters of two of Cromwell's agents on the Continent, John Dury and John Pell, during this period, confirm various details in the scheming. Dr. Susanna Akerman and I are planning a study of the "theological-political conspiracy" of Christina, Condé, and Cromwell. The inflammatory pamphlets about the persecution of the Grisons, and the need to invade southern Europe to save them, were written mainly by the Rev. Stoupe, who was himself originally from the Protestant Grisons in Savoy.
27. Michael Roberts, ed., *Swedish Diplomats at Cromwell's Court, 1655-1656: The Missions of Peter Julius Coyet and Christian Bonde*, Camden Fourth Series, vol. 36 (London, 1988). In Bonde's message of 23 August 1655, he reported that "The common people, on the Exchange and in the streets, say openly that all the learned men have shown, from the prophecies of Daniel and by other means, reasons that a king of Sweden, with England, shall overthrow the seat of the pope, and give to the service of God its right prosperity and use again; which time is now at hand, and the occasion to be embraced" (p. 142).

28. See Katz, *Philosemitism*, chaps. 5 and 6; and the Introduction by Henry Méchoulan and Gérard Nahon to Menasseh ben Israel, *The Hope of Israel* (Oxford, 1987).
29. All of this appears in Arise Evans, *Light for the Jews, or the Means to convert them, in Answer to a Book of theirs, called the Hope of Israel, written and printed by Manasseth Ben-Israel, Chief Agent for the Jews here* (London, 1656-1664).
30. Evans, *Light for the Jews*, 4-5. See on this, Popkin, *La Peyrère*, 100-102.
31. *Ibid.*, 5-20.
32. See Isaac De Larrey, *Histoire d'Angleterre, d'Ecosse et d'Irlande*, 4 vols. (Rotterdam, 1697-1713), 4:341. This is repeated in Hannah Adams, *The History of the Jews from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Present Time* (London, 1818), 386-387, and Charles Malo, *Histoire des Juifs* (Paris, 1826), 402-403.
33. On Nayler, see Mabel R. Brailsford, *A Quaker from Cromwell's Army, James Nayler* (London, 1927); Emilia Fogelkou, *James Nayler, the Rebel Saint* (London, 1931); Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakerism* (London, 1949), chap. 8; and Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, 1972), chap. 10.
34. On this, see Michael McKeon, "Sabbetai Sevi in England," *AJS Review* 2(1977): 131-169; R. H. Popkin, "Jewish Messianism and Christian Millenarianism," in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), 67-90, and Popkin, "Two Unused Sources about Sabbetai Zevi and his Effect on European Communities," in *Dutch Jewish History*, vol. 2, ed. Jozeph Michman (Jerusalem, 1989), 67-74; Gershom Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi, The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, 1973), chap. 4; and van der Wall, *Petrus Serrarius*, chap. 10.
35. Cf. Hanna Swiderska, "Three Polish Pamphlets on Pseudo-Messiah Sabbetai Sevi," *British Library Journal* 15(1989): 212-216.
36. See the articles by Popkin and van der Wall listed in n. 19, and van der Wall, *Petrus Serrarius*, chap. 10.
37. Henry Oldenburg, *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, ed. Marie Boas Hall and Alfred Rupert Hall, 13 vols. (Madison, 1965-86), 1:633-37 (letter no. 467, dated December 8, 1665). Oldenburg wrote: "Here everyone spreads a rumor that the Jews having been dispersed for more than two thousand years are to return to their country. Few in this place believe it, but many wish for it. You will tell your friend what you hear and judge of the matter. For myself, so long as this news is not conveyed from Constantinople by trustworthy men, I cannot believe it, since that city is most of all concerned in it. I should like to know what the Amsterdam Jews have heard of this and how they are affected by such important news, which, if it were true, would seem to bring some catastrophe to the whole world." Although there is no evidence that Oldenburg received any news from Spinoza, he received lots of information from Serrarius, and apparently became a believer himself.
38. John Evelyn, *The History of the three late famous Impostors* (London, 1669), "The History of Sabatai Sevi, the Pretended *Messiah* of the *Jewes*, in the Year of the *Lord*, 1666, The Third Impostor."
39. See Charles Leslie, "A Short and easy Method with the Jews," in his *Theological Works*, 2 vols. (London, 1721), 1:52.
40. Cf. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 214, where Cardoso is quoted as arguing, "Whosoever will not entertain the belief that Sabbetai Sevi could be the messiah, even if [it should ultimately] transpire that he is not, entertains no belief in the messiah of Israel."
41. On Moses Germanus and Oligier Pauli, see Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Philosemitismus im Barok* (Tübingen, 1952), 67-81.
42. Charles Blount, *The Life of Apollonius Tyaneus* (London, 1680).
43. *Biographia Britannica: or, the Lives of the Most Eminent Persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland*, 6 vols. (London 1747-66), 2:836, s.v. "Blount, Charles."

44. This dissertation is appended to C.F. d'Houtteville, *A Critical and Historical Discourse upon the Method of the Principal Authors who wrote for and against Christianity from its beginning* (London, 1739), 211-254. The quotation is on p. 240.
45. See, for instance, all of titles listed in the British Library Catalogue under "Apollonius Tyaneus."
46. The article on him in the *Dictionary of National Biography* gives the impression that he became irreligious.
47. See Isaac Vossius, *De Sibylliniis aliisque quae Christi natalem praecessere oraculis* (Oxford, 1679).
48. *Ibid.*, "Ad Judaeos," 99-101. David S. Katz has been investigating those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers who thought they had found the *true* revelation in the unvocalized text of Hebrew Scripture. See his most recent study on this, "The Hutchinsonians and Hebraic Fundamentalism in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, ed. D.S. Katz and J.I. Israel (Leiden, 1990), 237-255.
49. It was published in London in both the original Latin and in English translation. See above, n. 1, for full citation.
50. *Ibid.*, 255.
51. *Ibid.*
52. See Richard Simon, *Lettres choisies*, 2d ed., 3 vols. (Rotterdam, 1702-1705) 2:14, where he told La Peyrère about his friend and co-worker, Jona Salvador.
53. Bradley, *An Impartial View of the Truth of Christianity*, "Advertisement" page before p. 1. See above, n. 1, for full citation.
54. *Ibid.*, a2v-a3.
55. *Ibid.*, chap. 2.
56. *Ibid.*, 36.
57. *Ibid.*, 96-107.
58. *Ibid.*, 108.
59. *Ibid.*, 150-157.
60. *Ibid.*, 227-231. Bradley specifically attacked remarks in Blount's dialogue between a Jew and a Moslem about Apollonius.
61. *Ibid.*, 231-235.

*Washington University, St. Louis and UCLA*