

Negotiating Religion in Search for Equality. Jewish-Christian Dynamics in Prussia after Poland's Third Partition

Dyskusje religijne w poszukiwaniu równości.
Dynamika żydowsko-chrześcijańska w Prusach
po III rozbiórze Polski

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Abstract: German and Polish Jewry have long been viewed as distinct and unrelated entities, and historiography has perhaps overlooked their intricate intertwining in some instances. This essay offers a variety of examples that illustrate personal and intellectual encounters and a neighborhood that challenges some common assumptions.

It seems that German Idealism's focus on reason, ethics, and moral responsibility may have had some influence on Jewish Reform thinkers in German and Polish lands. They sought to harmonize Jewish tradition with modern values and rational inquiry. Enlightenment thinkers such as Moses Mendelssohn focused on universal values, and Romanticists emphasized cultural heritage and historical uniqueness.

This essay examines David Friedländer's attempt to reach civic equality by negotiating religion and finding common ground in rational theology. It also examines Friedrich Schleiermacher's refusal to dilute the Christian religion and presents Israel Jacobson's attempts at modernizing Judaism. All these deliberations have contributed to developing Polish Jewish thought on identity, culture, and community.

Keywords: Izaak Cylkow; Antoni Eisenbaum; Enlightenment; David Friedländer; Haskalah; Israel Jacobson; Moses Mendelssohn; Adam Mickiewicz; Rational Theology; Romanticism; Science of Judaism; Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher; Johann

Joachim Spalding; Wilhelm Abraham Teller; Warsaw Rabbinical Seminary; Christian Wolff

Abstrakt: Żydzi niemieccy i polscy od dawna postrzegani byli jako odrębne i niepowiązane ze sobą grupy, a historiografia często pomijała ich złożone relacje. Artykuł przedstawia przykłady ilustrujące osobiste spotkania intelektualne oraz znaczenie sąsiedztwa.

Wydaje się, że niemiecki idealizm, skupiający się na rozumie, etyce i odpowiedzialności moralnej, mógł mieć pewien wpływ na myślicieli reformatorskich w Niemczech i na ziemiach polskich. Dążyli oni do harmonizacji tradycji żydowskiej z nowoczesnymi wartościami i racjonalnym poszukiwaniem prawdy. Myśliciele oświeceniowi, np. Mojżesz Mendelssohn, skupiali się na wartościach uniwersalnych, a romantycy kładli nacisk na wyjątkowość dziedzictwa kulturowego i historycznego.

W niniejszym artykule podjęto analizę próby osiągnięcia równości obywateli, podjętą przez Davida Friedlandera, poprzez dyskusję na tematy, dotyczące religii i poszukiwanie wspólnej płaszczyzny, porozumienia w racjonalnej teologii. Zbadano reakcję Friedricha Schleiermachera na próby modernizacji judaizmu podjęte przez Israela Jacobsona. Wszystkie te rozważania przyczyniły się do rozwoju myśli żydowskiej na temat tożsamości, kultury i wspólnoty.

Słowa kluczowe: Izaak Cylkow; Antoni Eisenbaum; oświecenie; David Friedländer; haskala; Israel Jacobson; Mojżesz Mendelssohn; Adam Mickiewicz; teologia racjonalna, romantyzm; Science of Judaism; Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher; Johann Joachim Spalding; Wilhelm Abraham Teller; Warszawskie Seminarium Rabiniczne; Christian Wolff

Introduction

The 19th century was the age of the Jewish Enlightenment, also known as Haskalah, and the struggle for Jewish emancipation. These developments were based on intellectual advancements that took place at the end of the 18th century. The Haskalah fostered a revised Jewish self-concept regarding Jewish heritage and one's surrounding society and culture. Religion became negotiable in seeking equality. This article will examine the intellectual prerequisites for the civil and religious coexistence of Christians and Jews within the framework of German 19th century thought.

It will focus on Prussia as a prime example within German territories on the way to a German empire under Prussian dominance. Since the Polish partitions, many of Prussia's territories have been Polish. Therefore, the question of Jewish civil equality became a pressing one. When Frederick II granted the general privilege of residence in 1750, 4,716 Jews lived in Brandenburg, and 2,188 lived alone in Berlin. The end of the 18th century saw a significant surge in the Jewish population of Prussia, which also included Silesia. The

first partition of Poland in 1772 more than doubled it, and the subsequent partitions in 1793 and 1795 added more, with the second partition adding 53,000 Jews and the third partition 75,000 (Herzig 2010).

Prussia is the perfect example of a rich exchange of ideas and the permeability of cultural borders in an age of coexistence, which also saw the Poles' struggle to regain their independence (cf. Walicki 1994). The article takes a Jewish perspective on the influences of German Enlightenment thought and its resonance among Polish contemporaries.

1. Moses Mendelssohn: Eternal Truths are not Unique to Judaism

The Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was the preeminent figure of the Jewish Enlightenment. In his works, he argued that Judaism is the epitome of the "Religion of Reason", purged of the dogma and superstition that allegedly dominate Christianity. Mendelssohn shaped the understanding of Judaism as a rational religion. In his 1783 legal and religious philosophical work *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*, he called for freedom of religion and conscience (Mendelssohn 1783/1983; De la Bedoyere 2019).¹

For Mendelssohn, eternal truths are not unique to Judaism, they should be universally acceptable through rational cognition. On the other hand, historical truths can only be accepted through faith in tradition, and faith in revelation is based on these historical truths. Mendelssohn shared these thoughts with the *maskilim*.² He was convinced that Judaism was a rational religion in harmony with the truths of philosophy.

In Berlin, Mendelssohn's place of residence, the path of emancipation – a gradual and conditional process – began in 1781 with the Prussian State Councilor Christian Wilhelm Dohm's essay *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* ("On the Civil Improvement of the Jews"³) (Dohm 1781/1973). The historian Monika Richarz described emancipation as a path "from protected Jew to second-class citizen" (Richarz 1989, 11). A process of religious reform accompanied emancipation, and there were strong interactions between the striving for legal equality, the Enlightenment, and acculturation to the social environment.

¹ An English translation by Moses Samuels, *Jerusalem. A treatise on ecclesiastical authority and Judaism*, was published in London in 1838.

² *Maskil* has been the self-designation of representatives and followers of the Haskalah since 1783, when the term first appeared in the programmatic leaflet *Nachal HaBesor* ("Stream of Tidings"), published in Königsberg as part of the Hebrew journal *HaMeasef* ("The Collector").

³ All translations into English are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

Mendelssohn's social connections with enlightened thinkers, publishers, and senior civil servants enabled him to take a stand on political issues and advocate for the concerns of the Jewish community in the German lands and beyond, including Poland (Geiger 1871, I 82, II 131). He also arranged employment for talented young men in need, such as Jacob Besas from Krotoszyn, whom he placed as a tutor in Fredericia, Denmark (Siebe and Prüfer 1922, 3).

Mendelssohn, who translated the Torah into German, was later named "the first German Jew" (Jacob 1912, 461). A closer look at his circle reveals several ties to Poland. His maternal grandmother, Sisa Wahl née Menachem (ca. 1660-1730), was from Kalisz. One of his teachers in Berlin was Israel ben Moshe Halevi of Zamość (ca. 1700-1772), who taught him Hebrew, science, and Jewish philosophy, exerting a formative influence on him. Many years later, Mendelssohn engaged Aaron Zechariah Friedenthal of Jaroslav (fl. late 18th c.) as a tutor to his children. He was a member of Mendelssohn's Biurist school of biblical exegesis⁴ and returned to Lemberg (today *Lwów*) with the clear intention of becoming a teacher. Friedenthal then took on the role of director of the Galician state educational system. Another Polish-born maskil who became a Hebrew grammar teacher for Mendelssohn's sons was Solomon Ben Joel Dubno (1738-1813). He lived in Berlin from 1772 to 1782 and is best known as a contributor to Moses Mendelssohn's German translation of the Torah and his Torah commentary (cf. Krzemień 2025).

1.1. Mendelssohn's Impact on Polish Maskilim

Mendelssohn's ideas and works rapidly spread from Berlin to the East. In 1785, the literary journal *Magazyn Warszawski* published a Polish translation of Moses Mendelssohn's essay "Was heißt Aufklären?", "Co to jest oświecenie?" within months of its publication in German (Mendelssohn 1785).

Personal relationships were also key to spreading Mendelssohn's ideas. The maskil Mendel Lefin of Satanow (1749-1826) spent time in Berlin among Mendelssohn's circle from 1880 to 1884 and returned to Poland to spread the message of the Haskalah. Nehama Rezler Bersohn said it best: "Satanow, like Mendelssohn, emphasizes the supremacy of the Jewish religion, despite his call for an end to religious polemics. He is adamant: Judaism, unlike Christianity, does not contradict reason. In fact, it is based on it. The argument that reason rejects faith is a Christian argument; their faith is contrary to reason. However, Judaism is based on rationalism" (Rezler-Bersohn 1975, 78).

