

# From mission to dialogue : the Verein der Freunde Israels Basel and its changes in the concept of mission and perception of 'the Jews'

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# From Mission to Dialogue: The *Verein der Freunde Israels Basel* and its changes in the concept of mission and perception of ‘the Jews’

By *Jehoshua Ahrens\**

## *Abstract*

*This article focusses on the case study of the Verein der Freunde Israels Basel [Association of the Friends of Israel Basel, Switzerland]. It analyses the motivation behind the association’s engagement with the Jews and present the different groups that co-operated on the common goal of mission to the Jews. Another important aspect is the question of their perception of ‘the Jews’.*

*The article is a contribution to the largely un-researched history of Christian-Jewish dialogue in Switzerland. It discusses how both the missionizing concept and the perception of the Jews changed dramatically in the course of time and examines the impact of external influences on this. Special emphasis will be put on the question of continuity and change, and what finally caused the transition from mission to dialogue. Not least due to the limited number of pages, the article primarily deals with the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the 19<sup>th</sup> century is well-documented by two major works of Sara Janner.<sup>1</sup>*

*The article uses secondary literature to introduce the topic, to help explain changes, and to cover the history of the Verein in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It mainly draws, however, on original source material from the archives of the association (today part of the State Archive of the Canton of Basel-City and of the Lehrhaus in Zurich), and from the Verein’s periodical *Der Freund Israels*,<sup>2</sup> for periods that saw important shifts in areas of interest. This material varies from documents on the leadership of the association and their backgrounds, to*

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1 Cf. SARA JANNER, “Der Verein der Freunde Israels 1830-1894,” in: SARA JANNER, *Zwischen Machtanspruch und Autoritätsverlust. Zur Funktion von Religion und Kirchlichkeit in Politik und Selbstverständnis des konservativen alten Bürgertums im Basel des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Basel 2012; SARA JANNER, “Judenmission in Basel in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Ein Forschungsbericht,” in: *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 104 (2004), pp. 31-81. – For a general background of Protestant Mission to the Jews, cf. PAUL G. ARING, *Christliche Judenmission*, Neukirchen 1980; CHRISTOPHER M. CLARK, *The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia, 1728-1941*, Alderley, UK 1995; and JOHN CONWAY, “Protestant Mission to the Jews, 1810-1980: Ecclesiastical Imperialism or Theological Aberration?” in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1 (1986), pp. 127-146.

2 With one exception, all texts from this periodical form primary material. Quotes note the year, volume and page. Since many articles and sermons have no title

speeches, sermons, articles, and minutes of meetings. Original interviews by the author with an expert on the topic and individuals involved are also drawn on. The article concludes with reflections on continuity and change in the missionizing concept and theology of the Verein.

The *Verein der Freunde Israels* [Association of the Friends of Israel] was founded on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1830 in Basel. About a dozen men attended the inaugural meeting, the majority of whom were young members of the *Basler Brüdersozietät*<sup>3</sup> and connected to older societies for mission to the Jews. The founding group included five theologians and four laymen (merchants and craftsmen). All were very active within the Protestant church, but none was in a leading position. The *Verein* established itself quickly and clearly distinguished itself from the older missionary organisations.<sup>4</sup>

The young leaders of the new association wanted to refrain from aggressive missionary activities. They understood *Judenmission* as community work within Christian congregations (the support and integration of Jewish converts) and outreach to Jews who were ‘seeking after truth’ (Jews who already intended to convert). This concept is reflected in the name of the *Verein: Freunde* (friends), since the founders wanted to raise awareness amongst Christians of Jews who were interested in Christianity, and to promote better treatment of Jews generally; and *Israel*, since they did not want to be a charitable organization for needy Jews, but rather offered help to Jews who embraced Christianity. In their understanding, these converts were truly Israel, since the name Israel identified someone who wrestled with God and comprehended that the God of Israel was the God revealed through Jesus Christ. It was not the principal goal of the *Verein* to spread the New Testament amongst Jews, nor to baptise them (although this was still part of the missionary strategy, albeit not paramount). The *Friends of Israel* wanted to contact Jews and teach them their interpretation of the Old Testament, particularly the passages about God’s covenant and messianic prophecies. They hoped that eventually Jews would understand their purpose in salvific history.<sup>5</sup> This is reflected in the three main elements of the early statutes of the *Verein*: prayer, education and

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and sometimes no author, I cannot always provide this information, but mention it in the text whenever available and relevant.

3 A local Protestant religious movement strongly influenced by Pietism.

4 JANNER, “Der Verein” (note 1), pp. 301-307.

5 JANNER, “Judenmission” (note 1), pp. 66; 68-69. This is the overall argument of Sara Janner in both her articles on the missionary activity of the *Verein* until 1894, which is very plausible based on the archival evidence she presents.

support for Jews and Jewish converts.<sup>6</sup> The *Friends of Israel* organised Bible classes and a Sunday school for Jews. They offered financial and pastoral help to converts, and tried to integrate them into Christian society, for example by finding them jobs. Since it was difficult to find accommodation in Christian host families for Jewish converts or Jews about to convert, the *Verein* established a *Proselytenhaus* (house of proselytes) in 1842, close to Basel synagogue, (which caused considerable resentment in the local Jewish community, represented by Rabbi Moses Nordmann).<sup>7</sup> Some Jews accepted the payment of school fees for poor Jewish children by the *Freunde Israels* and Jewish teachers used their free printed textbooks and bibles. The Jewish establishment intervened, however, and discouraged this support after some time.<sup>8</sup>

This positive attitude towards Jews was rather superficial. The *Verein* had neither interest in nor respect for Jewish religion or culture. It shared the typical Christian anti-Jewish bias. In the understanding of the *Friends of Israel*, the ancient Israelites had once had a covenant with God and they recognised the Jews as ‘Israel by flesh’, but the religious practice of the Jews of the time had become alienated from their original faith. Since the Jews had rejected Jesus as Christ and crucified him, they had forfeited their salvation. Texts from the Gospel of John in particular were proof for Christian Revivalists that the Pharisees had replaced the revealed faith with dead laws and agitated the Jewish masses to request Jesus’ death, which had brought a curse onto the Jews and caused the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the expulsion into exile. They believed that contemporary rabbis misled ordinary Jews in the same way by teaching that Jesus was not the Messiah. Therefore, the rabbinic texts and traditions were obstacles to the Jewish People understanding the real revelation in the Old Testament and the true destiny of the Jews. Any adherence to Jewish traditions and customs was a sign of spiritual inferiority.<sup>9</sup>

This differentiation between Pharisees/rabbis on the one hand and ‘ordinary’ Jews on the other made it possible to integrate the salvific significance of the Jewish People – as outlined in Paul (Romans 11) – into the millenarian theology of the Christian revivalists. The guilt of the Jews for the murder of Christ became a debt of gratitude of the non-Jews towards

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6 THOMAS WILLI, “Verein der Freunde Israels: 150 Jahre,” in: *Der Freund Israels* 143/1 (1980), pp. 12-13.

7 JANNER, “Judenmission” (note 1), p. 70.

8 WILLI, “Verein” (note 6), p. 14.

9 JANNER, “Judenmission” (note 1), pp. 77-78.



the Jews, since only through the failure of the Jewish People could the revelation of God through Christ become accessible for non-Jews. The *Friends of Israel* respected the Jews as inheritors of God's eternal promise to Abraham, but required their acceptance of Christ's New Testament for truly accepting them. They therefore rejected everything that defined Jews as Jews from a Jewish perspective. Nevertheless, this theological understanding was the source of a certain tolerance and feeling of obligation towards Jews.<sup>10</sup>

The *Verein der Freunde Israels* increasingly departed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from its original tripartite missionary concept of *Proselytenpflege* (assistance to and integration of converts), raising awareness within the Christian community of their cause, and outreach to 'truth-seeking' Jews. The *Friends of Israel* discussed intensely the support of converts and the reasons for the failed mission to the Jews in Central Europe. The original missionary concept of the *Verein* was challenged. As a result, the active mission to the Jews was noticeably strengthened under the increasing pressure of critics and the adverse financial situation, which allowed less traditional assistance to proselytes, one of the pillars of the original missionary concept that distinguished the *Verein* from other contemporary associations of mission to the Jews. In 1855, for example, statutory amendments softened the prohibition of active missionizing amongst Jews. During the 1880s, the *Verein* finally abandoned local *Proselytenpflege*.

