"When Jesus Spoke Yiddish":

I concede: the story of Yiddish translations of the New Testament is a minor footnote in

Jewish literary history. But that makes it all the more curious that among the first four or five

Yiddish books ever printed was Paul Helic's translation of New Testament. The translation

appeared in 1540, only six years after the three Helic brothers founded the first Hebrew-language

press in Poland, and three years after they converted as a group to Roman Catholicism, a

conversion that may have something to do with the press's financial difficulties. (SLIDE 2) To

put this in context, Martin Luther's German New Testament translation appeared in 1522, only

18 years earlier (SLIDE 3). The timing of this last detail is no coincidence: Despite being a new

Catholic, Helic was happy to ride Luther's coattails, relying on the overlap between German and

Yiddish to produce a Yiddish translation that was more-or-less a transcription of Luther's

German into Hebrew characters. Helic seems to have barely paid attention as he carried out his

work, or perhaps he was fuzzy about the details of his new religion. He dedicated the volume to

the archbishop of Cracow in the pious hope that his translation would bring errant Jews to true

Catholic faith, but in Romans 3:28 he faithfully repeated Luther's Protestant heresy, adding the

word *aleyn* to the famous verse—"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith *alone*

apart from the deeds of the law." A decade later, Paul resurfaced in Istanbul, having reverted to

Judaism and changed his name again, not back to Samuel, the name he had abandoned in favor

of Paul, but rather to Shavuel, to mark his repentance. It was only desperate publishers or Jewish

converts who were willing to steal Luther's work for Catholic use. Luther himself complained

about the papists who declared him a heretic, even while being happy to repackage his

translation under their own name. For Yiddish translators of the New Testament in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, most of whom were German Protestant missionaries, the model Helic had set of taking advantage of the closeness of German and Yiddish to print Luther in Hebrew letters was just too easy to resist (there were also other reasons for this choice). They also obscured this larceny, as so many others had done, by propagating the fiction that, as good Protestants, they were translating, as Luther had, directly from the Greek.

But the most sustained efforts to proselytize Jews through New Testament translations occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth-century, and were initiated by British rather than German missionaries. (SLIDE 4). In the two centuries since the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded in London in 1804, the Bible in whole or part was translated into nearly two thousand languages (SLIDE 5). Among these were a significant number in Jewish languages. By 1851, the Bible Society reported translations not only into Hebrew and Yiddish, but also into Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-German, Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian (SLIDE 6). Bible societies also produced a number of parallel editions designed to appeal to Jews, with a Hebrew New Testament on the right and German, French, Hungarian, Italian, Russian, Polish, Turkish, English, Romanian, Portuguese or Yiddish on the left-facing page. Aside from these Bible translations, missionaries also published and publish other materials, including stories directed to Jewish children. (SLIDE 7)

In many respects, these Jewish-language translations were no different from the thousand other Bible translations produced by Bible societies: As part of the founding principle of the Bible Societies, these translations skirt doctrinal controversy by avoiding notes or commentary. But just as in other translations directed toward non-Jews, editors and publishers find ways around these restrictions to communicate with specific readers. Bible Societies disseminated

(SLIDE 8) not only official reports but also more popular fundraising publications, which featured sentimental stories of the powerful effect of the New Testament on Jews as on other prospective converts. Thus, one missionary reported that a Jewish woman described the Yiddish New Testament as "heavenly words, which are so comforting to a widow's heart." Another missionary described approaching Jewish immigrants on board a ship bound for America, who were so eager to hear the Christian message that "They fought for a NT in Yiddish."

For all the congruence between the broader project of global evangelism and the mission to the Jews, the translations produced for Jews inevitably had some unique characteristics, given the special nature of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Jews were particularly prized converts, as evidenced by references in Bible Society literature to the "ministry of special importance." In some varieties of evangelical Christianity, the conversion of the Jews played a crucial role in visions of Jesus's Second Coming, amplifying the stakes for missionaries aiming at Jews. Within Bible Societies themselves, Jewish-born converts were valued as informants and language-experts, not only in the target languages of missionary publications and in the cultural peculiarities of the populations missionaries targeted, a role they shared with other converts and native informants the world over. In the case of Jews, they also provided expertise in the sources to be translated, in the biblical exegesis that could ease a translator's task, and in the Jewish culture that was the background of the New Testament; these roles had deep roots in the historical Christian reliance on Jewish sources, but they held new importance in the millenialist context of the spread of Bible Societies (SLIDE 9). Jews were more likely than other converts to rise in the ranks of these Bible Societies—one prominent example is Isaac Salkinson, a Russian-born convert who worked on the New Testament in Hebrew, and was the first Hebrew translator of both Milton and Shakespeare. His associate Christian David Ginsburg (1836-1914), (SLIDE

