

CHRISTIAN HERESY AND JEWISH POLEMIC IN THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

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The suggestion that there was meaningful contact between Christian heretics and Jews during the middle ages is entirely plausible, quite significant, and generally unproved.¹ That the existence of heresy had some impact upon the status of medieval Jews is, of course, beyond question. Inquisitorial proceedings aimed at heretics affected not only crypto-Jews (whether real or alleged) but members of the established Jewish community as well. Jews were accused of harboring heretics, encouraging them, and even of leading orthodox Christians into heresy. On several important occasions, procedures usually directed against heretical works were turned against the Talmud, the works of Maimonides, and certain sections of the Jewish liturgy. By the end of the middle ages, Jews were very well aware of the Church's lack of affection for heretics.²

¹L. I. Newman's *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925) is an important study, but it does not succeed in establishing the thesis implied by the title. See the discussion by F. Talmage, "An Hebrew Polemical Treatise," *HTR* 60 (1967) 335-37. See also G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin: de Gruyter and Co., 1962) 206-10. Scholem has noted one clear reference by a Jewish polemicist to Christian "heretics who believe in two gods, one good and one evil" (Meir of Narbonne's *Milhemet Mizvah* [1245], cited in Scholem's "Te'udah Hadashah LeToledot Reshit HaQabbalah," *Sefer Bialik* [Tel Aviv: 1934] 152). On this reference, see note 36 below. On the possible relationship between Provençal kabbalah and Catharism, see also Sh. Shahar, "HaQattarim VeReshit HaQabbalah BeLanguedoc," *Tarbiz* 40 (1971) 483-509.

²For a discussion of the impact of inquisitorial procedures on the Jews in a fairly early period, see Y. Yerushalmi, "The Inquisition and the Jews of France in the Time of Bernard Gui," *HTR* 63 (1970) 317-77. The investigation and burning of the Talmud in the thirteenth century has been discussed most recently by Ch. Merchavia, *HaTalmud BiRe'i HaNazrut* (Jerusalem: 1970) 227-48. On the burning of the works of Maimonides in the 1230s, see A. Schochet, "Berurim BeParshat HaPulmus HaRishon al Sifrei HaRambam," *Zion* 36 (1971) 27-60. It is especially noteworthy that a Hebrew manuscript alleges that a Christian missionary in 1272-73 threatened to demonstrate that the Jews have no faith and that, like the *Bougres*, they deserve to be burned; see A. Neubauer, "Literary Gleanings, IX," *JQR*, o.s., 5 (1893) 714. R. Chazan's suggestion that one of the earliest large-scale persecutions of Jews in the high middle ages was related to the beginnings of heresy in the West is interesting although there is no concrete documentation to bear it out; see his "1007-1012: Initial Crisis for Northern

Similarly, heretics were incessantly reminded of the Church's attitude toward the Jews. It was a long-standing practice for Christians to label schismatic groups "Jews" even when the relationship of the particular group to Judaism was tenuous or imaginary. This was the case during several early controversies in the Byzantine Empire,³ and similar tendencies can be documented in western Europe throughout the middle ages. Peter Damian, for example, reserved his most bitter anti-Jewish invective for occasions when he was attacking not Jews, but Christian heretics; these heretics, he asserted, are even worse than "the Jewish perfidy itself."⁴ St. Bernard, who defended Jewish lives with vigor and courage during the second crusade, nonetheless used Jews as a pejorative standard of comparison for various forms of heresy and sin.⁵

The established Church, then, used each group to attack the other; heretics were Jews, while Jews were guilty of encouraging heresy and even of producing heretical works. But did it ever occur to Jews or heretics to use similar tactics? Did Jews ever cite heresy as a way of attacking the Church, and did heretics ever use Judaism to accomplish the same end? Since Jews and heretics were made acutely aware of one another by the Church itself, such possibilities must at least be considered. Moreover, if each group was familiar with the doctrines of the other, there may be examples of direct attacks against heretical views by Jews or against Jewish views by heretics without reference to the orthodox Church. Since very little heretical polemic survives, the place to look for possible verification of these suggestions is the Jewish polemic of the high middle ages. An examination of this literature yields some speculative but intriguing conclusions.

European Jewry," *Proceedings of The American Academy for Jewish Research* 38-39 (1970-71) 101-17. For the charge of harboring heretics as well as a more general bibliographical discussion, see S. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (2d ed.; New York, London, and Philadelphia: Columbia University Press, 1965) 9. 59, 267-68.

³See J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (London: 1934; reprinted New York: Atheneum, 1969) 300-03.

⁴See his *Liber Qui Dicitur Gratissimus*, ch. 37, *PL* 145. 153, and his *De Sacramentis per Improbos Administratis*, *PL* 145. 529, discussed in my "St. Peter Damian: His Attitude toward the Jews and the Old Testament," *Yavneh Review* 4 (1965) 86-87, 89-90.

⁵See my study, "The Attitude of St. Bernard of Clairvaux toward the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 40 (1972) 104-05. See also Cassiodorus, *PL* 70. 74D ("Judaei vel Donatistae"); Hadrian I, *PL* 98. 1255-56; Humbert, *PL* 143. 1093C. Cf. B. Blumenkranz, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le Monde Occidental 430-1096* (Paris: 1960) xvi-xvii, and note 11 there, and see Baron, *History*, 58-60.

Several years ago, Frank Talmage argued that a short Hebrew polemic attributed to Rabbi David Kimhi (d. 1235) contains three arguments, “apparently unique in Hebrew polemical literature,” directed against Cathar or Bogomil doctrines.⁶ This position, though plausible and stimulating, cannot, in my view, withstand careful scrutiny; nevertheless, it is possible that one of the heretical beliefs to which Prof. Talmage alludes is found in another, even less likely, Jewish polemic.

The first passage in the so-called *Vikkuaḥ Leha Radaq* which is alleged to be directed against Christian heresy reads as follows:

I, the insignificant one, have seen fit to write briefly concerning some of the notions of those who err in saying that Mary conceived Jesus without normal intercourse. They say too that the annunciating angel, Gabriel, said to her, “Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, etc.” At that moment the holy spirit of the Lord entered through her ear so that she conceived. Reply to them that every intelligent person knows that the young of all creatures, whether man, animal, fowl or beast, leaves the mother’s body from the place where the semen entered. Therefore, Jesus should have left through the ear through which the holy spirit entered her womb. Yet he did not leave from there but from the place where all others [leave].⁷

Prof. Talmage notes that “the concept (of conception through the ear) was employed in orthodox Christianity in the patristic period,”⁸ but he adds that “the absolute dualists among the heretics carried this further to prove the noncorporeal nature of Jesus himself.” These dualists, however, believed in exit through the ear as well, and the author of the *Vikkuaḥ Leha Radaq* obviously did not know of that doctrine; hence, says Prof. Talmage, he must have been arguing against “mitigated dualists.”⁹

First of all, it is difficult to see what the doctrine of aural entry as opposed to aural exit has to do with dualism in any form. It was not necessary to be a docetist to believe that an incorporeal spirit had entered Mary; only the doctrine of aural exit supported the

⁶“An Hebrew Polemical Treatise, Anti-Cathar and Anti-Orthodox,” *HTR* 60 (1967) 323-48. The article contains a translation of the treatise; the Hebrew text appears in *Milḥemet Ḥovah* (Constantinople: 1710) 13a-18b and in Talmage’s *Sefer HaBerit u-Vikkuaḥei Radaq im HaNazrut* (Jerusalem: 1974). In his introduction to the Hebrew text (15-16), Talmage reiterates the central thesis of the article.

⁷Talmage’s translation, 341.

⁸He refers to C. Schmidt, *Histoire et Doctrine des Cathares ou Albigeois* 2. 41f.

⁹“An Hebrew Polemical Treatise,” 327.

docetist position. Without aural exit, aural entry seems logically irrelevant to any heretical position.

Moreover, there is no question that the doctrine of conception through the ear was widespread among orthodox Christians not only in the patristic period but in the later middle ages as well. Many paintings of the annunciation appear to reflect this belief rather clearly.¹⁰ More important, there are unambiguous literary references to such a doctrine. At least seven medieval hymns begin with the lines

Rejoice, O virgin, mother of Christ,
Who conceived through the ear
With Gabriel as messenger
(Gaude, virgo, mater Christi
Quae per aurem concepisti
Gabriele nuntio).¹¹

It has been argued, in fact, that no less an authority than St. Bernard refers to this belief,¹² and even if symbolic interpretations can be read into some of these remarks, it is clearly inadmissible to assume that the Christian masses or the ordinary priest who heard such statements would do anything other than take them literally.¹³ Consequently, there is no reason to believe that the reference to aural conception in the *Vikkuaḥ Leha Radaq* reflects contact with Cathars or any other Christian heretics.

However, we are not yet finished with this rather interesting doctrine. Joseph Official, a Jewish polemicist from northern France writing in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, makes the following brief comment with respect to the Christian assertion that the speaker in Psalm 22 is Jesus:

¹⁰See M. Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth Century Paintings," *The Art Bulletin* 27 (1945) 175-81. Cf. also the brief reference in D. M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *The Art Bulletin* 18 (1936) 523.

¹¹Quoted in Y. Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine* (London: B. Franklin, 1912) 297, and in E. Jones, "The Madonna's Conception Through the Ear," *Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis* (London: 1923; reprinted New York: International University Press, 1964) 2. 269.

¹²*PL* 183. 327, cited in Hirn, 298.

¹³Cf. Hirn, 298. In the fifteenth century, a *converso* monk later suspected of judaizing asked about the channel through which Jesus was conceived, and one answer suggested to him (apparently by an orthodox colleague) was "per la oreja"; see A. A. Sicroff, "Clandestine Judaism in the Hieronymite Monastery of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe," *Studies in Honor of M. J. Bernardete*, ed. by I. Langnas and B. Sholod (New York: 1965) 105-06.

"In thee our fathers put their trust; they trusted, and thou didst rescue them" (Psalm 22:5). Now, did he have fathers? After all, they maintain that he entered her through the center of the head.¹⁴

Here again, pictorial representations of the annunciation appear to reflect such a view,¹⁵ and references to a belief of this sort in a northern French polemic is interesting in itself. But another Jewish polemic goes even further.

The *Nizzahon Vetus* (or *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*) was written by a German Jew in the late thirteenth or very early fourteenth century. It is basically an anthology of Ashkenazic polemic against Christianity, and it therefore contains a great deal of French material dating from a somewhat earlier period.¹⁶ In discussing the same Psalm 22, the author writes:

"I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's stomach" (Psalm 22:11); but not in the womb or in the stomach. Moreover, if this were said about the hanged one, the problem would be their assertion that he was born out of the forehead of a harlot, for the verse says that he was born out of a woman like all children; thus, your books lie when they say that the spirit entered Mary.¹⁷

This unusual passage contains two separate refutations of the contention that Jesus is the speaker in this Psalm. First, the verse indicates that the speaker recognized God only after he was born ("from my mother's stomach" but not in it); if he were divine from the moment of conception, he would have recognized God even in the womb.¹⁸ Secondly, Christians believe that Jesus was born

¹⁴*Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, (ed. by J. Rosenthal; Jerusalem: 1970) 104. This section of Joseph's work had never been published before Rosenthal's edition and was therefore unavailable to Talmage. The belief that Jesus was conceived "through the brain" was also reported by Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen in his *Sefer [Ha]Nizzahon* (written at the very beginning of the fifteenth century; Amsterdam: 1709) section 8, 15a. He goes on to argue that Jesus should have emerged through the same passageway, and yet no one has ever maintained that the site of his birth was different from that of other infants.

¹⁵See Jacob Arlow, "The Madonna's Conception through the Eyes," *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society* 3 (1965) 13-25, esp. 20 (pointed out by my colleague at Brooklyn College, Prof. Elizabeth Brown).

¹⁶The work was published with a Latin translation by J. Wagenseil, *Tela Ignea Satanae* (Aldorf: 1681) 2. 1-260. On the date, see E. Urbach, "Études sur la littérature polémique au moyen âge," *Revue des Études Juives* 100 (1935) 60, 76-77, and Rosenthal's introduction to *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, 15. See also the introduction to my forthcoming critical edition, translation and commentary.

¹⁷*Tela Ignea Satanae*, 167.

¹⁸This argument is more elaborate and explicit with respect to the Christian identification of Cyrus with Jesus in Isaiah 45. See *Tela*, 102: "It is written, 'That you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel'

through the forehead, while the verse says that the speaker was born from the stomach.

Here we finally find a Jewish polemicist referring to an unusual location for Jesus' exit at birth. Several arguments can be posed to mitigate the significance of this statement. The Hebrew text is a little bit awkward, and it is not impossible that the key passage ("Moreover - children") is a gloss; nevertheless, even if this is true (and there is no evidence that it is), it would mean that the glossator was aware of such a doctrine. It could also be argued that the author read the above-quoted remark by Joseph Official and merely assumed that Christians would place the birth at the same site as the entry. This, however, seems improbable, since there are several passages in the *Nizzahon Vetus* which reflect awareness of the orthodox view of Jesus' birth.¹⁹ It is one thing to attack a known alternate view; it is something else entirely to invent a view which contradicts the only Christian belief you have ever heard and then proceed to refute it. The passage in Joseph Official's work may well have reminded the author of an unorthodox view of Jesus' birth, but it is quite unlikely that he would have simply made it up.

Exit through the forehead is, of course, not the same as exit through the ear, and I am unaware of any heretical view which maintained the former position. It is therefore highly probable that the passage in the *Nizzahon Vetus* reflects a distorted awareness of the heretical doctrine of aural exit. The distortion may be a result of Joseph Official's reference to entry through the forehead, or it may result from an uncontrollable urge to use the insulting Biblical phrase "the forehead of a harlot" (Jeremiah 3:3) with respect to Mary; it is not even impossible that some heretics could have distorted the doctrine themselves (influenced, perhaps, by the myth of Athena's birth) and that the *Nizzahon Vetus*, which is generally quite reliable in its descriptions of Christian beliefs and ceremonies, may be reporting such a heretical view accurately.

In any case, this passage indicates Jewish familiarity with a clearly heretical doctrine. That such familiarity should be

(Isa 45:3). Thus, you say that this Cyrus whom you identify with Jesus did not know God until the point when all these things were done to him. In light of this, how can you say that the spirit of God entered Mary and took on flesh? If that were true, he certainly should have known God even before his birth."

¹⁹Cf. *Tela*, 7, 210. See 201, where the author is apparently interested in proving from Christian sources that Jesus was born from the stomach; this too may be directed against the heretical view. His evidence consists of a quotation which is apparently an abridged and distorted version of Luke 2:5-11.

reflected in a late-thirteenth-century work from Germany is somewhat surprising. Nevertheless, heretics were to be found in northern France and Germany in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries,²⁰ and some of their ideas could have become known to Jews. Otherwise, the argument may have come north through the medium of Jewish polemic itself, but whatever its source, it demonstrates some Jewish contact with Christian heretics.

The second argument in the *Vikkuaḥ LehaRadaq* which is supposed to be directed against a heretical belief appears in the following passage:

It is well known to all, even to fools, that every woman from the age of thirteen on undergoes menstruation, which is the period of the blood of women in confinement which the woman experiences every month. When she becomes pregnant, she does not have this blood, for the foetus is nourished on this blood of confinement during the nine months he is in the womb. Furthermore, when a woman gives birth, that menstrual blood goes to the nipples of the woman several days later and turns into milk. Therefore, when the child sucks the breasts of the mother, she does not have this blood, since it went to the breasts, as we have said.

I shall make an additional point to you. Know that the menstrual blood is a virtually fatal poison. Were a man to drink one cup of it, he would die in a few days or succumb to leprosy, for it is blood which is foul and impure. The wonders of the Lord are so great that the foetus is nourished on that blood for nine months without being harmed. However, it does make the child somewhat weak, so that when he leaves the mother's womb, he does not have the strength to walk on his feet, since he was nourished on that blood all those months he was in the womb. This is not the case with the animals, for as soon as they leave their mother's womb, they walk on their feet. This is so because beasts and animals have no menstrual blood and the foetus is nourished on the blood of the heart which is good, healthy, clean blood. Therefore, when the [young of the animal] leaves the womb of its mother, it walks on its feet immediately. If then Jesus' mother conceived him by the holy spirit, so that he was not nourished in his mother's womb on that corrupt blood, he should have walked on his feet the day he was born and he should have spoken and been as wise as he was when he reached the age of thirty. Rather, he left [her body] from the customary place, was small like other infants, and performed his needs as do other children.²¹

The heretical doctrine at which this passage is allegedly aimed is the view that Jesus did not partake of ordinary nourishment. Since this is so, he would not have been nourished by menstrual

²⁰See A. Borst, *Die Katharer* (Stuttgart: 1953) 103-04. Cf. also W. Wakefield and A. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969) 38-39.

²¹Talmage's translation, 341-42.

blood and would therefore have been born with the ability to walk and talk. Now, this interpretation of the passage may be correct, but there exists an alternative explanation which is at least equally reasonable that does not force us to assume any knowledge of heretical beliefs.

The first crucial observation is that there is no intimation in this passage that Jesus did not eat or drink after his birth. The author's reference to the transformation of menstrual blood into mother's milk is not intended to indicate that the milk is harmful or to show that Jesus' failure to drink it (a heretical view) should have made him stronger than the ordinary infant.²² The reason for that reference is quite different. The author's argument that the foetus is nourished by menstrual blood depends upon the observation that menstruation stops during pregnancy. He must therefore deal with the obvious objection that it does not begin again immediately after childbirth, particularly when the mother is nursing; his solution to this difficulty is the long-standing view that the menstrual blood becomes milk, but there is no reason to believe that it retains its harmful qualities after its transformation.

The only belief that the author assumes explicitly is that Jesus was not nourished in the ordinary fashion *while in the womb*, and this, I think, was his own deduction rather than his report of a known Christian doctrine. The important clauses read, "If then Jesus' mother conceived him by the holy spirit, so that he was not nourished in his mother's womb on that corrupt blood. . . ." The second clause, which contains the heretical view, is a logical inference from the doctrine that Mary conceived by the holy spirit.²³ The basis of this inference is fairly clear. Jews frequently asked Christians why Jesus had to eat or drink if he was divine. After all, Moses had been sustained without food by the holy spirit for forty days and nights, and if Jesus possessed the holy spirit constantly, he should have had no need of any physical nourishment.²⁴ The only answer that a Jew might grudgingly

²²It is not quite clear to me whether Talmage understood the argument in this fashion. He does express surprise (328) that the author should consider mother's milk harmful when all other medieval writers praise its quality.

²³Talmage's translation of the *vav* which introduces the second clause as "so that" is precisely to the point. This is a corollary of the first clause rather than a continuing exposition of the straightforward Christian position.

²⁴See Meir ben Simon of Narbonne (thirteenth century), *Milhemet Mizvah*, Parma manuscript, 26b-27a, 89a-b; *Nizzahon Vetus, Tela Ignea Satanae*, 213-15, 217-18, 224-26. The point was raised in connection with Matt 4:2 in Jacob ben Reuben's *Milhamot HaShem* (ed. by J. Rosenthal; Jerusalem: 1963) 144, and in the *Nizzahon Vetus*, 200.

accept would be that Jesus made every effort to behave like an ordinary mortal, and so he ate even though he did not have to do so.²⁵ But this makes sense only after birth; while in the womb, Jesus had no conceivable reason for engaging in a totally useless enterprise, and the author simply takes it for granted that Christians would recognize this.²⁶ There is therefore no compelling reason for regarding this as a response to a known heretical position.

The third and final reference in the *Vikkuaḥ Leha Radaq* which could be related to heresy is the citation of a Christian view that Adam was promised redemption after five and a half days, which equal 5,500 years. This may have been "an element of Bogomil theology," but, as Prof. Talmage himself points out, it is found in many early orthodox writers.²⁷ There is, moreover, nothing specifically "heretical" about it. Had the first two indications of familiarity with heresy been convincing, the probability that this concept was learned from heretical sources might have been reasonably high; standing on its own, however, this example cannot demonstrate Jewish contact with heretics.

The *Vikkuaḥ Leha Radaq*, then, probably does not reflect Jewish knowledge of heretical doctrines. Surprisingly, the *Nizzahon Vetus* probably does, but the report in that work is bizarre and possibly distorted. On the other hand, we can now turn to a passage in another, unpublished Jewish polemic where the reference to heresy is crystal clear and where the heretical

²⁵Such a Christian argument (although in a different context) is cited without direct refutation in the *Nizzahon Vetus*, 173: "You may then argue that he prayed and cried not because he wanted to be saved but because people normally pray when they are in trouble; thus, he too prayed because he behaved like an ordinary mortal in every respect." Cf. Jerome, *In Esaiam (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 73A)* 706.

²⁶For the argument that Jesus did not have to make pretenses in a private situation involving only "himself and his Father," see the *Nizzahon Vetus*, 60. The author there is commenting on the Christian assertion that the addressee in Jeremiah 1 is Jesus (cf. Cyprian's *Testimonia* 1.5, *PL* 4. 691). If so, he argues, why does Jesus respond, "Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak," so that God must tell him, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer 1:6, 9)? "This implies," he continues, "that up to that time he possessed no such power of speech and certainly not divinity. . . . Notice, then, their shame, for he was supposed to have been divine from birth, yet Jeremiah says that the divine word was granted him only now. If the Christian will respond by arguing that Jesus spoke this way [reading *amar ken* with the Munich manuscript rather than *amar lah ken*] because of his humility, refute him by asking why humility should be necessary in a conversation between himself and his Father."

²⁷"An Hebrew Polemical Treatise," 328-29. Cf. also H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (2d ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964) 1. 364.

doctrine is reported with complete accuracy. Moreover, unlike the argument in the *Nizzahon Vetus* and the possible arguments in the *Vikkuaḥ LehaRadaq*, the purpose in this passage is to attack the orthodox Church itself.

One of the recurring issues in Jewish-Christian polemic was the numerical superiority enjoyed by Christians. This was cited as evidence of the validity of the Christian faith because it showed that the Jews had been rejected and that various Biblical prophecies (such as Genesis 12:2-3; 15:5; Psalms 2:8; 72:11) had been fulfilled through Christianity. Jews responded to this argument in a variety of ways which ranged from the traditional assertion that they were being temporarily punished for their sins to the claim that their degradation is itself proof of their religious superiority.²⁸ One of the more interesting Jewish approaches to this problem was to reverse it by maintaining that Christians do not constitute a majority of the world's population and that they themselves can be placed on the defensive through the use of a numerical argument.²⁹

Another issue in which numbers became relevant was the question of God's fairness in making his revelation known. The argument was first raised by a Christian. Why, Tertullian asked, should we believe that God, who rules the entire world, revealed his law to only one nation and did not grant it to all?³⁰ Well, said some Jewish polemicists (not in direct response to this question), the alleged Christian revelation is hardly a model of fairness either. The miracles associated with Jesus are not particularly impressive, especially in light of the incredible sort of thing we are supposed to believe about him and the terrible consequences of a

²⁸This last argument, based on Dan 8:12 ("And it cast down the truth to the ground"), was proposed by Meir of Narbonne, *Milhemet Mizvah*, Parma ms., 13b, 22b, 105b; cf. also *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, 113. For Jewish explanations of the exile in polemic, see the additions to Joseph Kimhi, *Sefer HaBerit*, in *Milhemet Hovah*, 36a, the Jew in the *Dialogus* of Rupert of Deutz, *PL* 170. 606, the *Nizzahon Vetus*, 253-57, and Solomon de' Rossi, *Edut HaShem Ne'emanaḥ*, in J. Rosenthal, *Mehqarim u-Meqorot* (Jerusalem: 1967) 1. 395-400 (= *Sura* 3 [1948] 260-64).

²⁹This argument was applied to Ps 72:11 by Jacob ben Reuben (*Milhamot HaShem*, 74), Nahmanides (*Vikkuaḥ*, in Ch. Chavel, *Ketavei Ramban* [Jerusalem: 1963] 1. 311), and the author of the *Nizzahon Vetus*, 176. See also Meir of Narbonne, *Milhemet Mizvah*, Parma ms., 13b, and Jacob ben Reuben, *Milhamot HaShem*, 38-39, 114. Cf. especially the *Nizzahon Vetus*, 237-38.

³⁰"Cur etenim Deus, universitatis conditor, mundi totius gubernator . . . legem per Moysen uni populo dedisse credatur, et non omnibus gentibus attribuisse dicatur?" *Q. S. F. Tertulliani Adversus Iudaeos mit Einleitung und kritischem Kommentar* (ed. by H. Tränkle; Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1964) 4 (= *PL* 2. 599).

failure to believe.³¹ With respect to the Jews, Jesus caused more suffering than he alleviated, because it was through him that they are supposed to have committed a sin of unparalleled magnitude.³² Finally — and here the numerical argument comes into play — if Jesus came to redeem the world from damnation, he didn't do a very good job, since only a minority of the world's inhabitants believes in him; he could have found a way to cause all nations to have faith.³³

A thirteenth-century polemicist from Avignon by the name of Mordecai ben Joseph put this argument in the following form:

Moreover, how did he redeem the world by his advent? If you alone are saved, a greater number than you have been damned (lit., lost), such as Jews and Muslims who do not believe in him. Indeed, many have become Albigenians (*Albigois*³⁴) or Bogomils (*Bougres*), for (lit., and) they cannot believe his shame, that he should disgrace himself by entering a woman and having men prevail against him (lit., have power over him). The result is that most of the world goes to hell through his advent.³⁵