In 1890, the *Evangelisation der Juden* became the ultimate aim of the association. Simultaneously, the geographic focus of the mission of the *Friends of Israel* changed from Basel and its surroundings to Eastern Europe, namely Bohemia and Poland. The statutory amendments of 1890, the new centres of missionary activity, and the employment of a *Judenmissionar* fundamentally changed the theological and practical path and led to a virtual reinvention of the *Verein* in the 1890s.<sup>11</sup> As part of this change, missionary activities were now concentrated on traditionally Orthodox and Hassidic Jews – for the *Freunde Israels* "authentic" Jews – and turned away from assimilated or Reform Jews, who were considered "inauthentic."<sup>12</sup>

These transformations happened under the leadership of Pastor Friedrich Heman-Blaul, salaried secretary of the *Verein* since 1874. They were accompanied by conflict and several resignations of active members of the *Friends of Israel*. Nevertheless, Heman-Blaul insisted on an active mission to the Jews and the employment of a missionary. On his urging, Paul Benjamin

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10 JANNER, "Judenmission" (note 1), pp. 79-80.

11 JANNER, "Der Verein" (note 1), pp. 322-323; 326-327.

12 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 31/4 (1904), pp. 52-53.

Laub-Elsässer was appointed as a missionary in 1894, and the *Verein*'s main activities were relocated from Basel to newly established mission stations in Eastern Europe after 1900. With the decision to sell the *Proselytenhaus* in 1902, traditional assistance to proselytes ceased.<sup>13</sup>

The relocation of missionary activities and stations to Eastern Europe was a general trend among European associations missionizing to the Jews at the turn of the century.<sup>14</sup> Paul Benjamin Laub-Elsässer – himself a Jewish convert and partly educated in the Basler *Proselytenhaus* – commenced work in Switzerland, the Alsace and Southern Germany. He tried to reach out to Jews and make them believe in Jesus as the Messiah, while also attempting to teach Judaism to Christian communities and fight Christian antisemitism. During the summers he undertook missionary journeys to Russia, Poland, Lithuania and Romania.<sup>15</sup> While neither the local Christian communities nor the Jews in and around Basel showed much interest in his work, Laub-Elsässer sensed huge potential in Eastern Europe.<sup>16</sup> Many Jews in Russia, Poland and Lithuania yearned for a Western education and lifestyle. The harsh antisemitism and related pogroms had led some Jews into the hands of Christian missionaries, who had sympathy for the Jewish People. As a result, Laub-Elsässer convinced the *Verein* to establish mission stations in Vilna and Lodz in 1906 and 1911 respectively. He employed Jewish Christians in each station to reach out to Jews through education. After Laub-Elsässer took over the leadership of the *Verein* from Heman-Blaul – who resigned for health reasons – mission activity in Eastern Europe was further extended. The work was fairly successful.<sup>17</sup>

The ‘father’ of the two mission stations and long-standing leader of the *Verein* Pastor Laub-Elsässer resigned in 1924 for health reasons. Pastor August Gerhard – who had already been employed as a missionary for two years and had a good knowledge of the Polish mission stations – took over in 1925.<sup>18</sup> Gerhard was born in Russian Poland in 1875 to Lutheran immigrants from Austria. He had already had contact with Jews in his childhood. Following ordination, he was sent for further studies to the *Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum* in Leipzig, where he was trained to missionize among Jews. When he started work for the *Verein* in 1922, he was mainly responsible

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13 JANNER, “Der Verein” (note 1), pp. 354-358.

14 JANNER, “Der Verein” (note 1), pp. 465-466.

15 WILLI, “Verein” (note 6), pp. 35-37.

16 *Der Freund Israels* 29/4 (1902), pp. 63-65.

17 WILLI, “Verein” (note 6), pp. 38-40.

18 *Der Freund Israels* 51/4 (1924), pp. 49-50.

for Vilna and Łódź. Although he also travelled to Christian communities in Southern Germany, Switzerland and the Alsace to preach about the Jewish mission, he was less connected to this region. He took over leadership at a difficult time, and sensed early the rise of antisemitism in Europe, especially within the churches. This strong antisemitism influenced the form and content of the theological discussions of the time within the *Verein* and led to crises and conflicts.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1920s the *Verein* spoke out against antisemitism. In an article published in 1925, it called it a danger and condemned it as unreligious, since the faithful Christian had to stand up for the Jews. The article also defended Jews: any (racial) differences between Jews and Christians were rejected. While there might be Jews with bad characters, there were certainly Christians with bad characters too, so the argument.<sup>20</sup> Hence, there was no reason to give up *Judenmission*, as demanded by secular anti-Semites, who thought that Jews would remain Jews even when baptised, and Christians, who believed that they would automatically convert when Christ returned. On the contrary, the *Verein* claimed a right to proselytise Jews, as a duty for every Christian. This was based on three reasons. Firstly, the Jews, just as all peoples, were searching for salvation, which could only be offered by Jesus. Secondly, the Jewish belief in the Talmud and its laws, made by the rabbis, was far from the Old Testament. Only through Christ and the gospels could Jews really find their way to God. Thirdly, based on several passages from the Bible, the Great Commission was outlined, which was above all relevant for the Jews.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, in the 1930s *völkisch*-racist opinions increasingly found their way into the mind-set of the *Friends of Israel*, often mixed with classical Christian anti-Judaism.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, other members continued to argue strongly against these positions and defended the traditional opinions of the *Verein*. The wide range of opinions on Jews among the *Friends* are shown by a variety of statements from that decade. An article in 1933 for example blames the Jews for antisemitism and contains explicitly racist language:

Godless Jewry, on the other hand, is, wherever it settles, the fungus in the wooden rafters of the house of the people, the bacillus of decay in the state organism [...]. Some riots and pogroms, which we absolutely reject and disap-

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19 WILLI, "Verein" (note 6), pp. 43-45.

20 *Der Freund Israels* 52/1 (1925), pp. 7-11.

21 *Der Freund Israels* 52/2 (1925), pp. 17-20.

22 Regarding racial anti-Semitic influences on German(-speaking) Protestantism after First World War, see CLARK, *Politics of Conversion* (note 1), pp. 285-286.

prove of because they are against the spirit of Christianity [...] were self-inflicted by some Jewish circles... While faithless Israel is destined to be a curse for the nations, the renewed and converted Jewish people will be a blessing to the world (Zechariah 8, 13).<sup>23</sup>

This statement mixes Church antisemitism with *völkisch* vocabulary. Expressions such as “fungus in the wooden rafters of the house of the people” and “bacillus of decay in the state organism” are clearly Nazi terminology. Moreover, it claims that Jews are themselves responsible for antisemitism. As a Christian, however, the author rejects violence against Jews and interprets a verse from Zechariah as the fate of the Jewish People: those who remained Jewish – faithless – would be a curse to the nations; but those who converted would be a blessing for the world. This means that conversion was understood as a way out for Jews – contrary to Nazi ideology.

In 1936, Pastor Prof. Ernst Staehelin came to a very different conclusion about guilt and responsibility concerning Jews and Christians:

But we have not only to be silent [...]. concerning the guilt of Israel, but at the same time we have to become aware of our own guilt towards Israel. Or what is the nature of history for nearly two millennia? [...] precisely through our treatment of the Jewish People the sinister side in its character took shape. What Israel may have sinned against us, is ultimately nothing more than what we have sinned against it.<sup>24</sup>

Staehelin was not completely free of racist notions, for example, he mentions the “sinister character” of the Jews. He places responsibility for their behaviour, however, on Christian treatment of the Jews. He even speaks of Christian guilt being at least as heavy as Jewish guilt. Although this was certainly in favour of the Jews, typical Christian ambivalence towards Judaism remained, i.e. the idea of Jewish guilt.

