

# A Scottish Millennial Mission to Jews

## The Conversion, Work, Theological views, and Hungarian Connections of Adolph Saphir (1831–91)

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### Abstract

*This paper investigates how the missionaries of the Church of Scotland sought to convert the Jews in Hungary. The research studies carefully Adolph Saphir's change of faith, his theological views, and his work. His family was the first "fruit" of Scottish missionary activity among the Hungarian Jews in 1843. After scrutinizing his conversion, the study proceeds to map his sphere of work as a missionary. In particular, it examines his millennial views, which gave the impetus to his missionary activity. Finally, the paper demonstrates that he became an ardent supporter of mission to the Jews not only in Britain but also in Central Europe.*

### Keywords

*Jewish mission, Scottish evangelicalism, millennialism, conversion, Hungary, Reformed*

The Scottish evangelical attempt aimed for the conversion of Jews in Hungary, a "highly preposterous" enterprise of Scottish evangelicalism that resulted in a transplantation of Free Kirk evangelical culture.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, this research examines the conversion, theological outlook, and work of one of the first Hungarian Jewish converts, Adolph

<sup>1</sup> Gavin White, "Highly Preposterous: Origins of Scottish Missions," in *Records Scottish Church History Society* 19 (1977), 111–24, at 114–16. See also Andrew F. Walls, "Missions," in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 570; Andrew Landale Drummond, *The Kirk and the Continent* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1956), 187; Stuart Piggen and John Roxborough, *The St. Andrew's Seven* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985).

Saphir, whose family was baptized by missionaries in 1843. He had a unique relationship with the Scottish mission of the (Free) Church of Scotland in Hungary during the 19th century, which began its mission in Budapest in 1841.<sup>2</sup>

Adolph Saphir's conversion embodies how Scottish missionaries succeeded in transferring their millennialist belief to Hungary. His life and work were in constant interaction with Scottish evangelicalism in Hungary as well as abroad. Later, Saphir propagated the same worldview that the Scots sought to disseminate. This research paper not only studies his conversion, but also scrutinizes how his worldview, of which his conversion story is a good indicator, affected his relations as a Jewish Christian with the work of Scottish Calvinists who spread evangelical piety and praxis in Central Europe, particularly in Hungary.

## A Little Boy's Conversion and His Appearance in the Famous Painting of Disruption

In the famous picture of the disruption within the Church of Scotland that took place in 1843, there is a child from Hungary in the centre right. It is somewhat perplexing and unusual to include a little boy in a painting of such a solemn occasion as the act of seceding from the national church. It is not widely known that he was a Hungarian Jew named Adolph Saphir whose life and work were the unique result of the Scottish evangelical mission in Hungary. Adolph was the youngest son of Israel Alexander Saphir, a rich Jewish merchant of Pest.<sup>3</sup> His father spoke several languages and was held in high regard within the Pest Jewish circles. His election to be on the board of trustees for the only Jewish school of Pest, where many of the Jewish elite sent their sons, is evidence of this high regard.<sup>4</sup> Israel was a well-connected Jew, and many of his relatives held high positions in society. He was the brother of the famous humorist Gottlieb Moritz Saphir.<sup>5</sup> Another brother, Zsigmond, was among the first generation of Hungarian Jews who moved into journalism, the contemporary world of media. He became the editor of

<sup>2</sup> Ábrahám Kovács, *The Origin of the Scottish-Hungarian Church Relations: The Settlement and the First Years of the Scottish Mission in the 1840s* (Debrecen: DRHE, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Pest, Buda, and Óbuda were united as Budapest in 1873. Pest is the eastern flat part of the current capital of Hungary, Budapest.

<sup>4</sup> Bernát Mándl, "A Pesti Izr. Hitközségi Fiu-Iskola Monográfiája," in *A magyar- zsidó felekezet elemi és polgári iskoláinak monográfiája*, 2 vols, ed. J. Barna and F. Csukás (Budapest: 1896), I, 22–23.

<sup>5</sup> Jefferson S. Chase, *Inciting Laughter: The Development of "Jewish Humor" in 19th Century German Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000). See also Gavin Carlyle, "Mighty in the Scriptures," *A Memoir of Adolph Saphir, D. D.* (London: John F. Shaw and Co., 1893), 444.

*Pesther Tageblatt* and *Pesther Sonntags Zeitung* between 1839 and 1845.<sup>6</sup> The Saphirs were part of the newly forming community, full of reforming initiatives, which later came to be known as the Neolog trend of Hungarian Jewry.

It was the elderly Saphir and his family who became some of the most well-known converts among his contemporary Jewish people in Pest.<sup>7</sup> The father turned to Christianity with his entire family, and little Adolph was introduced to the faith at a very young age. Strangely enough, there is a relative silence about the Saphirs' change of faith, in both contemporary Jewish and Christian papers and modern works. Even in the most respected work of Aladár Komlós, author of an excellent book on the history of Hungarian Jewish literature, we find no mention of this conversion.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps Komlós found it unacceptable for a Jew to change their inherited religion to another, perceiving it as apostasy. Some sources enable us to reconstruct the Saphirs' conversion. Regarding the theological views of Adolph, his life and work are well documented. He produced a vast body of literature that is available to the researcher.<sup>9</sup> From this data, it is possible to construe his life, his theological stance, and his involvement in Scottish and English evangelicalism. Through his career, Adolph became more widely known among the (Christian) Jews in Europe, particularly in Britain and Hungary.<sup>10</sup>

The conversion of Israel Saphir and his family came as a blow to the Pest Jewish community, which had fostered good relations with the Scottish mission since its arrival in August 1841. Before the conversion took place in 1843, the leaders of the Pest Jewish community were cordial to the Scots despite some accusations that appeared in Jewish papers about the early attempt of some of the associates of the mission to proselytize.<sup>11</sup> It seems as if Rabbi Arszlán Schwab of the Neolog community did not realize the missionary endeavour of the Scots, who officially ministered to the British workers of the chain bridge that was under construction in Buda and Pest. However, the Scots were determined to reach out to the Jews with the gospel as they understood their own faith.

<sup>6</sup> Béla Kempelen, *Magyar zsidó családok* (Budapest: Makkabi Kiadó, 1999), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Mándl, "A pesti izr. hitközségi fiu-iskola monográfiája," I: 22–71.

<sup>8</sup> A. Komlós, *Magyar-zsidó szellemi történet a reformkortól a holocaustig I. A magyar zsidóság irodalmi tevékenysége a XIX. században; II. Bevezetés a magyar zsidó irodalomba*, 2 vols (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Carlyle, "Mighty in the Scriptures," 443.

<sup>10</sup> Péter Újvári, *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon* (Budapest: Pallas Irodalmi és Nyomdai Kiadó, 1929), 765.

<sup>11</sup> "Pesth im Juni (Eingefandt)," *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 7:30 (1843), 444–46.

The Scottish Presbyterians' worldview was imbued by millennialism.<sup>12</sup> According to their eschatological view, they believed that by converting the Jews and the heathens, they may prepare the way for the return of Jesus Christ's millennial kingdom. For Free Kirk evangelicals, the revival of the church and the Jewish mission were linked. One of the famous revivalist preachers of that time, Robert M. McCheyne<sup>13</sup> (1813–43), indicated that “the ‘revival’ proper followed upon, rather than led to, the inauguration of [the] Jewish Scheme.”<sup>14</sup> McCheyne was a driving force behind the Jewish mission initiated within the Church of Scotland. In the *Edinburgh Christian Witness* he wrote: “Is it not a remarkable fact, that in the very year in which God put it into the hearts of the church to send a mission of kind inquiry to Israel ... God visited his people in Scotland by giving them bread in a way unknown since the days of Cambuslang and Moulin.”<sup>15</sup>

This millennialist expectation led to the establishment of the most well-known “Jewish mission” station in Pest. John Duncan, the first professor of Hebrew and Oriental languages at New College Edinburgh, became the first missionary to the Jews in Pest. He was also a millennialist who thought that the Jews “feel themselves drawn especially to British Christianity (evangelicalism) since it was tolerant, and defended civil and religious liberty.”<sup>16</sup> This statement reveals that for Duncan, a change of faith naturally resulted for the converts in an advancement in civil society as a Christian. This contains a strong element of truth.<sup>17</sup>

However, for him this social aspect of improving someone's social status was not the reason for trying to pass on his Scottish evangelical belief. Being a deeply religious person, his motivations arose from his religious conviction that the Jews needed to be shown who their Messiah was: Jesus, the Christ. Duncan's eschatological belief was expressed in the following manner: “the fullness of the Gentiles could not be completed because of the continuance of blindness to a part of Israel.”<sup>18</sup> He argued that it was evident that the mission to the Jews had to be a priority, *a primus inter pares*, among the mission activities of the Scots. Thus, an interconnectivity was established between

<sup>12</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Ian Hamilton, “McCheyne, Robert Murray,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, 504–505.

<sup>14</sup> Don Chambers, “Prelude to the Last Things: The Church of Scotland's Mission to the Jews,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 19 (1977), 55.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne, “Revival,” *Edinburgh Christian Witness* 23 (1840), 3.

<sup>16</sup> David Brown, *Life of the Late John Duncan* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872), 438.

<sup>17</sup> Mel Scult, *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

<sup>18</sup> John Duncan, “Addresses in the Free Church Assembly on the Mission to the Jews in Hungary, and on the Christian Future of the Jewish People 25 May, 1857,” in *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Held at Edinburgh May, 1857* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1857), 44–48.

