

INTRODUCTION

The study of Jewish-Christian relations has evolved in dramatic new directions in the past few decades. The old view of two implacable enemies battling for their version of truth, of Jews living as insular pariahs within a hostile world, the tale of persecution by the mighty of the weak, has given way to a much more nuanced understanding of areas of congruence, of cultural, economic, and social interchange. More recently, social- and cultural-historical approaches have opened new frontiers of research. This work has drawn a more finely textured picture of the interaction between Jews and Christians than the old religious and political histories could ever have envisioned.

Although new scholarly discourses continue to enrich the picture of Jewish-Christian relations, they have not displaced the study of established figures and texts of this monumental interreligious engagement. Religious disputations, centered on interpretation of key prooftexts from both religious traditions, continue to engage creative scholars. The iconographic representation of Jews and Judaism provides a continuously renewable font of inspiration for cultural and art historical investigation. Some scholars continue to uncover new worlds of meaning in familiar venues, while others forge completely new disciplinary directions.

One of the key questions scholars of Jewish-Christian relations have attempted to answer is that of turning points. After the classical patristic age with its bilious anti-Jewish rhetoric gave way to the expansion of Christianity in the West, the period from approximately the fifth to the eleventh centuries was characterized by relative polemical quiescence. During the centuries after the fall of Rome, the church embarked on a process of education and dissemination of its teachings among pagans, and Jews were not central to its message. Small Jewish communities took root in Western Europe and their members, often pioneers of commerce, were seldom singled out as targets of verbal abuse or physical violence.

This balance changed during the eleventh century, and historians of medieval Europe and its Jews have long struggled to pinpoint the roots of that turn which erupted in ferocious outbursts of anti-Jewish violence and a gradual, but universal, erosion of the image and legal

status of Jews in the Christian world. The change in the Christian posture toward the Jews occurred in a time and place of tremendous cultural and religious creativity among both Christians and Jews of Western Europe. How and why this turning point arose, and the responses of Jews to the unprecedented assault on their right to exist as Jews, are questions that stand at the center of the work of the historian David Berger. In his books and in a series of essays that span several decades, Berger has examined with exquisite care every potential clue to the origins of the negative shift in medieval Christians' assessment of Jews. In this historical detective work, even minute adjustments of theological thinking could lead to monumental, long-term consequences.

Berger traced the tension between the Augustinian position that regarded Jews as unwitting witnesses to the truth of Christianity (and therefore to be granted limited toleration) and the strong conversionary drive among Christian missionaries who hoped and labored for the conversion of all Jews as soon as possible. Berger explored in his work the consequences that arose from this ambivalence, the attraction-repulsion that inhered deeply in Christian relations with Jews. Nourished by pre-Christian classical era suspicion of Jews and by patristic rhetoric, the medieval calm gave way to an elemental force that underwent change and variation but never disappeared. The tension between acceptance of the presence of Jews in medieval Christian thought and society and the negation or severe restriction of their rights within the Christian polity animates several of Berger's pioneering studies. Bernard of Clairvaux, pillar of European monasticism and powerful twelfth-century preacher, provides a perfect example of a Christian thinker balancing on a precipice, preaching hateful images of Jews at the same time as he sounded Scripture-based admonitions that they must be protected despite their nature. As Berger has articulated it, "The other side of the coin of unique toleration was a unique persecution."

Despite the long-standing ontological tension between toleration and rejection, the question of how, when, and why the delicate balance gave way remained a challenge. Would it be possible to pinpoint the shift in Christian posture from the early eleventh century, when polemic was not intended to convert the Jews, to the thirteenth century, when it clearly was? Berger's answer locates the genesis of later sophisticated polemic in the frequent low-level theological repartee between Jews and Christians. At the beginning of the trajectory, these

interchanges attest to neighborly relations and a common exploration of religious differences. Jews felt comfortable and secure enough in these exchanges to attack certain Christian beliefs so aggressively that Christians needed to prepare polemical responses to them. Berger describes a series of slight escalations of tension through the mid-thirteenth century when Christians became serious about proselytizing to the Jews, eliminating the possibility of conducting such exchanges for their own sake and freighting them with far graver consequences for Jews.

Berger maps out with elegance and precision the changes over time that contact and conflict with Christian claims wrought in Jewish culture. He draws a textured picture of the highly literate Jewish culture of High Middle Ages Europe, and its responses to the challenges posed by various Christian polemicists in turn. Learned Christians became increasingly aware of this culture, and a series of parries and counter-offensives can be charted within various realms of the Christian-Jewish polemical exchange. Jews learned to negotiate the powers and perils of that world, and to act assertively to defend their lives and their interests, although they comprised a tiny fraction of the larger society.