In his first annual report as director of the *Verein* in 1933, Pastor Gerhard stated that there was no difference between Jews and Aryans, based on a sermon by Paul about Jews and Greeks. Gerhard claimed it was the same Jesus Christ who created salvation for both Jews and non-Jews.<sup>25</sup> In another sermon in 1937, Pastor Vischer vehemently opposed the notion that the Jewish People had been rejected by God. He said that no other people had been chosen as God’s people as much as the Jews. Vischer based his sermon on Paul’s statements in Romans 11:1-15, where the apostle not

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23 *Der Freund Israels* 60/2 (1933), pp. 29-30.

24 *Der Freund Israels* 60/2 (1933), p. 51.

25 *Der Freund Israels* 60/3 (1933), pp. 33-34.

only proclaims himself Jewish, but also explains why God did not cast off the Jews as His people.<sup>26</sup>

All opinions – classical Christian and *völkisch*-influenced alike – had one major common denominator: although Jews might be guilty of rejecting Jesus as Christ, and while they might be a different race, through their acceptance of Jesus as Christ they could make a full transition and become an enrichment for the Church, since in the moment a Jew converted, he not only became blessed, but became himself a blessing. This was the promise God gave and therefore the “Bride Church of Christ” longed for the salvation of the Jewish People.<sup>27</sup>

After the late 1930s, no racial antisemitism can be found in any of the volumes of *Der Freund Israels*. We can only speculate why, but there are two plausible reasons: firstly, Nazi policies against both Jews and the *Verein* in Germany and later Eastern Europe caused a change of attitude among those members who had previously sympathised with Nazi Germany; and secondly, opposition to the *Verein* from circles close to the *Deutsche Christen* and other nationalist Christian movements within Switzerland and the German-speaking Protestant community drew the *Friends of Israel* closer to the opposing *Confessing Church*.<sup>28</sup> Janner suggests that this was influenced by Wilhelm Vischer, president of the *Verein* at the time, who vehemently opposed any kind of racial antisemitism.<sup>29</sup>

Concerning antisemitism, the relationship with Jews remained ambivalent. While the *Verein* fought actively against racial antisemitism<sup>30</sup> and supported Jewish refugees,<sup>31</sup> even in these difficult times for the Jews, Christian anti-Judaism remained part of the *Verein's* policy. In an article on Jews during the lifetime of Jesus, who were regarded as murderers of Christ, their behaviour was compared to that of the Nazis during World War II. In fact, the Nazi's treatment of the Jews was understood as a punishment for this Jewish guilt.<sup>32</sup> In the same issue, published in 1942, it was written that Jews should understand that not the evil of the Christians,

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26 *Der Freund Israels* 64/4 (1937), pp. 50-52.

27 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 61/4 (1934), p. 61.

28 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 69/3 (1942), p. 38.

29 Sara Janner, Interview with author, personal interview, Basel (Switzerland), 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2014.

30 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 69/3 (1942), p. 34.

31 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 69/4 (1942), p. 63.

32 *Der Freund Israels* 69/2 (1942), pp. 20-22.



but their own guilt and their refusal to repent, were the source of their suffering.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, in January 1938 the German government had banned the *Verein* and its activities in Germany.<sup>34</sup> After the outbreak of World War II the mission stations in Łódź and Vilna had to close down as well, in January 1940 and July 1940 respectively. The *Verein* tried to keep in touch with the missionaries and supporters in Eastern Europe, most of whom were Jewish converts, but this was very difficult.<sup>35</sup> Shocked by these developments, Pastor Gerhard resigned as director of the *Verein* in March 1940 and declared: Today God has called in the field of work in Poland through world events and thereby withdrew my mandate after 18 years.<sup>36</sup>

Subsequently, Pastor John Witt took over leadership. John Witt, son of a Swedish missionary, had worked for the *Verein* since 1930 in Zurich. His appointment was a clear expression of the intention to focus again on Switzerland, which had been neglected in the missionary concept of the *Verein* for many years.<sup>37</sup> Two missionaries were employed in Basel and in French-speaking Switzerland towards the end of World War II.<sup>38</sup> In fact, there was not much choice, since the loss of the mission stations in Eastern Europe was a huge blow for the work of the *Verein*. But although the target group of *Ostjuden* in Eastern Europe was lost and opposition in Switzerland against the *Judenmission* becoming stronger, the *Verein* remained in existence. The situation led, however, to a debate about how to define the *Judenmission* exactly and how to continue the practical work.

One opinion was not to give up the active mission to the Jews, but to strengthen it. In his annual report former president Gerhard wrote about the work of the *Verein*:

But has the Great Commission of Jesus been annulled? Has the work ended? Never! The Lord of the mission has the path of all paths to finalise his goal, the Kingdom of God [...]. Who has eyes [...] can see today how the destiny of

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33 *Der Freund Israels* 69/2 (1942), p. 30.

34 StABS PA 946a F 2-8, minutes of the 1103<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the *Verein*'s committee; 27<sup>th</sup> January 1938.

35 WILLI, "Verein" (note 6), pp. 51-52.

36 Cited in: WILLI, "Verein" (note 6), p. 52.

37 WILLI, "Verein" (note 6), pp. 52-53.

38 Cf. State Archive of the Canton of Basel-City (= StABS) PA 946a F 2-9-1, minutes of the 1153<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the *Verein*'s committee, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1944; StABS PA 946a F 2-9-1, minutes of the 1158<sup>th</sup> meeting of the *Verein*'s committee, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1945.



Israel is also accomplished and turned. Admittedly, the path of Israel still seems to lead through particularly deep and dark abysses [...]. But if Israel returns to the Lord, its grief will turn to great joy and its lament to rejoicing [...] thus promised God.<sup>39</sup>

From Gerhard's point of view, in bad times like the Holocaust, Jews needed the revelations of Jesus more than ever. Even when most Christians – and most Jews – opposed *Judenmission*, the Great Commission had to be continued until the “Kingdom of God” was achieved. Gerhard believed that the suffering of the Jews was part of their destiny, which would turn to great joy “if Israel returns to the Lord.” This implies both that Jewish suffering was natural and self-inflicted as long as Jews did not accept Jesus as their Messiah, and that Jews could be saved at any time by converting to Christianity.

Pastor Herbert Hug, director of the *Verein* from June 1943,<sup>40</sup> advocated a totally different approach. He objected to an active mission during the Holocaust, since he thought this was ethically problematic. He demanded instead that Christians preach to themselves so as to learn more about Jews and Judaism, and offer Jews the Christian grace of charity. Nevertheless, Hug still said that the *Friends of Israel* have the “duty to expect our brother in every Jew,” meaning they should still reach out to those Jews who were interested in Christianity.<sup>41</sup> The objective of mission and missionary work however did change for Hug:

They [the Jews] expect and may expect that we [...] make use of the commandment of charity that is also applicable for them and... assist them, not out of interest [...], but from obedience. They wish and may wish that we respect the freedom of faith, conscience and creed, and consequently let them be and remain Jews. More than ever, they have a right to assert their Jewishness, and it would be a downright indecent, yes, outrageous act on our part, if we currently exploit their indescribable grief and wish to use the opportunity of our helpfulness as a kind of bait for a [...] change of faith.<sup>42</sup>

Pastor Hug argued for a halt in missionary activities during the Holocaust for moral reasons. At a time of affliction for the Jews it was “indecent” and “outrageous” to carry on as usual. He said that Jews should be able to rely on Christian help, not out of any interest in converting them, but out of the Christian duty of charity. Jews had a right to their Jewishness – an untouched freedom of faith. The fact that Hug was so reluctant to pursue

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39 *Der Freund Israels* 68/3 (1941), p. 37.

40 *Der Freund Israels* 70/5 (1943), p. 61.

41 *Der Freund Israels* 70/5 (1943), p. 71.