⁴ The *Bi'ur* ("commentary") is the Hebrew Mendelssohn commentary on the Torah.

Prussia gained control over Gdańsk and Toruń, Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), and parts of Mazowsze (Mazovia) during the 2nd Partition of Poland. These areas were combined to form the new province of South Prussia. The Third Partition in 1795 made Warszawa the second largest city in Prussia until 1806. The Berlin Enlightenment had a significant impact on the Polish Jews and Christians there, even in the period after the Peace of Tilsit in 1807, when Prussia lost its gains. In 1815, it regained the western third around Posen (Poznań), making up the most significant part of the newly formed province of the Grand Duchy of Posen. Like Silesia, it became the Jewish hinterland for Berlin.

“Prussian Poland acted in many ways as a halfway house”, Polonsky explains (Polonsky 2000, 8). Mendelssohn’s legacy continued to have an effect in the Kingdom of Poland, i.e., under Russian rule, which began in 1815. In 1829, Jakub Tugendhold (1794-1871) published his Polish translation of Mendelssohn’s work *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, which became the most widely read book in Germany after its publication in 1767. Tugendhold’s translation, *Fedon czyli o nieśmiertelności duszy*, provided a model of becoming Polish while maintaining the Jewish faith.⁵

2. David Friedländer: Negotiating Common Religious Ground

David Friedländer (1750-1834) was a prominent figure of the Berlin Haskalah. He was a Jewish banker, writer, and communal leader. He worked towards establishing equal legal status for Jews in Prussia. A friend and disciple of Mendelssohn, he endeavored to overcome the societal differences between Jews and Christians by creating a common ground in a religion of reason. In April 1799, he sent an anonymous missive, “Sendschreiben einiger Hausväter jüdischer Religion” (“Open Letter in the Name of Some Jewish Householders”), to the Berlin provost Wilhelm Abraham Teller (1734-1804) (Friedländer 1799). The subject was the offer of members of Berlin’s Jewish Enlightenment circles to convert to Christianity to finally achieve legal equality, explaining that they would recognize the fundamental truths of all religions: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and that the destiny of humanity is divine bliss (Friedländer 1799, 19). In his pamphlet, Friedländer boldly declared his aim to “choose the great Christian Protestant society as a place of refuge” for Judaism (Friedländer 1799, 63). The willingness to repeal the Jewish ceremonial law

⁵ Mendelssohn’s legacy and place in collective memory in Jewish communities in Germany, divided Poland and the United States is the topic of ambitious survey: Steer, Martina. 2024. *Mojżesz Mendelssohn i potomność. Historia żydowskiej kultury pamięci*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar).

aims to “make it possible for us to fulfill the duties of a citizen” (Friedländer 1799, 47). He even sent a copy to Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who then served as General Superintendent in Weimar, to get his reaction.

Was Friedländer’s proposal a capitulation through assimilation? It is essential to examine the background of this event to draw the correct conclusions. The addressee of the letter, the theologian and Enlightenment philosopher Wilhelm Abraham Teller (1734-1804), had worked in Leipzig and Helmstedt before becoming provost of St. Peter’s in Berlin in 1767. He had published studies on the reinterpretation of the Bible and Christian doctrine, including his *Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments zur Erklärung der christlichen Lehre* (“Dictionary of the New Testament – An Explanation of Christian Teaching”) which was published in several editions starting in 1772. In Jewish circles, Teller was known as a representative of liberal Protestantism and an advocate for the equality of Jews. He opposed the ecclesiastical-political restoration in Prussia under Friedrich Wilhelm II, who reigned from 1786 to 1797. According to Beutel, Teller “prolonged the theological development process of his father [Romanus Teller] into a variety of neology aimed at unrestricted religious maturity and, in this respect, tending towards rationalism” (Beutel 2009, 125).

His writings of 1792, *Anleitung zur Religion überhaupt und zum Allgemeinen besonders* and *Die Religion der Vervollkommenen. Beitrag zur reinen Philosophie des Christenthums* identified him as a representative of a rational religion. In the same year, Teller was briefly suspended from his post during a doctrinal investigation by the church. In 1786, Teller took a stand in a court case at the Berlin Court of Appeal. The case involved two Jewish women who had converted to Christianity. They argued that their conversion did not mean they had left the Jewish religion. They were supported by an expert opinion from Olaf Gerhard Tychsel (1734-1815), Professor of Oriental Literature. Tychsel stated that conversion to Christianity could not be regarded as apostasy from Judaism. Christianity had ultimately emerged from Judaism and should not be understood as its alternative (cf. Schoeps, 2012, 215f). Teller must have appeared to David Friedländer and his followers as an open-minded friend of Jewish emancipation and a sympathetic representative of Protestantism.

2.1. Friedländer: Not Submission to Christian Doctrine but Search for Civil Equality

The “Open Letter” was not intended to be a submission to Christian doctrine. Instead, Friedländer’s letter aimed to sound out what should be regarded as the core of the Christian faith. The central Christian dogmas would make it difficult for an enlightened Jew to convert to Protestant Christianity. The doc-

trine of the Son of God, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper were "historical truths" that contradicted the "truths of reason". Julius H. Schoeps aptly captures Friedländer's intentions: "Friedländer and the 'householders' clearly had a specific goal in mind: the unification of faith based on a purified Christianity on one hand and an enlightened Judaism on the other". If the Christians renounced Christian dogma and the Jews made concessions to the ceremonial laws, then nothing would stand in the way of unification of faith, including – and this was ultimately the point – the civil equality of the Jews in Prussia" (Schoeps 2012, 213).

However, the provost did not respond to the letter's arguments. Instead, he called on the Jewish authors to "make a modified confession of Christianity, to confess Christian teachings and convert to Christianity completely" (Schoeps 2012, 218). "Teller went a long way towards accommodating Friedländer", states the Leipzig church historian Kurt Nowak (1942-2001). "He knew that the confession of Jesus Christ as the Messiah was essential. The suggestion that only the Christianization of the Jews could solve the problem of emancipation from the ground up remained effective. The fact that Friedländer almost succumbed to it in his despair over the stagnation of political reform and his displeasure at the lack of religious modernization among his co-religionists proves the pressure on the Jews" (Nowak 1995, 36). Beutel comments on Teller's reaction: His suggestion that Jews willing to convert should not be required to profess the Apostolicon, but rather the confession of Christ as the "founder of a better moral religion", which was associated with baptism, was controversial (Beutel 2009, 127).

2.2. A Warsaw Parallel

An incident in Warsaw at the end of 1815 is reminiscent of Friedländer's "Open Letter" of 1799, even if in a watered-down form adapted to the current circumstances. This time there was no offer of conversion to de-dogmatized Christianity, but again the hope of social and civic recognition by the authorities. Antony Polonsky points out that in 1815 a group in Warsaw described itself as made up of "distinguished Jews" and numbered forty families. They submitted a petition to Alexander I requesting him to differentiate between them and the unreformed mass of Jews and to grant them rights commensurate with their achievements, wealth, and culture. This would cause wider circles to emulate them and would "accelerate the process of civilizing the Israelites"⁶ (Polonsky

⁶ Quoted in Askenazy, Szymon. 1913. "Ze spraw żydowskich w dobie kongresowej!" *Kwartalnik poświęcony badaniu przeszłości Żydów w Polsce*, 1/3: 1-36.

2013, 67). The request, dated Warsaw, December 1, 1815, was signed by the physician Dr. Józef Wolff (1766–1836) and the printing business owner and publisher Natan Glücksberg (1780–1831). It is not yet clear if Friedländer’s “Open Letter” was the model for the Warsaw petition. Paweł Fijałkowski, who wrote about the many pleas of the Jewish community of Warsaw to Tsar Alexander I, does not mention this (Fijałkowski 2023).

3. Friedrich Schleiermacher: A Defender of Christian Identity

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher is a German theologian and philosopher and may be considered one of the founders of modern liberal theology and hermeneutics. Schleiermacher’s ideas on religion, ethics, and understanding texts significantly impacted theology, philosophy, and biblical studies. He blended Enlightenment thought with German Idealism and Romanticism to develop a “science of education” and formulate Protestant dogmatics. He saw rational Protestant theology and its inclination to turn Christianity into a civil religion as a significant threat to Christian identity. This is why he engaged in the debate that evolved around Friedländer’s missive, which played a major role in his founding of modern Protestant theology.

