

er's articulation of complex Theosophical ideas is known among Theosophists and students of the Theosophical movement as *technical Theosophy* because of his sophisticated presentation of Theosophical teaching going back to Blavatsky and carried forward, in the Point Loma Theosophical tradition, through Judge and Tingley. De Purucker altered the organization's name to the Theosophical Society, dropping the older appellation of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. By the time of his death in 1942, the community had moved from Point Loma to Covina, near Los Angeles, to avoid the military activity occurring at Point Loma after the United States entered World War II. De Purucker's successor was not clearly identified. During the war years a group of leaders ran the organization. In 1945 a retired U.S. Army officer, Colonel Arthur L. Conger (1872–1951), was brought in as leader. Some lifelong Theosophists objected to Conger, but their party failed to carry the day. Many of these individuals left the Theosophical Society. Conger was succeeded by James A. Long (1898–1971) in 1951. He was succeeded in 1971 by Grace F. Knoche (b. 1909), who served as leader of the Theosophical Society, Pasadena, the organizational descendant of the Point Loma Theosophical Community. Their principal activities include the publication of *Sunrise*, a bimonthly magazine, as well as Theosophical classics by Blavatsky, Judge, Tingley, de Purucker, and others.

SEE ALSO Besant, Annie; Blavatsky, H. P.; Judge, William Q.; Olcott, Henry Steel; Theosophical Society; Tingley, Katherine.

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W. MICHAEL ASHCRAFT (2005)

POLEMICS

This entry consists of the following articles:

JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS

MUSLIM-JEWISH POLEMICS
CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM POLEMICS

POLEMICS: JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS

[*This article focuses primarily on Jewish polemics against Christianity.*]

The intensity, persistence, and significance of Jewish-Christian polemics are in large measure a function of the peculiar combination of intimacy and divergence that marks the relationship between the two faiths. It is not merely the fact that Christianity emerges out of Judaism; it is, further, the combination of the continuing centrality of the Hebrew Bible for Christians together with the profundity of the theological differences that separated Christians from Jews. In these respects, a comparison with Islam is particularly instructive. It too arose in large measure out of Judaism, but because it lacked the other crucial characteristics, polemic between Jews and Muslims, however important it may sometimes have been, never played the same role as did the Jewish-Christian debate. Muslims revered the Hebrew Bible; Muslims did not, however, elevate it to the position that it held in Christianity, and they expressed the most serious reservations about its textual accuracy. Moreover, Islamic monotheism left no room for the creative rancor that produced the philosophical dimension of Jewish-Christian discussions, which addressed such issues as trinitarianism and incarnation. Moses Maimonides (Mosheh ben Maimon, 1135/8–1204), who has sometimes been accused of inconsistency in his attitude toward the two other faiths, was accurately portraying a complex situation. On the one hand, he described Islam as a religion of "unblemished monotheism," an accolade he would not bestow upon Christianity; on the other hand, he maintained that teaching Torah to Christians can be a fruitful enterprise, while doing the same for Muslims is, from a Jewish point of view, an exercise in futility.

The dispute between Judaism and Christianity, then, revolved around both doctrine and exegesis. To Christians, Jesus was the Messiah, the ritual law was abrogated, and the church was the true Israel, not only because Christian scripture and tradition said so but because the Hebrew scriptures themselves supported such claims. Beginning with the New Testament and continuing with the earliest church fathers, Christian ingenuity was mobilized to uncover references to the full range of Christian beliefs in the Hebrew scriptures. The Jewish polemicist was required to undertake the onerous task of point-by-point, verse-by-verse refutation, and the sparse Talmudic references to debates with *minim* (a term for heretics that surely embraces many early Christians) describe precisely such conflicts in biblical interpretation.