42 *Der Freund Israels* 71/1 (1944), p. 13.

active missionizing, and that he also cared about and was willing to help Jews as Jews – and not only those Jews who converted or were interested in Christianity – was an important development, almost certainly influenced by the horrors of the Holocaust. Janner suggests that Hug was well-aware of what had happened in Germany and the German-occupied countries.<sup>43</sup>

To be sure, even the faction within the *Verein* that agreed with pausing active missionizing during the Holocaust did not give up on the mission to the Jews in general. The reasons for the pause were practical and ethical, not theological. Hug, for example, wrote in the same article that Christians and Jews could not relate as equals, since that would mean giving up the Great Commission of Jesus. Moreover, he claimed that Jewish suffering during the Holocaust would only make sense when Jews accepted the martyrdom of the crucifixion. The rabbis could not comfort the Jews, only the Church could do this. Christians had to continue with the mission, since they should not leave the Jews to their doom, but combat continuing Jewish disbelief. It was just the means of missionizing that should be different at this time. Hug also adhered to the Christian stereotype of Jewish guilt for the crucifixion, although he believed that God had no deadly intent. In Hug's theological understanding, the Jews had to reject Jesus during his lifetime so that the heathens would accept Jesus as the Messiah for the entire world. Jews could still become chosen – by accepting Christ.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the fact that theologically Hug cleaved to traditional Christian triumphalism and supersessionism, in practice his new approach had a great effect on the work of the *Verein*, since missionary work was suspended and the *Friends of Israel* supported Jewish refugees regardless of their interest in Christianity. Hug's position was revolutionary and broke with the status quo. He may not have thought about giving up missionizing in favour of a Christian-Jewish dialogue of equals, but he certainly sensed the impact of the Holocaust and was sceptical about continuing to work as they had before World War II. Hug's ideas could have fundamentally changed the *Verein's* agenda, but instead they caused an uproar within the *Verein*.

In several letters to Hug and to the *Verein's* president Pastor Rudolf Vollenweider, members complained about Hug's new policy of suspending the active mission to the Jews. Some letters were critical, but constructive and sympathetic. Most were outright negative. The letter from Conrad

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43 Janner, Interview. This seems plausible, since the development of the Holocaust is intriguingly well-documented in *Der Freund Israels* from sources in Germany and Eastern Europe.

44 *Der Freund Israels* 71/1 (1944), pp. 2-3; 5; 13.

Böhringer – the oldest member of the *Verein*'s committee – to Vollenweider was probably crucial. In this letter Böhringer bluntly demanded Hug's resignation and a return to missionary work "on the old basis." He claimed that the majority of the *Friends of Israel* thought exactly this way, and threatened to found a new association in Zurich and Eastern Switzerland if these demands were not met.<sup>45</sup> The committee sided with Böhringer and as a result, Hug resigned as director of the *Verein*, and Vollenweider as its president, in February 1944.<sup>46</sup> Three pastors sent a letter to the committee of the *Verein* to intervene in favour of Hug. They expressed their concern about the "overhasty resignation" of Hug and suspected that the *Friends of Israel* was shirking responsibility for Jewish refugees. The committee refused to renegotiate with Pastor Hug. It also rejected Hug's request to continue to work for the *Verein*'s periodical *Der Freund Israels*.<sup>47</sup>

Pastor Robert Brunner took over leadership and in May 1949, became director of the *Verein*.<sup>48</sup> His definition of *Judenmission* and his ideas about the practical work of the *Friends of Israel* prevailed and remained authoritative for the period after the Second World War:

Mission is a gift, wherever it is, as it has been from the beginning with the Apostles: An insertion of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ into the suffering of a fellow man, into the misery of a nation... Wherever an act of mission occurs a well opens up [...]. This simple [understanding] [...] must be looked at [...] wherever the question arises, if mission may be [...].

Who knows another way, not only to help individual Jews spiritually and physically, than this one? [...] What can prevent us from praying and working so that to the Jewish person of today...the word can be said: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"<sup>49</sup>

Brunner claimed that he knew no way to help the Jews other than through proselytising, based on Acts 3. Unlike Pastor Hug, he argued that it had not been morally questionable to actively missionize to the Jews during the

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45 StABS PA 946a K 8-1-1, letters to Hug and Vollenweider.

46 StABS PA 946a F 2-9-1, minutes of the 1146<sup>th</sup> meeting of the *Verein*'s committee; 28<sup>th</sup> February 1944.

47 StABS PA 946a F 2-9-1, minutes of the 1148<sup>th</sup> meeting of the *Verein*'s committee; 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1944.

48 Cf. StABS PA 946a F 2-9-1, minutes of the 1203<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the *Verein*'s committee; 7<sup>th</sup> October 1948; StABS PA 946a K 8-1-3, Pastor Brunner's acceptance letter to the *Verein*'s committee, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1948; StABS PA 946a K 8-1-3, Work contract, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1949.

49 *Der Freund Israels* 71/3 (1944), pp. 41-43.

Holocaust, but on the contrary, morally questionable not to do so and therefore exclude Jews from redemption. He may have nicely paraphrased his agenda, but it clearly meant that the primary goal remained active missionizing and conversion.

This ambivalence towards Jews continued in the *Verein* after World War II. In the immediate post-war years, the situation was similar in Germany. Not much changed concerning Protestant-Jewish relations. Some progressive churchmen spoke out against antisemitism, but they nevertheless maintained traditional Christian anti-Judaism – as did the *Friends of Israel* in Basel. In Germany, however, things changed over time, influenced by the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and other minor factors.<sup>50</sup>

In Basel, quite the opposite happened: The *Verein* officially changed its name to *Schweizerische Evangelische Judenmission (SEJ)*<sup>51</sup> in 1951 and approved new statutes, in which “spreading the Gospel amongst the Jews” and “delivering” the word of Jesus Christ to “all nations, beginning with Jerusalem” were the objectives mentioned in the first article.<sup>52</sup> The new name and objectives clearly reflected the SEJ’s aim of an active mission to the Jews. The priority of the Jewish People in the general mission efforts was theologically based on Luke 24:47.<sup>53</sup> While in Germany the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel impacted Christian-Jewish relations, and the Protestant mission to the Jews changed relatively early after the war in favour of dialogue, the *Verein* mostly ignored these developments. One reason was almost-certainly that Switzerland had not been involved in the war and Swiss Jewry not as strongly affected by the Holocaust as Jews in other European countries. Moreover, it seems that the *Verein* was generally isolated from the mainstream in its theological understanding. For the *Friends of Israel*, both Christians and Jews had to repent. Christians, because they rejected and killed the Jews; Jews, because they rejected and killed Jesus – and therefore had to suffer in the Holocaust. Through repentance and the acceptance of Christ both groups would come together in the religion of the Holy Spirit in the Kingdom of

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50 MATTHEW D. HOCKENOS, “The German Protestant Church and Its Judenmission, 1945-1950,” in: KEVIN P. SPICER (ed.), *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, Bloomington, Ind. 2007, pp. 174-175.

51 Swiss Evangelical Jewish Mission.

52 StABS PA 946a B 1-4, Statutes of the *Schweizerische Evangelische Judenmission* (formerly *Verein der Freunde Israels zu Basel*), October 1951.

53 “and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (NIV).

God.<sup>54</sup> Brunner continued with exactly the same positions as before the war – as if the Holocaust had never happened. Whenever he mentioned the Holocaust he did not question his missionary approach towards Jews, but on the contrary, it was a reason for him to continue on his path, since the mass murder of the Jews and the “survival of a rest” was part of the “promise of God to Israel” and “confirmed” that God would lead the Jews “into a new future.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, in stark contrast to the German-speaking Protestant Church generally, Brunner was negative about the State of Israel.<sup>56</sup>

This position was not representative of the general development of Christian-Jewish relations in Switzerland. Affected by the Holocaust and the poor situation of Jewish refugees in Switzerland, Protestant Christians in particular came to realise that antisemitism was not resolved and could only be overcome by a strong Christian-Jewish dialogue between equals. ‘Refugee Pastor’ Paul Vogt was one of the first to bring Christians and Jews together in November 1945 to exchange views on what had happened during the Holocaust and the consequences for both Christians and Jews in future. The result of this study week was a declaration that condemned antisemitism in the strongest terms, with the fight against antisemitism the basis for dialogue.<sup>57</sup>

On 28<sup>th</sup> April 1946, the *Christlich-jüdische Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus (CJA)*<sup>58</sup> was founded in Zurich. Three important members of the local Jewish community were on the new board, amongst them Rabbi Zvi Taubes.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, when it came to Jewish refugees in Switzerland, Vogt worked closely with the *Verein* and had similar theological beliefs.<sup>60</sup> Concerning practical work with Jews, however, the differences were significant.<sup>61</sup>

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54 *Der Freund Israels* 73/2 (1946), pp. 25-26.