mission to the pagans and the Jews. For him, the time he lived in was “pregnant with mighty change.”<sup>19</sup> Evangelicals like him always looked at the “sign of times” in history.<sup>20</sup> The events of the contemporary world were connected to prophecies from the Bible, including, for instance, his interpretation of the decline of Ottoman military power. He stated that the “lune of Islam is rapidly decreescent; and all things portend that the time when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in is nigh – even at the door.”<sup>21</sup> He also believed that the “decrepitude” of popery and “idolatrous” religions of India and China were speedily to fall and would hasten the national conversions of the Jews. The hostility became evident toward Islam and Roman Catholicism by portraying them as “AntiChrist.” This was a common practice among the Puritans, and evangelicals were heir to this worldview.<sup>22</sup> To hasten Jesus’ return one must reach out to the Jews, meaning to convert them to Christ “who died for them,” not to Christendom as a culture, or Christianity as a mere religion, as he distinguished between these spheres. Thus millennialism provided the mental framework and larger context as well as providing justification for a mission to the Jews.<sup>23</sup>

Adolph, the youngest child of the Saphir family, became one of the first converts of the Scottish mission in Pest when he was only 12 years old. It may sound strange and astonishing but the Scottish missionaries, after they managed to build cordial relations with the Saphirs, had high expectations of him becoming a missionary to the Jews. The Scottish missionary Robert Smith, who resided in Pest, wrote about him in this vein: “I feel confident that this child, if he is not being prepared for a speedy removal to another world, is being prepared for much good in Jewish Mission.”<sup>24</sup> The evangelical Scots were shrewd enough to capitalize on this promising situation of converting such a

<sup>19</sup> S. Sinclair, *Rich Gleanings after the Vintage from “Rabbi” Duncan with Biographical Sketch* (London: Chas. J. Thynne & Jarvis, 1925), 360.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Keith, *Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion from the Literal Fulfilment of Prophecy; Particularly as Illustrated by the History of the Jews and by the Discoveries of Recent Travellers* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1833). Keith was the member of the “famous” deputation to the Jews in 1839 together with R. M. McCheyne, A. Black, and A. Bonar.

<sup>21</sup> John Duncan, “Addresses in the Free Church Assembly on the Mission to the Jews in Hungary, and on the Christian Future of the Jewish People 21 May 1860,” in *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Held at Edinburgh May, 1860* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1860), 39–42.

<sup>22</sup> Ariel Yaakov, *Mission to the Jews in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000). See also C. Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology 1550–1682* (Bletchley: Milton Keynes, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Crawford Gribben and Timothy C. F. Stunt (eds), *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880* (Bletchley: Milton Keynes, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Robert Smith, “Letter from Mr Smith Pesth February 25, 1843,” *Home and Foreign Missionary Record Church of Scotland* (hereafter *HFMRCofS*) 2:17 (1843), 230–33.

family who would open a door to proclaiming Christ to the Jews of Budapest. This expectation stems from that millennial conviction that the conversion of the Jews as a people would hasten the return of Christ, and was the “sign of times.”<sup>25</sup> The evangelical Scots were natural heirs of this millennialist worldview surviving from British Puritanism going back to Cromwell’s time.<sup>26</sup> Smith’s wish concurred with that of the father. During an intensive relationship of almost two years, the Scots managed to influence the Saphirs to change faiths on the basis of their faith conviction.

The change of religious conviction becomes obvious from the primary sources. The evidence shows a highly intense religious feeling among the participants. The result was emotional, social, and religious turmoil occasioned by the change of religious allegiance. The Scots, as well as their recent converts, the Saphirs, thought they were enacting the biblical times of the apostles. This is evidenced by the application of biblical stories, images, and words to their own lives.

One of the highly intriguing aspects of the first Jewish conversions was the perception of the series of events by the participant missionaries as well as the Jewish converts. The inquiries leading to the first conversions started in late 1842 and lasted until the spring of 1843. The following features of the conversion process shed light on their peculiar perception of their own contemporaneous context.

First, the missionary accounts speak of the autumn of 1842 as a time of “Pentecostal blessings,” when seven missionaries gathered “providentially” in Pest. The very language (seven missionaries, not six, “providential” and “Pentecostal blessings”) shows clearly an application of religious “truth,” or story, to one’s own situation to provide the believer with a “rational” and acceptable explanation for the events taking place. This circular interpretation functioned to justify the appropriateness of the convert’s decision. According to the missionary reports, during the winter of 1842/43 some of the Jewish inquirers began to show an interest in the gospel. They received “education,” which meant a kind of catechism, from the missionaries which, in some cases such as the Saphirs, eventually led to their conversion.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Keith, *Sketch of the Evidence from Prophecy; Containing an Account of Those Prophecies Which Were Distinctly Foretold, and Which Have Been Clearly or Literally Fulfilled with an Appendix, Extracted from Sir Isaac Newton’s Observations on the Prophecies* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1823).

<sup>26</sup> Mel Scult, *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

<sup>27</sup> In the late-reform era of the Hungarian Kingdom (1840–48), the Jewish community in Pest was in the making. The community leaders allowed reforms from the 1830s, and the leading voices were some wealthy leaders as well as people from the emerging *intelligencia*. This was a highly dominant group that was later referred to as the Neolog (reform) group. Alongside this appeared the Orthodox, status quo ante, as reactions to modernization, and, last but not least, the Messianic Jews.



The second feature is the application of the biblical text to their contemporaneous situation. The missionaries and the would-be Jewish converts saw themselves as “walking in the shoes of the apostles.”<sup>28</sup> As the leaders of the Jewish community realized that the Scots were proselytizing, they began to oppose the involvement of their community members with them. This had a counterproductive effect in some cases, certainly for the Saphirs. Due to this, the Saphir family and some other Jewish inquirers drew even closer to Scottish evangelicalism and spoke at their gatherings – which often took place secretly – about the “fear of the Jews,” a language formula that was also obtained from John 7:13, the time of the first Jewish conversions.<sup>29</sup> This exhibits the perplexing social-religious phenomenon of Jewish people speaking of other Jews persecuting them, a topic that has led to various, and conflicting, interpretations in the history of Christianity.<sup>30</sup>

The third highly interesting feature of evangelical conversion is to be gathered from the following story. The missionary reports record an uncommon event that took place before the baptism of the Saphir family in May 1843. Israel Saphir committed his young son Adolph to Duncan’s care with these words: “When I give my son to Christ it is the new thing to myself.”<sup>31</sup> The self-sacrificing element is a typical indicator of evangelical spirituality. One wishes to imitate the life and deed of the master, Jesus, whom the convert sees as his or her redeemer from sin. Smith’s desire, mentioned earlier, came to fruition as the young Adolph was baptized together with his father.

The act of Israel Saphir’s dedicating his child to missionary work recalls the Old Testament story of Anna’s vow and her promise to devote her son Samuel to Yahweh. Thus, Israel Saphir’s example shows clearly that he applied the biblical text literally to his own context.<sup>32</sup> Saphir, like Anna, offered his son for the service of God as an expression of gratitude. The father’s exceptional religious zeal destined the young boy’s life. One may say he was “predestined” to be an evangelical Christian. Adolph Saphir’s conversion can be described as his will of being baptized concurring with that of his father.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Life of the Late John Duncan*, 353.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Smith, “A Personal Narrative of Ten Years’ Mission in Hungary,” *Sunday at Home* 13:65 (1866), 773–74.

<sup>30</sup> The evangelical stance was always Philo-Semitic, whereas, for instance, the stance of the Protestant, or most notoriously that of the Catholic Church, was to blame the Jews for killing Jesus, who was, as if they were oblivious to his ethnic background, very much a devout Jew. This issue is discussed in ample literature and is not part of my discussion in this paper.

<sup>31</sup> William Wingate, “Journal,” *HFMRCofS, January, 1842–May, 1843* 2:12 (1842), 171.

<sup>32</sup> Adolph Saphir’s speech at the “The Jewish Evening at the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland 24th May 1889,” in *Report on the Conversion of the Jews to the General Assembly 1889* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1889), 23.

The application of biblical events to one's own life is a fascinating product in Scottish evangelicalism and its successful transplantation to Hungary in a family's life.

## The Sphere of Adolph Saphir's Work

Owing to the shared conviction of the Scottish missionaries and Israel Saphir, Adolph travelled to Scotland with "rabbi" Duncan in 1843, aged 12, to be trained for mission among the Jews. He lived in Edinburgh for six months with Duncan's family. Duncan deemed that it would be better for the young Saphir, feeling alone and isolated in the new environment, to live closer to his relatives. Therefore, he sent him to Berlin to study, where he stayed with Charles Schwartz, the husband of Adolph's eldest sister.<sup>33</sup> After three years of secondary school education, he returned to Scotland. He continued his studies at Glasgow University and later at Marischal College, Aberdeen. Finally, he moved to Edinburgh in 1851, where he became a student of theology at the Free Church's New College. Having completed his studies in 1854, upon the recommendation of Alexander Keith, the originator of mission to the Jews in Pest, he was ordained as a missionary to the Jews by the Irish Presbyterian Church.<sup>34</sup>

The Irish church sent him to Hamburg, where he began to write for the Jews. From that time Adolph began to produce literature for Jewish mission in which his evangelical views are clearly visible. He strongly believed in using literature as a means of Jewish evangelism. One of his first tracts was *Wer ist der Apostat?* (Who is the Apostate?). He wrote a Passover story in which the conversations at the Passover table were at the heart of the narrative. The climax of the story was when the stranger, partaking of the meal with the Jewish family, points out that the real apostate was he who rejected God as revealed and prophesied in Jesus, the Messiah.<sup>35</sup> This work created some interest among the Jews, and the number of inquirers increased in Hamburg, the city of transition for the Eastern European Jewry to the "New World." Adolph's biographer, Gavin Carlyle, points out that the sending agency, the Jewish Mission Committee of the Irish Presbyterian Church, did not agree with his method, which overtly challenged Jewish customs and doctrines. The dispute between him and the board about how to evangelize the Jews intensified.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Edinburgh, New College Library, BRO-142-813-24. Manuscript on Robert Smith. Schwartz was one of the seven missionaries who participated in the first "Pentecostal times" in Pest in 1842. See Ábrahám Kovács, *The History of the Free Church of Scotland's Mission to the Jews and Its Impact on the Hungarian Reformed Church* (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2003), 84.

<sup>34</sup> Gavin Carlyle, "Mighty in the Scriptures," 118.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, besides Carlyle's remark, there is no further information about why the Irish board opposed it.



In this atmosphere another problem arose. While staying in Hamburg, the Austrian authorities had a claim on him to do military service, forcing him to leave the country. Having returned to Britain, he offered his resignation to the Irish sending board. Though from that time he ceased to be a missionary to the Jews officially, he exerted considerable influence among both Jews and “Gentiles” as a preacher and a writer. First, Adolph became a minister at the Laygate Presbyterian Church, South Shields, in England<sup>37</sup>; some years later he moved to St Mark’s Church, Greenwich, London, and then he moved to Notting Hill, London. Finally, he was invited to become a minister at Belgrave Presbyterian Church in 1880.<sup>38</sup> His sphere of work was mainly in Britain, and he never had an opportunity to return to Hungary. However, he was a steady supporter of the Scottish mission in Hungary and other Central European countries. This is evidenced through his collecting money for the new converts as well as offering them assistance to fit into the new subculture of Christian society. But before turning our attention to this, I will explore his theological views further.

### Saphir’s Views on the Bible, Eschatology, and *Ecclesiola*

Saphir’s life clearly shows the success of converting a Hungarian Jew who became a strong advocate of Scottish evangelical views. He maintained a productive and influential life as a writer. Throughout his ministry, his literary activity was on a broad scale and influential. I underline three characteristics of his theological views: the rejection of higher criticism; the adherence to a particular millennialist eschatology; and the belief in the missionary role of the interdenominational (evangelical) body, the remnant elected, the true church.

First, he insisted on the authority of the Bible, which he perceived as a literal revelation of God. Therefore, he strongly opposed historical criticism spreading to Britain from Germany. The works of F. C. Baur and D. Strauss were seen as undermining efforts to question the chief tenets and doctrines of the Christian church.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that the Free Kirk evangelicals played an important role in trying to counter-balance this continental influence by establishing the Evangelical Alliance in 1846.<sup>40</sup> Saphir’s theology was in line with the Scottish evangelical view. His most well-known work was the *Golden A B C of the Jews*, a commentary on Psalm 119. In this work, Saphir argued against what he termed “traditionalism” and “naturalist reasoning”: “we are in

<sup>37</sup> Carlyle, “*Mighty in the Scriptures*,” 134.

<sup>38</sup> “Saphir, Adolph”, in S. Lee (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Russen-Scobell, 63 vols. (London, 1897), L, 299.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander C. Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 123–38. See the chapter on “The Bible and Change in the Nineteenth Century.”

<sup>40</sup> J. B. A. Kessler, *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre N. V., 1968), 30, 33.

danger of becoming servants of men, and of being led astray either by the tradition of antiquity or by the ever changing speculations of human reason.”<sup>41</sup> The evangelical Christians deemed another of his works, entitled *Christ and the Scriptures* – a small book circulated in the tens of thousands – to be the ablest and most popular work.<sup>42</sup> The booklet intended to refute the “unbelief and scepticism of the day.” It emphasized the great discovery of the Reformers:

Christ only, Christ above all; and the Scriptures only, the Bible above all human authority. Higher than the Bible is not reason, not the Church, not the Christian consciousness, but the Holy Ghost, who reveals Christ in the Written Word, so that it becomes to us what it truly is, the Word of God, the voice of the Beloved.<sup>43</sup>

Second, it can be claimed that Saphir’s eschatology was also an heir of his “spiritual parents,” the Scottish evangelicals. He shared their theological views about the special role of the Jews in God’s economy. Being part of the millennialist evangelicalism, his writings evidence his belief that mission to the Jews and the end of time are inseparable. He managed to avoid obsessive calculations about the precise time of Christ’s return and knowing exactly the course of events. However, he was not entirely exempt from trying to decipher God’s will, a typical attitude of 19th-century fundamentalism, and often evangelicalism, that led to the emergence of new religious movements such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Mormons. Of course, this is the wider context of a worldview stemming from the fervent mentality of British and American Protestantism imbued by evangelicalism.<sup>44</sup> As was mentioned, mission to the Jews was just one segment of evangelical interest in mission, but for some highly influential Free Kirk churchmen, like Duncan, it was *primus inter pares*. That is why for many, millennialism<sup>45</sup> was closely tied to the mandate of the church to preach Christ, to extend the benevolent result of Christianity to other people and cultures, particularly to the Jews. Adolph’s view bears testimony to a particular millennialist scheme that sketched out the event of the last days of world history, which was perceived as God’s history.

<sup>41</sup> Carlyle, “*Mighty in the Scriptures*,” 171.

<sup>42</sup> Adolf Saphir, *Krisztus és az írás*, trans. V. Győry (Budapest: Hornyánszky Viktor, 1879). Strangely enough, it was the only book that was translated into Hungarian, as far as my research uncovered. Győry was the son-in-law of Bishop József Székács, a former supporter of the mission. See also K. Rácz, “Könyvismertetés Adolph Saphir: *Krisztus és a Biblia*,” *Evangeliumi Protestáns Lap* 3:33 (1877), 275–76.

