**“‘Together a Step Towards the Messianic Goal’ –**

**Jewish-Protestant Encounter in the Weimar Republic”**

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In an extensive book review in the *Monatsschrift fuer Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* in 1927, Max Dienemann, Rabbi, scholar, and one of the most prominent figures in German liberal Jewry during the Weimar republic, couldn’t stop praising the recent works of Gerhard Kittel, a New Testament scholar thirteen years his junior, a liberal Protestant with a thorough and keen understanding of the rabbinical tradition, who had just begun his tenure at the University of Tuebingen.[[1]](#footnote-2)

“It is with special pleasure to read his books as a Jew,” Dienemann wrote, “because in recent days no other scholar has done as much justice to Judaism as Kittel.” Kittel, Dienemann emphasized, “puts away the many claims and misjudgments (…) to which Protestant biblical scholarship still clings to so tenaciously.” Kittel’s books also helped Dienemann to reflect upon the Jewish-Christian dialogue, which Dienemann considered to be first of all a dialogue among scholars. “One has to thankfully welcome [Kittel’s] assumptions and demands. [He] speaks out against the deficient recognition of rabbinical literature (…) and [he] demands that Christian scholars in community with Jewish scholars stimulate each other.” But beyond that, Kittel’s work is also eye-opening for the wider community. “One has to be thankful for [Kittel’s] excellent books which are an enrichment of knowledge and insight and a piece of the good fight for truth of all honest and noble men.” Rabbi Dienemann admired especially Kittel’s fair treatment of the Jewish religion. “A Jew can only have respect and praise for [Kittel’s] position, because Christianity is not lifted up on behalf of Judaism.” Accordingly, Dienemann can express his sincere hopes for any future dialogue. “Kittel needs to be credited that he, without diminishing Judaism, attempts to explain Jesus and Judaism. Much blessing will grow out of his method of scholarship for all sides.”

Dienemann wrote this review at the height of the Weimar republic, he, of course, could not foresee that the Christian scholar he was praising so abundantly here, would, in 1933, reverse his approach.[[2]](#footnote-3) Yet this is still Weimar in 1927, and, however irritating it is to see proponents of Jewish-Christian dialogue swiftly changing sides in 1933, Kittel with his rigorous historical approach to the New Testament, and his deep knowledge of the rabbinical traditions is but one example for the fruitful theological interconnections between Protestants and liberal German Jews at that time.

When we refer to the “Weimar moment” we are justified in referring to a number of genuine new exchanges of religious ideas and opinions unseen before in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. There is abundant evidence of the marked spike in interest among both Protestants and Jews to foster dialogue for greater understanding. In this regard, we need to call to mind Hugo Gressmann’s invitation to members of the *Hochschule des Judentums* to lecture at the *Institutum Judaicum* in Berlin.[[3]](#footnote-4) Of importance are also the contributions to the second edition of *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* by Jewish theologians.[[4]](#footnote-5) The *Association of Defense against Anti-Semitism*, founded in 1890, was another place for encounter. Its board was now joined by Professor Otto Baumgarten and Pastor Eduard Lamparter - two prominent and, in their fight against anti-Semitism, very outspoken Protestant clergymen.[[5]](#footnote-6) Especially noteworthy are the many attempts for dialogue by Martin Buber. Buber attended conferences run by missionary societies,[[6]](#footnote-7) founded the inter-religious journal *Die Kreatur*,[[7]](#footnote-8) published a special edition of his journal *Der Jude* focusing on Judentum und Christentum,[[8]](#footnote-9) and he met at the *Stuttgart Lehrhaus* with New Testament scholar Karl Ludwig Schmidt for their famous *Streitgespraech*[[9]](#footnote-10) – all these examples are part of a fundamental inter-religious effort to clarify and re-define the relationship between Jews and Protestants during Weimar.

However, while these theological encounters and efforts opened a new chapter of Jewish-Christian relations, the Weimar period still seems to go fairly unrecognized when it comes to charting out the history of Jewish-Christian encounter and dialogue. [[10]](#footnote-11) This seems to be especially true in Protestant historiography. Here we often find emphasis either on the Jewish-Christian encounters during the German empire or on the catastrophe after 1933.[[11]](#footnote-12)

On the side of Jewish intellectual history, however, we find a different picture. Historian of religion Paul Mendes-Flohr has looked at these encounters more closely, and he deems them to be “ambivalent” for their Jewish participants, because they were largely organized around the defense of theological interpretation of scripture. Mendes-Flohr underscores that Jews and Christians were in this dialogue together “in a common quest to understand anew the meaning and challenge of religious faith.”[[12]](#footnote-13) However, Mendes-Flohr also takes notice of the limits of dialogue on the Protestant side. Protestants failed, he argues with the example of Martin Buber, to recognize Israel as a living reality of faith beyond Christian conceptualizing of it.[[13]](#footnote-14)

My paper follows Mendes-Flohr in its overall conclusion, but offers some different arguments. In my view, the reluctance on the side of the Protestant participants to fully embrace the dialogue with their Jewish counterparts cannot be explained by a hermeneutical literalism of Scripture as Mendes-Flohr seems to suggest at the end of his essay. Rather, we need to investigate the Jewish-Christian relationship within the context of Weimar modernity and culture. Thus, we need to take into account the different theological approaches towards Israel among Protestants, while we also need to look at these Protestants in their fight against anti-Semitism. Accordingly, I want to examine more closely these Protestant theologians’ views, assumptions, and ideas about Jews and Judaism, as well as their assessments of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. I suggest that, despite their own calls for openness, despite their attempts to reach out to their Jewish fellow citizen, and despite their strong stand against anti-Semitism, in the end Protestant theologians failed to comprehend Judaism as a lived religion. In particular, the Protestant players in this debate did not fully grasp the possibility of religion as a part of Jewish modernity, and thus, their persistent reluctance undermined the promise of this inter-religious dialogue.

This paper focuses primarily on two major publications in which the Jewish-Christian dialogue took place. First, the leading Protestant encyclopedia in Weimar, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, originally a liberal product of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, which was published in a completely revised second edition between 1927 and 1932. The articles by Gerhard Kittel on *Judaism and Christianity,* historian of religion Heinrich Frick on *Anti-Semitism*, and by missionary director Otto von Harling on *Mission to the Jews* help us to sketch a good picture of mainstream Weimar Protestantism on the issue of the Jewish-Christian relationship.[[14]](#footnote-15) Secondly, I want to look at the special 1927 edition on *Judaism and Christianity* of Martin Buber’s *Der Jude*. *Der Jude* was a widely- read quarterly journal for Jews of all political affiliations and backgrounds, which during its short existence became – according to Michael Brenner - the “most important intellectual forum of modern German Jewry.”[[15]](#footnote-16) The special edition included a diverse group of Protestant theologians representing a wide range of theological approaches and opinions. Religious socialist and Zurich pastor Hermann Kutter,[[16]](#footnote-17) cultural Protestant and liberal theologian Martin Dibelius,[[17]](#footnote-18) historian of religion and active missionary Alfred Jeremias,[[18]](#footnote-19) and Church critic and former pastor Christoph Schrempf,[[19]](#footnote-20) all these thinkers followed Martin Buber’s invitation to contribute a short essay under the guiding question “is it possible that Jews and Christians not just understand each other, but are opening up for each other?”[[20]](#footnote-21)