10) another Russian-born convert and Bible scholar active in the Liverpool chapter of the London Mission to the Jews, completed Salkinson's Hebrew New Testament after his death. The work of these prominent and educated converts delighted missionaries, and raised hopes that other Jews would follow; thus, Scottish Home and Foreign Mission Record reported in 1895 on the European distribution and circulation of "tens of thousands of the Salkinson-Ginsburg Bibles," appending to this the hopeful description of a Rabbi Lichtenstein who had recently preached the Gospel in a synagogue in Budapest. The report concluded: "Surely it is the part of the Church of Scotland to not stand idly by, but to do her part in the great ingathering that is at hand." This mission to the Jews was not only a matter of correcting the Jewish blindness toward Christ, but indeed "a gift to Israel, in recognition of what the Jews had given the world in the Hebrew Bible and in Jesus." The report added that support for the Scottish mission would also "atone in some measure for the errors and misdeeds of the past in the Church's treatment of the Jews." Scottish Christians could do no better to right these wrongs than to send in contributions to help house missionaries in areas with large Jewish populations. Similar language appears everywhere the literature of the Jewish mission, and it is worth tracing its implicit economy. The Old Testament is the Jewish gift to the world, and it is only just that this gift be repaid by a commensurate Christian one, the New Testament. But if this New Testament is somewhat shorter than the one the Jews bestowed on the world, it has the added power of saving Jewish souls by correcting Jewish error. This redemption,--and the word redemption, we should recall, has economic as well as theological resonance--atones not for the sin of Jewish deicide (tactfully unmentioned in most Bible Society publications) but rather for the Christian sins of historical persecution of Europe's Jews. But if charges of Jewish murder remain outside this discourse, the Jewish perception of the New Testament as not a gift but a threat, part and parcel of the "errors

and misdeeds of the past", is similarly unmentioned. The gift economy of the mission to the Jews is only half the story.

The unique relationship between Christianity and Judaism—in which Jews are both target of eschatological hopes and source of Christian genetic anxieties—also reflected itself on the linguistic level of missionary translation. In the one hand, Christianity was more familiar to the Jews than it was to, say, the New Caledonians or the Thai: Jews had long lived among Christians and shared a sacred text and many religious concepts with them. Unlike Mongolian, for instance, which lacked words not only for Messiah and Sabbath but also for palm tree and pomegranate, Jewish languages possessed a rich vocabulary from which a translator could draw. These were perhaps more lexical than semantic or pragmatic equivalents—is it really true that the Jews share the word messiah or Sabbath with Christians? For some translators, though, there could be no doubt about these resonances. Translators rendering the New Testament in Hebrew sometimes reported that their experiences were less translation than retroversion, that is, uncovering the lost original of a translated text. The Baptist minister Robert Lindsey (SLIDE 11), working on a Hebrew Gospel of Mark in Jerusalem in the 1960s, wrote that his work gave him the "frightening feeling that I was as much in the process of 'restoring' an original Hebrew work as in creating a new one," and spoke of "the tantalizing possibility" that he was discovering "the exact words of Jesus himself." (SLIDE 12) For Matthew, the Gospel richest in Hebraisms and sometimes believed to be a Greek translation of an original Hebrew text, this effect was even more pronounced: Verse 1:21 ("And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins," KJV) makes sense *only* in Hebrew translation, the language in which the etymological connection between the name Jesus and the concept of

salvation is clear, as in Salkinson-Ginsburg: *ve-hi yoledet ben vekarata et sh'mo* **yeshua***, ki hu* **yoshia** *et amo mehat'oteihem*.