55 *Der Freund Israels* 72/4 (1945), p. 58.

56 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 74/1 (1947), p. 2.

57 ZSOLT KELLER, *Der Blutruf (Mt 27,25), eine schweizerische Wirkungsgeschichte, 1900-1950*, Göttingen 2006, pp. 115-116.

58 Christian-Jewish Group on Fighting Antisemitism; later simply Christian-Jewish Working Group.

59 KELLER, *Der Blutruf* (note 57), pp. 116-117.

60 StABS PA 946a F 2-9-1, minutes of the 1151<sup>st</sup> meeting of the *Verein*'s committee; 25<sup>th</sup> May 1944; StABS PA 946a F 2-9-1, minutes of the 1158<sup>th</sup> meeting of the *Verein*'s committee; 21<sup>st</sup> January 1945.

61 Cf. Pastor Mannheimer's report about the study week in November 1945 (which Mannheimer attended) in: *Der Freund Israels* 73/2 (1946), pp. 24-29.



Individual members of the *Verein* understood quite early that the Holocaust would have a huge impact on Christian-Jewish relations. Pastor Lydia Schächli, for example, wrote in her missionary report in February 1945 that many Jews were not interested at all in Christianity; some were even hostile. They explained that there was no need and no reason to become Christian, especially after what Christians did to the Jews. Much more important for Jews in 1945 were the daily “problems in the post-war period” and the question of Palestine/Israel. Schächli wrote that the mission to the Jews “will have difficult and serious times.”<sup>62</sup>

The *Verein* came tantalisingly close to Christian-Jewish dialogue, but in the end it did not take the crucial step. A comprehensive re-orientation of the *Verein* failed not least because the *Friends of Israel* did not understand the real situation of the Jews but “only a shade of Judaism, often even only a caricature of it.”<sup>63</sup>

Real changes happened only after the Brunner era. Brunner stood for the continuity of traditional missionary work like no other within the SEJ, and reinforced his position in articles, statements and sermons until the end of his leadership.<sup>64</sup> Only the style of the mission changed, as outlined in a guest article by Pastor Otto Naegeli:

It is true that we have to continuously look anew for the right, contemporary way to bring the mission forward. But the core concern of the mission, the direction of the Evangelical message of salvation, the call to repentance and to follow Jesus Christ must not be concealed, and certainly not attacked. Where the mission crosses this line, it commits suicide.<sup>65</sup>

Individual voices demanded an end to active missionizing in the late 1960s. Pastor Reinhard Schmälzle, employed as an emissary for Zurich and Eastern Switzerland, wrote that the Jews were chosen by God and Christians were consequently not the New Israel. There was no ‘Jewish Question’, but the Jews were a “divine answer to all our questions.” Schmälzle criticised the Protestant Church for its failure concerning Jews and condemned Luther’s anti-Judaism. For him the role of Christians was simply to bear witness to Jesus – nothing more. Jews should not be forced to convert to Christianity.<sup>66</sup> Schmälzle could not carry through his opinion, however, at that time.

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62 *Der Freund Israels* 72/1 (1945), p. 12.

63 WILLI, “Verein” (note 6), p. 63.

64 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 132/2 (1969), p. 25; ASKJ, 138<sup>th</sup> annual report 1969, p. 12.

65 *Der Freund Israels* 133/2 (1970), p. 11.

66 *Der Freund Israels* 132/3 (1969), pp. 55-57;59.



After Brunner's death in 1971<sup>67</sup> the SEJ made an important shift in the early 1970s concerning its name and organisation, but only partly regarding its approach and theology. The association was transformed into a foundation<sup>68</sup> and, more importantly, its name changed to *Schweizerische Evangelische Judenmission – Stiftung Kirche und Judentum*.<sup>69</sup> Almost straight away the first part of the name – *Schweizerische Evangelische Judenmission* – was usually abbreviated to SEJ and not written out.<sup>70</sup> The new statutes were profoundly different, and the new aim of the foundation was “to bear witness to the Gospel amongst Jews and non-Jews according to Romans 1:16, to minister to Jewish Christians, and to arouse appreciation of and love for the Jews as God's People amongst the Christians [...]”<sup>71</sup>

This was a major step away from the former missionary concept: the word ‘mission’ was no longer mentioned. Moreover, Jews were referred to as God's People, which implied a valid, ongoing covenant between God and the Jews, and a rejection of triumphalism and supersessionism. The second part of the new name, containing Church and Judaism as equals, showed a new emphasis on Judaism, not on Jews interested in Jesus or the New Testament. These positive aspects were not far-reaching enough for real change towards dialogue, however. The foundation's name still contained the word ‘mission’. Although active mission was no longer a goal, through an indirect, passive mission (“bearing witness”) conversion was still desired.

This ambivalence is reflected in the article ‘Why a Jewish Mission?’ by Prof. Schmid, president of the SEJ (and later *Stiftung*) at that time. On the one hand, he wrote that Jews had the right to exist as Jews alongside Christianity, since “all of Israel” would be saved at the end of days. The Church was neither a replacement of Judaism nor a New Israel, but Church and Synagogue were interconnected. On the other hand, his openness for a “conversation with Jews” did not mean that he was interested in real dialogue. For Schmid this was only a means to an end. Christians should confess Christ and evangelise the Jews, since Jews were prioritized for missionizing, based on several sources from the Gospel of Matthew and Romans. The connection between Church and Synagogue meant neither

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67 *Der Freund Israels* 134/2 (1971), p. 5.

68 WILLI, “Verein” (note 6), p. 73.

69 Swiss Evangelical Jewish Mission – Foundation for Church and Judaism.

70 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 137/1 (1974); and all issues later on, compared to the issues in 1973.

71 StABS PA 946a B 1-4, draft version of the foundation's statutes, undated.

partnership nor co-existence, but a “union of Christ and the Jews” through Jesus, promotion of which was a “*Biblical* reason, *Biblical* duty and churchly necessity.”<sup>72</sup>

The theological content and ambivalence towards Judaism of Schmid’s position is reminiscent of the position of the *Friends of Israel* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This shows that change did take place within the SEJ/*Stiftung* after the Brunner era. The change was not from mission to dialogue, but from active to passive mission. In this context, it is no surprise that Pastor Lydia Schäppi, the new director of the *Stiftung* from 1973,<sup>73</sup> specifically quoted in an important article the theological credo of the *Verein* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century concerning Jewish mission and based her own opinion on it.<sup>74</sup>

Not everyone within the *Stiftung* shared this view. In the 1970s the *Stiftung* was divided into three main groups concerning its future direction:

- The first group wanted to continue missionizing, albeit not actively. They shared many of Brunner’s views. Nevertheless, they were open to changes, but only moderate ones. Schmid and Schäppi were part of this group.
- The second group wanted real dialogue with the Jews. One member of this group was Schmäzle, who had proposed such a direction during Brunner’s leadership, as mentioned earlier. Another important member was Prof Kurt Hruby, editor of *Ami d’Israel*, the French-speaking edition of the *Freund Israels*. He also wrote regularly for *JUDAICA*, another periodical of the *Stiftung*, which was founded in 1944 and was much more academic than the *Freund Israels*.<sup>75</sup> Hruby was a professor of Jewish Studies in Paris. He was a good friend of Brunner, but nevertheless highly critical of missionizing.<sup>76</sup> In 1978 he was elected to the foundation board of the *Stiftung*.<sup>77</sup>
- Pastor Dr Thomas Willi represented the third group. The members of this group stood theologically between the first two groups. It was nonetheless under the leadership of Willi that the move towards real dialogue began.