The heretical doctrines alluded to in this passage are the denial that God entered a woman or that men prevailed against him. The pronouns are ambiguous, and the sentence can even be read as a denial that Jesus entered a woman or that men prevailed against him. I am quite convinced that the first explanation is correct, but either one can yield an accurate description of the beliefs of thirteenth-century occitanian heretics. The Cathars believed that Jesus was not God but an angel; hence, God was neither placed in a woman nor crucified. In a sense, these events were not even applicable to Jesus, because his body was not real; consequently, the crucifixion and even incarnation itself were illusions.³⁶

³¹That Christian miracles should have been more impressive was asserted in Meir of Narbonne's *Milhemet Mizvah*, Parma ms., 121a-b, in the *Vikkuaḥ LehaRadaq*, Talmage's translation, 345, 347, and in the *Nizzahon Vetus*, 6, 90, 155, 159. The unfairness of punishing someone who refused to believe in the divinity of Jesus was emphasized by Joseph Kimḥi, *Sefer HaBerit, Milhemet Hovah*, 228.

³²*Nizzahon Vetus*, 211, 234-35.

³³*Ibid.*, 238.

³⁴This is the preferable form in thirteenth-century French (the Hebrew transliteration is with a *gimel*); see Hatzfeld and Darmesteter, *Dictionnaire Générale de la Langue Française*, s.v. *Albigois*.

³⁵*Liqqutim MeḤibburei R. Mordekhai ben Yosef MeAvignon* (ed. by A. Posnanski, Hebrew University manuscript, Shelf Mark Heb 8° 769) 26. On Posnanski's unpublished transcriptions of Hebrew polemical manuscripts, see D. Simonsen, "Eine Sammlung polemischer und apologetischer Literatur," *Festschrift für Aron Freiman* (Berlin: 1935) 114ff.

³⁶On these doctrines, see Borst, *Die Katharer*, 162-67; J. Russell, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press,

Not only were these beliefs accurately perceived by Mordecai, they are in fact at the center of heretical thought. A medieval writer could easily have defended the statement that people became heretics because of an unwillingness to accept demeaning doctrines about God, and here this assertion is used against the orthodox Church. Christians are not only outnumbered by a combination of Jews and Muslims, but Christian heretics must also be counted among the unredeemed. For a thirteenth-century writer living in southern France, no argument could have been more natural, and the passage clearly reveals an awareness of heretical beliefs as well as a willingness to cite them as part of an anti-orthodox polemic.

We now turn to a passage in another Jewish polemic which may shed new light on the tactics of medieval heretics. Jacob ben Reuben's *Milhamot HaShem* (*The Wars of the Lord*) was an epoch-making work. Written in southern France in 1170, it is the first or second extant Jewish polemic from western Europe, and it contains the first Jewish critique of a portion of the New Testament (Matthew), the first Hebrew translation of sizable selections from the Latin New Testament (again Matthew), and what may be the first Hebrew translation of any section of a medieval Latin work (Gilbert Crispin's *Disputatio*).³⁷ It is, moreover, the product of a genuine discussion between Jacob and a Christian acquaintance.

After lengthy but rather cordial disputes concerning the trinity, incarnation, allegory, and standard Christological verses, Jacob's opponent, who is clearly an orthodox Christian, announces that he has a friend named Paul who has posed two philosophical

1965) 203; Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 8, 48. Mordecai's reference to heretics is somewhat more significant than that of Meir of Narbonne (see above, note 1). Mordecai employs the specific terms Albigensians and Bogomils rather than the generic "heretics," and the doctrines he cites are less obvious to the casual observer than the dualism mentioned by Meir. Finally, it is of considerable interest that while Meir contrasted heretics and orthodox Christians to the detriment of the former (Jewish law, he tells his orthodox listener, is far more favorably inclined toward orthodox Christians than it is toward dualists), Mordecai cites heresy with some approval as part of an attack against the Christian mainstream.

³⁷On the date and place, see Rosenthal's introduction to his edition of *Milhamot HaShem* (Jerusalem: 1963). The problems cited by Ch. Merhavya (*Kirjath Sepher* 39 [1964] 144-48) are not sufficient, in my opinion, to cast substantial doubt upon the 1170 date in the colophon. On the translations from Matthew, see Rosenthal's "Targum shel HaBesorah 'al Pi Matti leYa 'aqov ben Reuven," *Tarbiz* 32 (1962) 48-66, and on the translation from Crispin, see my "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Polemic," *Speculum* 49 (1974) 34-47.

objections against Judaism. The objections are described, Jacob responds, and the discussion then returns to Biblical verses. There is, however, something suspicious about those objections, and they deserve some very careful scrutiny.