The institutional separation of the two religions was furthered when a curse against the *minim* was inserted into the rabbinic prayer book, and doctrinal developments made it increasingly difficult even for "Jewish" as opposed to "gentile" Christians to remain a part of the Jewish people. The Jews, it was said, had been replaced by a new Israel, and their

defeats at the hands of the Romans were a just punishment for their rejection of the Messiah; moreover, by the middle of the second century there were few Christians who did not believe in some form of Jesus' divinity, and this was a doctrine that remained beyond the pale of even the most flexible definition of Judaism.

In the wake of these developments, early Jewish sources record hostile perceptions not only of Christianity but of Jesus as well. In the Talmud itself, clear references to Jesus are exceedingly rare, but those that exist do include the assertion that he was a sorcerer who led his followers astray (cf. Goldstein, 1950). Outside the Talmudic corpus, there developed a more elaborate series of early Jewish folk tales that go by the name *Toledot Yeshu* and can probably best be described as a counter-Gospel. The various versions of *Toledot Yeshu* trace Jesus' life from his birth as a result of Mary's liaison with a Roman soldier through his checkered career as a sorcerer and on to his ignominious hanging between two thieves on a massive stalk of cabbage. Although such stories did not constitute binding Jewish doctrine, they colored Jewish views of Christianity and enraged Christians who became familiar with them in subsequent periods.

From the Jewish perspective, these early responses to Christianity remained episodic and peripheral. Before Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, there was little reason for Jews to confront its religious claims systematically; after that point, Jewish literary activity in the Christian world was on the wane, and before the high Middle Ages, Jewish arguments against Christianity were preserved primarily in Christian works. The only significant exceptions are a little book of eastern provenance called *Sefer Nestor ha-komer* (Book of Nestor the Priest), which was written by a convert to Judaism, and a handful of passages in Jewish philosophical works composed in the Muslim world.

In the second half of the twelfth century, this situation began to change. Partly because the inner dynamic of Christianity required a confrontation with Judaism, the "renaissance" of Christian literature and thought associated with the twelfth century included a renewal of anti-Jewish polemics. At this time Jewish literature too was in the midst of a vigorous revival, and Jews throughout western Europe began to engage in a literary polemic that was to remain active through the end of the Middle Ages.

Although this polemic extends to works of exegesis, philosophy, homiletics, and even liturgy and law, a list of explicitly polemical works through the fifteenth century can serve as a useful introduction to the scope and intensity of this activity.

- Twelfth century: Yosef Kimhi, *Sefer ha-berit* (Book of the Covenant), southern France; Ya'akov ben Reu'ven, *Milhamot ha-Shem* (The Wars of the Lord), southern France.
- Thirteenth century: *Vikkuah le-ha-Radaq* (The disputation of Rabbi David Kimhi), pseudonymous, prove-

nance uncertain; Me'ir of Narbonne, *Milhemet mitsvah* (The obligatory war), southern France; Mordekhai of Avignon, *Mahaziq emunah* (Upholder of Faith), southern France; Shelomoh de Rossi, *'Edut ha-Shem ne'emanah* (The testimony of the Lord is perfect), Italy; *The Epistle of Rabbi Jacob of Venice*, Italy; *The Disputation of Rabbi Yehi'el of Paris*, northern France; Yosef Official, *Sefer Yosef ha-meqanne'* (The book of Yosef the zealot), northern France; *The Disputation of Nahmanides*, Spain; *Sefer nitsahon yashan* (The old book of polemic), Germany.

- Fourteenth century: Moses ha-Kohen of Tordesillas, *'Ezer ha-emunah* (Aid of faith), Spain; Yitshaq Polgar, *'Ezer ha-dat* (Aid of religion), Spain; Hasdai Crescas, *Bittul 'iqqrei ha-Notsrim* (Refutation of Christian doctrines), Spain; Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, *Even bohan* (Touchstone), Spain; Profiat Duran, *Al tehi ka-avotekha* (Do not be like your fathers) and *Kelimat ha-goyim* (The shame of the Gentiles), Spain.
- Fifteenth century: Yom Tov Lippman Mühlhausen, *Sefer ha-nitsahon* (The Book of polemic), Bohemia; Shim'on Duran, *Qeshet umagen* (Bow and shield), Spain; the Tortosa Disputation, Spain; Shelomoh Duran, *Milhemet mitsvah* (The obligatory war), Spain; Hayyim ibn Musa, *Magen va-romah* (Shield and spear), Spain; Mattityahu ben Mosheh, *The Book of Ahituv and Zalmon*, Spain; Binyamin ben Mosheh, *Teshuvot ha-Notsrim* (Answers to the Christians), Italy; Eliyyahu Hayyim of Genezzano, *Vikkuah* (Disputation), Italy.

POLEMICS ON BIBLICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES. Many of the issues addressed by the authors of the aforementioned works remained relatively unchanged from late antiquity through the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. To Jews, the fundamental Christian assertion that Jesus was the Messiah had been massively refuted by the evidence of history. Since the essential characteristic of the biblical Messiah involved the inauguration of an age of peace, virtually all Jewish polemicists pointed to the persistence of war and misery as a formidable refutation of Christianity. Moses Nahmanides (Mosheh ben Nahman, c. 1194–1270), in fact, reports that he went so far as to tell James I of Aragon how difficult it would be for him and his knights if war were to be abolished.

Christians, of course, argued not only that scriptural evidence demonstrates that the Messiah had already come but also that it points to a first coming that would end in apparent failure. The key citations demonstrating these propositions were probably the most extensively debated biblical passages in the entire literature: *Genesis* 49:10 on the first point, and *Isaiah* 52:13–53:12 on the second.

"The scepter shall not pass away from Judah, nor shall a legislator pass away from among his descendants until Shiloh comes and to him shall the nations gather." This translation of *Genesis* 49:10, with *Shiloh* understood as *Messiah*, ap-

peared to lend powerful support to the Christian position: since there was now no scepter in Judah, the Messiah must already have come. For this passage Jews did not have a particularly attractive alternative interpretation, but they did have a persuasive argument against the Christian position. That position, they said, cannot be valid because the scepter (understood by Christians as kingship) had passed from the Jews well before the time of Jesus; during the Babylonian exile there was no Jewish rule, and even during the second commonwealth there were no kings from the tribe of Judah. Although alternative explanations of this passage were beset by difficulties, they were nonetheless abundant: Shiloh indeed refers to the Messiah, but the verse is merely asserting that whenever there will be a Jewish king, he can legitimately come only from Judah; *scepter* and *legislator* refer not to kingship but to exil-archs and patriarchs or even to ongoing communal autonomy; Shiloh is not the Messiah but a place-name, and the verse refers to a past event, most likely the schism after Solomon's death.

With respect to *Isaiah* 53, which can be read as a description of an innocent servant of the Lord who will suffer and die for the sins of others, the situation of the Jewish polemicists was reversed: they had an excellent alternative interpretation, but some of them expressed disappointment at the absence of a crushing refutation of the christological exegesis. Despite a messianic understanding of this chapter in early rabbinic sources, medieval Jews overwhelmingly saw the servant as the exiled people of Israel, and strong arguments could be adduced for this identification. At the same time, Jews were sharply divided concerning the presence of a concept of vicarious atonement in the passage; to some exegetes and polemicists, such a concept was too Christian to be readily discerned in the Bible even if applied to Israel rather than the Messiah. Finally, specific refutations of the christological interpretation were proffered: aside from the inappropriateness of the term *servant* for a divine figure, this servant, unlike Jesus, "will see his seed and live a long life," will experience ongoing affliction and disease, and will suffer as a result of the sins of many rather than for the purpose of removing the original sin of Adam and Eve.

It has already been seen that Christians considered the Jewish rejection of the Messiah to have resulted in the suppression of "carnal Israel" and its replacement by the church. Initial Jewish bewilderment at this perception gave way to a charge of Christian arbitrariness in defining biblical references to Israel, and Jews pointed to a number of citations in which favorable eschatological references that Christians took as descriptions of the church seemed inextricably linked to pejorative passages that Christians referred to the Jews. By the thirteenth century, Jews had even begun to cite their own retention of the Hebrew language as evidence that they had not been exchanged by God for people who knew the Bible only in translation.