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72 *Der Freund Israels* 135/1 (1972), pp. 4-6.

73 *Der Freund Israels* 136/3 (1973), p. 2.

74 *Der Freund Israels* 138/3 (1975), p. 2.

75 About the periodical *JUDAICA*: cf. StABS PA 946a F 2-9-1, minutes of the 1156<sup>th</sup> meeting of the *Verein*’s committee, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1944.

76 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 134/2 (1971), pp. 11-12; ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1976.

77 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1978.

Pastor Willi became director of the *Stiftung* in May 1977 and was elected to the foundation board the same year. This happened by agreement with Schmid and Schächli, who retired after 36 years of serving the *Verein/Stiftung*. She remained on the foundation board.<sup>78</sup> Willi is difficult to define theologically and with regards to mission to the Jews. He was neither a proponent, nor an opponent, taking a position somewhere in-between, and influenced by experiences in his youth. Born during World War II in a town near the Swiss-Austrian border, he had contact with people who saved Jews, for example Paul Grüninger,<sup>79</sup> who was his teacher for a short time, and ‘Refugee Pastor’ Paul Vogt. His traditional Protestant Christian upbringing was mixed with a very positive attitude towards Jews.<sup>80</sup> This ambivalence is reflected in the discussions about the purpose and goals of the *Stiftung*, which lasted nearly the entire 1980s.

Willi continued the traditional approach of the *Verein/Stiftung* and did not reject missionary work in general, while opposing active missionizing. Theologically he was much closer to those who advocated missionizing than those who wanted a true dialogue with the Jews without ulterior motives. When Jewish circles (including Dr Ernst-Ludwig Ehrlich, a major Jewish representative within Jewish-Christian dialogue and active in the CJA<sup>81</sup>) criticised two articles by Werner Werren in the *Freund Israels* for its blatantly anti-Jewish, mission-oriented content,<sup>82</sup> Willi did not reject the articles. He said that theologically nothing was wrong with them. Although Willi agreed that the style of Werner Werren was no longer up-to-date, he did not question missionizing as such, but defended Werren, claiming that he was important for the readership of the *Freund Israels*. Moreover, Willi said that the leadership had to show consideration for the Evangelical members of the *Stiftung*, who expected a “certain missionary impetus” in *Der Freund Israels*. After all, the Evangelicals supported the *Stiftung* financially,

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78 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1976; ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1976; ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1977; ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1978.

79 Grüninger was a Swiss police commander, who allowed some 3600 Jewish refugees to enter Switzerland by backdating their visas.

80 Thomas Willi, Interview with author, Personal interview, Zurich, Switzerland, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.

81 Cf. HARTMUT BOMHOFF, *Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich: Ein Leben für Dialog und Erneuerung* (Jüdische Miniaturen – Spektrum jüdischen Lebens, vol. 80), Berlin 2011.

82 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 142/3 (1979), and *Der Freund Israels* 142/4 (1979).

and there was a risk that they would found their own missionary organisation, if they were dissatisfied with the *Stiftung*'s work.<sup>83</sup>

Despite this, Willi was not a typical proponent of missionizing and he did want change. In the end, he was crucial for the move towards dialogue. Willi phrased his basic opinion very subtly in the 1980 annual report. He made it clear that he wanted a change in attitude towards Jews. For him, it was important to interact with Jews without ulterior motives, to learn from Jews and to participate in Jewish community activities as a guest. Willi wanted an open discourse with the Jewish congregations and to establish strong relations with them. In his opinion, Christians had to be "ready to ask and to listen." This included educating Christians about Judaism and campaigning for a positive attitude towards Jews and Judaism within the Church. Moreover, Willi expressed his strong support for the State of Israel. However, his wording was often very general and open to interpretation, and he avoided taking a clear stance against missionizing and open conflict with the faction supporting it at the time.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, Willi took many practical steps towards Christian-Jewish dialogue. He had open and sincere contact with the leadership of the Jewish communities in Basel and Zurich, and regularly visited synagogue services and other events.<sup>85</sup> It was his initiative to erase SEJ from the name of the *Stiftung* – a huge symbolic step.<sup>86</sup> He also suggested enhancing the quality of *Der Freund Israels* by using "more authentic Jewish material for a Christian audience."<sup>87</sup>

Willi practised a personnel policy that strengthened the pro-dialogue wing of the *Stiftung*. His most important appointment in this context was Pastor Martin Cunz<sup>88</sup> – later the major driving force behind the change towards dialogue. Another decision was to put Pastor Ulrich Knellwolf on the foundation board,<sup>89</sup> who was close to Pastor Cunz and likewise supported a change towards dialogue, as reflected in one of his sermons on the Gospel of John. Knellwolf emphasised the eternal covenant between God and the Jews. In

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83 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1979;  
ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1980.

84 *Der Freund Israels* 144/4 (1981), pp. 7-12.

85 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1980.

86 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1981.

87 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1982.

88 Appointed in 1980. Cf. *Freund Israels* 144/1 (1981), p. 18.

89 Appointed in 1982. Cf. ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1982.

fact, in his opinion salvation can come into this world only through the People of Israel. Jesus serves as tie between God, the Jews and the non-Jews. Knellwolf also stressed the Jewish roots of Christianity and concluded that “whenever the Church is anti-Jewish it ceases to be the Church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>90</sup> This sermon is not only a strong statement against Christian anti-Judaism, but a clear rejection of the mission to the Jews. Knellwolf understood Judaism as the essential source of Christianity, and Jews as equal partners in salvific history. This emphasis on equality and partnership was an open break with the traditional focus on mission of the *Verein/Stiftung*.

Willi also changed over time theologically himself. In an article in 1987 about the current goals and realignment of the *Stiftung* he explicitly distanced himself from missionizing and complained about the lack of concept before he took over the leadership. For him the traditional values and faith attitudes of the *Verein* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had to be renewed to establish a future-oriented basis. The Holocaust in particular, and its aftermath, had to be taken into account. Willi wanted to fight antisemitism and intensify relations with the Jewish communities.<sup>91</sup>

The pro-mission wing reacted furiously. Schäppi wrote a letter to Pastor Laubscher, president of the *Stiftung*. For her it was “unfair” and “rude” how Willi-Plein “settled his account with the recent past of the SKJ.” She rejected any criticism of Brunner and the past concepts and goals of the *Stiftung*, and asked what differences remained between the *Stiftung* and the dialogue-oriented CJA.<sup>92</sup> A revealing question, since theologically both organisations had come much closer to each other.

Willi – who tried to satisfy the different strands of opinion and to avoid a schism – understood that the *Stiftung* nevertheless had to stay abreast of change if it wanted to have a future.<sup>93</sup> In the 1988 annual report Willi clearly acknowledged the change in Christian-Jewish relations and the consequent need for a change in the *Stiftung*'s policy. He wrote that an “intense theological work makes us see our task in a new light” and added that the base in Christian-Jewish relations is “the *one* and eternal covenant with Israel.”<sup>94</sup> This suggests a theological turning-point for Willi and therefore the future work of the *Stiftung*.

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90 *Der Freund Israels* 145/5 (1982), pp. 1-2.

91 *Der Freund Israels* 150/1 (1987), pp. 6-11; Willi, Interview.

92 ASKJ, letter from Lydia Schäppi to Paul Laubscher, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1987.

93 Willi, Interview.

94 *Der Freund Israels* 152/2 (1989), p. 2.