But all Jewish languages have Hebrew components, which might be mobilized to produce a similarly uncanny effect. For Yiddish, such a recovery effect could only be achieved as long as translators were willing to leave behind the familiar Luther Bible and mobilize a more idiomatic, more "Jewish" Yiddish, one which drew more fully on in its Hebrew component. Such a fully Jewish Yiddish New Testament appeared only with the 1941 publication of *Der bris khadoshe* by Henry (Chayim) Einspruch (SLIDE 13). Typically, missionary Bibles find retranslation much sooner, with the first generation of Christian converts who are also native speakers discovering the mistakes and infelicities of the first missionary efforts. Why the long delay, then, in producing a more idiomatic Yiddish translation? Certainly the strong pull of Luther's canonical German New Testament, and the ease with which it could be rendered in Hebrew letters, played a part. It is also true that missionaries shared a sense with converts and, beginning with the Enlightenment, even Jewish intellectuals, that Yiddish was not really a language, it was a *Zhargon*, a jargon. It is hard to overstate the stigma that surrounded Yiddish, the visceral distaste of non-Jews and acculturated Jews for what was considered something like the "language of Caliban", a horrendously mispronounced, ungrammatical mishmash of various languages, spoken by the unwashed Jewish masses because they had no access to a more civilized tongue. Could the sacred words of the New Testament really be poured into so flawed, dirty, and unaesthetic a vessel? (Jesus may have spoken a similarly denigrated Galilean dialect of Aramaicized Hebrew, and of course, Koine itself is kind of Greek patois, but that's a different story.) It was true that Yiddish-speaking Jews could hardly understand missionaries who used a Yiddish "corrected" toward German; they mocked this odd language as "missionary Yiddish."

Nevertheless, missionaries persisted, since, as one German missionary put it: "A Yiddish purified toward German is already a step toward a Judaism purified toward Christianity." With this logic, a New Testament in Germanized Yiddish paved the way to the baptismal font. In some sense, it already embodied the transformation that it hoped to effect.

The man who inaugurated a new era of Yiddish New Testament translation, Henry Chaim Einspruch, was born into a Szanzer Hasidic home in Poland, spent the years 1909-1911 in Palestine as a Labor Zionist, and after returning to Poland and embracing Christianity, immigrated in 1913 to the United States. He graduated from McCormick Theological Seminary in 1920, and embarked on a mission to the Jewish community of Baltimore. Notice that I have not mentioned his conversion, for the simple reason that Einspruch never converted to Christianity (SLIDE 14), deeming his allegiance to evangelical Lutheranism a true fulfillment of his Judaism rather than apostasy or betrayal. He married an Amish woman, Marie Erlach, who died about ten years ago at the age of 102; they communicated in an odd marital idiolect: she spoke to him in Pennsylvania Dutch and he spoke to her in Yiddish. Einspruch achieved a certain infamy in Baltimore for standing on a soapbox in front of various Orthodox synagogues on Sabbath, preaching the Good News in Yiddish (or, as he would put it, di bsure toyve of Yeshua hanoytsri) to those leaving services.

Despite Einspruch's affiliation with the United Lutheran Church, the new translation left Luther far behind. Its model was rather the Yiddish translation of the Hebrew Bible by Yehoash (Solomon Blumgarten), which was handed down on Mount Bronx in 1926 to great acclaim (SLIDE 15). The main difference between Einspruch's New Testament and Yehoash's Bible is that Einspruch's Yiddish is persistently more Jewish (explain that there are often variants, and

people can choose more or less). While Einspruch hewed closely to Yehoash's high modernist literary style, often quoting him where when he needed to cite the Old Testament, he also added a homier, more Jewish element missing from Yehoash, whose project was to produce a worldly "cultural Bible" for secular Jews. The resulting effect is that of the two great twentieth-century Yiddish Bible translation projects, Einspruch's and Yehoash's, the Yiddish New Testament is more Jewish than the Yiddish Hebrew Bible: I hope that one example can suffice: Yehoash translated the Hebrew word *sefer* (holy book) as *bukh* (the more secular and neutral, German-derived word). Einspruch, however, translated the Greek word *biblios* as *sefer*. Biblios, of course, was presumably the Greek translation for the Hebrew word sefer, but that seems not to have occurred to Yiddish translators before Einspruch.

Einspruch's work is perhaps more profitably compared with its immediate predecessor, Bergman's widely circulated *Dos Neye Testament* (London, 1887, SLIDE 16) generally stayed in Luther's shadow: Bergman of course translates *biblios* as *bukh*. He also neglects the opportunity, at every turn, to remind his readers that Jesus was Jesus: Thus, Bergman's disciples address Jesus as *lerer* or *meister*, and his title for *The Book of Acts*, following Luther, is *Di apostolgeshikhte.* Einspruch's disciples, on the other hand, call Jesus *rebe*, and the Book of Acts is rendered as *Di maysim fun di shlikhim*, a title with significantly more Jewish and even Hasidic resonance (SLIDE 17). Where Jesus, at the Last Supper, "took bread and blessed it" in the King James Version and in Bergmann, Einspruch's Yeshua makes a *brokhe* over the *matse.* The seven angels in the Book of Revelation blow "seven trumpets" on Judgment Day; Eichhorn's angels are apparently more Jewish than Bergmann's, since they blow *zibn shoyfres,* "seven shofars." It is not just that the Hebraic component of Einspruch's translation is richer than Bergmann's and others. His Hebrew was also better, more idiomatic, even than that of the widely praised

Salkinson-Ginsburg: When Jesus comes to fulfill the Torah, in Matthew 5, the Salkinson-Ginsburg has "*lemalot et ha-Torah*," while Einspruch is more faithful to Jewish idiom in having Jesus *mekayem der toyre*. Whether or not that Hebrew phrase was beneath the Greek of Matthew, it certainly rang truer as a Jewish sentiment to the average contemporary reader. In these and other decisions, Einspruch was reflecting not only on strictly linguistic or exegetical issues. He also was expressing his sense of the deep and close relationship between Jews and Christians, Judaism and Christianity. By drawing out the Jewish cultural and linguistic meanings that lay hidden beneath the apparently foreign text of the New Testament, Einspruch was also expressing his own profound sense that Judaism and Christianity stood in no necessary contradiction. As a translator, Einspruch was expressing his own conviction that conversion was unnecessary for Jewish Christians. In this he participated in a broader historical trend, in which Jewish Christians, whether they had converted or not, formed separate Hebrew-Christian congregations in the early years of the twentieth century; later in the century, they joined messianic Jewish congregations, or Jews for Jesus, in which adherents (only some of whom were born Jews) proudly kept their Jewish names if they were fortunate enough to have one, and took on new Jewish names along with new Christian beliefs. It was only within this cultural and linguistic environment that the first truly idiomatic Yiddish New Testament could be written.

For all Einspruch's sense of the closeness of Judaism and Christianity, he could hardly avoid dealing with the fissures in that picture, which already appear in the text itself, and not only in its afterlife. The Gospel of John is no doubt the most (shall we say) *challenging* to Jewish ears, and neither Salkinson-Ginsburg nor Einspruch do much to render John's reports about the persecuting and blind Jews—*Hayehudim* or *di yidn*—more palatable to Jewish ears (it was only

more recently that a messianic Jewish and progressive workaround was discovered, by translating "Hoy ioudaiyoi" as "the Judeans" or "the Jewish leaders.") But if the Yiddish Gospel of John posed the challenge of attracting Jewish readers, it had the virtue of reflecting its translators' own charged circumstances: the notion that Judaism and Christianity are rival siblings or twins, battling even before their birth, has deep roots in both rabbinic and patristic sources. But with the parting of the ways, this sibling rivalry became largely metaphorical, except, that is, for Jewish converts to Christianity. For Einspruch, son of a Sandzer Hasid, the adoption of Christianity brought him into open conflict with actual kin, friends or former friends, parents, comrades, colleagues. (SLIDE 18). He left Poland for America to escape these tensions, but after his time at the seminary, Einspruch took up residence in the very heart of Baltimore's Orthodox neighborhood, apparently reveling in the proximity of Jews while no doubt (if we can picture the reception he received) also absorbing their abuse. The book of John, in which "the Jews" cruelly persecute a good Jewish man whose only crime is that he yearns to redeem their souls, may have been an *expression* of Einspruch's own experience of Christianity, rather than a challenge to his ability to attract Jewish readers. (SLIDE 19)

It is not John but rather Paul, I would argue, that posed the greatest challenge for Jewish-Christian translators. As Martin Buber points out, Paul's theology rests heavily on a prior mistranslation in the Septuagint, in which the Hebrew word Torah, which means—well, everything—is rendered in the Greek as *nomos*—which is usually translated into English as Law. "Without the change of meaning in the Greek sense," Buber writes, "the Pauline dualism of law and faith, life from works and life from grace, would miss its most important presupposition." Law may have its opposites in faith and grace, but Torah easily absorbs those concepts in its more capacious grasp.