<sup>43</sup> Carlyle, “*Mighty in the Scriptures*,” 182.

<sup>44</sup> Ariel Yaakov, *Mission to the Jews in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000).

<sup>45</sup> N. R. Needham, “Millennialism,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, 562–64.

Therefore, he wrote, “All Israel shall be saved *finally*, [and] in the meantime God has not *totally* rejected His people.” The salvation of the Jewish people was presented in a systematic process of restoration, “the phases of restoration culminating in the coming of the Great King.”<sup>46</sup> For the first stage many Jews would be brought to Jerusalem in order to be judged in an unconverted state. According to his view, this was the first gathering of the Jews. Second, nations would rise against the Jews, “attracted by their defenceless position.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, this would be followed by a “great crisis.” Then, “there shall be a second and more general ingathering of Israel out of all nations . . . Thus, there are two restorations, – one before, the other after the great crisis; one partial, the other complete.”<sup>48</sup> The great crisis is the time of the Anti-Christ’s reign, which would be destroyed by Christ’s second coming. The second advent marked the moment when Israel as a nation turned to God, meaning that they would accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah.<sup>49</sup> Saphir was convinced that during the “great crisis,” two-thirds of the whole of Israel would be destroyed and the remaining part of Israel would turn to God. Christ’s peaceful rule would then be established over the nations and “Jerusalem shall be rebuilt.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, Christ’s millennial rule comes after his destruction of the Anti-Christ and the second coming. This millennial language shows some resemblance to that of his “spiritual father,” John Duncan, who was instrumental in his conversion.

The third observation is that his view on the church is in accordance with that of the Scottish Presbyterians. He shared their view of the “elected remnant,” which was a very particular aspect of Scottish and Hungarian Calvinism at various times in their history.<sup>51</sup> Saphir’s ecclesiological views were expressed at the 50-year-jubilee anniversary of the mission deputation of 1839 to the Jews in Edinburgh. There, Saphir urged the Scots to carry out mission to the Jews with these words: “There would always be among the Jews *a remnant* according to the election of grace” till the fullness of the Gentiles comes, then “that finally all Israel shall be saved.”<sup>52</sup> For Saphir and the Free Church, the importance of the Messianic movement did not rest in its “numerical strength” but in

<sup>46</sup> David Brown, *The Restoration of the Jews: The History, Principles and Bearings of Question* (Edinburgh: Alexander Strahan & Co., 1861), 115–17; Adolph Saphir, *The Restoration of the Jews* (London: Blackheath, 1864), 27.

<sup>47</sup> Saphir, *The Restoration*, 28.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>49</sup> Carlyle, “*Mighty in the Scriptures*,” 304.

<sup>50</sup> Saphir, *The Restoration*, 34.

<sup>51</sup> Óze Sándor, *Apokaliptikus időszemlélet a korai reformáció Magyarországon, 1526–1566* (Budapest: Magyar Napló, 2016).

<sup>52</sup> Adolph Saphir, “The Jewish Evening at the General Assembly,” 23. Emphasis mine.

its “intrinsic character.”<sup>53</sup> This argument reoccurs in Saphir’s speech again when he refuted the charge that “it is often said that are few converts.” He argued that “God’s witnesses is always a little flock,” an “ever victorious minority.”<sup>54</sup> He was shrewd enough not to give the exact date when this was to happen. However, he did give some “clues” to the solution, the “sign of time,” language which was, of course, always open to different layers of interpretation. By doing so, those involved in mission to the Jews often managed to justify their own way of interpretation and were able to keep the missionary spirit high in spite of the numerical failure of converting Jews in large numbers. In such a process, the coherence community comes first, and theological justification functioned to support their own view. Another crucial aspect of their commonly shared ecclesiology was how they perceived the relationship between mission and church and what they regarded as the true *ecclesiola*. The mutuality of common mission interest, to evangelize both Jews and Gentiles, made the denominational stance secondary to Saphir and the Scottish Jewish Mission Committee. This was often a theological trait of many mission initiatives. In other words, interdenominational and trans-national cooperation of like-minded people from different church bodies was favoured as the true church. Saphir’s understanding of the church reflected this conviction:

The Church is an abstraction. All saints that ever lived, and still live, are in the Church. The church is yet in the future, at Christ’s coming. Now there are only churches. As for the assumption that Romanist, Anglicans, and Greeks are the only three Churches, it has no scriptural foundation whatever. Where there is an organized brotherhood of Believers we recognize a Church. This includes individualist, like the independents, and corporate churches, like the Methodist, Presbyterians, Anglicans. Of course some are more scriptural and fully developed than the others. State church contains churches, but are not churches. But this last sentence would require explanation. It was held by Luther, and I think him a host in himself.<sup>55</sup>

This ecclesiology is clearly “based on the brotherhood of believers” regardless of their denominational stance. It gained full expression in the evangelical alliance, which was the embodiment of such ideas.<sup>56</sup> Evangelicals, who thought similarly to Saphir, supported various mission organizations whose common goal was more important than the elements that made them distinct from one another.<sup>57</sup> Saphir’s interdenominational

<sup>53</sup> Kai Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1995), 159. See also Adolph Saphir, *Rabbinowich and His Mission to Israel* (London: J. F. Shaw & Co., 1888), 4–6.