The differences between dialogue groups such as the CJA and the *Stiftung* became mainly practical and less theological. While the CJA focused particularly on dialogue and encounter with Jews, the primary task of the *Stiftung* was to work within the Protestant Church. The *Stiftung* wanted to give Christians a better understanding of Judaism and the Jewish roots of Christianity. It fought Christian anti-Judaism within the Church and hoped to bridge the gap between the Jewish and Christian “brothers and sisters,” who were connected through the one “divine covenant.” The *Stiftung* tried to achieve this goal mainly through education, for example lectures, seminars and publications.<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, the self-definition of the *Stiftung* was to be a “service agency of the Church” for its parishes concerning Judaism and Christian-Jewish relations.<sup>96</sup> Traditional goals, such as missionizing or baptism, were no longer mentioned. In fact, the *Stiftung* strengthened its ties with the CJA.<sup>97</sup>

Despite many small changes and a clear rejection of active missionizing, the basic structure of the *Stiftung* remained the same throughout the 1980s, and the discussions about its exact position, principles and future goals did not lead to concrete answers.<sup>98</sup> In a letter to the board in January 1989, Willi himself questioned if a foundation was the right legal and organisational form for the future, and demanded new approaches, since it was impossible to simply continue Jewish missionizing “under a different banner.” He pressed for changes in organisation and approach, and urged quick decisions.<sup>99</sup> Two responses typify the two major opinions about the future of the *Stiftung*: one faction wanted to continue as usual, with only marginal changes, while the other faction wanted more radical change.

In a reply Schmid wrote that changes could happen “more easily” without him, although he doubted that his resignation would solve the “deep underlying problems.” Schmid criticised the greater acceptance of the *Stiftung* by Jewish circles at the expense of missionizing. Missionizing was essential, albeit as an “inner mission.” But he did not define “inner mission” exactly.<sup>100</sup>

In a letter to Willi, Knellwolf drafted the idea of an ‘Institute for Church and Judaism’ that should “review the history of the relationship between

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95 *Der Freund Israels* 152/2 (1989), p. 5.

96 *Der Freund Israels* 152/2 (1989), p. 16.

97 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1986.

98 Cf. ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1985.

99 ASKJ, letter from Thomas Willi to the foundation board, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1989.

100 ASKJ, letter from Herbert Schmid to Thomas Willi, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1989.



European Christianity and Judaism, keep connected to contemporary Jewish thought, and promote the awareness of the one, eternal covenant...in Church and theology.” To achieve these goals a centre should be created to offer meetings, congresses, scientific research and educational material for community work and religious classes.<sup>101</sup>

At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the desire for change and a new direction finally prevailed and the dialogue-wing became stronger. This was expressed, for example, in a press conference about the work of the *Stiftung* in 1990, which focused on the “friendship” with Jews, the eternal covenant of God with the Jewish People, the Jewish roots of Christianity and solidarity with the State of Israel. Missionizing was mentioned as a goal neither directly, nor indirectly. In fact, the missionary past of the historical *Verein* was even relativized.<sup>102</sup> Another example is the change of the statutes in 1993. The object of the *Stiftung* was now “to bear witness to the enduring calling and significance of the Jewish People and Judaism for the Church and the world, and to contribute to a biblically well-grounded and theologically reasonable attitude vis-à-vis Judaism and Jewish content.”<sup>103</sup> Mission was not only omitted, but even any intention of passive missionizing.

The pro-mission faction tried to hold back these developments. In response to the 1991 annual report, for example, Pastor Elsi Weber, a member of the foundation board, said that she liked the many activities of the *Stiftung*, but “miss(ed) a clear messianic testimony and the mention of Jesus.”<sup>104</sup> This criticism remained however ineffective.

In 1994, Pastor Martin Cunz became the new strong man within the *Stiftung*, when Willi resigned as director for a professorship in Germany.<sup>105</sup> Cunz succeeded him as co-chair in Zurich, together with Nico Rubeli, who became co-chair in Basel.<sup>106</sup> After a long stay in Israel following his studies, Cunz worked as a pastor in – at that time – West Berlin and Italy before accepting a position in Locarno, Switzerland, in 1975. Through his work in the local branch of the CJA he came into contact with Kurt Hruby and the *Stiftung*.<sup>107</sup> From the beginning, Cunz made no secret of the fact that he rejected missionizing to the Jews. He wanted to learn about the Jewish roots

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101 ASKJ, letter from Ulrich Knellwolf to Thomas Willi, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1989.

102 ASKJ, Zurich Press Conference, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1990.

103 ASKJ, Statutes of the Foundation for Church and Judaism, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1993.

104 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1992.

105 ASKJ, letter from Thomas Willi to Paul Laubscher, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1994.

106 *Der Freund Israels* 157/2 (1994), p. 16.

107 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1980.

of Christianity, engage with Jews, and teach Christians about Judaism, so that they could understand Judaism in the way that “Jews understand it themselves.”<sup>108</sup> Cunz was active in Christian-Jewish dialogue and became vice-president of the CJA Switzerland in 1985.<sup>109</sup>

Cunz picked up Knellwolf’s idea and put it in concrete terms. As early as 1989 he came up with a project design for a ‘Christian *Lehrhaus*<sup>110</sup> of encounter with Judaism in Zurich,’ which he drafted together with Michel Bollag, Principal of the Jewish school at the time, who later became an important partner in the dialogue work with Cunz and in implementing the *Lehrhaus*.<sup>111</sup> In 1990, Cunz continued to lobby for the project and argued that such a centre would give the *Stiftung* more weight and influence. Laubscher agreed, saying “it is a serious perspective and we have to be open for a venture.” He suggested the establishment of a group to develop a detailed and concrete action plan.<sup>112</sup>

Cunz presented a first plan in October 1990 to the foundation board. The goal of the *Lehrhaus* was to “become acquainted with Judaism” and to “deepen practical work” with the Jewish community. It should coordinate and expand educational programmes about Judaism for a Christian audience. The hidden agenda of the *Lehrhaus*, as outlined by Cunz, was certainly Christian-Jewish dialogue, as reflected by the focus on Christian-Jewish encounter, a Jewish employee, and close collaboration with the Jewish community.<sup>113</sup> Further details, such as financial matters and a place for the centre, were discussed in 1991.<sup>114</sup>

All the members of the foundation board were very positive about the project and decided to start with a pilot course led by Cunz and Bollag in winter 1992/1993. The board also started negotiations with Bollag on potential part-time employment.<sup>115</sup> Through the endowment of a house for the *Lehrhaus* by a member of the *Stiftung* the question of a domicile was

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108 ASKJ, letter from Martin Cunz to the executive committee of the SKJ, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1980.

109 *Der Freund Israels* 149/2 (1986), p. 13.

110 *Lehrhaus* means literally ‘house of learning’. It is a specific term from the German Jewish enlightenment, which has its root in the Hebrew *Bet Midrash*, adopted to German language.

111 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the executive committee of the SKJ, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1989.

112 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1990.

113 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1990.

114 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1991

115 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1991.

solved.<sup>116</sup> At the same time the *Lehrhaus* project was communicated to the public. The encounter with Jews and Judaism and joint learning were the focus of the articles concerning the new centre.<sup>117</sup> In the 1992 annual report Cunz added that one of the goals of the *Lehrhaus* was to debate “fundamental questions on the relations between Christians and Jews.”<sup>118</sup>

The definite establishment of the *Lehrhaus*, the reduction of director Willi’s job from full-time to part-time due to a teaching assignment at university,<sup>119</sup> and his later resignation, made it necessary to discuss once more the aims and future of the *Stiftung*. On a retreat in February 1993, the foundation board set the course for further Christian-Jewish dialogue and the strengthening of cooperation with other dialogue groups, such as the CJA.<sup>120</sup> In a newspaper interview Cunz reaffirmed this position and again rejected any kind of missionary work.<sup>121</sup> The 1993 retreat was the starting point for a tremendous change in the organisation and work of the *Stiftung*. Four, or rather five, developments highlight this change:

- Firstly, Michel Bollag became the first Jewish employee, taken on as a temporary in 1992<sup>122</sup> and made permanent in 1993.<sup>123</sup> The idea of a Jewish employee had been discussed beforehand but always dismissed.<sup>124</sup> As principal of the Jewish school and part-time assistant of the Rabbinate in Zurich, he was very active in Jewish-Christian dialogue and became friends with Cunz. Both together shaped the idea of the *Lehrhaus*. For Bollag, the *Lehrhaus* was a great opportunity to reduce prejudice and to teach about authentic Judaism.<sup>125</sup> His employment was not without controversy, albeit from the Jewish, not the Christian side. The mainstream Jewish community supported his engagement, even financially. A minority, however, especially within ultra-Orthodox circles, mistrusted

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116 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1992.