Before we now begin to analyze these essays in more detail, we need to reflect upon the way Weimar changed the ground rules for Jewish-Christian dialogue. When Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed the Weimar republic from the balcony of the Reichstag on November 9, 1918, he also opened the floodgates of modernity, and soon modernity penetrated every sphere of life in post-empire Germany.[[21]](#footnote-22) This sudden take-off was first of all a political, structural one. The inter-religious efforts could take place, because the Weimar constitution established new ground rules of religious pluralism. Modern states are based on the protection of individual rights, the separation of powers, and the separation of religious and governmental institutions, i.e., church and state. The Weimar constitution guaranteed those rights, it guaranteed religious freedom, and it guaranteed the institutional separation of church and state. What had long been established as constitutional practice on the other side of the Atlantic,[[22]](#footnote-23) in Germany it was not signed into law before August 11, 1919.[[23]](#footnote-24)

Yet, aside from this political creation of a modern, democratic state with a liberal constitution at its heart and center, another process took place. Modernity was budding in Weimar in another way. The great socio-cultural transformations towards modernity now broke through, and the case for classical modernity unfolded. To be sure, this case was a contested one. Weimar displayed, as Detlev Peukert so pointedly noted, the “fascinating and fatal possibilities of our modern world.”[[24]](#footnote-25) Fascinating, because of its avant-garde, its all encompassing freedom of expression, and its freedom of religion. Yet, those possibilities were also fatal, and Weimar is a case in the cultural height of modernity as well as a case in the permanent crisis of modernity. People suffering under dreadful economic conditions and the continuous cultural criticism from the right echo the fragility of the Weimar moment.

While the great majority of German Jews endorsed Weimar and the challenges and possibilities of modernity, and while German Jews soon began to play an important role in Weimar culture,[[25]](#footnote-26) there were numerous opponents of the new republic - and many of them were to be found on the side of Protestant conservative monarchists. These conservatives bemoaned the loss of the old order, and the Protestant cultural and political hegemony which had characterized the old empire. Weimar democracy did not provide for the same strong bond between Protestantism and the monarchy which had put its stamp on the *Kaiserreich*. Weimar did not provide for a new alliance of throne and altar. Monarchy by the grace of God and the Protestant church were no longer the cornerstones of the German state. Accordingly, Protestant conservatives in their great majority did not accept the new modern state, its challenges and possibilities. These Protestant conservatives were keen to delegitimize the new state’s constitutional heart and center, and increasingly they joined the choir of anti-Semites.[[26]](#footnote-27) Based on racial biases, they lamented the granting of civil liberties for all citizens. Conservatives were also vehemently opposed to the growing influence of individual German Jews in the cultural sphere. These and other issues were debated widely and across all camps in the Weimar media under the label of the so-called *Judenfrage* (‘the Jewish question’). In addition, under the *Judenfrage*, many leading Protestant conservatives questioned the 19th century process of emancipation as well as the growing number of immigrants of Eastern European Jews. By repeatedly bringing up the *Judenfrage* in the media people were not only letting loose their hazy anti-Semitic emotions. Rather, the *Judenfrage* was bundling up the question of modernity, its challenges and consequences. In the media, Jews were referred to as a paradigm of modernity. The Jew became the standard negative symbol in the cultural criticism of the right against modernity. The *Judenfrage* displayed Jews as the deputies of modernity in a culture war against modernity.[[27]](#footnote-28)

Despite the increasing dominance of the conservatives, many Protestant theologians and clergy supported the broad aims of inter-religious dialogue. Broadly speaking, we find in the Protestant mainstream at least three different groups which actively participated in the Jewish-Christian encounters in Weimar. These groups, however, often times overlapped, and we can recognize some individual thinkers moving back and forth between them.

In the first group we find liberal theologians who fully accepted modernity and the new democratic state. These liberals did not take issue with the new cultural strength of German Jews, although the socio-economic problem of uncontrolled immigration of Eastern European Jews was critically debated among liberals as well. The liberal theologians’ defense of Jews was rooted in the old alliance of liberals and Jews of the German revolution of 1848. Liberal Jews and liberal, cultural Protestants also clung to certain elitist cultural ideas, and their social milieus overlapped to a good degree. It is hardly a surprise that liberal, cultural Protestants played a key role in the inter-religious dialogue during Weimar, and in the fight against anti-Semitism.[[28]](#footnote-29)

The second group of Protestant theologians who were important contributors to the Jewish-Christian dialogue in Weimar came from the tradition of the German Awakening. Although these theologians had trouble with modernity, their critique differed substantially from that of other conservatives. Theologians of this tradition didn’t oppose Weimar for political reason, but rejected the process of modernity on a religious basis. They looked at history from the point of salvation, and they argued that salvation cannot be brought about unless all Jews collectively convert and accept Christ as Messiah. Yet modernity and emancipation contradicted this *heilsgeschichtliche* theology. The process of emancipation, they claimed, led Jews to assimilation, and moved them further away from collective religious renewal. Theologians advocating the mission to the Jews were also permeated by a deep philo-Semitism. Following scholars like Hermann Leberecht Strack, Franz Delitzsch, and Gustaf Dalman, the thorough study of rabbinical sources grew, because of the idea of Israel as God’s means for the salvation of the world. Though the final objective of these theologians was conversion, their missionary efforts were still fueled by love for Jews.[[29]](#footnote-30)

In addition to these two groups, we can also recognize a wide openness for dialogue among the group of religious socialists. Protestant religious socialists and Jewish religious socialists mixed often. Alexander Szanto, for instance, a social democrat and representative of the Berlin reform congregation, reports in 1929 and in 1931 in the Marburg based *Zeitschrift fuer Religion und Sozialismus* on the relationship between religious socialism and Judaism. Szanto maintains in his articles that “the religious socialism of the Christian confession will be of valuable stimulus for the Jewish-religious socialism.”[[30]](#footnote-31) Thus, it comes as no surprise when the honor of the opening essay in Martin Buber’s special edition of *Der Jude* on *Judaism and Christianity* went to the founder of religious socialism in Switzerland, Hermann Kutter.[[31]](#footnote-32)

For Jews, on the other hand, the Jewish-Christian encounter had to be understood before the background of the “renaissance” of German Judaism during Weimar. German Jews were ready for the new chapter of encounter and dialogue, because they felt strengthened after the recent exchange with Eastern European Jewry and its spirituality. “All in all,” Leo Baeck pointed out in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* in 1929, “Judaism today looks much deeper, stronger, and more confident of itself and its future than a century before.”[[32]](#footnote-33) Some of the Jewish participants, however, entered the debate with caution. Still fresh was the memory of the somewhat one-sided religious debate Jews had experienced at the beginning of the century by publicly disputing the claims regarding Judaism Adolf von Harnack had made.[[33]](#footnote-34) Reminiscent of this earlier debate, Friedrich Thieberger noted the lopsidedness of the debates by referring to Christianity as an unquestioned measure of true religion: “On both sides, Christianity is not questioned as the highest religious value, and Judaism is measured against it [Christianity].” And, he lamented, “Even in Jewish circles it has become a fashion to accept Jesus as the executor of prophetic signs!” Thieberger found the reason for this lopsidedness deeply ingrained in western culture. “The intellectual reality of Europe (…) has uplifted the absolute value of the Christian idea to its axiom.” If, however, dialogue can take place only among equals, the Jews had yet to become equals. After a century of emancipation and assimilation, they still needed the necessary elbow room for themselves, their self-identity and their place in a culture of Protestant dominance. Accordingly, Thieberger continued, “It is more important for Judaism than for Christianity that the debate can be held freely without this axiom.”[[34]](#footnote-35)

This quest for Jewish identity notwithstanding, the inter-religious dialogue was clearly welcomed on both sides, and the general attitude with which participants joined these inter-religious encounters were open and positive. When entering the dialogue, Jews and Protestants even referred to it in striking archetypical metaphors underscoring their mutual sacred sources. Max Dienemann, for example, viewed the relationship between Judaism and Christianity as “two different river-beds of one river from the same spring.”[[35]](#footnote-36) Gerhard Kittel, on the other side, frequently invoked the metaphor of soil to explain this relationship. Referring to the history of Israel, he staunchly declared that “all attempts to disconnect Christianity from this soil will turn it into an unhistorical phenomenon,” and will deny Christianity its “mother soil of moral strength.”[[36]](#footnote-37) While the image of the olive tree of Paul’s letter to the Romans was also frequently cited,[[37]](#footnote-38) historian and New Testament scholar Martin Dibelius advised his audience to look for the common ground between Judaism and Christianity not just in the historical origins of Christianity, but also in their “shared intellectual property.” This shared property Dibelius recognized first of all in the psalms of the Hebrew bible and in the monotheism of the biblical prophets.[[38]](#footnote-39) Dibelius also didn’t tire of reminding all his Jewish and Christian readers that Christianity kept Israel’s theology of a God of history who judges over sin. Moreover, he emphasized, Christians acknowledge in the father of Jesus Christ the God of Abraham and the patriarchs.[[39]](#footnote-40)

The most astonishing fact, however, is that both sides eventually invoked messianic language to make sense of this new stage of inter-religious encounter. By doing so, they placed the dialogue in the widest possible spiritual and historical horizon. On the Christian side Alfred Jeremias, for instance, cited Hosea 3:5 (“Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days”) - one of the key texts to determine what the Messiah will do - to express his confidence that in the last days a “religiously renewed Jewry” will look for the Messiah. But only God, Jeremias summarized, to whom “faithful Christians and faithful Jews pray together” knows when these last days will begin.[[40]](#footnote-41)

Rabbi Max Dienemann met Alfred Jeremias on equal ground. Dienemann emphasized that the meaning of this Jewish-Christian dialogue was not to work out differences, but instead this dialogue has to be “one step on the way towards the messianic goal.” Dienemann was quoting from Isaiah 11:9 (“That the earth will be filled for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea”), a crucial text in the Christian liturgy in Advent, to link the Jewish-Christian encounter with the awaited eternal realm of peace through the coming of the Messiah. Though Jews and Christians read this text with very different eyes, Max Dienemann very well knew that by quoting it he laid out the widest possible dimension for this new chapter of Jewish-Christian encounter. In Isaiah 11, the Bible reminds Jews and Christians to expect everything from the future, when the whole creation will be penetrated with the knowledge of God, and the King of peace will rule eternally. For Dienemann, a re-definition of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity was a cornerstone of the messianic age. Jewish-Christian dialogue was not only essential to bring about a different, better world, but it was also a sign of that new world.[[41]](#footnote-42)

But despite these striking messianic overtones, the inter-religious dialogue was a fragile and contested one. While embarrassed and challenged by widespread anti-Semitism in Weimar, Protestant theologians were almost always quick to point to the fundamental theological differences between Judaism and Christianity, which amounted, in the words of Gerhard Kittel, to an “unbridgeable opposition” between these two religions.[[42]](#footnote-43) According to Kittel, Jews can reach salvation as a reward for human merit within a “legalistic” setting, and the Jewish religion is represented best by the biblical figure of the Pharisee. Christians, on the other hand, assume that all man have sinned, and acknowledge therefore pure grace and forgiveness at the center of their religion. In this fundamental distinction between “Judaism as a religion of law” versus “Christianity as a religion of grace,” Kittel recognized the impulse which has “forever turned the daughter-religion into a different religion.”[[43]](#footnote-44)

In quite similar fashion, Martin Dibelius stressed the “decisive opposition of the Christian and Jewish religion to each other concerning man’s relationship with God.”[[44]](#footnote-45) Yet Dibelius’ distinction is characteristically different than the one of Kittel. For him, the usage of legal concepts in the sphere of mind and spirit, the sphere of religion, indicated something anachronistic. And thus, already in his *Geschichtliche und uebergeschichtliche Religion im Christentum* of 1925, Dibelius viewed Judaism as a pre-modern and “legalistic” religion in opposition to Protestantism as an embodiment of modern religion.[[45]](#footnote-46) This distinction between pre-modern Judaism and modern Protestant Christianity seems to be the centerpiece of his interpretation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

For Dibelius, Judaism represents legalism, which is a constant threat for Christianity, because its basic precepts are not grace and faith, but a collection of rules which ought to be executed. The Jewish religion, he argued, emerged out of the Judaism of the Hellenistic diaspora and the rabbinical tradition. It is centered around law and synagogue, and it is, as a type, the first and permanent opponent of Christianity. In its essence, Judaism subordinates human existence and morality under a law which comes directly from God. And God’s will is present in this law and it gives clear guidance for the believer. Christianity is distinct from Judaism regarding the notion of revelation. In Christianity, what is revealed, is not a “to do” but a “to be”. Unlike Jews, Dibelius stressed, Christians are required not just simply to repeat, but to “creatively regenerate in their own lives the archetypical meaning of the life of Christ.” Jews on the other hand, Dibelius asserted, have received God’s revelation in the format of a book which contains God’s will in a list of rules. Faith, for Jews, means pious execution of such rules. The Christian on the other hand, is the real modern person. He can’t just execute the law’s requirements, but, according to Dibelius, approaches the law in “creative receptivity.” Moreover, for Jews the law is a continuation of God’s works of creation, and thus it is fundamentally good. And accordingly, the Jews’ attitude to the world is based on a strong optimism. In Christianity on the other hand, the relationship between God and world is symbolically expressed in the cross. The relationship between God, world and man is a broken one. The cross represents not a continuity of an existing relationship between God and man, but a new creation, and “man can achieve salvation only through the struggle with God, sin, misery, and fate.”