<sup>54</sup> Adolph Saphir, “The Jewish Evening at the General Assembly” 29.

<sup>55</sup> Letter dated 23 December 1878. It is cited in Carlyle, “*Mighty in the Scriptures*,” 241.

<sup>56</sup> J. B. A. Kessler, *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain* (Goes, Netherlands: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1968).

<sup>57</sup> Andrew F. Walls, “Missions,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* 56–94.

understanding of mission can be seen in his support for mission to the Jews in cooperation with Christians of various backgrounds.<sup>58</sup>

## A Hearty Supporter of the Scottish Mission in Pest and Central Europe and His Influence in the Life of Hungarian Reformed Tradition

During his life, Adolph fostered good relations with the Scottish mission in Pest. Saphir's Greenwich Presbyterian congregation provided funds for a Jewish convert, colporteur Neuman, to travel to Debrecen and all parts of eastern Hungary.<sup>59</sup> Adolph Saphir was keen on raising funds for Jewish mission. He hoped that A. C. Schönberger,<sup>60</sup> another active and zealous convert, would become the first Jewish missionary in Pest.<sup>61</sup> The minutes of the Jewish Mission Committee state that "Rev. Mr. Saphir [Adolph] and his congregation made an offer of £20 towards the proposed increased salary £130 of Schönberger." This initiative never materialized, though Saphir really pushed for this end. The Committee in Edinburgh regretted that for several reasons they "cannot raise [sufficient money] nor could [they] give him other job than work of an evangelist."<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Saphir did contribute to the reorganization of a colportage network in Hungary, thereby supporting one of the means of evangelization of the Scottish mission in Pest. Clearly, he attached great significance to the distribution of Bibles and worked with the Bible societies, as did former Edinburgh students like Ferenc Balogh,<sup>63</sup> a professor of Church History in Debrecen, and Lajos Komáromy,<sup>64</sup> another prominent Hungarian churchman in the later years.<sup>65</sup> As for Schönberger, he eventually became a missionary of the Free Church of Scotland, then the British Society for the

<sup>58</sup> Franz Delitzsch was Lutheran, C. A. Schönberger was Reformed, whereas his congregation was Presbyterian.

<sup>59</sup> Rudolph Koenig, "Report," *Free Church of Scotland Missionary Record* (hereafter, *FCofSMR*) 1865–66, 4 (1865), 925. See Koenig, "Report," *FCofSMR* (1867), 252–54.

<sup>60</sup> *Register of Baptism at Kálvin tér Reformed Church 1858–65*, Entry 85, 5 May 1864, "Schönberger Károly," an "Israelite," was baptized by Pál Török, and his godparents were Károly Rau and Andrew Moody. Schönberger was his brother-in-law who married Johanna Saphir. See also Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement*, 115.

<sup>61</sup> Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS) Dep. 298.252 (1864–71), Free Church of Scotland Jews Conversion Committee, 17 January 1868, fol. 171.

<sup>62</sup> NLS Dep. 298.252 (1864–71), Free Church of Scotland Jews Conversion Committee, 18 February 1868, fols. 176–77.

<sup>63</sup> László Ötvös, *Balogh Ferenc életműve (1836–1913)* (Debrecen: Karcagi Nyomda, 1997), 137–39.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Drummond, *Természeti törvény szellemi világban*, trans. Csizmadia, Lajos, 40 (Budapest: Magyar Protestáns Irodalmi Társaság, 1895).

<sup>65</sup> Adolph Saphir, "Adolph Saphir's Speech at the British and Foreign Bible Society's Conference in 1866," *Bible Society Monthly Reporter* 8:37 (1866), 386–89.

Propagation of the Gospel of the Jews.<sup>66</sup> In the early 1900s, he established the mission with Mr. Baron of Mildmay mission.<sup>67</sup>

Saphir also championed mission to the Jews in countries other than Hungary. As a minister of the English Presbyterian Church, he always preached about the necessity of mission to the Jews on the third Sunday of every January, which was the annual collection day for Jewish missions.<sup>68</sup> Just like the first missionaries to the Jews in Pest, Saphir spoke of the “sign of times” and “proofs.” He was excited by the Rabinowitz movement, begun in southern Russia by Josef Rabinowitz. At the 1889 Mildmay conference, he rejoiced, “Rabinowich is a wonderful sign of the times, and the message which, as a Jew, he brings to the Jews, that Jesus is our Brother whom we sold into Egypt has awakened marvellous echo.”<sup>69</sup> To promote mission to the Jews in Russia and Hungary, Saphir cooperated with the Lutheran Franz Delitzsch<sup>70</sup> to support Rabinowitz and later Isaac Lichtenstein.<sup>71</sup> A committee was set up for supporting Rabinowitz on 15 March 1887, shortly after Rabinowitz’s first visit to England. He underlined that “this step was taken . . . partly at the earnest request of Professor Delitzsch, . . . who is convinced that only in England the requisite spiritual, moral and financial support could be secured.”<sup>72</sup> Adolph Saphir became the first president of the so-called London Council for Rabinowitz.<sup>73</sup> Saphir was instrumental in channeling financial support from Scotland for Rabinowitz. In particular, the Edinburgh and Glasgow evangelical circles played an important part in collecting funds for Kishinev.<sup>74</sup> His relation to the Free Church of Scotland remained cordial throughout his life. He was awarded the title of Doctor of Divinity by the University of Edinburgh.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>66</sup> “Report on the Conversion of the Jews to the General Assembly 1868, Appendix VIII,” in *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Held at Edinburgh May, 1868* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1868), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Raymund Lillevik, *Apostates, Hybrids or True Jews? Jewish Christians and Jewish Identity in Eastern Europe* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014).

<sup>68</sup> Carlyle, “*Mighty in the Scriptures*,” 294.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>70</sup> Arnulf Baumann, “Frans Delitzsch Las Missionar,” *Fiede über Israel* 3 (1990), 101–108; P., “Ferenc Delitzsch,” *Hajnal* 3:2 (1913), 11–12.

<sup>71</sup> Carlyle, “*Mighty in the Scriptures*,” 306. See also “Saphir, Adolph,” *Dictionary of National Biography*, 299.

<sup>72</sup> Saphir, *Rabinowich and His Mission to Israel*, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement*, 173.

<sup>74</sup> *Service for the King* (London, 1887), 60.

<sup>75</sup> Carlyle, “*Mighty in the Scriptures*,” 270–71.



As regards the Hungarian Reformed Church, the only contact Saphir had was through the Jewish converts, the colporteurs of the Pest mission. His sphere of work was Great Britain, but, as we have seen, he was a zealous supporter of Jewish missions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia. At the Jubilee event of the Free Church in 1889, two years before his death, he reminded the Scots “not to forget the love to Israel which at that time [1839] so eminently characterised you.”<sup>76</sup> Saphir was a Jewish convert with evangelical interdenominational understanding of mission that also characterized the Pest mission. Though his contribution to mission was mainly outside the scope of the Pest mission, in England and Scotland, the writer of his obituary in the *PEIL* (Protestant Church and School Review)<sup>77</sup> regarded him as a great Hungarian missionary to Jews.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

Adolph Saphir was the first homegrown missionary to the Jews whose entire life was impacted by the piety and theology of Scottish evangelicalism. His conversion story shows clearly how literally the missionaries as well as the converts understood and interpreted the Bible. The perception of time, the acceptance of Christ as the promised Messiah, and Israel Saphir’s offering his child for missionary purposes all bear witness to the highly intensified religious fervour of not only the missionaries but also their converts. Adolph Saphir’s life and work clearly indicate how successfully Scottish millennialist views were instilled into Adolph’s piety and thinking. The Hungarian Jewish Christian rejected higher criticism, defended the Bible as source of revelation, and strongly held onto the millennial scheme of carrying out a mission to the Jews and pagans in order to hasten the return of Jesus Christ. All this was based on a particular view of ecclesiology, where denominational borders were suspended and the “brotherhood of believers” who subscribed to the common evangelical beliefs were praised. Finally, this paper highlights that Saphir held mission to the Jews as a major concern. Therefore, he did not spare any time, money, or energy to further the cause of mission to the Jews in Hungary and Central Europe.

In sum, Saphir’s life and work illustrate how successfully the Scottish evangelicals transplanted millennialist ideas and generated interest in missionary work among the Jews. The literal reading of the Bible as a spiritual guide, the message about Christ, the need for personal conversion, the colportage, missionary work to reach out to various social

<sup>76</sup> Adolph Saphir’s speech at “The Jewish Evening at the General Assembly,” 31.

<sup>77</sup> *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*, abbreviated as *PEIL*.

<sup>78</sup> “Dr. Adolph Saphir 1831-1891,” *Protestáns Egyházj és Iskolai Lap* (hereafter *PEIL*) 33 (1891), 750–51. See also J. F. A. De le Roi, *Die Evangelische Christenheit und die Juden*, Schiften Des Institutum Judaicum in Berlin, 3 vols (Berlin: [1884 (I); 1891 (II); 1892 (III)], III, no. 9. (1892), 232.

groups, and support lent for publishing Christian literature – all bear witness to how efficacious Scottish evangelicalism was regarding Saphir's case. Although Saphir worked most of his life abroad, he had strong ties with the Scottish missionary outpost in Budapest and lent strong support to the revivalist Scots, who had had an impact on the Reformed Church of Hungary through many channels.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Á. Kovács and R. Hörcsik, "A Transplanted Scottish Presbyterian Culture: The Peregrination to New College, Edinburgh and the Impact of Free Kirk Evangelicalism on Debrecen Reformed College in Hungary," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 44 (2015), 103–32.