For translators of Paul into Hebrew or Yiddish, *nomos* seemed to find a ready equivalent in the term *Torah*—restoring the Jewish concept that lay originally behind nomos. The return to Torah indeed works beautifully when Jesus speaks of himself as the fulfillment of the Torah, but the strategy falls apart when it's Paul doing the talking. Pauline theology sets itself up not as the fulfillment of but rather a victory over the Law, and it is only the narrower term that allows Paul to see *nomos* as something so unpleasant that humans need to be rescued from it. Einspruch discovers a lexical equivalent, indeed, performs an apparent retroversion, but he fails to take into account the pragmatic, semantic, associations of each term in their respective cultures. Torah, whatever the dictionary says or the Septuagint believes, is not nomos, and nomos is not Torah. Translation history, that is, cannot be so easily reversed, once a community of interpretation has been built on it. When Paul's letter to the Galatians assures his readers that Christ redeemed them from the curse of the Law, the Hebrew or Yiddish translation renders Paul not less but rather *more* difficult to swallow, for his Jewish if not his Galatian readers. Einspruch renders this pivotal theological claim: "*Moshiah hot uns oysgeleyzt fun der klole fun der toyre*" (or in Salkinson-Ginsburg: "*Hamashiach padah et nafshenu me'kilelat hatorah*"). Let me translate into Yinglish, which I hope most of you understand: "Moshiach saved us from the curse of the Torah." Unlike the promise that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, this sentence is not so much offensive as nonsensical, combining recognizably Jewish terms in ways that their internal Jewish significations rule out. Such ostensible "recovery" projects as Einspruch's Yiddish version of Galatians may have attempted to demonstrate how embedded Pauline Christianity was within Jewish sources. But precisely by translation into Jewish idiom, it also rendered visible the great chasm that separated Paul from the world of rabbinic and traditional values, and continued to separate Einspruch from his Orthodox family and neighbors.

Missionary translators like Einspruch who were working within this complex field of resonance and fissure, equivalence and difference, had a double task: to mobilize the closeness of Judaism and Christianity wherever it existed, while sidestepping those places in which Judaism and Christianity, Jews and Christians, had gone their radically separate ways (SLIDE 20). And they had to do so without the aid of prefaces or commentaries, as the Bible Society had ruled. While keeping to the letter of this law, missionary translators managed to evade its spirit, conveying theologically charged material not only through translation choices but also through epigraphs, advertisements, illustrations, and book covers (SLIDE 21): Thus, while missionaries focused their efforts on distributing the New Testament to Jews, since Jews could find their Hebrew Bibles elsewhere, the translations they circulated managed to telegraph the *connection* between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament; both Bergman's *Dos neye Testament* and Einspruch's *Der bris khadoshe* open with a well-chosen epigraph from Jeremiah, promising in Hebrew and Yiddish translation that God will establish "a new covenant" (*brit hadashah*, or, in Yehoash's version, *a neyem bund*) with the House of Israel and Judah. The phrase appears five times in the New Testament, but by choosing their epigraph from the Hebrew Bible, Bergman and Einspruch strive to link the New Testament with a text more canonical for Jews. Making a theological and psychological claim on potential Jewish readers, these tactics let them know that the book they are holding had been promised by God to *them*, in *their* Torah, however dangerous and unfamiliar the New Testament might feel to them.

The strategies that characterize the Christian mission to the Jews reflect more than theological sympathies—or lack of sympathy—between the religions. It was well known on both sides of the missionary enterprise that the Jews felt for Christianity a visceral distrust that was undoubtedly harder to overcome than the simple ignorance missionaries encountered in other