Biblical exegesis became one of the central occupations of Jewish intellectuals, who were deeply affected by Jewish awareness of Christian interpretations and the need to reject them. Jewish messianic beliefs were articulated with new emphases as Christian claims concerning the timing and identity of the Messiah and the calculation of the end of time heightened Jewish concern over these questions.

In each of Berger's discussions, entire worlds can turn on the meaning of a few critical lines or phrases, yet he never loses sight of the human dimension, the lives and minds of the men (for they were always men), Jewish or Christian, who struggled to fit the other into their sense of the demands of their faith, and to balance the human opponents confronting them with the mythical image of the traditions they inherited.

Berger has been a professor of medieval Jewish history for over forty years. During this time he has taught thousands of students (among them the editors of this volume), and his teaching and scholarship have immeasurably advanced our understanding of two religious traditions in conflict and contact. Maintaining the delicate and carefully balanced voice of a scholar who respects the integrity of his subjects and follows the intricate shifts in their intellectual positions, Berger's studies have lost none of their poignancy, nor have his opinions on contemporary

issues lost any of their pungency. His scholarship, while focused on the medieval world, extends from the ancient to the early modern and modern periods. Berger's studies of medieval Jewish-Christian relations address fundamentally important concerns, and his scholarship is undergirded by an acute awareness of their continued relevance in contemporary contexts.

We have dedicated this volume to the subject that stands at the center of Berger's interests, inviting leading scholars of Jewish-Christian relations to reflect upon the broader themes of that encounter within the particulars of their own work. Their contributions, summarized below, are grouped under six headings that articulate those broader themes. We hope that the volume will reflect, honor, and extend in new ways Berger's pioneering scholarship.

Christian Triumphalism and Anti-Jewish Violence

From its inception, Christianity and its supersessionist claims fostered a rivalry with Judaism. As it spread and grew, its tone became triumphant and it sometimes encouraged the erasure of Jewish presence or influence by violent means. In the case of a famous Christian interpolation into Josephus's *Antiquities*, which Louis H. Feldman considers here, the violence was perpetrated on a Jewish text. By inserting the *Testimonium Flavianum* into Josephus's account in *Antiquities*, a Christian writer, most likely Eusebius, reshaped the account into what he thought Josephus ought to have said, rather than preserving what Josephus actually wrote.

A violent erasure of another kind of text—one carved in stone—forms the subject of Steven Fine's contribution, "The Menorah and the Cross." It is not merely the archeological artifact, a menorah with a cross rather brutally carved over it, but its historical and historiographical implications that interest Fine. He situates it within a period in which Christians effaced pagan and Jewish symbols in order to depict their triumphant succession. For a long time the historiography of late antiquity glossed over the violent aspect of the spread of Christianity, particularly in the case of Jewish synagogues and Jewish symbols. Fine reassesses this bias, and his analysis of how ideology has affected the interpretation of history and archeology raises important questions far beyond this particular image.

It was not only Jewish texts that Christians tampered with; they sometimes interfered polemically with texts from their own tradition.

William Chester Jordan looks to a signal event in the Passion story, the mocking crowning of Jesus with thorns, and asks how this event, which is clearly attributed to Roman soldiers in the Gospel accounts, came to be associated with the Jews. Jordan traces the progression of the text through the medieval period, showing how memories were corrupted and distorted by the anti-Jewish inclinations of an entire society.

Benjamin R. Gampel examines the well-known incident of anti-Jewish rioting in 1391 that is widely seen as marking a turn for the worse in the history of the Jews of Spain, as religious tension erupted into violent depredations. Gampel investigates how it was possible for such chaos to have continued in Aragon, a land governed by strong monarchs. The archival records of the royal household betray a shocking abrogation of royal oversight, as the monarchs paid close attention to the minutiae of their household while their subjects descended into anarchic violence.

Christian Mission and Jewish Conversion

The second group of essays in this volume considers one of the signal issues in the erosion of Christian tolerance of Jewish presence, namely the intensification of Christian efforts to bring Jews to the baptismal font. Missionaries to the Jews included some of the most eminent churchmen, and they adopted many innovative approaches. They constantly sought new means of attacking the theological basis of Judaism. Robert Chazan turns to the thirteenth century and the opening of a new chapter in Christian proselytizing by prominent Dominicans. They caught Jewish interlocutors by surprise when they introduced a polemical strategy that involved accepting and utilizing rabbinic sources to prove their arguments about the Christian Messiah.