117 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 155/2 (1992), pp. 7-9; *Der Freund Israels* 155/4 (1992), pp. 15-18.

118 *Der Freund Israels* 156/2 (1993), p. 4.

119 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1992.

120 ASKJ, minutes of the retreat of the foundation board, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1993.

121 MICHAEL MEIER, “Die jüdischen Wurzeln des Christentums aufzeigen,” in: *Tages-Anzeiger*, March 10, 1993, p. 23.

122 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1992.

123 *Der Freund Israels* 157/2 (1994), p. 8.

124 Cf. ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1982; ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1986.

125 *Der Freund Israels* 157/3 (1994), p. 14.

the *Stiftung* and disapproved of it. Ultra-Orthodox Rabbi Daniel Levy even threatened Bollag with consequences.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, Bollag was very successful in his work and acquired an excellent reputation in a very short time within the *Stiftung*.<sup>127</sup> Subsequently, he was able to strongly influence the further development of the *Lehrhaus* towards a centre for dialogue. Since 2002, Bollag has been coequal with the Christian director.<sup>128</sup>

- Secondly, the theological question about the objectives of the *Stiftung* and how to deal with missionizing was quickly and clearly resolved under the new leadership of Cunz. A position paper from 1995 states the goals of the *Stiftung* as dialogue and “building bridges between Christians and Jews.” It condemns “any kind of Jewish mission” and clarifies:

The SKJ [...] practised [...] Jewish mission. After a thorough process of reversal, the SKJ declares today: The SKJ regrets that there were anti-Jewish tendencies and religious abuses against Jews in its history. Mission to the Jews...is not a proper attitude of the Church towards Judaism [...]. The SKJ acknowledges the truth claim of the mission of Israel.<sup>129</sup>

This statement broke once and for all with missionizing, no matter how missionizing was defined or conceptualised. Moreover, the expression of regret for past mistakes was an important step towards the Jewish community and building mutual trust and friendship. This was further manifested in the 1995 annual report.<sup>130</sup>

- Thirdly, *Der Freund Israels* was published for the last time in December 1996 and thereafter replaced by a totally new publication called *Lamed*. The name was derived from the Hebrew letter ‘lamed,’ which symbolises ‘learning.’ Learning was understood as a main feature of the Jewish religion, and also as a means of communication between Jews and non-Jews, the basis of dialogue.<sup>131</sup> The change was also regarding content, not just style. The old-fashioned *Missionsheft*<sup>132</sup> was replaced by a publication that promoted dialogue and an authentic view of Judaism. Michel Bollag was the first Jew to write articles from a Jewish perspective. Admittedly, there had also been articles by Jews in *Der Freund Israels*, but these were mostly

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126 Michel Bollag, Interview with author, Personal interview, Zurich, Switzerland, 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2014.

127 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1993.

128 Bollag, Interview.

129 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1995.

130 Cf. *Der Freund Israels* 159/2 (1996), pp. 2-5.

131 ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1996.

132 A magazine for missionary activity.

about Israel or introductions to Jewish topics for a Christian audience, fitting the agenda of the *Verein/Stiftung* and not necessary Jewish ideas.

- Fourthly, the work of the *Stiftung* was concentrated on the *Lehrhaus* (and the two periodicals *Lamed* and *Judaica*). After the change to dialogue most members of the pro-mission/Evangelical wing left the *Stiftung*. Unlike Willi, Cunz did not try to keep them, but on the contrary, was happy that they left. They had been the basis of the *Stiftung*'s work in Southern Germany, which therefore ceased.<sup>133</sup> The work in French-speaking Switzerland and France had declined after the death of Hruby in 1992, and was finally discontinued in 1997.<sup>134</sup> The Israel projects were likewise given up in the 1990s.<sup>135</sup>
- Fifthly, the – thus far – last major step on the way to the re-orientation of the *Stiftung* was taken at the end of the 1990s when the *Stiftungsrat* (Board of Councillors) started discussing to amend its *Satzung* (statutes) and re-formulate article 3 of the *Satzung*, which outlines the *Stiftung*'s objectives.<sup>136</sup> The intention was to widen the scope of the *Stiftung*'s activities and to make the *Lehrhaus* an institute of trilateral, i.e. Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue. At its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2001, the board unanimously agreed upon that and adopted the proposed amendment of the *Satzung* (§ 3).<sup>137</sup> In line with this re-orientation, the name of the *Zürcher Lehrhaus* was changed, too. Since January 2016, the – former – *Zürcher Lehrhaus* is called *Zurich Institute for Interreligious Dialogue* (ZIID).

These five major developments ultimately 'reinvented' the *Stiftung* from an association for Jewish mission to a centre for Christian-Jewish, and eventually, Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue.

In the roughly 185 years from the establishment of the *Verein der Freunde Israels* as an association for missionizing to the Jews until the reorientation of its successor organisation *Stiftung für Kirche und Judentum* with the establishment of the *Lehrhaus* as a centre for Christian-Jewish dialogue in the mid-1990s, its objectives, theological view and practical work changed dramatically more than once. Nevertheless, the *Verein/SEJ/Stiftung* had one key purpose through all the years, which provided continuity and kept its members to-

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133 Bollag, Interview.

134 Cf. ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1993; ASKJ, minutes of the meeting of the foundation board, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1997.

135 Bollag, Interview.

136 Cf. minutes of the board meeting, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2000.

137 Cf. minutes of the board meeting, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2001.



gether, despite all the changes: the mission to the Jews. The moment missionizing was dismissed, the *Verein/Stiftung* ceased and was replaced by something new: the *Lehrhaus*, and finally, the *Institute for Interreligious Dialogue*.

This does not mean that there were no shifts in the past – on the contrary. There were important, even radical, adjustments. As long as these happened under the banner of missionizing, however, only the missionizing concept changed, due to the theological principle of a positive attitude towards Jews on the one hand and their spiritual inferiority on the other. In this understanding, salvation could only come through Christ. This theological fundament was a recurring theme throughout the history of the *Verein/Stiftung*. Changes happened to meet new situations or by necessity, but none of these changes questioned the basic theological outline – until the 1990s. Whatever promised more success and was supported by most of the members was done to guarantee a future.

In its early years the *Verein* focused on a passive missionizing concept, by assisting converts, raising awareness of the Jewish roots of Christianity and reaching out to ‘truth-seeking’ Jews. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this concept changed to active missionizing, accompanied by a new geographic centre (Eastern Europe), new methods (mission stations), and a new target group (Orthodox Jews). Despite these radical changes the *Verein* continued normally, since missionizing remained the main goal and the practical work was simply adapted to new conditions. Even those members of the *Verein* who were influenced by the racist antisemitism of the 1930s remained within the common theological concept, since they believed that with baptism Jews changed totally and became good Christians – in contrast to Nazi ideology. Likewise, radical was the practical work towards dialogue of Willi-Plein in the 1980s. At this time the missionizing concept was again very passive and as long as Willi-Plein did not question it, he was able to implement many important changes towards dialogue.

The *Verein* broke with its theological base only twice. First, in 1943/1944 Hug argued for a halt to missionary activities. Although he argued ethically and not theologically, and he was not a proponent of dialogue, but a missionary himself, the *Verein* dismissed him as director after a very short time. This was followed by a period of very active missionizing and hence guaranteed the continuity of the *Verein*’s theological base.

Secondly, in the 1990s, Cunz discarded missionizing in any form. This time the majority of the members supported their director and the *Stiftung* broke radically with its past. The theological principle was written anew, mission was replaced by dialogue, and its scope widened: from bilateral Christian-Jewish to trilateral Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue.