From Jewish Prominence to Buddhist Prominence: Julius Goldwater and the Jewish-Buddhist Encounter from 1924–1958

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Abstract

The 1920s witnessed a growing appearance of individual American Jews – largely from wealthy and prominent families – who received training by Asian teachers and pursued Buddhist practices in Asian-founded Buddhist groups. Some of these American Jews gained prominence and leadership status in Buddhist communities and also ran their own semi-established Buddhist groups, with limited success. The social position and material success of these Jewish Buddhists allowed them the time and means to study and practice Buddhism. This paper illustrates these developments through the story of Julius Goldwater, a member of the prominent German Jewish family that included Senator Barry Goldwater. After encountering Buddhism in Hawaii and being ordained in Kyoto, Goldwater moved to Los Angeles to become one of the first European-American Jodo Shinshu ministers in America. This paper demonstrates how he was an early convert, teacher, and wartime proponent of American Buddhism.

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, Charles Theodor Strauss (1852–1937) – a wealthy haberdasher of Jewish descent – became the first person ever to be initiated into Buddhism on American soil. Strauss's turn to Buddhism marked the first time in history when converting to Buddhism became a serious religious possibility for Jews in America.[1] His conversion to Buddhism is the nineteenth century's most noted

[1] Before this point, there were no Buddhist teachers in America from whom Jews could have taken these precepts. I use the word "conversion" here in the way other Buddhist Studies

example of Jewish involvement in Buddhism, yet it is also indicative of a wider turn in the late Victorian era toward a Jewish interest in the Buddhist tradition.[2] As accounts from popular late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jewish newspapers made plain, Buddhism captured the interest of many Jews just as it had of other Americans during this period, though it largely remained an armchair fascination for most Jews during those years.[3]

Beginning in the 1920s, the engagement between Judaism and Buddhism both persisted and changed in America.[4] While the late nineteenth-century America saw Buddhism emerge as a new and alluring liberal religious movement, especially on the East coast, that Buddhist vogue waned in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Antipathy towards Asians – particularly the Japanese – gripped America in the decades leading up to World War II, which lessened if not diminished the popular Jewish interest in Buddhism.[5] On the West coast in particular, the strength of anti-Asian sentiment and the desire for social acceptance discouraged Jews from identifying with or publicly promoting Asian culture or religions.[6] While Jewish newspapers from the late nineteenth century were replete with articles romanticizing Buddhism and reports of Buddhist teachers speaking in synagogues packed with attendees, I did not find a single newspaper article in the mid-1920s that painted

scholars use it: it its original sense of turning one's heart or mind towards the teachings of Buddhism.

2 Thomas Tweed: The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912, Chapel Hill 2000, p. 39.

3 I describe the extent and breadth of this nineteenth century engagement in: American JUBU: Jews, Buddhists, and Religious Change in America, under contract, Princeton University Press.

4 Looking beyond U.S. borders, it is important to note that this period is also when the first Jews are ordained as full monks in Asia. This includes the major twentieth century promoter of lay meditation Nyanaponika Thera (a German Jew who ordained in Sri Lanka in 1936, and whose book *Heart of Buddhist Meditation* achieved virtual canonical status) and several other German Jews who also ordained and trained with the (non-Jewish) German ex-pat monk Nyanatiloka.

5 Antipathy towards Asians began in the nineteenth century with the Chinese exclusion movements but increased in force leading up to WWII. First the Chinese and later the Japanese came to be seen as the chief racial threat on the West Coast where Asians were the primary targets of nativist and racist groups. Anti-Asian sentiment in America culminated in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which severely restricted the annual number of immigrants who would be accepted into America and outright banned the immigration of Asians.

6 Ellen Eisenberg demonstrates how the strength of anti-Asian sentiment and the centrality of Asian otherness to white self-definition in the West discouraged Jews from identifying with or publicly supporting Asians. See Ellen Eisenberg: The First to Cry Down Injustice? Western Jews and Japanese Removal during WWII, New York 2008.

Buddhism in a positive light or discussed any romantic or popular Jewish interest in Buddhism.[7]

Replacing the broader armchair Jewish interest in Buddhism of the previous century was the appearance of solo American Jews – mostly from wealthy and prominent families – who received training by Asian teachers and pursued Buddhist practices in immigrant Buddhist groups. Several of these American Jews gained prominence and leadership status in Buddhist communities and ran their own semi-established Buddhist groups (though with limited success). Some of these Jewish Buddhists in the first half of the twentieth century were also advocates and allies of the Japanese during a time in America when Asians were under suspicion if not attack. While Jewish Americans largely remained silent in the face of the federal policy of removal and incarceration of Asians, these Jewish Buddhists notably spoke out against the wartime policies in support of Japanese Americans.[8] This paper illustrates these developments in the Jewish-Buddhist relationship through the story of Julius Goldwater (1908–2001), a member of the prominent Goldwater family that included Senator Barry Goldwater, and an early convert, teacher, and wartime proponent of American Buddhism.[9]

2. From Prominent Goldwater Family to Jodo Shinshu Leader in Hawaii

Julius Goldwater was born in Los Angeles to one of the most prominent Jewish families in the American West. Goldwater's paternal family arrived in California in the mid-1800s, just after the Gold Rush of 1849 that brought many Jews to the state for the first time.[10] Shortly thereafter, the discovery of gold in Arizona in the 1860s attracted his grandfather and great-uncles to the Arizona territory where they set up small-business enterprises around the

[7] The last article I found that positively spoke of Buddhism was an untitled article in *The American Hebrew* in 1920. The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger, 1920 (10.12.1920), p. 144.

[8] Nationally, the silence of Jewish groups in the face of the federal policy of removal and incarceration has been explained by the allegiance and investment these groups had towards the Roosevelt administration and the war effort. See Eisenberg, First to Cry Down Injustice.

[9] This is the period between the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act and the publishing of *The Dharma Bums* in 1958, a novel by Beat Generation author Jack Kerouac. By 1958, Buddhism was no longer under threat and had come back in vogue.

[10] See Reva Clar: Los Angeles Jewry: A Chronology, Los Angeles 2002; Robert Goldberg: Barry Goldwater, New Haven 1995.

sites of new mines. These small trading and mercantile businesses grew in size and influence eventually to become the Goldwater's Department stores, founded by Julius Goldwater's great-uncle Michael Goldwater. These stores remained in family hands until 1962, when they were sold to Associated Dry Goods Corp. of New York.[11]

Before immigrating to America, Julius Goldwater's grandfather and his family lived in Konin, a Jewish shtetl in Russian Poland. The son of Jewish innkeepers Elizabeth and Hirsch Goldwasser, he – like his brothers before him – left Poland fleeing the Revolution of 1848 and the onerous restrictions placed on Jews by the Russian tsars. Once in America, the Goldwassers anglicized their name to Goldwater. In addition to their success as merchants, the Goldwater family also achieved political prominence in America. Most famously, Julius Goldwater's second cousin, Barry Goldwater, who was born in 1909, just a year after Julius, served five terms as a U.S. senator from Arizona (1953–65, 1969–87) and the Republican party's nominee for the President of the United States in the 1964 election.

On his maternal side, Julius Goldwater's family came from Germany. His mother, Ray Etta (possibly Rayette) Goldwater (nee Michaels) intended to raise him an observant Jew following her family tradition.[12] She died when he was only two-and-a-half. His father, Benjamin Goldwater, enrolled him Jewish Sunday school for a few years, but Julius Goldwater reported in an interview that "it didn't take."[13] During his early years living with his father in Los Angeles, Goldwater took an interest in mysticism and Eastern religious philosophies. He was particularly close to and influenced by the Manly P. Hall, a charismatic writer, philosopher, and preacher who took over leadership of the Christian Church of the People in Los Angeles in 1923.[14] A world-traveler and prolific author, Hall served as a figurehead for the Los Angeles subculture comprised of mystics, artists, faith healers, and spiritual visionaries.[15] He took Goldwater under his wings, mentoring him, inviting him to services at his

11 Bart Barnes: Barry Goldwater, GOP Hero, Dies, in: Washington Post, 1998 (30.05.1998), p. A0.

12 Rayette Goldwater. Ancestry.com. 1910 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006; Stephen Prothero: The Good Shepherd, in: Tricycle. The Buddhist Review 7 (1997) 2, pp. 44–48.

13 Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 45.

14 Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 45.

15 Louis Sahagun: Master of the Mysteries. The Life of Manly Palmer Hall. Port Townsend, Washington 2008, pp. 20–28.

church, and granting him access to his extensive library about parapsychology, mysticism, and Eastern religions.[16]

In his late teens, Goldwater left Hall's mystical world to follow his father to Hawaii, where he first encountered Buddhism.[17] The dominant tradition of Buddhism in Hawaii in the 1920s when Goldwater arrived was Shin Buddhism, also known as Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land), practiced by the island's Japanese American population. These Japanese immigrants had come to Hawaii to replace the Chinese laborers who were banned entry by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.[18] These first-generation Japanese immigrants (called *Issei*) mostly worked on plantations, but, like the Chinese before them, faced significant legal discrimination.[19] They could not become naturalized citizens, were forbidden from certain occupations, and were subject to miscegenation laws.[20] By 1924, the total population of Japanese in Hawaii had reached over a hundred thousand people.[21]

Recognizing a need for Buddhist ministers to serve the *Issei*, the Jodo Shinshu leadership in Japan sent Buddhist missionaries to Hawaii in 1889. For protection and mutual aid, the missionaries and the *Issei* established a network of new Shin Buddhist temples on the Island, which served as community centers as well as places of worship. By the mid-1920s, there were more than 170 Buddhist temples in Hawaii.[22] Up until the 1920s, the services that these missionaries conducted in these new temples were in Japanese, catering to the *Issei*. Few if any Americans of non-Japanese descent attended these Japanese-language services. In an effort to adapt Buddhism to its new

16 Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 45.

17 Tetsuden Kashima: Buddhism in America. The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution, Westport, CT 1977, p. 98–101; Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 45.

18 Taitetsu Unno: The Pure Land in the New World, in: Tricycle Magazine, 2001. Accessed online on 25 June 2016. http://tricycle.org/magazine/pure-land-new-world/

19 Duncan Ryuken Williams: Camp Dharma: Japanese-American Buddhist Identity and the Internment Experience of World War II, in: Charles S. Prebish / Martin Baumann (eds), Westward Dharma. Buddhism Beyond Asia, Los Angeles 2002, p. 192.

20 Unno, The Pure Land in the New World; Tiffany Hill: Hawaiʻi's Japanese Buddhist Temples Are Struggling to Keep Ancient Traditions Alive, in: Honolulu Magazine, 2013. Accessed 25 July 2016: http://www.honolulumagazine.com/Honolulu-Magazine/July-2013/Buddhism-in-Hawaii-Fading-Tradition

21 Michihiro Ama: Immigrants to the Pure Land: The Modernization, Acculturation, and Globalization of Shin Buddhism, 1898–1941, Honolulu 2011, p. 32.

22 Hill, Hawai'i's Japanese Buddhist Temples. The person most credited with establishing Buddhism in the Islands is Bishop Emyo Imamura.

environment and to minister to the English-speaking second generation Japanese Buddhists, Honolulu's Honpa Hongwanji Temple began to offer services and study classes in English, which opened the door for non-Japanese participation in the Temple.[23]

Goldwater attended one of these English-language Buddhist study classes as a teenager in 1924 at the recommendation of a friend.[24] At this study class, Goldwater met Reverend Ernest Hunt, a British-born teacher of Buddhism. About this experience, Goldwater later explained:

> "I didn't understand a thing and he [Ernest Hunt] spoke in perfect English, and I heard every word he said. I couldn't cognate his usage of words but it was very exciting, you know, and there were just a few people, about eight of us gathered, and of course I was the only kid. And gradually…I became more and more seduced."[25]

The seduction that Goldwater described came from Hunt's moral lessons drawn from the teaching of the Dharma, or the Buddha's teachings, about love, charity, kindness, respect, and service.[26] Hunt emphasized that Buddhism and true Americanism had much in common, both advocating for absolute religious freedom and equal opportunity for all people irrespective of race, color, or creed.[27] Hunt also championed the creation of a broad, ecumenical Buddhist movement focused on active goodwill.

Captivated by Hunt's teachings, Goldwater became one of his serious and committed students. In Honolulu in 1928, Goldwater, along with eight others in his study group, took the Buddhist vows of *pansil* in front of Bishop Yemyo Imamura and Ernest Hunt to "become publicly the first group of Occidentals to become Buddhist under the American flag."[28] As to why Goldwater took these Buddhist vows (in a ceremony called *tokudo*), he later noted, "I began to realize that the doctrine, as well as the way of life of my English teacher, conformed exactly with my ideas of how a true gentleman should conduct

23 Ama, Immigrants to Pure Land, p. 91*;* Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 46; Kashima, Buddhism in America, pp. 69–112.

24 Goldwater attended the class with Carl Scheid, a German-American student of Buddhism, who had moved to Hawaii after his wife's death. See Ama, Immigrants to Pure Land, p.76.

25 Kashima, Buddhism in America, p. 99.

26 Ernest Shinkaku Hunt: Buddhist Sermons, Honolulu 1955; Ernest Hunt: Essentials and Symbols of the Buddhist Faith. Honolulu 1955.

27 Ama, Immigrants to Pure Land, p. 56.

28 Ama, Immigrants to Pure Land, p. 99. On July 8, 1928, Imamura and Hunt "initiated" nine members of the forum.

himself." He continued, "The vital thing that is furnished by Buddhism, and lacking in other religions, is genuineness." Even after the initiation ceremony, Goldwater did not see himself as a Buddhist convert, but rather felt that becoming Buddhist was a process and "a true believer is determined by the way he lives" rather than the lines he recites or the ceremonies in which he participates.[29]

Three years after the initiation ceremony, Goldwater married Pearl Wicker, a Lutheran, in a Jodo Shinshu ceremony in Hawaii. Both Imamura and Hunt officiated at the wedding.[30] Shortly thereafter, at the urging of his wife, Goldwater returned to Los Angeles. He joined the Nishi Hongwanji Los Angeles Buddhist Temple affiliated with the Buddhist Mission of North America (the early Jodo Shinshu governing body in North America), marking the period of his service to and leadership in the Buddhist community.[31]

3. Goldwater: A Buddhist Minister, Wartime Advocate, and Religious Reformer

At Nishi Hongwanji in Los Angeles, Goldwater played an important role in promoting and explaining Buddhism to second-generation Japanese immigrants and Americans of European ancestry. He delivered sermons about the Dharma in English and held study classes for English-speaking people. He also attended officiated at funerals and weddings and fought to allow the Japanese children to participate in American youth dances that the *Issei* did not find culturally acceptable.[32] As part of his mission to help disseminate Buddhism, he introduced and interpreted the Tannisho, the best-known text in Shin Buddhism, to European-Americans.[33] Goldwater's work extended beyond the temple as well. He visited Japanese-American agricultural settlements on the

29 American Jew Says Buddhism Best Religion, in: The China Press, 1937 (03.04.1937), p. 9.

30 Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 45.

31 Prothero suggests that Goldwater was the only Caucasian member of the Temple but Ama argues that Bishop Masuyama, who assumed the BMNA office in July 1930, started "initiating" Caucasians into the Nishi Honganji in 1933, including Robert S. Clifton. See Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 46, and Ama, Immigrants to Pure Land, pp. 73–74.