In *Man and God*, Dibelius’ essay in *Der Jude*, Dibelius writes under the same premises.[[46]](#footnote-47) Here, he first emphasizes developments within Judaism, which led to the disconnect from its Hellenistic branch, and to the dominance of the rabbinical tradition.[[47]](#footnote-48) After the destruction of the second temple, the law becomes the center of Judaism. According to Dibelius, the law creates a sphere of life which lifts the pious Jew beyond the battles of faith and soul which are crucial elements in the intellectual tradition of the occident. The Jew, he adds, is certain of his God while executing the law. In addition, the connection through blood, family, and community grows in the diaspora, and pharisaic life becomes normalcy.

For the Christian, on the other hand, the relationship between God and man is symbolized by the paradoxical symbol of the cross. For the man who lives out of this relationship, life comes out of the tension between human sin and God. But the Christian’s existence and suffering cannot be traced back to any higher law or justice. Rather, what upholds man is divine grace. “The conviction that there is divine grace beyond any rational measure is what gives the Christian safety.” Dibelius stresses that grace is beyond law, and that God’s greatness is beyond all our ‘correct’ thoughts.

At this point of the essay, Dibelius relates his argument to the new Jewish theology of Weimar. He refers implicitly to Martin Buber’s attempt to connect mystery and morality at the core of Jewish faith, and explicitly to Leo Baeck’s rejection of pure moral activity as the center of modern Judaism. Still, Dibelius insists that these new theological approaches are not what defines Judaism. Instead, he emphasizes that the organizing principle of Judaism is not the mystery of God, but divine commandment. This “Jewish realism”, he notes, is “too easily satisfied with everything worldly.” Jewish realism is mere worldliness based on an engineering attitude of a legalistic life. But, Dibelius finally adds in a critical tone, “God’s kingdom and his business is always different than world and man.”[[48]](#footnote-49)

Gerhard Kittels and Martin Dibelius’ distinction of law and grace, old and new, is reminiscent of the traditional distinction in Lutheran theology between law and gospel. While in Jewish faith and theology the law is a positive means to keep the relationship between God and man in healthy balance, in Lutheran theology the law has a somewhat negative connotation. Martin Luther taught that God’s laws only function is to help man to recognize his existence as sinful. Other theologians like Philipp Melanchthon corrected Luther and taught that God’s law – which is his commandments but not the ceremonial law in the Torah - helps to bring about good works. However, man cannot rely on those good works for his salvation, and sinful man cannot earn God’s grace, but rather, God grants his grace to sinful man.[[49]](#footnote-50)

In any event, this distinction seems to be at the heart of the Protestant’s attitude towards Judaism. And by referring to this traditional theological distinction of law and grace, even Swiss Reformed Hermann Kutter stresses that the core ideas of both religions contradict each other. For him, as for Kittel and Dibelius, law and legalistic attitude towards salvation is at the center of Judaism, whereas grace and forgiveness describe best the center of Christianity. With such general yet classic distinction at hand, Kutter maintains the impossibility to define a mutual basis of dialogue on theological grounds.[[50]](#footnote-51)

However, as religious socialist, Kutter is also highly critical of institutional Christianity and its official theologies. It didn’t take much for him to leap towards the mutual notion of the one God beyond all doctrine. Moses’ and Christ’s concern was about God and not about Judaism and Christianity, Kutter notes. Law and grace are only different manifestations of the one God. Yet, accepting Judaism and Christianity as lived religions would turn the Jewish-Christian encounter into real dialogue. Jews and Christians will come closer to each other, Kutter maintained, if they would allow themselves to rediscover this common ground beyond all historical religion, and “if the supreme idea of one God becomes their supreme reality again.” If Jewish-Christian dialogue begins with this common bond, with faith in the one God, and with people who live in the reality of this faith, Kutter prophesied, then Jewish-Christian dialogue will have a good chance to prevail.[[51]](#footnote-52)

But Kutter’s approach was just one undercurrent among mainstream Protestants. Of more influence was the third main approach to dialogue, the offspring of the German Awakening theology of mission. This mission approach could rely on the support of the organized church.

This theology of mission is at the core of Leipzig mission director Otto von Harling’s entry *Judenmission* in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.[[52]](#footnote-53) In this entry, Otto von Harling, who sharply criticized anti-Semitism at many occasions,[[53]](#footnote-54) maintains a strong and renewed interest in the mission to the Jews in the 19th and 20th century, although he recognizes that educated Jews increasingly do not convert to Christianity but remain Jewish.

This missionary attitude is the same we recognize in Alfred Jeremias’ essay on *Christianity and Judaism* in *Der Jude*.[[54]](#footnote-55) Naturally, Jewish theologians were appalled by this attitude. Oskar Wolfsberg, for example, called Jeremias tendency to missionize a “disturbing factor” which “prevents Jeremias from objectivity.” As long as Jews are mere objects of mission, Wolfsberg pointed out, dialogue on equal ground is impossible.[[55]](#footnote-56)

In this context, it is important to note that looking at Jews as an object of Protestant mission was not limited to the theologians of the *Heilsgeschichte*. Rather, it was a common position even among liberal theologians. Karl Ludwig Schmidt, for instance, in his public discourse with Martin Buber in the *Stuttgart Lehrhaus* upholds this missionary objective in his parting statement.[[56]](#footnote-57) Hugo Gressmann - who assured his Jewish colleagues at the outset of their lectures at the *Institutum Judaicum* that his Institute’s only mission is the mission for objective research - deemed it necessary to mention his membership in the Protestant missionary society in his public dispute with Emil Brunner in 1926.[[57]](#footnote-58)

At the center of his essay, Alfred Jeremias propounds a negative view of the process of assimilation, which “has damaged Christianity as well as Judaism.” During assimilation, Jews embraced a religiously diluted occident, and thereby “spoiled their own religion.” Judaism is now no longer true to its oriental essence.[[58]](#footnote-59) Reform Judaism, Rationalism, and Intellectualism are blamed for Jewish religious “homelessness.” Finally, Jeremias uses the distinction of “true Christianity” versus “true Judaism.” “True Christianity” is based on the acknowledgment of Christ as Messiah for the world. One essential element of true Christianity is its mission to all people including Jews. Without the idea of mission, Christianity would turn into an amoral principle of culture, Jeremias claims. But Christianity as a mere cultural principle wouldn’t be strong enough to keep anti-Semitism in check. Conversely, Jeremias adds, a christianized Jewry would be strong enough to cut off anti-Semitism.

But what is “true Judaism,” Jeremias wonders and immediately points towards biblical prophetism at its core. Yet unlike the old prophets, modern Jews have lost their longing for reconciliation with God. They consider God’s creation of man in his image a permanent state, rather than a final destination. Yet, for Jeremias, sin is the all-encompassing reality of creation, and he expresses his hope for a Jewish return to the biblical prophets away from the Talmud. This religiously renewed Jewry will then search for the Messiah, and will be open for Christian proselytizing.