Here is a brief overview of Schleiermacher’s life: Born into a family of Reformed clergymen in Breslau, Lower Silesia (Wrocław, Poland) in 1768, he was influenced by both rationalism and pietism during his theology studies at the University of Halle. After ten years of church service in Berlin and Potsdam, he made an indelible impression in 1799 with his work *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (translated by John Oman as *On Religion. Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, published in London in 1883). His notion of religion as feeling and taste for the infinite hit the spirit of the time. He also made a name for himself in Berlin with his socializing, had friends from well-known Jewish families, such as Henriette Herz (1764–1847) and Dorothee Veit (1764–1839, later Schlegel, née Mendelssohn), and published his *Versuche einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens* (“Essay on a Theory of Social Behavior”) in 1799. In 1804, he became a professor at Halle. The Napoleonic occupation abruptly ended his career there in 1806. He returned to Berlin and played a pivotal role in establishing the University of Berlin in 1809, where he was appointed Dean of Theology in 1810.⁷ In the years that followed, he encountered members of the Polish aristocracy

⁷ For the significant impact of Schleiermacher’s concept of theology on Abraham Geiger’s concept of science, see Stallmann, Imke. 2013. *Abraham Geigers Wissenschaftsverständnis. Eine Studie zur jüdischen Rezeption von Friedrich Schleiermachers Theologiebegriff*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

in Berlin's salons, for example as a frequent guest of Princess Louise Radziwill (1770-1836), a Princess of Prussia by birth. When he died in 1834 after a twenty-four-year tenure, some 30,000 people lined the streets of Berlin to watch his funeral procession. Notably, David Friedländer, who had retired from his business in 1804 to devote himself exclusively to public service, died just over a month after Schleiermacher.

3.1. Friedländer's "Sendschreiben" and Schleiermacher's Reaction

The "Sendschreiben" is interesting for two main reasons. First, its purpose was to improve the standing of Prussian Jewry. Second, it leads onto another track: the theological state of Prussian Protestantism at the time. Schleiermacher's contributions to a change from rational theology to German Idealism are eminent. This is why he participated in the discussion about Friedländer's missive⁸ and published six letters in response to it in 1799, "Briefe bey Gelegenheit der politisch-theologischen Aufgabe und des Sendschreibens jüdischer Hausväter" (Schleiermacher 1984). In his comments, he clearly expressed his understanding of the precarious situation of the Jews at the time. Julius H. Schoeps asserts: "His primary concern, however, was to prevent Christianity from serving as a means of civil improvement" (Schoeps 2012, 224).

In the epilogue to the facsimile edition of the "Letters", Kurt Nowak states that Schleiermacher's primary objective was to protect the fundamental essence of the Christian message. Rational theology had already caused central doctrines to slip. A wave of conversions of Jews for the reason of civil equality was not in his interest "because then [...] so much external religion would be practiced, behind which there would be nothing at all [...]" (Nowak 1984, 34). The result is clear: a "de-dogmatized Christian-Jewish religion of reason" (Schleiermacher 1984, 334), a "middle ground between Jews and Christians" (Schleiermacher 1984, 352), a "Judaized Christianity, that would be the right disease that we should still inoculate ourselves with" (Schleiermacher 1984, 336f). Instead, he proposed detaching Jews' civil equality from their Christianization. Here, Schleiermacher prefers an internal Jewish reform that categorically rejects an ultramontane utopia of messianic statehood, decisively subordinating Jewish ceremonial laws to the laws of the state (cf. Nowak 1984, 80). Schleiermacher was adamant in his opposition to the notion of a Christian civil religion, a concept he saw exemplified by Provost Teller.

⁸ For the entire debate, see Crouter, Richard and Julie Klassen (eds.). 2004. *David Friedländer, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Abraham Teller – A Debate on Jewish Emancipation and Christian Theology in Old Berlin*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett.

3.2. Rational Protestant Theology in Prussia

In order to appreciate Schleiermacher's intentions, it is worthwhile to look back to the 18th century when rational theology offered a platform where Jewish and Christian belief could meet under the circumstances of a rational Protestant theology which flourished under Frederick the Great's promotion of a "freer theological doctrine" (cf. Semler 1777). Schleiermacher, on the other hand, made it clear that Christianity was not served by such dilution.

In his essay "Vernünftiges Christentum" ("Reasonable Christianity"), Walter Sparn outlined the historical task of the theological enlightenment in Germany in the 18th century and recalled remarkable upheavals (Sparn 1985). For example, the Wolffian Johann Lorenz Schmidt (1702-1749) took a consistent rationalist approach in his translation *Die göttlichen Schriften vor den Zeiten des Messia Jesu*, the so-called *Wertheim Bible* (1735). Schmidt "particularly eliminated the evidence of miracles and prophecy and the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament in general" (Sparn 1985, 24). This sparked a wave of indignation among Lutheran orthodox and the Pietists. The Jewish philosopher and publicist Fritz Mauthner (1849-1923) later described it: "It caused a storm in the theological swamp, an anger that we can hardly descend to understanding today. The audacity of wanting to suppress Luther's text was resented. After all, it had been almost sanctified by a tradition of 200 years. But it was Wolff's rationalism that truly riled people. He reproduced the original text – for example, 'a strong wind' blew over the waters, instead of 'the Spirit of God' – and explained the words of the Bible in numerous and often superfluous comments, with the consistent intention of critically rejecting all the prophecies of the Old Testament, namely those relating to Jesus Christ. He was declared a mocker of religion, and the malicious fanatic Joachim Lange hounded the Protestant Church and the Imperial Treasury after him" (Mauthner 1921, 18f). Mauthner calls Johann Lorenz Schmidt a "man who does not deserve to remain lost" (Mauthner 1921, 18f).

The theological enlightenment led to the study of church history, including the history of dogma and historical-critical biblical studies. This systematized the critical examination of biblical texts and their translations. It is important to note that Wolffian rationalism significantly influenced the Polish Enlightenment. Wolff's doctrine was brought to Warszawa in 1740 by the Theatine monk Antonio Maria Portalupi (1713-1791), director of Warszawa's Theatine College and tutor to the future king Stanisław August Poniatowski. From 1743, its chief Polish champion was the German Protestant Lorenz (Wawrzyniec) Mitzler de Kolof (1711-1778), court physician to August III. At the same time, the Warsaw publisher Michael Gröll (1722-1798) became an important mediator of the German Enlightenment in Poland, as he had a selection of the

fundamental texts translated into Polish. Gröll, a Nuremberg native, became president of the German Protestant congregation of the Augsburg Confession in Warsaw in 1778.

3.3. Frederick the Great and the Purpose of Rational Theology

Walter Sparn has also described the transformation of Prussian Protestantism by Frederick the Great (1712-1786): “Frederician Prussia was the site of the most significant change in Protestant Christianity after the Reformation. It underwent a transformation in the spirit of a pious Enlightenment. ... Frederick appointed neologian theologians to the Berlin consistories and, through the minister Karl Abraham von Zedlitz, to his universities, and even to the faculties of philosophy if necessary. This is precisely what happened to Johann August Eberhard (1739-1809), whose *Neue Apologie des Sokrates* (“New Apology of Socrates”, 1772) claimed: »Even morally good heathens can be saved«” (Sparn 2012). A preacher in Charlottenburg near Berlin, he had close ties to the Berlin Enlightenment, especially to Friedrich Nicolai and Moses Mendelssohn. Anyone who has delved deeply into intellectual history knows that this profound change in Christianity attracted the attention of Jewish contemporaries and opened new perspectives for them. For example, the Jewish philosopher Saul Ascher (1867-1822) from Berlin boldly called in 1792 for an enlightened, religious-political reform of Judaism and the unconditional equality of Jews in state and society (cf. Hiscott 2017).

Protestant theology and the church under Frederick the Great were transformed by numerous causes and forces. Christian Freiherr von Wolff (1679-1754) was a “central figure of German Enlightenment philosophy” (cf. Schwaiger 2000). He was expelled from Halle in 1723 as an atheist and propagator of a state-endangering determinism. He accepted a call to Marburg but returned to Halle in 1740. Albrecht Beutel summarizes that theological Wolffianism was content to apply the “scientific” method to the Bible and the doctrine of faith. He notes its enormous effectiveness: “The insight spread by the Wolffians that it was quite reasonable to have religion had an influence on the educated public, which had increasingly lost its taste for traditional church faith. One can hardly overestimate the importance of this fact, and it may have been an indispensable prerequisite for the mediation of neology” (Beutel 2009, 109).

When Frederick ascended the throne in 1740, he rejected the compact Christian orthodoxies of the confessional age. Despite its educational and social presence, Halle Pietism had reached a crisis of plausibility. Halle was the birthplace of the theological enlightenment. The theologian Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten (1706-1757) and the philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgar-

ten⁹ (1714-1762) are key figures in this discussion. Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten is unquestionably the “most independent and important of Christian Wolff’s theological students” (Beutel 2009, 109). Beutel stated that his apologetic leit-motif was free of any fear of contact: “The Christian faith could not suffer any harm if it allowed itself to be challenged, to carefully examine and justify its doctrine by the impartial and sober presentation of the religious-philosophical debate” (Beutel 2009, 111). Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten laid the foundation for the historical-critical method of exegesis, moving beyond the confines of philology. His student, Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791), a co-founder of Enlightenment theology, expanded this approach to the entire biblical canon. This methodology would later become essential for the Science of Judaism.