32 Kashima, Buddhism in America, p. 100; Richard Seager: Buddhism in America, New York 2012, p. 100.

33 Ama, Immigrants to Pure Land, pp. 76, 228.

West Coast, conducting outreach work that he saw as akin to "preaching the gospel."[34]

In the 1930s and early 40s, Goldwater received three different Buddhist ordinations. Although he had been ordained (*tokudo*) in Honolulu in 1928, he accepted ordination a second time in 1934 from Bishop Kenju Masuyama in Los Angeles at the Nishi Hongwanji temple. This ordination gave him formal recognition as a Buddhist "missionary" and American minister. Masuyama, the head of the Buddhist Mission to North America, was strict about who he would ordain. He would only consider ordaining students if he supervised their practice and study for one year and found them satisfactory, a test that Goldwater passed.[35]

In taking this ordination at Nishi Hongwangji, Goldwater became the first European-American to become a Buddhist priest or minister in Los Angeles.[36] The novelty of the ordination attracted the attention of *Los Angeles Times*. In an article titled "Buddhists Ordain American," the newspaper described Goldwater's ordination ceremony in considerable, even flowery, detail, noting that, for example, "Buddha sat cross-legged … and with immutable gaze saw a fair-haired American don the robes of priesthood in one of the earth's oldest religions." The article described the scene of the ceremony as well as the nature of the vows and chants that Goldwater performed.

A few years later, Goldwater traveled to Kyoto, Japan, to take ordination in a tonsure ceremony like other Japanese priests. This ordination came at the urging of the leading Japanese priests in Los Angeles who wanted him to have the authority of an Asian Buddhist ceremony in order to better serve as a role-model and leader to the Japanese youth back in Los Angeles.[37] In an interview, Goldwater later explained that "I couldn't have been less interested in the priesthood … but their [the Los Angeles Japanese community's] need was so great."[38] Goldwater also took a third ordination in in Hang Chow, China in 1937.[39]

34 Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 46.
35 Ama, Immigrants to Pure Land, pp. 74–77.
36 Buddhists Ordain American, in: Los Angeles Times. 1934 (18.06.1934), p. A5.
37 Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 46.
38 Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 46.
39 Date uncertain but an article in *The China Press* describes his trip to Hang Chaw taking place in 1937. American Jew Says Buddhism Best Religion, in: The China Press, 1937 (03.04.1937), p. 9.

Goldwater rose to a position of increased significance in the Buddhist Mission to North America after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in response to this bombing, removing Japanese Americans from their homes and incarcerating them in internment camps. Following this internment order, nearly all of the Japanese-American Buddhists from Goldwater's Los Angeles temple were sent to camps. Goldwater became the sole resident minister and volunteer caretaker at the Temple during this time. He was also given power of attorney and full control over three other Los Angeles temples.[40]

Concerned about the plight of his fellow Buddhists, Goldwater became a war-time Buddhist advocate and ally. He encouraged Japanese Americans to store their belongings and possessions in the Temple so that he could safeguard them during the incarceration era. He traveled to every internment camp, including centers in Wyoming and Arizona, distributing coffee, candy, and Buddhist service materials, including devotional and liturgical books and shrines.[41] He also watched over internees' homes, even preventing the illegal sale of one home by alerting the FBI. Advocating for Buddhism during the war also meant that he wrangled with the police and federal authorities to try to make them understand that Buddhism was autonomous and not connected with the Japanese government.[42]

During the war, Goldwater raised funds for the Buddhist community by leasing the temple to black war workers and the Providence Baptist Church. When the Japanese internees were released at the end of World War II, Goldwater ousted the black church to turn the temple into a hostel, where Japanese Americans could find temporary housing as well as assistance obtaining a job, a driver's license, and gas rations. Goldwater loaned his car to his fellow Buddhists, and when anti-Japanese grocers refused to sell them food, he would buy it for them.[43]

[40] Kashima, Buddhism in America, p. 101.