Obviously, in this mission theology the interpretation of modernity plays a major role in the approach to dialogue. Contrary to Dibelius, who took issue with Judaism not being modern enough, Jeremias wishes for a renewed Judaism under pre-modern premises. Theological basis for his way to enter the inter-religious encounter is a negative anthropology and the focus on a world determined by the reality of sin. Here, Jeremias comes close to theologians who emphasize human struggle and the need for grace in a broken world. However, unlike his colleagues, Jeremias does not explicitly operate with the distinction of law and grace. Instead, his guiding principle of dialogue is a christological universalism which turns Jews into targets of the missionary.

Thus, a close reading of some texts by Protestant thinkers in this Jewish-Christian encounter in Weimar has shown that on theological grounds these Protestant theologians were unable to welcome their Jewish colleagues. However liberal, modern, historical, or even philo-Semitic they might have considered themselves, they all operated with an exclusivist theological distinction, which made it impossible to fully embrace a dialogue on theological ground. But if these Protestant theologians weren’t able to endorse the dialogue on theological grounds, what made up for theology as a basis of dialogue? The answer is obvious. All Protestant participants also vehemently fought anti-Semitism, and all the racial ideologies which had crept into Christianity, and which soon were beginning to dominate the political and cultural discourse in Weimar. Thus, these Protestant thinkers found their mutual basis for Jewish-Christian dialogue first of all in their fight against anti-Semitism. The increasing dangers of anti-Semitism, apparent in Weimar everyday life, as well as the fight against anti-Semitism and the ideologies of blood and race became a common denominator for Protestants in their relation to their Jewish fellow citizen. The spread of anti-Semitism in Weimar Germany has been noted many times.[[59]](#footnote-60) It also has been noted before that we see a good number of “Protestant leaders” in Weimar Germany fighting anti-Semitism “energetically.”[[60]](#footnote-61) Many efforts were taken by Protestants between 1918 and 1933 in defense of their Jewish fellow citizens.[[61]](#footnote-62) Taking clear sides in the culture wars of Weimar on this issue indicates the full cultural acceptance of German Jews by the Protestant mainstream.

Among the many Protestant examples for the strife with anti-Semitism, some need to be mentioned. Eduard Lamparter’s *Evangelische Kirche und Judentum* (1928) for example was written specifically for Protestant clergy and laity. The small book was an outcome of Lamparter’s activities as a board member of the Association of Defense against Anti-Semitism. It was published with a preface signed by theologians of very different affiliation, among them the liberal theologians Martin Rade and Otto Baumgarten, dialectical theologian Karl Barth, and religious socialists Hermann Schafft and Paul Tillich. This preface pointed at the “uncertain and broken position of the Protestant clergy to the anti-Semitic movement” which will do “great damage to the peaceful relations of the confessions in our fatherland.” Naturally, Judaism was considered to be part of the confessions of the fatherland, and the clergy were asked to proclaim publicly that “banning any race or religious confession is sin against Christ.”[[62]](#footnote-63)

Another outspoken public figure against anti-Semitism was Otto Baumgarten, professor of theology at the University of Kiel, who had become a board member of the Association of Defense against Anti-Semitism in December 1924. At many public appearances, in speeches, essays and pamphlets, Baumgarten took a stand against anti-Semitism. Within a few years he was labeled a philo-Semite, a republican and unpatriotic. Things escalated around the *Bachfest* in Kiel in October 1930, where Baumgarten delivered the sermon in a festive worship service. Nazi students rallied in Kiel’s market square against Baumgarten’s participation. A few days after the *Bachfest*, following a torch march, these students assembled at the house of Baumgarten mocking him.[[63]](#footnote-64)

Also, Hugo Gressmann, the director of the *Institutum Judaicum* referred in his introductory remarks to the lecture series by Jewish scholars explicitly to anti-Semitism in Weimar. Gressmann considered these lectures in the face of Weimar anti-Semitism of enormous importance. According to Gressmann, Jewish scholarship needs academic recognition “especially today where a strong wave of anti-Semitism is going through our people, and where the image of Judaism is distorted.”[[64]](#footnote-65) More examples could be added.

However, by fighting anti-Semitism, the Protestant mainstream also had to define the Jewish-Christian relationship under the new ground rules of Weimar. The arguments used by anti-Semites, often targeted the Christian foundations of German culture. While Germanizing every sphere of life, Jews were rejected as the racially other, and, in the same breath, the legitimacy of the Old Testament as a sacred Christian document was disputed, and theories were out to proof the Arian descent of Jesus of Nazareth. How then did the theologians of the Protestant mainstream deal with the acceptance of Jews not just in a cultural, but in a religious sense? How did they acknowledge the religious component of anti-Semitism which aimed at the very heart of the Jewish-Christian encounter?

A very good summary of the arguments made by Protestant theologians in this regard can be found in Heinrich Frick’s encyclopedia entry *Antisemitismus* in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. In this short entry we find all the major issues raised by Protestants in their strife with anti-Semitism. The entry also displayed the Protestant agenda for inter-religious dialogue, and it thus helps to further explain the reluctance with which Protestant theologians entered this dialogue.[[65]](#footnote-66)

Frick begins his encyclopedia article by pointing out that modern emancipation, which, according to Frick, is based on Protestant freedom of conscience and enlightened tolerance, has overcome traditional anti-Semitism and led to general acceptance.

A new situation has been reached with the racial ideologies of the 19th century. Here, as Frick points out, traditional anti-Semitic arguments are mixed with pseudo-science, anti-Semitism becomes a modern political force, and Christian theology is challenged to respond. Race has been made a key component in the history of men, race theorists claim that all life of mind and religion is supposedly based on racial instincts, and mixture of races makes life less valuable. At the core of this thinking, Frick observes, is the “materialistic idea that blood is the decisive factor of human existence.”

After this summary of the ideologies of race, Frick responds to three widely discussed issues in Germany at that time. First, he rejects the distinction between Arian and Semitic religion, which sketches Judaism as materialistic, self-centered, and legalistic. Comparative study of religion has shown that all religions move from primitive beginnings to higher forms, and thus, Judaism can be looked at as a step by step development of ethical monotheism. Christianity, though distinct and different from Judaism, is based on Judaism and has to be viewed as completion of the prophetic religion of the Old Testament. Secondly, based on biblical sources, Frick rejects the opinion that Jesus is no Jew. Thirdly, he rejects the claim of anti-Semites to ban the Old Testament in the Christian church. The Christian needs the Old Testament because it was the bible of Jesus and of early Christianity. To abandon the Old Testament means to rid oneself of a sense for the historical development of Christianity and of the New Testament’s idea of salvation.

Frick finally summarizes the Protestant mainstream position towards the *Judenfrage*.[[66]](#footnote-67) In regard to the *Judenfrage*, he makes a distinction between morality and ethics versus religion. In a moral sense, Jews have to be considered fellow Germans (*Volksgenossen*) and politics needs to abstain from anti-Semitism. In a religious sense then, he continues, the Christian has to “reject any degradation of mind and faith to functions of the blood,” and to “declare himself to the rule of the mind.” And therefore the Christian has to “advocate the ideas of tolerance, equality, and human dignity for his Jewish fellow citizen.” Moreover, the Christian has to “work together with religious and philosophic Jewish groups to fight together false religion and immorality.” Frick could not have reminded his fellow Protestants about their obligations in their fight against anti-Semitism in more precise and stark words.