It was not only the Jewish people, however, who were supposed to have been superseded. The same was said about

Jewish law, and here the issue of allegorical interpretation of the Bible became crucial. Christians argued that, at least in the postcrucifixion era, only a nonliteral meaning is to be assigned to the legal sections of the Pentateuch, and they buttressed their position by raising questions about the rationality and consistency of biblical law. This challenge added a polemical dimension to Jewish speculations about "the reasons for the commandments." While some Jews argued against any attempt to fathom the divine intent or even denied the very existence of rational explanations, others provided both hygienic and spiritual reasons that sometimes seemed so persuasive that they became the basis for questions about the Christian failure to observe such evidently beneficial injunctions. Christian allegorization did not stop with the law; consequently, Jewish insistence on literal, contextual reading of biblical verses is a central theme of polemical literature, and some scholars have even suspected an underlying apologetic motive for the radical insistence on straightforward exegesis advocated by several significant medieval commentators such as Rashbam (Rabbi Shemu'el ben Me'ir, c. 1080–1158) who were not primarily polemicists.

While Christian questions about the rationality of the law were a minor theme in medieval polemics, Jewish questions about the rationality of Christian dogma were at center stage. Many Jews were unable or unwilling to see trinitarianism as anything but tritheism. Those who did come to grips with the full complexity of the doctrine maintained that it violates logic and that multiplicity in God inevitably implies corporeality in God himself (i.e., not just in the temporary form of the historical Jesus). Most important, sophisticated Jewish polemicists maintained that any truly monotheistic understanding of trinitarianism—in which three divine persons are identified with attributes of God or understood in light of the perception of God as thought, thinker, and object of thought—fails because of the second, crucial doctrine of incarnation. If only one of three divine persons took on flesh, then true unity was irretrievably compromised.

Jewish objections to incarnation were not confined to the troubling light that it shed on the Christian concept of a divine trinity. Not only did the attribution of divinity to a human being raise the ugly specter of idolatry; it also seemed vulnerable to definitive philosophical refutation. Jewish polemicists argued that since infinity and immutability are essential characteristics of God, incarnation could not take place even miraculously. Moreover, they said, it is equally impossible to unite a human and a divine nature in a single person with each nature retaining its distinctiveness. Finally, even if all this were possible, it is hard to imagine that God could find no way to redeem humanity without subjecting himself to the filth and indignity of spending nine months in a womb and then passing through all the stages of a life that culminated in a humiliating death.

Virginal conception, although denied by Jews, was not vulnerable to the charge of philosophical impossibility. However, the specific doctrine that Mary remained a virgin

during childbirth did appear to violate the principle that two bodies cannot take up the same space simultaneously. More important, the miracle of transubstantiation also seemed impossible, partly because Jesus' body would have to have been in many places at the same time.

There was, of course, also a scriptural dimension to these philosophical issues. Christians attempted to demonstrate trinitarianism by citing verses that contain plural verbs in connection with God, as, for example, "Let us make man in our image" (*Gn.* 1:26); or a threefold repetition of a key word, as, for example, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts" (*Is.* 6:3); or a repetition of the names of God, as, for example, "Hear O Israel, the Lord [is] our God, the Lord is one" (*Dt.* 6:4). For the incarnation, they cited the eschatological king in *Jeremiah* 23:5, whose name they translated as "the Lord our Righteousness," and, most effectively, the child in *Isaiah* 9:5–6, whose name they translated as "Wondrous Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." Jews had to respond by providing alternative explanations or, in some cases, alternative translations. Thus the plural verb in *Genesis* 1:26 is either a plural of majesty or God's statement to the earth, which would provide the body into which he would place a soul. The name in *Jeremiah*, they said, should be translated "the Lord *is* our Righteousness," and the child in *Isaiah*, at least according to most medieval Jews, was named only "Prince of Peace" by God, who is himself the "Wondrous Counselor, Mighty God, [and] Eternal Father."