Judah Galinsky revisits the Disputation of Paris, a trial of the Talmud based on a condemnatory letter written by Nicholas Donin, a convert out of Judaism. In 1240, Rabbi Jehiel of Paris was summoned to appear before a court to defend the Talmud against the new charges leveled against it. On the basis of new manuscript evidence, Galinsky reassesses scholarly views about the Hebrew and Latin reports of the *Vikkuah*, and particularly about the role of Donin himself in the actual trial, in which the Talmud was condemned to be burned.

Robert Bonfil takes us into the charged environment of Counter-Reformation Italy, in which Jews came under relentless pressure to

convert to Christianity. One of the means used by the church to pressure the Jews was to compel their attendance at conversionary sermons. A noted convert, Ludovico Carretto (brother of the famous Jewish chronicler Joseph ha-Kohen), offered up his son, a child of five or six, as an oblate to the church. Bonfil has discovered in the Vatican Library a heretofore-unknown copy of the text of a “miraculous” sermon preached by the child to the Jews of Rome, a true unicum. His contribution explores this extraordinary find.

Sid Z. Leiman investigates an account of the purported existence of an eighteenth-century Jewish-Christian sect that emerged out of the earlier Sabbatian heretical movement. By meticulous research into the primary sources, Leiman proves that what began as a literary fantasy was later accepted by scholars as an established fact.

*The Imprint of Christian Society on Internal Jewish
Cultural Patterns*

One of the thematic threads that runs through Berger’s work is the notion that Jews responded in an active, open, and conscious manner to the enveloping Christian culture. Recent scholarship has argued that even when Jews were not consciously aware of it, the influence of Christian society subtly shaped internal Jewish cultural patterns. This section opens with Elisheva Baumgarten’s examination of a judicial process that was widespread in Christian Europe, the trial by ordeal. Her close reading of the sources reveals how the practices and presuppositions of trial by ordeal in Christian society penetrated medieval Jewish judicial culture.

Bernard Septimus approaches the question of cultural interpenetration through the lens of a literary text. Emerging from the heated crucible of Jewish-Christian relations in fifteenth-century Spain, the poem he analyzes testifies to a deep and penetrating engagement by its Jewish author with the challenge of Christianity. To the Christian charge that Judaism was too legalistic to permit the spiritual elevation God demands of His people, the poet retorted that the Bible, through the example of the *‘Akedah*, finds works combined with belief a more efficacious way to bring human beings to a greater level of closeness to God than faith alone.

Debra Kaplan pursues the question of the Christian imprint on Jewish culture in the early modern period, within a different type of

source. Kaplan's analysis of a seventeenth-century rabbinic responsum regarding the halakhic status of Jewish women who enter the homes of non-Jews to conduct business is revealing both of the ongoing debate in Jewish sources about the ontological status of contemporary Christians, as well as the shared sociological context in which Jewish attitudes regarding the economic opportunities available to women closely reflected those of Christian society. Rabbinic guidelines betray the delicate balance between the shared norms and the desire to maintain appropriate distance from the other, particularly in matters that touched upon sexual propriety.

Jewish Evaluations of Christianity

This unit of essays considers the ways in which various Jewish thinkers framed Christianity, mostly within the context of halakhic discourse. Yaakov Elman evaluates recent scholarship on the position of Menahem Meiri (d. ca. 1310) regarding the status of Christianity from a halakhic perspective, unique to Meiri among medieval halakhists. Meiri's stance was expressed in different ways that yield subtle inconsistencies, and these ultimately lead to substantially different scholarly readings. Elman suggests that Meiri's position may have been grounded in extra-halakhic considerations, such as his actual contacts with Christians.

Ephraim Kanarfogel traces subtle changes in the medieval halakhic stance toward apostates from Judaism, from "once a Jew, always a Jew" to a position that equated their status in some respects to that of Gentiles. Kanarfogel's study shows that this reversal began to take place far earlier than previous scholarship has allowed, and that it likely arose in response to specific events that intensified the perception of enmity between Christians and Jews.

Miriam Bodian asks how Jews whose conception of Christians and Christianity was shaped by the persecution they had experienced in Catholic Spain were able to reconfigure their thinking when they entered the far more tolerant Dutch Calvinist orbit. Bodian notes that the stance of Provençal halakhic decisors (such as Meiri) who slowly began to exclude Christians from the category of idolaters, thus paving the way for a greater tolerance within Halakhah, has been the focus of much scholarly research and comment. In contrast, Spanish Jews had been conditioned to think of (and reject) Spanish-Catholic Christianity

as idolatry. This was one of the most powerful rhetorical strategies for encouraging Jewish resistance to conversion, and it shaped images of Christianity within former *converso* communities long after their settlement in places like Amsterdam. Their opposition to Catholic Spanish tyranny gave them a powerful common cause with the Dutch. Yet Bodian shows that most Jewish leaders were reluctant to abandon the powerful rhetoric of idolatry, even when it came to Calvinism. They “discriminated” against lands that did not allow open Jewish worship, but the fact of their Catholicism was not the deciding factor.