Frick, however, adds a crucial final clause to this mainstream position. The Christian has to do all that, Frick adds, by “actively proselytizing among Jews, and by doing so he [the Christian] replaces the blurry racial distinctions and fosters intellectual encounters.” Consequently, the Christian can consider “the religious decision against all superstition of the blood a free action of the human mind.”[[67]](#footnote-68)

In other words, what Frick encourages Protestants to do is to fight anti-Semitism, and to support their Jewish fellow citizen. While Protestant Christians fight anti-Semitism, they can be assured of their religious superiority. Though they are modern, they do not need to abandon their mission to the Jews, because Christianity is a religion beyond ethnicity, which Judaism is not. This difference needs to be communicated in the Jewish-Christian encounter, so that Jews, like any citizen in a modern state, can freely choose Christianity – obviously in their modern Protestant version - as an intellectual choice of a religion beyond race.

In conclusion, Frick’s entry on anti-Semitism is a summary of the positions in the Protestant mainstream. In this entry in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Frick suggests to culturally accept Jews as fellow citizen, while still keeping distance to the Jewish faith, which he, like most of his fellow Protestants, still views as an outmoded pre-modern, race based and historically inferior faith. Thus, mainstream Protestants went into the culture war against anti-Semitism, but they did not reach out to their Jewish fellow fighters on the basis of faith and religion. By doing so, they did not fully acknowledge the religious component of anti-Semitism, and they did not overcome their traditional theological approach to the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Adhering to tolerance, equality, and human dignity did not change the theological attitude with which these thinkers entered the Jewish-Christian encounter in Weimar. Protestant theologians went into this encounter already ‘limping’,[[68]](#footnote-69) and they did not comprehend Judaism as a lived religion. In regard to Jewish-Christian dialogue, Protestant theologians failed to fully accept the challenges Weimar modernity presented. They did not take, as Rabbi Max Dienemann had wished for, “a step together towards the messianic goal.”