Frederick the Great promoted a “liberal theology”, which became an important carrier of modern historical meaning and hermeneutical awareness. Original sin and the dogma of salvation were replaced by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s (1646-1716) belief in progress based on the “perfectibility” of humanity through creation (Lorenz 2018, 75ff). The essay by the pastor – and later leading Berlin clergyman – Johann Joachim Spalding (1714-1804), *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (“The Destiny of Man”), published in 1748 and printed eleven times until 1794, became a cornerstone of the convergence of the Enlightenment’s ideal of reason and established religion. It was held in high esteem by Schiller, Schleiermacher, and Fichte. Spalding’s philosophy of religion transforms religious observance into faithful authenticity (Beutel 2009, 122). The undeniable reality of God and immortality is “religion”, which unites “head” and “heart”: “This is our religion; the love of God, which makes itself active in a general charity and love of mankind” (Spalding 1772, 128).

After the Seven Years War, in 1763, theologians and philosophers increasingly embraced the clear criteria of Enlightenment Christianity: religious subjectivity and historical criticism. Frederick the Great appointed theologians like the already mentioned Johann August Eberhard, a Schleiermacher teacher who dismantled the Augustinian legacy of theology. The neologians defied the church’s long-standing doctrines, particularly the doctrines of Satisfaction for Sin and the Trinity. Instead, they emphasized moral motivation and teachings aimed at religious elevation. Neology combined pious inwardness with rational scholarship, but this was only conceivable in the half-century from 1740 to 1790. The decisive shift in policy was set in stone with Woellner’s Edict on Religion of July 9, 1788. Together with the subsequent Censorship Edict, it marked the end of Frederick II’s policy of tolerance of the state. The pastor,

⁹ Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten developed a new aesthetic that focused on the sensory faculty of knowledge. Together with his brother he published the literary journals *Nachrichten von einer hallischen Bibliothek...* (8 volumes, 1748-1751) and *Nachrichten von merkwürdigen Büchern...* (12 volumes, 1752-1758).

conservative Baumgarten student, state minister, and head of the Office for the Worship Johann Christoph von Woellner (1732-1800) turned against rationalist positions in religion and advocated a theological and ecclesiastical restoration under Frederick William II (cf. Wiggermann 2010, 33). This effectively ended the official promotion of neologian positions, which would continue to have an impact for decades. This included the “Open Letter in the Name of Some Jewish Householders” and Schleiermacher’s response to it.

3.4. Tracing Rational Theology in Warszawa

Rational Protestant theology also resonated in Warszawa. In 1797, the Protestant theologian Samuel Gottlieb Wald (1762-1828), a pupil of Semler, was appointed consistorial councilor in South Prussia, retaining his previous offices in Königsberg. The position he received obliged him to assist the newly established government in Thorn (Toruń) and later in Warsaw by providing written advice on establishing the church and school system in the individual provinces. After his resignation in 1800, he was succeeded by the Protestant theologian Carl Friedrich Fischer (1766-?) from Königsberg. Protestant Samuel Bogumił Linde (1771-1841) was much more efficacious than Wald and Fischer. Linde headed the Lyceum in Warszawa, which opened in 1805. The Lyceum combined progressive pedagogical approaches with training for practical life. It thus bundled Prussian and Polish reform efforts until it was closed by the Russians in 1831. Interestingly, it was Linde who coined the term *oświecenie*, or “enlightenment”, in his dictionary of the Polish language, *Słownik języka polskiego*, published between 1807 and 1814.

3.5. Schleiermacher: Negotiating Religion as a Catalyst for Jewish Renewal?

Research has clearly described how the anti-Jewish strand of Protestant theology became an integral part of German Idealism (cf. Mack 2003). Some of its exponents added personal sentiments, such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). In spring 1791, he obtained a tutorship in Warsaw in the house of a Polish countess, but he left after two weeks’ probation. For Fichte, Poland was a land full of wild dogs and wild people, but furthermore, “full of Jews”, as he wrote in his diary in 1791, *Tagebuch meiner Oster Abreise aus Sachsen nach Polen, u. Preußen. Im Jahr 1791*.

Jayne Svenungsson states that German Enlightenment philosophy, steeped in a Protestant tradition, adopted the anti-Jewish features of Protestant theo-

logy. She argues that when these features were transferred from theology to philosophy, they underwent a process of secularization and politicization. The theological stereotype of the Jew as bound to the Law found an echo in the philosophical stereotype of the Jew as the embodiment of heteronomy, as opposed to the Enlightenment idea of autonomy. (Svenungsson 2020, 99f).

Schleiermacher fits in very well here. Kant famously wished Judaism a “euthanasia”, a beautiful death, and Schleiermacher asserted that Judaism had died and that its sacred books were closed. He brings a profound spiritual transformation, aligning firmly with the tenets of Christian doctrine. This significantly narrows the common ground between Judaism and Christianity that rational theology had previously provided.

This has led to the question of whether Schleiermacher was anti-Judaic. He certainly had a negative view of the Jewish religion, stating that “[...], for Judaism is long since dead. Those who still wear its livery are sitting and lamenting beside the imperishable mummy, bewailing its departure and its sad legacy” (Schleiermacher 1893, 238).

Matthias Wolfes was right to assert that “Schleiermacher was never able to overcome a profound experience of alienation from Judaism” (Wolfes 2005, 327). Like Wolfes before him, Arnulf von Scheliha concluded that “[...] Schleiermacher was unable to establish a positive relationship with the Jewish religion. In this respect, he was poorly informed, disinterested, and made derogatory comments. His friendship with people of Jewish origin did not stand in the way of this. In political terms, he strived for the civil equality of Jews. He opposed an enlightened unified religion, as proposed by David Friedländer” (von Scheliha 2012, 213f).

Kurt Nowak has described research into the enlightenment in Protestant theology after 1945. He discusses the phenomenon of Philo-Semitism among theologians in Halle, the anti-Judaism of Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791), and the pro-Jewish attitude of Pietism. The attitude of late Enlightenment theologians to the Jewish question is virtually unexplored: “The late Enlightenment theologians clearly affirmed political emancipation, but they lacked the strength to allow the Jews to be Jews religiously and culturally, i.e., to develop pluralistic concepts. It is imperative to examine the dialectic of political tolerance and religious-cultural intolerance” (Nowak 1999, 71). Kurt Nowak states about Schleiermacher: “There were only a few Christian contemporaries, among them Friedrich Schleiermacher, who opposed the linking of civil rights with the Christianization of the Jews” (Nowak 1995, 36).

Instead, Schleiermacher encouraged Judaism to push ahead with its internal Jewish reform. He was thus a catalyst for the denominational fanning out of Judaism in the 19th century. Schleiermacher provided no intellectual basis for Friedrich Wilhelm III’s religious policy, which sought to prevent any

reform and renewal of Judaism to increase the pressure to convert to Christianity (*Verhütung von Neuerungen in den Religionsgebräuchen der Juden*; cf. von Rönne and Simon 1843, 94). Instead, he believed that “even if all Jews became the most excellent citizens, not a single one would be a good Christian” (Schleiermacher 1984, 336).

This denial encouraged Jewish scholars to present Judaism as a vivid religion of lasting value. This coincides with the formation of the various Jewish religious communities as we know them today, particularly progressive Judaism and Jewish orthodoxy.¹⁰ It may also explain how non-religious expressions of Jewish confidence in a better world, e.g., socialism, became strongly linked to secular Jewish culture. It triggered the move to legitimize and aid the acculturation and integration of Jews into mainstream German civil and social life. The *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or Science of Judaism, and its academic institutions evolved.

Schleiermacher’s rejection can be interpreted as a catalyst for Jewish renewal and self-termination. This is why the Jewish historian Martin Philipppson (1846-1916) agreed with Schleiermacher in principle: He opined in 1913 that too close a proximity of Judaism and Christianity “would prove extremely dangerous for the continued existence of a Jewish community that strives to integrate itself completely into German society without ceasing to be Jewish [...] for, they [the liberal Protestants] demand of us, by faithfully following in the footsteps of Prof. Theodor Mommsen, that we give up our Jewish distinctiveness both in the spiritual and in the area of social contacts.[...] Moreover, equality in their eyes does not mean that all people have the same value and consequently the right to differ from one another [...] for the liberal Protestants and the liberal nationalists, equality is (rather) synonymous with egalitarianism [...] and in fact a standardization within the framework of Christian society. This framework, however, threatens us as a new Leviathan” (Philipppson 1903, 4).

In hindsight, one may conclude, therefore: Schleiermacher held a distance from Judaism as a religion. He also turned away from the neologian ideas of his teachers, who had favored proximity between Judaism and Christianity. In doing this, Schleiermacher prepared the ground for Jewish self-reflection and renewal. He understood the prophetic tradition of Judaism as an innovative and positive part of Jewish religious history, just like the Jewish reform theologians. He advocated a historical-critical method and distinguished between the “essence of religion” and “positive religion”. He emphasized the ethical relevance of religious ideas. Schleiermacher’s blatant anti-Jewish statements

¹⁰ For an overview of today’s Jewish denominations, see: Rosenthal, Gilbert S. and Walter Homolka. 1999. *Eine Einführung in die Religiösen Strömungen der Gegenwart*. München: Kneesebeck.

still dominate his reception today, but we may not forget that many maskilim were also grappling with pre-Enlightenment expressions of Judaism. Schleiermacher's thinking centered around the primacy of Christianity over Judaism. However, it prepared a path for many intellectual developments in Judaism and probably fertilized their content.¹¹

3.6. Exploring Schleiermacher's Reception in Poland

It is interesting to note that rational Protestantism was also effective in Warsaw, namely in the person of Adolf Theodor Julius Ludwig (1808-1876), an ardent advocate of rationalism and known as "a most dedicated follower of Hegel" (*The Christian Year Book* 1867, 273). The son of a Jewish tailor, he studied theology at the universities of Warsaw and Berlin. In Warsaw, he met the Polish philosopher and mystic Bronislaw Ferdynand Trentowski (1808-1869), and his university teachers in Berlin were Friedrich Schleiermacher and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). In 1834, Ludwig became the minister of the Lutheran congregation in Warsaw. In 1836, he was appointed a member of the consistory, and from 1838, he was also superintendent of the Warsaw diocese. In 1849, Ludwig was appointed General Superintendent and leading clergyman of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. There were undoubtedly other students of Schleiermacher who made a career in divided Poland and carried on his intellectual legacy.

Schleiermacher did not see himself as a cultural Protestant during his lifetime; however, he set impulses to inspire intellectual discourse during the 19th century and had an effect far beyond Berlin. In his case study of Posen (Poznań), *Religion and the Rise of Nationalism. A Profile of an East-Central European City*, Robert E. Alvis gives a few clues: "Prussia remained the center of innovative theological thought in the Protestant world at this time. [...] Liberal Protestant culture found a warm reception in the Poznań region after 1815. At this time, works by rationalist pastors filled the libraries of many Poznań-area congregations, and sermons reflected this influence. The rationalist and erudite tone of the region's pastors was one factor that provoked General Superintendent Freymark¹², himself a moderate rationalist, to issue a circular urging the clergy not to forget the needs of the less sophisticated laity. Just as they had embraced the religiosity of Prussia's liberal Protestant cul-

¹¹ For the significant impact of Schleiermacher's concept of theology on Abraham Geiger's concept of science, see Stallmann, Imke. 2013. *Abraham Geigers Wissenschaftsverständnis. Eine Studie zur jüdischen Rezeption von Friedrich Schleiermachers Theologiebegriff*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

¹² Dr Karl Andreas Wilhelm Freymark (1785-1855), General Superintend in Posen since 1829.

ture, Poznań-area clerics were undoubtedly influenced by its political leanings. Liberal Protestant leaders like Schleiermacher presented an attractive ideal of a progressive society bound together by national bonds and a glorious mission” (Alvis 2005, 131).

Adam Mickiewicz’s (1798-1855) portrayal of Schleiermacher in his lectures on Slavic literature at the Collège de France in Paris in the years 1842-1843 is colorful and detailed: In its German edition it reads: „Schleiermacher, einer der religiösen Philosophen, welcher die ganze Philosophie auf das Gefühl basirt, athmet gleichfalls einen ausländischen Einfluß; lange Zeit war er Mitglied der mährischen Brüder und ist dergestalt von einem Strahle slawischen Lebens, ausgehend von Huß [sic], berührt worden” (Mickiewicz 1844, 248). “Andererseits setzte Schleiermacher die Gewißheit in das individuelle Gewissen, das protestantische Princip auf diese Weise übertreibend” (Mickiewicz 1844, 328). (“Schleiermacher, one of the religious philosophers who based his entire philosophy on feeling, likewise breathed a foreign influence; for a long time he was a member of the Moravian Brethren and was thus touched by a ray of Slavic life emanating from Hus” (248). [...] “On the other hand, Schleiermacher placed certainty in the individual conscience, exaggerating the Protestant principle in this way”) (328).

Is it not remarkable that Mickiewicz refers to the Czech church reformer Jan Hus to suggest a cultural bond between Schleiermacher and the Slavs? Mickiewicz also refers to the system of a Polish contemporary who meets Jacobi and Schleiermacher in his endeavors (“welcher sich in seinem Bestreben mit Jacobi und Schleiermacher begegnet”) (Mickiewicz 1844, 251): that is Ludwik Królikowski (1799-1879), a leftist activist during the 1831 Uprising who lived first as an exile in Kraków, since 1831 in Paris, and became a Polish émigré in the United States in 1877 (cf. Kuligowski 2020).

The reception of a pivotal work in the landscape of modern theology, Schleiermacher’s *Glaubenslehre* (“The Christian Faith”, 1821/22), among Polish scholars appears limited. It is clear why Schleiermacher’s teachings were not valued in Catholic Poland. Today, he is best known for his hermeneutic approach to ethics (cf. Przylebski 2017). This special emphasis is also reflected in the lecture topics of the two Polish speakers at the international Schleiermacher conference “Reception – Transformation – Imagination” at the Christian Albrecht University of Kiel in September 2025, with Piotr de Bończa Bukowski on “Friedrich Schleiermacher in the Resonance Space of Polish Romanticism” and Henryk Machoń on “Religious Experience in the Works of F.D.E. Schleiermacher and C.G. Jung. Reception or Imagination?”¹³

¹³ <https://www.uni-kiel.de/en/theol/faculty/institutes/internationaler-schleiermacher-kongress-2025> (accessed: 27.06.2025).

However, Machoń recently wrote about the Landsberg sermon texts in the context of Schleiermacher's work, namely in a bilingual edition of these sermons from the years 1794 to 1768, *Wybrane gorzowskie kazania*, which he delivered in Landsberg an der Warthe, today Gorzów Wielkopolski (Schleiermacher 2024b). In 2024, a new Polish edition of Schleiermacher's *On Religion, Mowy o religii do wykształconych spośród tych, którzy nią gardzą* was also published (Schleiermacher 2024a). Research is necessary to investigate the impact that rationalism, Idealism, and Schleiermacher's concept of theology exerted in the Prussian part of divided Poland and beyond.

Let us look back at German Jewry and its struggle for emancipation. Whatever one thinks of Schleiermacher's attitude towards Jews, he had a significant influence on the intellectual developments in 19th-century Jewish thought. He rejected a diluted form of Christianity as common ground for civil religion and emphasized the importance of internal Jewish reform as the right path to civil equality. This insight is shared by another early 19th-century protagonist, the Jewish reformer Israel Jacobson.

4. Israel Jacobson: Negotiating a Judaism with a Future

It was not Prussia that became the incubator for a self-confident Jewry of equal citizens, but the model state of Westphalia with its King Jérôme (1784-1860). This also makes it clear to whom the Jews of the 19th century ultimately owed their civil equality: Napoléon Bonaparte (1769-1821). With the *Code Napoléon*, he created a model for a general civil code that impacted all states of the Confederation of the Rhine and beyond. There were no longer any special regulations for Jews; there was now only reference to citizens with equal rights. The *Code Napoléon* was also implemented in the Duchy of Warsaw in 1808 and remained in effect until 1815. At the same time, however, the *décret-infâme*, or Infamous Decree, was issued, which reversed several reforms and heavily regulated Jewish life in France and most French dominions.

The court factor and entrepreneur Israel Jacobson (1768-1828) was a key figure in Jewish renewal against the backdrop of the Enlightenment. He first became prominent in Westphalia and then in Berlin. Like Mendelssohn, he wanted the Jews to be able to take their place among Gentiles as cultural equals. He was convinced that secular education would effect this change. Since 2010, a memorial plaque at Burgstraße 25 in Berlin, right next to the Faculty of Theology at Humboldt University, has commemorated him. It honors the Halberstadt native, who moved from Kassel to Berlin in 1814 after the fall of Jérôme Bonaparte. It recognizes him as the "founder of liberal Judaism"

and a “pioneer of Jewish emancipation in Germany”. It continues: “He revived the Jewish school system and founded the world’s first reform synagogue in Seesen in 1810”.

From 1808 to 1814, Jacobson served as president of the Royal Westphalian Consistory of Israelites, reorganized Jewish worship, and introduced sermons in German. He advocated for an aesthetic reform of the synagogue service and pursued an emancipatory cause, not an assimilationist one. In 1815, he introduced his innovations for religious services in Berlin.

The academic study of Israel Jacobson has increased in recent years (cf. Berghahn et al. 2022). Bit by bit, one of the most interesting personalities of the early 19th century is coming to light. He was a gifted and versatile individual who succeeded under the Ancien Regime of the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. However, he also recognized the signs of the times and skillfully used them to push for an intellectual turnaround within the Jewish community. The ceremonial inauguration of the Seesen synagogue, the Jacob’s Temple, indicates this shift. “The celebration was original and unique in its kind”, a contemporary observer described the festivities on July 17, 1810. “There has never been a day in history where Christians and Israelites celebrated a joint service in the presence of more than forty clergymen of both religions. It is only the tolerance of our day that has made this possible” (*Sulamith* 1810, 303).

The course of the service is thoroughly documented. The historian Isaak Markus Jost (1793-1860) reported as an eyewitness: “The inauguration made an indescribable impression, especially on the Christian guests, several of whom enthusiastically expressed their feelings in German, Latin, and Hebrew songs. Great expectations were attached to this event” (Seligmann 1922, 72). The opening of the Jacob’s Temple in Seesen is remarkable for its religious emotion and the demand for tolerance and recognition that characterized the attitude of the non-Jewish participants. A clear example is a three-page hexameter poem written by the Goslar pastor and superintendent Dr Georg Heinrich Henrici (1770-1851). It was dedicated to Jacobson on the occasion of the inauguration (cf. Cramer 1986, 11). Henrici was deeply moved by Friedländer’s “Open Letter” and, a year later, authored a novel. *Charlotte Sampson, oder Geschichte eines jüdischen Hausvaters, der mit seiner Familie dem Glauben seiner Väter entsagte. Eine Geschichte der neuesten Zeit* (“Charlotte Sampson, or the Story of Jewish Family Father who Forsook the Faith of his Fathers”) was published in Berlin in 1809.

Israel Jacobson delivered the inauguration sermon while draped in a black robe, asking the august assembly: “All round us the Enlightenment is enlarging its scope. Should we alone get left behind?” (quoted from Meyer 2001, 34; cf. Jacobson 1810). Jacob Rader Marcus summed it up this way: “The

universalism and humanitarianism of the preceding century stand revealed in every paragraph of his sermon" (Marcus 1972, 89). Two years before, Jacobson declared his support for Mendelssohn in his speech at the opening of the Royal Westphalian Consistory of Israelites on 8 Feb 1808: "It is an irrefutable truth that history has proven this to be the case for the confessors of every religion: that bigotry considers everything – the shell as well as the core – to be equally sacred, that hypocrisy attaches itself to mere forms and that the apparent enlightenment carelessly throws away the core with the shell. Only the true, genuine religious know how to separate the core from the shell. They gladly modify non-essential institutions and customs as soon as purified reason shows them to be useless and harmful" (*Sulamith* 1808, 418).

Like Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) later, Jacobson distinguished between the eternally religious and the transient national; the exegete and historian of religion Rabbi Ismar Elbogen (1874-1943) later described him as the "father of confessionalism within Judaism" (Elbogen and Sterling, 1935/1966, 203). What some misunderstand as an effort to assimilate can be understood as a theologically underpinned project to give Judaism an equal footing. For Israel Jacobson, the Christian Reformation was an example of successful emancipation. However, he left no doubt that his orientation towards Protestantism had its limits. He assured traditionalist critics: "Far be it from me to make myself a traitor to religion as to you" (*Sulamith* 1810, 303). His mission in life was a "joint progress towards the better, the ultimate goal of reason" (*Sulamith* 1810, 303).

Jacobson's primary concern was the equal coexistence of Christian and Jewish citizens in a state based on the achievements and contributions of both religions. The basis for this was provided by the spirit of the times: rational theology. This replaced original sin and the dogma of salvation with the belief in progress established by Leibniz. This belief was made possible by the creative "perfectibility" of man. Or, to paraphrase Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), it is due to the "education of the human race".

Jacobson thus turned against what Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795-1861) would later elevate to doctrine as the Romantic idea of the "Christian state", which was strongly influenced by Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and his 1823 essay "Signature of the Age" (Schlegel 1823). The "Romantic on the throne" (David Friedrich Strauss) saw the connection between the monarch and the people as a sacred unity (*corpus mysticum*) (Schoeps 1997, 73). The king acted in accordance with his Lutheran beliefs, recognizing his responsibility only to God. In Frederick William IV's "Christian State", it was inconceivable that non-Christians could exercise the sovereign's authority over his Christian subjects. This is reminiscent of the later Christological worldview of Count August Cieszkowski (1814-1894). Cieszkowski studied philosophy in

Berlin and was initially an ardent follower of leftist Hegelianism. However, around 1848, he turned to the path of Christian messianism.

Jacobson's primary concern was fostering harmony between religions, including rapprochement, but not the full religious communion of Judaism and Christianity. He also expressed this on the façade of the synagogue building in Seesen, with the verse from Malachi 2:10 above the north portal: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" In doing so, Jacobson picks up on the spirit of the times, namely Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher's idea that "That no man can perfectly possess all religion is easy to see. Men are determined in one special way, religion is endlessly determinable" (Schleiermacher 1893, 212).

Schleiermacher described plurality as an inherent principle of religion. His *Über Religion* set new accents, but at the same time, he dismissed Judaism as a religion of revenge: "Is it anything but a relation of universal immediate retribution, of a peculiar reaction of the Infinite against every finite thing that can be regarded as proceeding from caprice? In this way, everything is regarded, growth and decay, fortune and misfortune. Even in the human soul, freedom and caprice interchange with immediate operation of the Deity. All other recognized attributes of God express themselves in accordance with this principle and are always regarded in their bearing upon it. The Deity is throughout represented as rewarding, punishing, disciplining single things in single persons" (Schleiermacher 1893, 239).

Let's focus on Israel Jacobson's efforts and accomplishments. Five years before the opening of the Seesen Temple, on 16 Aug 1805, the Protestant pastor and educator Karl Witte (1767-1845), of Lochau near Halle, paid tribute to Jacobson in the journal *Der Freimüthige*: "In general, it seems to be the quiet intention of the excellent Jacobson (as I may reasonably conclude from the facts) to remain unwaveringly faithful to the religion of his fathers, but – in its highest purity; and to work and work daily to ensure that this purity is preserved to the highest possible degree as soon as possible and spread further" (Witte 1805, 133f). The following year, the writer August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue (1761-1819) referred in *Der Freimüthige* to another "eulogist of Jacobsohn's institutes", the Würzburg professor of dogmatics and clerical councilor Franz Oberthür (1745-1831), a representative of the Catholic Enlightenment and, from 1805, Dean of the Faculty of Theology (von Kotzebue 1806, 221f.). In 1803, the Franconian Jewish community approached Oberthür with a request to interpret their wishes before the throne and draft a petition on behalf of all the heads of the Jewish community of Franconia, demanding "full citizenship and complete equality with Christians" (Eckstein 1905, 5). In 1807, Jacobson was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Helmstedt for his efforts to "enlighten his nation".

In this intellectual environment of a completely redefined Protestant Christianity, one will better understand the Jewish religious philosophy of that day, which forms the basis for Israel Jacobson's reform work and explains his educational approach. Judaism and Protestant Christianity underwent similar processes of transformation and confessionalization, and the rational theology of the late 18th century seemed to lay the foundation for "joint progress towards the better, towards the ultimate goal of reason". What a fallacy.

4.1. Coping with Restoration

The Napoleonic model state of Westphalia, in which King Jérôme granted Jews full civil rights, lasted until 1814. The Congress of Vienna showed that the reaction was in the majority. Legislation and administrative practice once again restricted the rights granted in the German states. The Prussian Emancipation Edict of 1812, which promised civil equality for Jews, was not without its weaknesses. The granting of citizenship to Jews in the provinces of Brandenburg, Pomerania, East Prussia, and Silesia was initially met with elation, but this edict also contained humiliations. Paragraph 9 clearly states that the king reserved the right to decide on the admission of Jews to the civil service. The newly acquired or regained provinces of Prussia after 1812 were not included in the scope of the edict (*Edikt, betreffend die bürgerlichen Verhältnisse der Juden in dem Preussischen Staate*, cf. Höxter 1930, 21f).

In the period that followed, there were renewed attacks and pogroms. Jews were excluded from universities and academies and barred from public office again. This led to numerous conversions to Christianity. In 1819, fear of competition and social envy led to the so-called Hep-Hep riots throughout Germany. Christian artisans and small merchants rioted against the Jews, whom they now saw as privileged. Also among Polish thinkers, reform efforts were linked to anti-Jewish resentment. A prime example is the attitude of Stanisław Wawrzyniec Staszic (1755-1826), who had studied in Leipzig, Göttingen, and Paris. He co-founded the Society of the Friends of Science (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauki*) and was elected chairman of the general council of the newly established University of Warsaw in 1816. In 1818, while supporting the Jewish inventor and educator Abraham Stern (1769-1842), Staszic published *O oczach niedowiarstwa synów Syjonu* ("On the Reasons of Jewish Noxiousness"). In it, he argued that the Jews were the cause of the indolence, stupidity, drunkenness, and misery of the Polish peasants.

Now, let's turn our attention back to German Idealism. Jewish speculative idealists such as the Galician Nachman Krochmal (1785-1840), who is con-

sidered the first Jewish Hegelian philosopher (cf. Rotenstreich 1968, 136ff), and the German Reform rabbis Solomon Formstecher (1808-1889) and Samuel Hirsch (1815-1889) drew upon the language of Idealism to promote Judaism as the perennial “religion of the spirit”, and it was the Galician-born Jewish scholar Fabius Mieses (1824-1898) who wrote the first Hebrew history of modern philosophy from Kant to Hegel. The first volume of his major work, *Korot ha-Filosofyah ha-Hadashah* (“History of Modern Philosophy”), appeared in print in Leipzig in 1887, where Mieses had moved to twenty years before.

The question remains when Jewish intellectuals became aware of the anti-Jewish traits inherent in German Idealism, for example, the claim that Christianity has superseded Judaism – a claim that seemed to have been overcome, at least among rational theologians. However, the struggle for civil equality continued. Most Jews wanted to integrate into German society and remain Jewish. “Just as I myself am both a Jew and a German”, wrote the radical democratic politician Johann Jacoby (1805-1877) in 1837, “so the Jew in me cannot become free without the German and the German cannot become free without the Jew” (Johann Jacoby to Alexander Künzel, May 12, 1837, quoted from Silberner 1974, 36). It was not until 1845 that the first Jews in the Rhine provinces regained their civil rights, with other federal states following suit and supporting emancipation.

But what about Israel Jacobson? After the fall of the Kingdom of Westphalia, Jacobson moved to Berlin at the end of 1814 and held services in his home in Palais Itzig from 1815 onward. These services attracted up to 400 worshippers. Due to the large crowds, they moved to Jacob Beer’s more spacious house, which had room for 1,000 worshippers. This was about a third of the Jewish community in Berlin at the time. The sermons of promising reformers such as Eduard Kley (1789-1867) also attracted Protestant clergymen. “Famous Christian preachers such as Schleiermacher and Ritschl frequently attended this service and attentively listened to the young preachers” (Seligmann 1922, 73).

In a letter dated October 16, 1815, Leopold Zunz (1794-1886) described how impressive these services were: “Yesterday, or rather Saturday (the 14th), I spent in Jacobson’s synagogue. People who for twenty years have had no close relationship with Jews spent the entire day there. Men who had already believed themselves above religious emotions poured out tears of devotion; the majority of the young people fastened” (Leopold Zunz to Samuel Meyer Ehrenberg, Oct 15, 1815, quoted from Meyer 1972, 150).

From Berlin, the new rite of synagogue services (the term “liberal” was only coined later) spread throughout Germany via Hamburg, Leipzig, Frankfurt am Main and eventually to Central Europe and North America. The

Hamburg Reform Temple was the first congregation to adopt Jacobson's innovations in 1817. In 1821, Count Julius von Soden wrote that in Hamburg, "German sermons are preached, prayers are said in German, and German chorales are sung with organ accompaniment, all according to the ideas of the insightful Jacobson" (von Soden 1821, 135).

While the Jewish reform movement broke new grounds elsewhere, the Prussian government sought to prevent its impact. In 1823, the traditionally oriented Jewish Community of Berlin (the term "orthodox" was only coined later) obtained a royal cabinet order according to which "the service of the Jews should only be held in the local synagogue and only according to the traditional rite without the slightest innovation in the language and in the ceremony, prayers and songs, entirely according to the old custom" (Order of 9 Dec 1823, quoted from Wolbe 1937, 247).

Some have suspected that this prohibition was issued on orthodox Jewish intent. Polish-born Bernhard Dov Sucher Weinryb (1900-1982), who studied in Breslau at the Jewish Theological Seminary and served as its librarian from 1931 until 1933, reports about Israel Jacobson's correspondence with Polish maskilim in Warsaw (Weinryb 1932, 147ff). From this correspondence we learn that his authority was called upon to resolve local Polish disputes. However, Jacobson's attention was firmly fixed on the closing decree of his synagogue in Berlin. He wrote his letters in Hebrew, and the correspondence makes it clear that the ban on progressive religious services in Berlin was not due to the supposed objection of traditional Jewish circles. It was due to the Protestant missionary society under the protectorate of the king (Weinryb 1932, 148f). In February 1822, King Frederick William III (1770-1840) had given his full approval to the *Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentum sunter den Juden* ("Society for the Advancement of Christianity among the Jews"). The king had helped found the society, and he declared his complete agreement with its intentions to win the descendants of Abraham, "who are still wandering in the desert and deceived by deception ... through conversion ... to the truth" (quoted from Puschwitz 2018, 250). Frederick William III also made it his mission to prevent Christians from converting to Judaism. In this light, the stance of Schopenhauer, who did not regard the Christian faith as a prerequisite for obtaining full citizenship rights, appears even more significant.

4.2. Negotiating Religion – Progressive Judaism in Warszawa

The documents Bernhard Weinryb refers to prove the close connection between Berlin and Warszawa in the 1820s and are evidence of the impact of Mendelssohn's ideas and Friedländer's political commitment in Polish lands.

He mentions, for example, a group of Jewish youth who carried out activities in Warszawa that aligned with Mendelssohn's ideas (Weinryb 1932, 144f). The correspondence quoted by Weinryb makes it clear that there was also a direct contact between Israel Jacobson and Jakub Tugendhold. (Weinryb 1932, 147). Tugendhold was already mentioned as a translator of Mendelssohn's *Phaedon* into Polish. He was an educator and, from 1852, the director of the Warsaw Rabbinical School.

Twenty years earlier, the innovations initiated by Jacobson in Westphalia had also been perceived as a necessity by a group of enlightened Jews in Warszawa, which was then under Prussian rule. The Prussian authorities had granted Jews the right to settle in the center of Warszawa and establish their own *kehilla*, or communal organization, in 1799. Despite the restrictions and taxes imposed on them, Warszawa became a magnet for Jewish bankers, wholesalers, doctors, and publishers from the German lands. The continuous immigration of German-speaking Jews led to a significant increase in the Jewish population, rising from 7,688 (12% of the total) in 1797 to 11,630 (17.4%) in 1804 (EJ 1996, vol. 16, 333). We must also acknowledge the significant presence of German craftsmen, artists, educators, and entrepreneurs in Warsaw since the Saxon court era. Under the reign of Stanisław II August Poniatowski (r. 1776--1795), many of them linked with the Holy Trinity Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran parish church of Warszawa, which was inaugurated in 1781.

Social ties between Polish and Prussian elites were part of everyday life in southern Prussia around 1800. "Driven by their intention to benefit financially from the Jewish population of their recently gained provinces, the Prussians allowed Jewish migration to the former Polish capital. While this new situation created tensions between established inhabitants and newcomers, it also allowed for the development of new forms of coexistence for the Christian and Jewish inhabitants of Warsaw" (cf. Nesselrodt 2025). This undoubtedly included social interaction with affluent and well-established Jewish families, as in the salons of Berlin.

The senior Prussian civil servants who contributed to the cultural life of Warsaw included Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822) and his friend Julius Eduard Hitzig (1780-1849). Hoffmann was transferred to Warsaw in 1804, where he became secretary and vice president of the German community's *Musikalische Gesellschaft* (Musical Society), which was co-founded by the Berlin-born Jewish banker Samuel Fränkel (1773-1833). Hoffmann was married to a Polish woman from Poznań, Michalina Rohrer-Trzcińska, and he is said to have been responsible for assigning names to some Jewish families in Warszawa. Hitzig was born Isaac Elias Itzig into the wealthy and influential Itzig family of Berlin. He converted to the Lutheran faith in 1799 and became

Criminal Counsel at the Berlin Supreme Court in 1815, then its director in 1825.

This period also saw the beginnings of progressive Judaism in Warsaw. In 1802, entrepreneur Isaac Flatau (1772-1806), a former Danzig resident who hailed from Złotów in the Poznań region, established a private synagogue for his family and friends in his home on Daniłowicz Street. This German Synagogue became a meeting place for the acculturated Jewish elite, including Flatau's brother-in-law Samuel Fränkel, and the nucleus of progressive Judaism in the later Kingdom of Poland (cf. Hensel 2003). Among the rabbis associated with the German Synagogue during the 19th century are such personalities as Abraham Goldschmid (1812-1889), Markus Jastrow (1829-1903), and Izaak Cylkow (1841-1908).

5. The Science of Judaism – Negotiating Jewish Identity

Berlin continued to retain its attraction for young Jews from Polish regions seeking access to secular education and the gradually emerging Science of Judaism. On September 7, 1819, a “Society for the Culture and Science of Judaism” was founded in Berlin. Its goal was promoting a deeper understanding of Judaism, fostering Jewish renewal, and contributing to broader academic discourse in a historical-critical context.

Its members included Eduard Gans, Heinrich Heine and Leopold Zunz. In 1822, lawyer and historian Eduard Gans (1789-1839) referred to the educational opportunities provided by the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* (“Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews”), which was founded in 1819, and its journal, *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, that first appeared in 1822. Gans, the society's chairman at the time, had studied law and philosophy in Berlin and Heidelberg, was influenced by Hegel, and became one of his closest students. Unlike Hegel and Kant, Gans argued that Judaism should be seen as one of the primary sources of Western culture and as the source of its notion of religion and morality. In 1822, he reported: “Every year, many Jewish boys and youths come here, mostly from Poland or the neighboring districts, to find instruction and sustenance. Not being able to speak a single language, not even being instructed in what children from better classes often have without tuition, they partly lack the means to attend one of the established institutions, partly other circumstances prohibit it” (Gans 1822, 14f). For Gans, it was not an option to send these young Jewish men from the East to one of the existing Jewish schools in Berlin, as these did not have the necessary resources for the required formative education and integration work. Thus, the teaching institute of the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft*

der Juden took care of them instead: "In order to meet the loudly demanded need, it was arranged that every young man belonging to the aforementioned classes, insofar as he is prevented from attending school and intends to devote himself to study, teaching, an art, or a higher trade, with the exception of commerce, may receive free instruction from the members of the association in all the knowledge necessary for the preparation for it" (Gans 1822, 15).