The first objection is reported by Paul's friend as follows:

Paul said: I truly know that the Jews believe in God, and they believe that he is a God who exists and brings everything into being, that he is primeval without antecedent, and that he is in the category of what is and what can be. If so, then the two principles of good and evil, which are what is and what can be, are found in him. He (Paul) also said that since he exists and brings everything into being, then he brings about evil just as he brings about good. He also said that since he is without beginning and without end, all created things, which have a beginning and an end, are in him; therefore, he contains evil as well as good. Indeed, my eyes have thus seen and recognized that the Jews do not believe anything, for even according to their own words they believe in a God in whom there exist two principles - good and evil. Now, one who makes evil has evil in him, as I have shown you on the basis of their type of faith and through that which they concede and believe. I have therefore said that your (read: their?) words have no foundation and that faith has been lost and cut off from their mouths.³⁸

This is an amazing objection for the obvious but devastating reason that there is nothing in it that cannot be directed against Christianity itself. Whatever reservations may be expressed about the formulation of the premises of the argument (and Jacob does object to at least one such formulation), the crucial fact is that none of those premises are characteristic of Judaism and not of Christianity. Since Christians also believe that God brings everything into being and that he is without beginning and end, it should follow that they too must concede that there is evil in God. But this is heresy! Indeed, it is the Cathar heresy, or something very much like it.³⁹

The 1160s were a turning point in the history of Catharism in southern France; it was in this decade that dualism began to

³⁸*Milhamot HaShem*, 116-17. I have tried to provide an extremely literal translation. Despite Merhavva's suggestion to the contrary (*op. cit.*, 146-47), it is quite clear that this Paul, who is a contemporary of the author, is not the same as the Paul mentioned in several earlier passages of *Milhamot HaShem*. Even if that Paul is not the apostle (and he probably is), he is certainly no contemporary of the disputants since he is mentioned along with Jerome and Augustine as one of the founders of the Christian faith (p. 5).

³⁹Whatever dualist elements may have influenced early Christianity (see Rosenthal's note *ad loc.*), it was clearly unacceptable for a twelfth-century Christian to say that there is evil in God.

spread and to become a vital force.⁴⁰ Needless to say, not every Christian who became attracted to dualism as it began to spread immediately announced that he was a heretic. Under the inquisition, of course, concealment of heresy became crucial, but it was hardly unknown in the earlier period. The temptation is therefore overwhelming to suggest that Paul was a concealed dualist of recent vintage who approached an old friend with some objections against Judaism; his real target, however, was not Judaism at all. Under the guise of giving a lecture about the deficiencies of Judaism, Paul was really sowing seeds that would weaken his friend's faith in orthodox Christianity. A fourteenth-century Christian writes about heretics who pretended to be Jews in order to be free to spread heretical ideas;⁴¹ here we are probably dealing with a heretic pretending to attack Judaism in order to accomplish the same end. Jacob's disputant apparently failed to grasp the implications of the question, or, like a famous fourteenth-century convert to Christianity, he may have concocted an orthodox interpretation of it,⁴² and so he passed it on to his Jewish acquaintance. The fact remains, however, that if we take this passage at anything resembling face value, it is urging a dualistic belief based on premises shared by both Judaism and orthodox Christianity.

Paul posed a second objection against Judaism in addition to the first, and an examination of this objection ought to help us confirm or deny the impression that there is something quite unusual about this anti-Jewish polemicist. Here, then, is Paul's second argument.

Paul continued and said: I truly know that the Jews believe in him who is the Lord, God, Almighty, true, and living, as it is written, "The Lord is the true God; he is the living God and eternal king" (Jeremiah 10:10). And [they believe in him who is] mighty and powerful, as it is written, "Through his great might, his might and power" (Isaiah 40:26). [They] also [believe] in him who is "merciful and compassionate, forbearing and constant in his love" (Psalms 145:8). Now, I know that he is not true by partaking of truth, so that truth would be something other than he; nor does he live by partaking of life as man does, who is alive at one time and dead at another; nor is he powerful by partaking of power as man is, who is powerful at one time and weak at another. The creator, blessed be he, is not that way. Rather, his essence is truth, and his essence is life, and his essence is power, and his essence is merciful, and his essence is God, and his essence is Almighty, and the same is true of all the names that apply to him. Moreover, we certainly know that the principle of strength is not

⁴⁰See Borst, *Die Katharer*, 89-108. Cf. also Russell, *Dissent and Reform*, 200, and R. I. Moore, "The Origins of Medieval Heresy," *History* 55 (1970) 23.

⁴¹See the quotation in Baron, *History*, 58.

⁴²For the assertion by Abner of Burgos that evil in this passage does not mean evil, see Rosenthal's note *ad loc.*

merciful, and the principle "merciful" is not strength, and the principle of life is not truth; even though truth cannot exist without life, life exists as a principle without truth. Thus, each of them is a principle in itself, and each one is the basic essence of the creator, blessed be he. Since this is so, it follows that the one in whom you believe is more than one, for his basic essence includes all these things. Now, there is no one who does not believe that he is the Lord, God, Almighty, merciful, compassionate, and living; and each of these is a principle in itself. This is the truth.⁴³

This second objection is only slightly less suspicious than the first. Once again, Paul presents a position that is almost incredible coming from an orthodox Christian and is, in fact, a common Jewish and Muslim argument against Christianity.

In this period, Christians often explained the trinity in terms of divine attributes. The identification of the trinity with power, wisdom, and will, or essence, wisdom, and will, is frequently represented in the polemical literature of the period, and Jewish writers cite this argument all the time.⁴⁴ Both Jews and Muslims responded with a philosophical explanation of attributes designed to undermine this assertion,⁴⁵ but they also did something else which was far simpler and probably more effective. God, they said, has more than three attributes.⁴⁶

Paul's argument, then, is once again most peculiar. He asserts that divine attributes imply a multiplicity of some sort within God, but it is a multiplicity of more than three. The only difference between his argument and that of Jewish polemicists is that he purports to believe in such multiplicity while Jews explicitly assert it just for the sake of argument. By purporting to believe in it, Paul can claim to be attacking the Jewish belief in the absolute unity of God, but the effect of his argument is to undermine the standard philosophical interpretation of the

⁴³*Milhamot HaShem*, 120-21.