1. Max Dienemann, “Judentum und Urchristentum im Spiegel der neuesten Literatur,” in *Monatsschrift fuer Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 71 (1927), 401-416. Dienemann reviews several books of New Testament scholars. Among them are two books by Gerhard Kittel, *Die Probleme des palaestinensischen Spaetjudentums und des Urchristentums* (Stuttgart, 1926); and *Jesus und die Juden* (Berlin, 1926). The first book is dedicated to his Jewish teacher and friend Israel Issar Kahan. The second one was part of a series of books for Christian Students, and is a distillation of the first. See Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft vor der Judenfrage* (Muenchen, 1980), 54-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. In fact, Kittel later turned out to be one of the most ardent anti-Semitic Protestant theologians, who, as William F. Albright already noted in 1947, together with Emanuel Hirsch “must bear the guilt of having contributed more, perhaps, than any other Christian theologian to the mass murder of millions of Jews by the Nazis.” See William F. Albright, “The War in Europe and the Future of Biblical Studies,” in Harold R. Willoughby, *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow* (Chicago, 1947), 162-174 (165). The work of Robert P. Erickson has shed much light on Kittel’s thought and activities. See, i.e., Robert P. Erickson, *Theologians under Hitler* (New Haven, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This lecture series was planned as just the first of many more to come, but it was stopped short because of Gressmann’s sudden death. Hugo Gressmann (ed.), *Entwicklungsstufen der Juedischen Religion* (Giessen, 1927); Ralf Golling/Peter von der Osten-Sacken (eds.), *Hermann L. Strack und das Institutum Judaicum in Berlin* (Berlin, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, “Das Verhaeltnis von protestantischer Theologie und Wissenschaft des Judentum waehrend der Weimarer Republik,” in Walter Grab/Julius H. Schoeps (eds.), *Juden in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart/Bonn, 1986), 153-178; Ulrich Oelschlaeger, *Judentum und evangelische Theologie 1909-1965. Das Bild des Judentums im Spiegel der ersten drei Auflagen des Handwoerterbuchs ‘Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart’* (Stuttgart, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Barbara Suchy, “The Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus (I). From its Beginnings to the First World War,” in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* XXVIII (1983), 205-239; Barbara Suchy, “The Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus (II). From the First World War to its Dissolution in 1933,” in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* XXX (1985), 67-103; Rita R. Thalmann, “Die Schwaeche des Kulturprotestantismus bei der Bekaempfung des Antisemitism,” in Kurt Nowak/Gerard Raulet (eds.), *Protestantismus und Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/M., 1994), 147-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Franz-Heinrich Philipp, “Protestantismus nach 1848,” in Karl Heinrich Rengstorf/Siegfried von Kortzfleisch (eds.), *Kirche und Synagoge. Handbuch zur Geschichte von Christen und Juden*, Band 2 (Stuttgart, 1970), 280-357 (349); Martin Buber, “Die Brennpunkte der juedischen Seele,” in Robert Raphael Geis/Hans-Joachim Kraus (eds.), *Versuche des Verstehens, Dokumente juedisch-christlicher Begegnung aus den Jahren 1918-1933* (Muenchen, 1966), 146-155. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. *Die Kreatur* was published quarterly in Berlin by Lambert Schneider from 1926 to 1930. Editors were Jewish Martin Buber, Protestant Viktor von Weizsaecker, and Catholic Joseph Wittig. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. *Der Jude. Sonderheft: Judentum und Christentum*, (Berlin, 1927). This special edition brought together four essays by Protestant theologians, and seven essays by Jewish intellectuals and theologians. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Martin Buber, “Kirche, Staat, Volk, Judentum. Zwiegespraech im juedischen Lehrhaus in Stuttgart am 14. Januar 1933,” in *Theologische Blaetter* 12 (1933), 257-274. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. The recent summary in the *Theologische Realenzyklopaedie*, for example, though written by one of the most erudite experts of the field, completely omits the Weimar debates. See John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, “Judentum und Christentum,” in *TRE* 17 (1988), 386-403. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Wolfgang E. Heinrichs, *Das Judenbild im Protestantismus des Kaiserreichs* (Giessen, 22004); Christian Wiese, *Wissenschaft des Judentums und der protestantischen Theologie im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Tuebingen, 1999); Marikje Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus und Judentum 1932/1933* (Muenchen, 1990); Wolfgang Gerlach, *Als die Zeugen schwiegen. Bekennende Kirche und die Juden* (Berlin, 21993); Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “‘Wir konnten dem Rad nicht in die Speichen fallen’. Liberaler Protestantismus und ‘Judenfrage’ nach 1933,” in Jochen-Christoph Kaiser/Martin Greschat (eds.), *Der Holocaust und die Protestanten. Analysen einer Verstrickung* (Frankfurt/M., 1988), 151-185. Kurt Nowak, however, emphasizes in his scholarship the Weimar era: See Kurt Nowak, “Protestantismus und Judentum in der Weimarer Republik,” in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 113 (1988), 561-578; and Kurt Nowak, *Kulturprotestantismus und Judentum in der Weimarer Republik* (Goettingen, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Paul Mendes-Flohr has called these inter-religious efforts “largely unsuccessful” as long as the issue at the core of the dialogue was the interpretation of Scripture. However, Mendes-Flohr also recognizes efforts of personal encounter beyond scriptural interpretation. In those personal encounters - Mendes-Flohr mentions the friendship of Paul Tillich and Martin Buber - Jews and Christians discovered the true meaning and challenge of faith and dialogue. See Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Ambivalent Dialogue: Jewish-Christian Theological Encounter in the Weimar Republic” (1987), in Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions. Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity*, (Detroit, 1991), 133-167 (159-160). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Ibid., 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Heinrich Frick, “Antisemitismus,” in *RGG* I (Tuebingen, 21927), 393-397; Otto von Harling, “Judenmission,” in *RGG* III (Tuebingen, 21929), 466-469; Gerhard Kittel, “Judentum III. Judentum und Christentum,” *RGG* III (Tuebingen, 21929), 491-494. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. See *Der Jude*, ibid.; Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven, 1996), 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Hermann Kutter, “Gott und die Ideen,” in *Der Jude. Sonderheft: Judentum und Christentum* (1927), 1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Martin Dibelius, “Mensch und Gott,” in *Der Jude. Sonderheft: Judentum und Christentum* (1927), 16-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Alfred Jeremias, “Christentum und Judentum,” in *Der Jude. Sonderheft: Judentum und Christentum* (1927), 41-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Christoph Schrempf, “Christentuemer, Judentuemer, und die Wahrheit,” in *Der Jude. Sonderheft: Judentum und Christentum* (1927), 82-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. See Kutter, ibid., 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Nowak summarizes the Weimar era as “Weimar – The explosion of modernity.” See Kurt Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland* (Muenchen, 1995), 205-242. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. The First Amendment to the constitution was signed December 15, 1791. It contains two clauses: 1. The prohibition to establish a national religion by the government (“establishment clause”) and 2. The guarantee to exercise religion freely (“free exercise clause”). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. August 11, 1919 was the day when president Friedrich Ebert signed the Weimar constitution, which was written under the chairmanship of Hugo Preuss. See also Gerhard Besier, “Germany and Prussia,” in *Encyclopedia of Religious Freedom*, Catharine Cookson (ed.), (London/New York, 2003), 163-168 (166): “Not until the revolution of 1918 was the power of sovereign princes over the church removed. The constitution of the Weimar Republic established that there was no state church, and also prohibited churches from exercising state-like powers.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der Klassischen Moderne*, Frankfurt/M. 1987, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. See Donald L. Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany* (New Brunswick/London, 22001); Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland*, ibid., 234; Brenner, *Renaissance*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Klaus Tanner, “Protestantische Demokratiekritik in der Weimarer Republik,” in Richard Ziegert (ed.), *Die Kirchen und die Weimarer Republik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1994), 23-36; Hans-Joachim Kraus, “Die evangelische Kirche,” in Werner E. Mosse (ed.), *Entscheidungsjahr 1932. Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik* (Tuebingen, 1965), 249-269; Hans-Joachim Kraus, “Tora und ‘Volksnomos’,” in Erhard Blum/Christian Machholz/Ekkehard W. Stegemann, *Die Hebraeische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte, Festschrift fuer Rolf Rendtorff* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1990), 641-655. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. See Werner E. Mosse (ed.), *Entscheidungsjahr 1932. Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik* (Tuebingen, 1965). For the concept of “culture war” see James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars. The Struggle to define America* (New York, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Beate-Carola Padtberg (ed.), *Das deutsche Judentum und der Liberalismus; German Jewry and Liberalism* (Koenigswinter, 1986); Nowak, *Kulturprotestantismus und Judentum*, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Alan Levenson, “Missionary Protestants as Defenders and Detractors of Judaism: Franz Delitzsch and Hermann Strack,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series 92 (2002), 383-420. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Alexander Szanto, “Sozialistische Stroemungen im Judentum,” *Zeitschrift fuer Religion und Sozialismus* 1,6 (1929), 21-25 (25)and Szanto, “Neues vom religioesen Sozialismus im Judentum,” *ibid.* 3 (1931), 233-236. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Kutter, *ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Baeck himself calls this period of renewal a “renaissance,” which had affected especially the younger generation of German Jews. See Leo Baeck, “Judentum: II B. Neue Zeit und Gegenwart,” *RGG* III (Tuebingen, 21929), 486-491. For the new Jewish theology in Weimar see also: Leo Baeck, “Theologie und Geschichte,” in *Berichte fuer die Lehranstalt fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 49 (1932), 42-54; Michael Brenner, “Leo Baeck und der Wandel des liberalen Judentums waehrend der Weimarer Republik,” in Georg Heuberger/Fritz Backhaus (eds.), *Leo Baeck 1873-1956. Aus dem Stamme der Rabbinern* (Frankfurt/M. 2001), 60-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Harnack developed his ideas in *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1900). Harnack claimed the purity of Jesus’ thought together with the strength of his personality as highest form of religion, which was represented best in modern Protestantism. This highest form of religion stood against the background of a Judaism of ritual and institution, represented by the Pharisees. The book provoked a massive response by Jewish scholars. The best one known today is Leo Baeck’s *The Essence of Judaism* of 1905, which was not the most read back then. Uriel Tal concludes at the end of his essay that modern Judaism did not fit into the modern worldview of liberal Protestant intellectuals. Since these intellectuals were also staunchly opposed to anti-Semitic ideas, Tal suggests that any tensions between liberal Jews and liberal Protestants might be based on the commonality of their worldviews. See Uriel Tal, “Theologische Debatte um das ‘Wesen’ des Judentums,” in Werner E. Mosse (ed.), *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890-1914* (Tuebingen, 1976), 599-632. See also Wolfram Kinzig, *Harnack, Marcion und das Judentum* (Leipzig, 2004); Christian Nottmeier, *Adolf Harnack und die deutsche Politik* (Tuebingen, 2004), 240-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Friedrich Thieberger, “Der juedische Erloesungsgedanke,” in *Der Jude*, ibid., 51-57 (51). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Max Dienemann, “Froemmigkeit in Judentum und Christentum,” in *Der Jude*, ibid., 30-40 (30). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Kittel, *ibid*., 493. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. See, for instance, Kittel, *ibid*., 492. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Dibelius, *ibid*., 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Dibelius, *ibid*., 18. Eleonore Lappin in her discussion of the special edition of *Der Jude* maintains that the dialogue was helpful only in regard to Jewish identity, but not very fruitful for any re-definition of the Jewish-Christian relationship. According to Lappin, the discussion showed “how Jews could live their tradition in a Christian environment, but Judaism and Christianity didn’t come any closer in their religious opinions.” But in her otherwise thorough and erudite scholarship, she dismisses the Christian arguments too easily and she seems to disregard the previous debate on Harnack’s *Wesen* when she writes that “The Christian arguments were known before, but now there was a clear Jewish response.” See Eleonore Lappin, *Der Jude 1916-1928. Juedische Moderne zwischen Universalismus und Partikularismus* (Tuebingen, 2000), 227-241 (241). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Jeremias, *ibid*., 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Dienemann, “Froemmigkeit,” *ibid*., 30. Still in 1937 Hans Joachim Schoeps draws on similar ideas while paralleling the Christian Lord’s prayer with the Jewish Kaddish prayer. See Schoeps, *Juedisch-Christliches Religionsgespraech in 19 Jahrhunderten* (Berlin, 1937), 158-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Kittel, *ibid*., 493. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. It is clear from the context that the term “law” refers to the ceremonial law of the Torah as well as the divine commandments. For Kittel, the distinction between law and grace plays out in at least four more areas: The absolute commandments of the Sermon on the Mount which stand against any fulfillment of God’s commandments as supposed by Jewish ethics; the authority of Jesus as the ultimate completion of the Torah; the notion of God for whom all human merit counts for nothing, and whose love welcomes the sinner out of pure forgiveness; and finally, the last certainty of salvation which Christians find in God’s forgiveness in Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Dibelius, *ibid*., 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. See, for instance, Martin Dibelius, *Geschichtliche und uebergeschichtliche Religion im Christentum* (Goettingen, 1925), 100-101 and 146. Like Kittel, Dibelius seems to refer to the ceremonial law as well as God’s divine commandments when he speaks of “the law.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Dibelius, “Mensch und Gott,” *ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. “The Judaism which edited the Mishnah did not have the ambition to defend its theology with the means of Hellenistic theology, and thus it has to do without a central intellectual element of the occident” (*ibid*., 19). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. In *Der Jude* it is especially Max Eschelbacher, who criticizes Dibelius’ separation of law and grace. According to Eschelbacher, Judaism also teaches the imperfection of man and the necessity of divine grace. Additionally, Eschelbacher reminds his Protestant colleague that the concept of Christian grace has its roots in the Hebrew bible. In Eschelbacher’s opinion, the lack of clear religious ethics on the Christian side is what separates both Judaism and Christianity. See Max Eschelbacher, “Das juedische Gesetz,” *Der Jude. Sonderheft: Judentum und Christentum*, (Berlin, 1927), 58-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. While Luther assumed that faith in the gospel eventually produces good works with a kind of inner logic, Melanchthon acknowledged the necessity of positive laws for good works. Melanchthon’s position later became the position of the theological majority. See, i.e., article VI of the *Confessio Augusta* (1530), in Robert Kolb/Timothy J. Wengert (eds.), *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, 2000): “It is also taught that such faith should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God’s sake *but not place trust in them as if thereby to earn grace before God*” (emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Kutter, *ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Religious socialist Paul Tillich gave this living in the reality of faith a more political spin when he underscored the common bond of Jews and Christians in the “prophetical protest against political romanticism.” See Paul Tillich, *Die sozialistische Entscheidung* (1933), (Berlin, 1980), 30.