Over the years, two different strands of the Science of Judaism were formed: a purely secular branch, represented by Leopold Zunz, and Jewish theology, represented by Abraham Geiger.

The Jewish historian and orientalist Heimann Jolowicz (1816-1875) praised 1841 the era of the historical school, which followed the idealism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and brought self-awareness and scholarship to the Jews. Indeed, while Protestant rationalism had provided a window for encounters with Judaism, the biased German Idealism spurred Jewish self-esteem and the Science of Judaism: Rolf Vierhaus has described this as follows: "Scholarship changed its appearance; it became 'scientific', i.e., argumentative, explorative and experimental. It was no longer seen as its main task to pass on authoritative doctrines, but to systematically increase knowledge, critically examine and improve knowledge, which was increasingly assessed from the point of view of its practical application" (Vierhaus 1985, 8). "The past was discovered and thus the foundation of the present was gained, a new generation conscious of its Jewishness was gradually created", as Leo Baeck described this development a hundred years later (Baeck 1929, col. 488).

The success of the Warsaw Rabbinical Seminary, established by the Russian authorities on July 1, 1825, opened in 1826, and operated until 1861, clearly demonstrates that rationalism was especially appealing to young Jews. However, it is notable that not a single ordained rabbi was among its approximately 1,200 graduates. Marcin Wodzinski only mentions one student, Jakub Szwajcer, who applied for the position of rabbi after graduating in 1831 (Wodzinski 2005, 137). The school never truly functioned as an effective rabbinical seminary; instead, it evolved into an important secondary education institution (cf. Finkelstein 2006; Kula 2017). The training represented a departure from traditional religion. When British Jewish philanthropist Moses Montefiore (1784-1885) visited the Rabbinical School, he praised the "superbly advanced students" (Green 2012, 193). In fact, it educated a lay elite that promoted acculturation and trained agents of religious change. The Warsaw School, led by Antoni Eisenbaum (1791-1852), a prominent figure in the Jewish integration movement in the Kingdom of Poland, served as a major influence in Jewish Enlightenment and political emancipation in Poland beyond religious boundaries. The school also reflects the dilemma faced by enlightened Jews, who

identified as Poles of the Mosaic faith but had to confront the fact that Polish society continued to distinguish between separate ethnic nations, even as the assimilated Jews sought to merge.

While the Warsaw School was especially successful in secular studies, it was left to Rabbi Abraham Geiger some decades later to establish rabbinical seminaries that became important as effective blends of vocational training, modern theology, and scholarly research. The Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau (1854) and the Higher Institute for Jewish Studies in Berlin (*Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 1872) fostered Liberal Judaism, which had become the leading denomination among German Jews.

There were many connections between Warsaw and Berlin within a progressive religious context. One example is Izaak Cyłkow, who began his education at the Rabbinical School in Warsaw when his father became a Talmud teacher. The Association of *Lomdei Torah* ("Torah Studies") awarded him a scholarship, allowing him to study in Berlin and Halle. In April 1865, Isaac Cyłkow was appointed preacher at the synagogue on Daniłowiczowska Street. Later, he became an esteemed scholar and rabbi of the progressive Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street in Warsaw. On September 26, 1878, just before Rosh Hashanah, he delivered his opening speech to the gathered guests, including Warsaw's Governor-General, Count Paul Kotzebue, and the City President, Sokrat Starynkiewicz, in Polish. "We have faith in God", Cyłkow stated. "We will not be considered as a separate community or as a separate people. We will be considered as eligible children of our country, citizens of one country". "Religions exist to bring people together and inspire them to act in unison for the common good" (Skibiński, n.d.). This clearly aligns with Israel Jacobson's call for joint progress towards a better future. Benjamin Matis, in his "Theology in Translation: Progressive Judaism in the Kingdom of Poland", definitively traces a line from Jacobson to progressive Judaism in Poland (cf. Matis 2014, 257).

Michał Galas outlined the influence of progressive Judaism in Poland, a line of tradition since 1802 (cf. Galas 2011). Galas clearly links progressive synagogue life and the Science of Judaism in the Polish context. Here is an illustrative example of this link: On June 13, 1925, the Society for the Promotion of Judaic Sciences in Poland, *Towarzystwo Krzewienia Nauk Judaistycznych w Polsce*, was formally registered in Warszawa. This was the result of the initiative of Rabbi Professor Mojżesz Schorr (1874-1941). The Society's mission was clear: establishing and operating the new Institute for Jewish Studies. Sponsored by the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street, it opened at the beginning of the summer semester of the 1928/1929 academic year. The institution consisted of two faculties: a rabbinic and a socio-historical one. By the 1930s, this institution had achieved a degree of self-confidence, and its

teachers and former students created a Union of Rabbis with a higher education degree [*Związek Rabinów Posiadających Wyższe Wykształcenie*] that marked itself off from the more traditional Union of Rabbis in Poland, explains Anthony Polonsky (Polonsky 2013, 250). In 1936, it organized a congress of progressive synagogues, during which a Central Union of Progressive Synagogues was created (Polonsky 2013, 250).

“Despite all the limitations, the religious changes taking place in the liberal Jewish community in the Polish lands can reasonably be seen as a low but successful revolution”, Marcin Wodziński summarizes. “The reformers understood that any change that was too radical would, on the one hand, arouse opposition from conservative circles and expose the reformers to a charge of usurpation, and, on the other, encourage those who had already moved away from practicing their religion to leave Judaism even more rapidly. Nevertheless, changes were gradually introduced, creating new forms of worship and social relations” (Wodziński 2016, 83).

Conclusion

The Enlightenment and Romanticism significantly influenced intellectuals in Germany and Poland during the 18th and 19th centuries. German and Polish intellectuals have been grappling with balancing universal values with specific national interests and cultural identities. Enlightenment thought, as expressed by Moses Mendelssohn, seems to have placed significant emphasis on reason, universal values, and individual rights. In contrast, Romanticism focused more on emotions, national identity, and unique cultural heritage, including the struggle for Polish independence as explored by Adam Mickiewicz.

It has been observed that rational theology has the potential to create new spaces and opportunities for Judaism and Jews in the German lands. David Friedländer believed that a less dogmatic Christianity and a more emancipated Judaism could find common ground. While rational theology provided a foundation for Jews and Christians to meet on equal terms, romantic ideas like Schlegel’s “Christian state” hindered the acceptance of multiple religions coexisting. Schleiermacher helped distinguish between civil equality and religious loyalty. By creating a clear separation between the religious and civic spheres, he – perhaps inadvertently – allowed Jews to explore their Jewish identity while also supporting their right to citizenship.

It appears that Schleiermacher’s intervention and Israel Jacobson’s reform efforts may have contributed to separating their two concerns: modern religion and civil equality. A certain ambivalence characterizes the reception of German Idealism in Jewish thought. Peter J. Haas suggested that, despite some

resentment, the Jewish Reform movement's European roots can be traced to German Idealism. For both Kant and Hegel, the two great philosophers that the Reform movement relied on for its intellectual self-understanding, the concrete aspects of religious life were simply reflections of the more abstract reality of the universe. When a religious tradition is reimagined, as was the case with the German Reformers, it is not the tradition that serves as the main source of guidance. Instead, the focus shifts to the truths of the universe revealed through philosophical inquiry (Haas 1888, 61).

German Idealism's influence on Jewish reform in Polish territories is significant: The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism) and Jacobson's innovations greatly impacted the striving for Jewish renewal in partitioned Poland. The emerging Jewish reform movement emphasized analyzing Judaism, using modern academic methods and applying critical thinking to Jewish texts and traditions to develop contemporary expressions of Jewish belief. The German Enlightenment and Idealist ideas influenced Poland's Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah). Some thinkers, like Nachman Krochmal (1785-1840), are known for incorporating elements of German Idealism into their Jewish philosophy, focusing on themes of reason, morality, and national identity.

Recent research has shown that many Jewish thinkers have committed themselves to a philosophy that, unfortunately, dismisses them and is filled with anti-Jewish resentment (Mack 2003; Sveningsson 2020). This discrepancy may resemble Gershom Scholem's 1966 analogy of the so-called German-Jewish symbiosis with a "one-sided love affair".

This article also suggests that the influence of religious Jewish reform in the Polish lands might be more significant than commonly believed. The shared histories and lived experiences highlight a network and space shaped by transregional interdependencies. Its many aspects could be worth exploring through case studies, intertwined memories, and microhistory. Numerous potential directions for further research exist within German and Polish intellectual history.

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