Jacob J. Schacter examines the writings of one of the most prominent rabbinic figures of the eighteenth century, Jacob Emden. Emden is famous primarily for his uncompromising, and possibly overzealous, persecution of Jews who adhered to Sabbatianism, a heretical theology that placed the fallen messiah Shabbetai Zevi at its center. Although one of the important critiques of Sabbatianism focused on its structural parallel to Christianity, Schacter reaffirms that Emden’s statements about Christianity were among the most positive and progressive of any eighteenth-century rabbi and suggests that a partial explanation for his openness may be found particularly in his anti-Sabbatian polemic.

Jewish Polemical Strategies in Light of Christianity and Islam

The polemical pressure on Jews to continually justify their tradition in the face of Christian challenges manifested itself within the most internal activities of the Jews as well as more broadly. Thus, within Ashkenaz, polemical considerations sometimes influenced Jews interpreting the Bible to make strategic choices that they may not have otherwise made. The impact of this polemical pressure was felt even among Jews who lived within the Islamic orbit.

Avraham Grossman categorizes the ways in which Rashi defended the Jewish interpretation of the Bible from the encroachments of Christian exegetes. His insights are crucial not just for understanding how Rashi approached the Jewish-Christian debate, but for seeing Rashi as an exegetical strategist who accomplished several significant polemical goals with one line of argumentation. His contribution provides insight on Rashi as a scholar who weighed every choice of words from several perspectives, including polemical ones.

Elliott Horowitz investigates the circumstances that led to the creation of Adolf Neubauer and S. R. Driver's opus on Isaiah 53, one of the most contentious passages in the Hebrew Bible and the focus of exegetical polemic between Jews and Christians since antiquity. His careful philological investigation leads backward from a nineteenth-century academic to a ninth-century poet and uncovers a new history of this chapter's interpretation.

It has long been a commonplace when analyzing styles of medieval biblical exegesis to assume that Jewish exegetes advanced the plain or literal meaning of the texts (the *peshat*) over other interpretations because such readings countered Christian attempts to read the texts allegorically. Martin I. Lockshin contests this assessment by showing that in the case of several leading medieval Jewish commentators, the *peshat* interpretations they advanced would have put them at a disadvantage against Christians interpreters.

The reach of Jewish-Christian polemic and its influence on Jewish exegesis extended to Jews living in Muslim lands. Even there, Mordechai Z. Cohen argues, Jewish polemicists criticized Christian exegetical strategies, demonstrating that the effect of the polemic penetrated into the thought processes of Jews beyond the Christian world.

Daniel J. Lasker notes the correspondence between the rise of Karaism, a Jewish sectarian movement, and the rise of a literary critique by Jews of Christianity. Internecine polemics among Muslim sects stimulated critical evaluations of religious traditions even among non-Muslims. With the exception of some (minor) positive inflections, the Karaite critique of Christianity, especially its appropriation and exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, was similar to that of other Jews; thus it is difficult to distinguish from the text of a polemic whether the author was, in fact, a Karaite Jew or a rabbinic Jew. This continued to be the case until the seventeenth century when, under the gaze of sympathetic Protestant scholars (and later, in order to distance themselves from persecutors of the Jews), Karaites began to identify themselves as closer in spirit to Christians than to Jews, a trend that developed to the point where some Karaites in the twentieth century embraced a syncretist identity quite distant from Judaism.

Contemporary Jewish-Christian Relations

The question of whether Judaism and Christianity as faith communities ought to be in dialogue with one another in contemporary times continues to confront theologians of both religions, a confrontation that has taken on momentous dimensions in the post-Holocaust era. David Shatz lays out the basic premises and moral problems involved in entering a dialogue about principles of faith. He explores the tensions within the thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik over some key issues in this dilemma.

Michael Wyschogrod provides another link in the continuing discussion between Jewish thinkers and Christian theologians. His analysis of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's statement about how the Christian Bible views the Jews is followed by a careful reading of a number of key issues, such as the election of Israel, the revelation of God, and divine reproaches and condemnations, that cannot be ignored by any scholar who wishes to develop a theology of Jewish-Christian relations.

Collectively, the essays in this volume shine new light on the remarkably fertile field of Jewish-Christian relations from the distant past to the present. The culture of each has been profoundly affected by the other at various points in their respective histories. No one has done more than David Berger to trace how each of these faith communities cherished its Scripture, was highly aware of the presence of the other, and shaped its responses accordingly.

Elisheva Carlebach
Jacob J. Schacter

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Elisheva Carlebach
Jacob J. Schacter



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