[41] Julius Goldwater, Wartime Buddhist Liturgy, in: Thomas Tweed / Stephen R. Prothero (eds): Asian Religions in America. A Documentary History, Oxford 1999, pp. 172–178; Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 47.

[42] Buddhists Ordain American, in: Los Angeles Times, 1934 (18.06.1934), p. A5

[43] Kasima, *Buddhism in America*, p. 102; Buddhists Ordain American, in: Los Angeles Times, 1934 (18.06.1934), p. A5.

In terms of Goldwater's approach to Buddhism, he is perhaps best known for his commitment to promoting an ecumenical, non-sectarian, and Americanized Buddhism. In Japanese Buddhism, sectarian differences have great importance. Different lineages in Japan have their own founders, histories, and traditions. Following in the footsteps of his teacher Reverend Ernest Hunt, Goldwater strove to free Buddhism in the United States from its sectarian traditions – specifically the three broad traditions of Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana that have historically structured Buddhist thought and practice – in order to promote a broader and more inclusive Buddhism.[44] During the incarceration era, he founded the Buddhist Brotherhood of America (BBA), a nonsectarian Buddhist organization designed to create an ecumenical American Buddhism. In a statement about the organization, Goldwater explained:

> "In this endeavor there can be no thought of discrimination in sect, race, or color; the teachings must be paramount, combining the best of both Hinayana [i.e. Theravada] and Mahayana School, and in doing so, reaching that equilibrium so necessary for completeness and growth."[45]

In addition to seeking a common ground among different Buddhist lineages, Goldwater also strove to Americanize Buddhism in order to validate it in the eyes of the wartime nation. Aware of the pervasive anti-Japanese sentiment in America during the war, Goldwater felt convinced that Buddhism needed to conform to the expectations and the norms of American Protestantism in order to be recognized as an acceptable American religious tradition. Goldwater likely had considerable knowledgeable about Christianity from his time in Hawaii, a territory that experienced tremendous Christian missionary activity since the 1820s, and from his teacher Reverend Hunt (who was born Anglican and who also sought to adapt Buddhism to the norms of American Protestantism).

During the war, Goldwater created and disseminated Buddhist worship materials in English that resembled Christian creeds and hymns in form and structure in order to make Buddhism appear less foreign and more American.[46] Among the books that he distributed at the internment camps was *A Book Containing an Order of Ceremonies for Use by Buddhists* which contained

44 Kashima, Buddhism in America, p. 56.
45 Kashima, Buddhism in America, p. 55.
46 Tweed / Prothero, Asian Religions in America, pp. 172–178.

two catechisms, responsive readings, numerous hymns, a liturgy for Buddha's birthday, and even a history of Buddhism in which Jodo Shinshu founder Shinran is likened to Martin Luther.[47] At Goldwater's urging, the Buddhist Mission of North America changed its name to Buddhist Churches of America in 1944, in an attempt to better assimilate into and become accepted by white, Protestant America.

The work that Goldwater did to Americanize and Protestantize Buddhism met with resistance from some of the Temple elders after the war. These Japanese-born Buddhists were not fond of Goldwater's assimilationist efforts and even sued him for the mismanagement of temple funds during the war.[48] The court ended up ruling in Goldwater's favor arguing that he only used those funds to the benefit of the Buddhist community. Although Goldwater kept close ties with the Buddhist movement after this lawsuit, he stopped actively participating in the ministerial ranks of the Buddhist Churches of America. From the 1960s to the 1980s, when new waves of immigration brought Buddhists from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Korea and other countries to the U.S., Goldwater helped them to get settled and establish temples, often with money from his own pocket. He also helped to establish the Buddhist Sangha Council in the 1980s that drew together diverse representatives of the Greater Los Angeles' growing Buddhist community.[49]