contexts. The missionary report about Jews fighting for a New Testament on board a ship bound for America concluded with a much more credible complaint about a certain rabbi on board who tried to stop these Jews from even touching the book. Einspruch was unable to find an American Yiddish press willing to print his translation, and was compelled to raise money to purchase his own press (SLIDE 22) the press, paid for by another Jewish Christian and longtime supporter, Harriet Lederer, was donated to the National Yiddish Book Center in the 1980s. (SLIDE 23). Jews tended to have a double relationship with Christian missionaries: On the one hand, rejection and hostility at the perceived threat of Christian mission, on the other hand, a proud dismissal of the paltry number of converts that resulted from missionary efforts. In the eighteenth century, yeshiva boys searched out copies of Christian Moeller's abridged Yiddish New Testament and consigned them to the flames. And while we know from missionary reports that roughly three quarters of a million Yiddish New Testaments were distributed over the nineteenth and twentieth century, a folkloric counter-discourse describes this flood of books as having ended up being used to wrap fish, or worse. (SLIDE 24) Levi Eshkol, attempting to quiet public anxiety about missionary activities in the State of Israel in a 1964 Knesset address, tried to put the issue in perspective by noting that, in Israel, only 201 Jews had converted to either Christianity or Islam since 1948, a period in which over four thousand Christians and Muslims had converted to Judaism. Not bad, for a religion that took such pride in not seeking converts.

But it seems to me that Jews often fail to understand that missionaries did not necessarily count success by the number of converts they made. The missionary enterprise is not a business plan based on a cost-benefit analysis but rather an integral expression of evangelical identity. Translators generally saw the exegetical and literary exercises at the basis of their work as their own reward, even if they continued to hope that the uncanny effect of a Hebrew-speaking

Matthew or—so help me, a Yiddish-speaking John—would not be lost on Jewish readers. (SLIDE 25) For translator-converts, the act of translation also established their sincerity and usefulness to their new communities, and symbolically expressed the fantasy of Jewish-Christian reconciliation. Translation was thus a kind of performance, functioning as the *embodiment* of certain theological principles concerning the relations between Jesus and Judaism, the Old and New Testaments, the Hebraic substratum underlying the Greek of the Gospels, and so on. Missionary translations like *Der bris hadoshe* or *Habrit hadasha*, in their textual conflation of Jewish language and Christian content, were, in this sense, already-achieved conversions, whatever their effects in the real world. These translations-as-conversions could take different forms, first Germanizing the ugly jargon of Yiddish-speaking Jews in New Testament Yiddish, and then—with Einspruch's dramatic reversal of this technique—Judaizing Christianity by restoring to Jesus his original Jewish speech and world.

Art designers participated in the project of forging a Jewish New Testament, fashioning books designed to look at home on a traditional Jewish bookshelf. The beautiful second edition of Einspruch's *Bris khadoshe*, for example, features a Star of David on the cover (SLIDE 26) and is lavishly illustrated by artwork taken, without permission or attribution, from the instantly recognizable work of the Jewish artist and illustrator Ephraim Moses Lilien. Lilien's oeuvre includes a range of Jewish images, from representations of biblical scenes to modern images and—most famously—Zionist iconography (SLIDE 27). But the publishers of the second edition ignored images that might evoke Jewish life in first-century Palestine, choosing rather from Lilien's representations of traditional Jewish iconography, and more particularly, images of traditional Jews (SLIDE 28). Thus, the letter to the Hebrews suggests that Paul was writing not to his contemporaries but to all Jews in generations to come. And *Di besoyre loyt Matya* (SLIDE

14

29) opens with a rendering of a pious old Jewish man wearing a yarmulke and wrapped in a *tallis* reading a *sefer* (a traditional or sacred book) by candlelight, providing a visual echo of the word *sefer* in the first line. Einspruch's translation choice and the illustration together signify that this is a *sefer*, and not a *bukh*, much less the *treyf posl* that traditional Jewish culture generally considered the New Testament to be. The image that opens Einspruch's New Testament, then, is an illustration not of the text it accompanies but rather of its ideal reception, imagining and in some sense supplying the traditional Jewish reader who will fulfill Einspruch's eschatological hope that Jews would embrace the New Testament as an authentic part of their heritage.

