While current scholarship on the German-Jewish relationship in Wilhelmine Germany has uncovered an “anti-colonial impulse” on the part of members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums vis-à-vis their Protestant colleagues, Jewish and Protestant socialists in the Weimar period engaged in a joint challenge to the colonialist discourse of bourgeois culture associated with Religionswissenschaft. These scholars attempted to infuse social and political institutions with spiritual meaning by fashioning a neutral zone of religious socialism between the liberal historicism of Religionswissenschaft and the ahistorical eschatology of neo-Orthodoxy. This liminal zone between theology and culture transcended the boundaries of Judaism and Christianity and provided an intellectual realm in which Jews and Christians could unite against a common enemy without having to promote their religious particularity in opposition to one another. In regard to the German-Jewish-Protestant relationship, the emergence of religious socialism in the Weimar years represents a dialogical window in time between the earlier ambivalent encounter between liberal Jewish and Protestant thinkers in the Wilhelmine period and the rapid deterioration of any German-Jewish discourse and eventual decimation of European Jewry in the Holocaust.

In order to fully understand the anomaly of religious socialism in the Weimar period, this analysis explores the writings of Martin

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1 In his analysis of liberal Jewish and Protestant scholarship in Wilhelmine Germany, Christian Wiese argues that members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums did not simply assimilate into Protestant culture, but rather illustrated an “anti-colonial impulse” in their scholarship, engaging in an “intellectual revolt against the way Protestant historiography constructed Judaism and tried to impose its own narrative and system of meaning and values.” See Christian Wiese, Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 25.
Buber and Paul Tillich, the Jewish and Protestant thinkers who were determined to rebuild the very foundations of modern culture destroyed in World War I by reunifying religion and culture with the intent of reconstructing true community. Together, they occupied the shared discursive space of religious socialism that constituted a bridge between theology and culture, in the sense that its proponents envisioned an infusion of divine holiness into the social and political realms of the secular world. Their goal was to not allow God’s presence to be subsumed by rational categories, while at the same time not allowing God to become a “disembodied spirit” separated from “the demands of the here and now.” These Jewish and Protestant scholars engaged in a symmetrical discourse that had eluded the members of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* who employed an apologetic approach in their competition for academic and theological legitimacy with liberal Protestants. At the same time, these religious socialists avoided the dialectical theologies of neo-Orthodox theologians like the Protestant thinker Karl Barth and Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig who portrayed a theologically complementary yet contradictory Jewish-Christian relationship based on their mutual rejection of secularization and historicism of religion. Because of its focus on the secular world, this movement also attracted nonre-

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3 When describing the discourse of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* vis-à-vis Protestant Christianity in Wilhelmine Germany, Christian Wiese does not refer to the term “apologetics” as an anti-Christian polemic or as a source of derision by Christians toward Jews, but rather views it as an “analytical term” in an attempt to understand the function it had for Jewish scholars at the time. He argues that they understood the apologetic discourse as a legitimate way of defending “their tradition against a repudiation of the religious and cultural value of Judaism that claimed to be scholarly and objective and that represented an enormous challenge to Jewish existence itself.” Using Habermas’s model for intercultural communication, Wiese raises the question as to whether the Jewish-Protestant interchange reflects a symmetrical discourse shaped by mutual respect and recognition or more accurately an asymmetrical discourse reflecting a modernized form of the Jewish-Christian disputation. See Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*, 27.