As he aged, Goldwater came to a different and broader understanding of the teachings of the Buddha. His Buddhist practice became increasingly eclectic, incorporating elements from Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Buddhism. Although he led a weekly Buddhist study group in his home up until his last year of life, he became disillusioned with the religious and ritualistic aspects of Buddhism. In his view, the purpose of Buddhist teachings was to give people effective and practical tools for living, not religious rites and moral commandments. By the end of his life, Goldwater – the Buddhist minister, organizational leader, political advocate, and ecumenical promoter – felt that "Buddhism is

47 Tweed / Prothero, Asian Religions in America, p. 172.

48 Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 47; Kashima, Buddhism in America, p. 101.

49 Elaine Woo: Rev. Julius Goldwater. Convert to Buddhism Aided WWII Internees, in: Los Angeles Times, 2001 (23.06.2011), accessed online 29. June 2016 http://articles.latimes.com/2001/jun/23/local/me-13844 (13.11.2017).

more American than America," by which he meant that while America talks about freedom, Buddhists actively practice it.[50]

4. Conclusion

The story of Julius Goldwater's engagement with Buddhism signals a distinct change in the Jewish-Buddhist relationship from the late nineteenth-century to the first half of the twentieth. Whereas nineteenth-century America witnessed a popular Jewish interest in Buddhism (mirroring the larger American interest in Buddhism occurring at that time), the first half of the twentieth century saw the decline of the popular, armchair interest in Buddhist and the emergence of a small number of Jewish-born Buddhist leaders like Goldwater who were ordained as Buddhist ministers / priests, led their own Buddhist groups, and advocated for Buddhist rights in America. As part of their advocacy work, these leaders deliberately "Americanized" Buddhism to make it acceptable and palatable to wartime society, which meant bringing it more in line with the spirit and form of Protestantism (in much the same way that other minority religious traditions, like Judaism, adapted to America).

From where did this early Jewish proclivity for and identification with Buddhism arrive? Michael Alexander has argued that American Jews identify with minority groups and participate in the group life of and / or support the rights of marginalized groups – a behavior he calls *outsider identification* – due to a "theology of exile," a belief that Jews felt culturally obliged to mark themselves as different.[51] In the case of Jews who turned to Buddhism, it does not seem that they were somehow theologically primed for participation in Asian religious traditions differently than non-Jews. Albeit in small numbers in the first-half of the twentieth century, European-Americans – Jews and non-Jews alike – studied and practiced Buddhism, and I have found no evidence that Jews were disproportionately interested in Buddhism or Asian culture in contrast to the developments in the second half of the twentieth-century. However, those Jews who turned to Buddhism in the first half of the twentieth century were distinctive in that they notably came from wealthy

[50] Prothero, The Good Shepherd, p. 48.

[51] Michael Alexander: *Jazz Age Jews*, Princeton 2001.

and prominent Jewish families.[52] It seems, therefore, that these Jewish Americans who pursued Buddhism did so in a search for human meaning beyond what could be found in material comfort. Their material success allowed them to integrate so thoroughly into American society, and to achieve an "insider status," that they then, paradoxically, felt secure enough in their American-ness to adopt the outsider status of another religious tradition.

In the postwar period, Buddhism grew in popularity in America. In particular, it loomed large among the anti-conformist, liberal- left subcultures of the 1950s. Buddhism had a strong foothold in these circles both as an alternative form of spiritual expression that emphasized the authority of the individual over conventional religious institutions and as an act of anti-conformist protest against the middle-class values of the 1950s. Because American Jews have historically trended to participation in countercultural circles, they were overrepresented in the segment of society – namely the left-leaning subcultures – to which Buddhism appealed most strongly. This countercultural embrace of Buddhism led to a period of intensive Jewish-Buddhist engagement that began within the American Left in the early 1960s and has continued until today.

52 However, we might not know less prominent and financially successful Jews who explored Buddhism during this time period because they might not have become as visible.