⁴⁴See Meir of Narbonne, *Milhemet Mizvah*, Parma ms., 30a-b, 49b-50a, 99a-101a; Moses of Salerno, *Ta'anot*, in S. Simon, *Mose ben Salomo von Salerno und seine philosophische Auseinandersetzung mit den Lehren des Christentums* (Breslau: 1932; Hebrew section) 6, 15; Nahmanides, *Vikkuaḥ, Ketavei Ramban*, 320; Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus*, PL 157. 606ff. On the early formulation of this interpretation of the trinity, see H. Wolfson, "The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity," *HTR* 49 (1956) 1-18.

⁴⁵See the references in Rosenthal's notes *ad loc.* Cf. also Nahmanides' *Vikkuaḥ*, 320.

⁴⁶See Simon, *Mose ben Salomo von Salerno* (Heb. sec.) 6, and Nahmanides' *Vikkuaḥ*, *loc. cit.* Baron (*op. cit.*, 85), while incorrectly stating that Nahmanides did not use this argument, refers to it as a "long-debated" matter. The extension of alleged trinitarian references in the Bible beyond three was also a rather common Jewish approach; see appendix 1 of my forthcoming edition of the *Nizzahon Vetus*.

trinity as well. Now, Cathars probably did not believe in this kind of multiplicity within God, but they did not believe in the trinity either,⁴⁷ and this sort of argument may well have been designed to erode the faith of the orthodox Christian in the trinity.⁴⁸

Can it be a coincidence that both of Paul's objections to Judaism pose a direct challenge to orthodox Christianity? Perhaps. It may be that he was just an incompetent polemicist who could not refrain from putting his foot in his mouth, or it may be that I have missed something and misinterpreted him. However, because of the time and place of this discussion, because both questions appear to undermine elements of Christianity which the Cathars denied, and because Paul presented his arguments against Judaism to Christians and not to Jews,⁴⁹ the possibility looms large that we have uncovered a subtle method of Cathar propaganda.⁵⁰

Jewish polemic, then, appears to shed considerable light upon the unhappy triangle of Jews, Christian heretics, and the orthodox Church in the high middle ages. It reveals some Jewish

⁴⁷See the references in note 36, and cf. also S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947) 148-49, and C. Thouzelier, *Catharisme et Valdésisme en Languedoc à la Fin du XII^e et au Début du XIII^e Siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966) 61.

⁴⁸It might be argued that all Paul meant is that Jews who maintain that there are more than three attributes must believe in extensive multiplicity within God; he himself, however, believes in only three hypostases. Aside from the fact that he never says this explicitly, his final comment that "there is no one (*ein ehad mikol hanivra'im*) who does not believe" in all these attributes as well as his remark that "this is the truth" make such a position very difficult to maintain. If Paul was a concealed heretic, these last remarks might have been insincere, but if he was an orthodox Christian, he should not have expressed himself in such a fashion.

Moreover, it should be noted that Paul's assertion of divine multiplicity in connection with the attributes of God (or, if our suspicions are correct, in connection with the attributes of the good God) is analogous to the reported views of a thirteenth-century heresiarch with respect to the evil god; in light of this, it is altogether possible that Paul meant what he said. According to the *Summa* of Rainerius Sacconi, John of Lugio maintained that "the first principle of evil is called by many names in the Holy Scriptures. It is called malice, iniquity, cupidity, impiety, sin, pride, death, hell, calumny, vanity, injustice, perdition, confusion, corruption, and fornication. And he also says that all the evils named are gods or goddesses, that they have their being from the malice which, he asserts, is a first cause, and that this first cause is signified from time to time by the vices named" (Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies*, 339).

⁴⁹*Milhamot HaShem*, 118.

⁵⁰In light of the paucity of heretical texts from the middle ages, it seems worthwhile to point out explicitly that if this suggestion is correct, Jacob ben Reuben has indirectly provided what is in effect a medieval heretical document from a relatively early period.

knowledge of heretical doctrines and provides insights into the tactics used by Jews and heretics to combat orthodox Christianity. The author of the *Nizzahon Vetus* was apparently aware of a heretical belief which he used to undermine the Christological interpretation of a crucial Psalm and which he later attacked directly on the basis of the Gospels themselves.⁵¹ Mordecai of Avignon knew some central heretical teachings and cited them explicitly and accurately in an attack against the orthodox Church. Finally, Jacob ben Reuben may have preserved evidence of the fascinating possibility that heretics used anti-Jewish polemic as a cover for efforts to undermine the traditional Christian faith.

Addendum

After this article went to press, I decided that Posnanski's identification of the author of the polemic mentioning Albigensians and Bogomils as Mordecai of Avignon (see n. 35) cannot be accepted with certainty. It would have been much safer to ascribe the passage (which comes from Vittorio Emanuele Hebrew MS 53, 23b) simply to "a thirteenth century French polemicist."

⁵¹Cf. note 19.