The actual rather than imaginary reception of Einspruch's translation may be rather surprising. Despite the financial and logistical difficulties Einspruch encountered in getting his translation printed, when the translation finally appeared it was greeted with admiration and respect in the Yiddish literary press; Einspruch got an especially warm review from the Polish-Mexican-Canadian-Yiddish poet Melekh Ravitsh (SLIDE 30). Just to be clear: Despite his failure to submit to the baptismal font, Einspruch was no liberal or progressive Jewish Christian but rather a passionate believer in the dispensational millenialist creed in its Lutheran Evangelical form, as well as a tireless, and no doubt tiresome, missionary. Ravitsh, on the other hand, was a secular Yiddish modernist, a champion of Spinoza and critic of both Zionism and traditional Judaism, who was committed to a worldly, cosmopolitan diaspora Jewish nationalism. Nevertheless, Ravitsh's review makes no mention of Einspruch's missionary efforts, focusing rather on the closeness of Einspruch's New Testament and Yehoash's Yiddish translation of the Hebrew Bible, and calling the translation "beautiful" and the translator a "master of the finest nuances of the language." Ravitsh delicately continues:

15

For well known reasons the NT has remained for many of us Jews a book sealed with seven seals. And that is truly a pity, for to some 700 million people it is a sacred work. A cultured person should know such a work; I recommend it to every intelligent Jew.

This new translation, in Ravitsh's view, was a welcome contribution to Yiddish literature, in some ways indeed a gift to the Jewish people.

The positive reviews of Einspruch's translation are even more remarkable given the outcry that had greeted the publication, the year before, of the English translation of *The Nazarene*, Sholem Asch's novel that explored the Jewishness of Jesus. (SLIDE 31) Among other sins, Asch was accused of apostasy and of having written a piece of missionary propaganda. But apostasy, in Asch's case, had a secular Yiddishist meaning rather than a religious Jewish one: Asch's great sin was not proselytizing but rather having published first in English translation. Einspruch, who actually *was* a missionary, purchased his own press to get around the boycott of his work. But when the Yiddish daily *Forverts* refused to print the serialized Yiddish version of *Der man fun natseres* (I should add that while the Forverts was a secular and socialist publication, the press operators were almost uniformly Orthodox), Asch took the more treasonous route of finding an English translator.

The different receptions of Asch and Einspruch must be understood, then, less in the context of Jewish-Christian relations than within the project of modern Yiddish culture. The twentieth century brought literary translations not only of the Hebrew Bible but also of Byron, Dostoyevsky, Goethe, Gogol, Hugo, Kipling, the Koran, Lao-Tzu, Shakespeare, Shaw, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Zola and many others. On such a diverse bookshelf—why *not* a Yiddish New Testament? In fact, modern Jewish intellectuals, artists, and writers often took a special interest in Christianity (SLIDE 32). The Yiddish literary "reclamation of Jesus" had many significations and motivations: it signified the Jewish entry into the European literary tradition;

was an the assertion of Jewish literary universalism; served as a bitterly ironic commentary on Christian persecution of Jews (SLIDE 33); worked as a critique of Jewish prejudices against other religions; expressed a sincere embrace of Jesus's ethical principles; rebelled against Jewish parochialism; and reminded Christians of the Jewish roots of their roots. What the modern use of Christian images in Jewish literature almost never *did* mean was apostasy. The term apostasy, in the scale of secular Yiddishist values, was reserved for those who abandoned the project of enriching Yiddish culture. Those who actually became Christian could be forgiven, as long as their Christianity took the form of a beautiful Yiddish style.

Einspruch's project resonated within modernist Yiddish culture for even more specific reasons: Einspruch shared with the secular Yiddish intelligentsia an appreciation for a literary Yiddish freed from its dependence on and subjugation to German, in which Hebraic synonyms were to be preferred and the distinctive shape that Yiddish had taken, as it moved eastward and lost its connections to German, were preserved. In the case of Yiddish modernists, these language ideologies served to construct a national tongue of Jewish coherence and integrity; in the case of Einspruch, this same preference for Yiddish linguistic autonomy worked to construct a more Jewish Jesus. The rapprochement envisioned by convert-translators on Jewish-Christian religious grounds thus indeed took place, only not on the religious soil Einspruch had plowed. (Slide 34) Remarkably, the secular Yiddish poet was able to counter Einspruch's missionary zeal with something more powerful than dismissal or abuse: the calm acknowledgement that Yiddish culture was commodious enough to welcome the contributions of even this Yiddish speaker. In the year of our Lord 1941, the cosmopolitan Spinozist and the evangelical missionary welcomed with one voice a Jesus who spoke Yiddish—if only for the briefest moment.