    Former pastor Christoph Schrempf (1860-1944) also had an anti-establishment approach to inter-religious dialogue, and tried to detach the dialogue from historical religions. Since Schrempf had resigned from his office as pastor, however, he was largely contained to the role of an outsider in Weimar theology. His “Unitarianism” was of no lasting influence in and beyond Weimar. His short contribution to the matter, in *Der Jude. Sonderheft: Judentum und Christentum* (1927), 82-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Otto von Harling, *ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. See Gerlach, *ibid*., 31, who cites Harling’s article: “Antisemitisms in the Christian press” of 1920. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Jeremias, *ibid*. An appreciative obituary can be found in the *Central Verein Zeitung* 5 (January 1935). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Oskar Wolfsberg, “Christliche Stimmen ueber das Judentum,” in *Der Jude. Sonderheft: Judentum und Christentum* (Berlin, 1927), 83-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. See Mendes-Flohr, *ibid*., 151-159. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Rudolf Smend, *Deutsche Alttestamentler in drei Jahrhunderten* (Goettingen, 1989), 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. In this context, Zionism is criticized by Jeremias for not being religious enough. According to Jeremias, a religious state in Palestine wouldn’t be a very enticing idea for modern, assimilated European Jews. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. See, for instance, Peukert, *ibid*., 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. Niewyk, *ibid*., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. In this regard, Matthias Wolfes refers to the conflict between Rudolf Bultmann and Georg Wobbermin. See Matthias Wolfes, *Protestantische Theologie und modern Welt* (Berlin, 1999), 334. At the end of his *Kulturprotestantismus und Judentum*, Kurt Nowak notes that the cultural, liberal Protestants who were faithful to the Weimar constitution were among the most important advocates of Jews in Weimar (see Nowak, *ibid*.). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. See Robert Raphael Geis/Hans Joachim Kraus, *ibid*., 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. Otto Baumgarten, *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz* (Gotha, 1926). Hasko von Bassi, *Otto Baumgarten. Ein ‘moderner Theologe’ im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/M., 1988), 240-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. Hugo Gressmann, *ibid*., 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. Hermann Frick, *ibid*. Frick had already spoken up against anti-Semitism at other occasions. In his preface to Julius Goldstein’s *Rasse und Politik* (Schluechtern, 1921), for instance, he considered anti-Semitism “one of the most concerning illnesses of the present” (13). Here, Frick also underscored the idea of biblical prophetism as common bond between Jews and Christians, and considered any move away from the biblical prophetical heritage a move towards paganism (9). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. See Werner E. Mosse (ed.), *Entscheidungsjahr 1932. Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik* (Tuebingen, 1965). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. In this additional clause we can easily identify three groups of the Protestant mainstream, merged together by Frick in an almost congenial manner. We can identify the old *heilsgeschichtliche* theology with its emphasis on the mission to the Jews (“actively proselytizing among Jews”); we also recognize traditional liberal theological thinking in the emphasis on the free mind and its activity, and in the degradation of race and blood (“blurry racial distinctions”, superstition of the blood”); and finally, we can acknowledge a new religious language at the very end of the essay by Frick’s use of the term “religious decision.” This term was familiar to Weimar Protestants at least since Friedrich Gogarten’s *Die religioese Entscheidung* (Jena, 1921), which quickly became a key text among the young dialectical theologians. In *Die religioese Entscheidung*, Friedrich Gogarten, in his typical expressive language, rejected religion as an arrogant human enterprise to overcome the absolute contradiction between creator and creature. The text represents the attempt to define a new language of God and revelation beyond history. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. I borrow this term from Ulrich Stutz’s classical characterization of the relationship of Church and state in Weimar as a “limping separation.” See Ulrich Stutz, *Die paepstliche Diplomatie unter Leo XIII* (Berlin, 1926), 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)