The scriptural evidence for virgin birth gave Jews their best opportunity to use the argument from context. The evidence, Christians said, is to be found in *Isaiah* 7:14, in which the prophet promised King Ahaz the birth of a child from an *'almah*. Jews not only argued that *'almah* does not mean "virgin" but also pointed to Isaiah's promise to Ahaz that deliverance would come before the child would know how to distinguish good from evil as decisive refutation of any identification of the child with Jesus.

POLEMICS ON THE TALMUD. In its classic form, the Jewish-Christian debate centered on the Hebrew Bible. Beginning in the twelfth century, however, and especially in the thirteenth, Christians became intrigued with the possibility of utilizing the Talmud for polemical purposes, and Jews found themselves confronting two distinct but overlapping challenges from Christians quoting Talmud. Nicholas Donin, a Jewish convert to Christianity, began a campaign in the 1230s that led to a virtual trial in which Yehi'el ben Yosef of Paris had to defend the Talmud against charges of blasphemy. Pointing to what would otherwise have been an anachronism in a Talmudic account of Jesus, Yehi'el made the novel assertion that there were two Jesuses and that any pejorative Talmudic references are to the first, who had no connection whatever to Christianity. Potentially even more serious was Donin's assertion that the Talmud constituted "another law" that was entirely different from that of the Hebrew Bible. Since Jews were tolerated in part because they

observed and authenticated the "Old Testament," the very existence of Jews in the Christian world could have been jeopardized by Christian acceptance of such an assertion. Yehi'el argued that the Talmud was, rather, an indispensable interpretation of the Bible. Ultimately, although various Dominicans and Franciscans toyed with the delegitimation of Jews on grounds related to the "other law" argument, it was the accusation of blasphemy that predominated, and this could be satisfied by the censorship of a handful of Talmudic passages.

The second approach to the Talmud is usually associated with another convert to Christianity. In the third quarter of the thirteenth century, Pablo Christiani (Cristia) began to emphasize a very minor theme in some earlier Christian polemics: that the Talmud demonstrates the truth of Christianity. Pablo and his successors did not have a positive attitude toward the Talmud, but they believed that the rabbis had preserved evidence of Christian truth. One of the earliest examples of this sort of argument is one of the best. The Talmud says that the world will last six thousand years: two thousand years of chaos, two thousand of Torah, and two thousand of the messianic age (B. T., *San.* 97a). This, said Christian polemicists, proves two crucial Christian assertions—that the Messiah has already come, and that with his arrival the age of Torah has come to an end. When Nahmanides was forced to confront Pablo in the Barcelona disputation of 1263, he insisted, of course, on the implausibility of finding Christian doctrines in a work produced by unconverted Jews, but he also made the striking assertion that *midrash* is not dogmatically binding and that Jews are therefore free to reject certain rabbinic statements. This issue became a *cause célèbre* in the next two or three centuries, largely because of the popularity of Raymund Martini's monumental *Pugio Fidei*, and the rabbis at the Tortosa disputation had to confront it under particularly trying circumstances. Generally, Jewish polemicists attempted to refute each argument individually, and they fell back on Nahmanides' position reluctantly and only as a last resort.

JEWISH POLEMICAL USE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. At about the same time that Christians began to examine the Talmud for polemical purposes, Jews began to scrutinize the New Testament. Here too the sacred text peculiar to the other faith could simply be attacked, and here too it could be used for more sophisticated polemical purposes. Jews pointed out contradictions in the New Testament, such as the differing genealogies in *Matthew* and *Luke*, but they also argued that the Gospels themselves support the Jewish position concerning the nondivinity of Jesus and the eternity of the law. The polemical usefulness of both approaches led to a sometimes ambivalent attitude toward Jesus himself. On the one hand, he was denounced for abrogating the Torah and turning himself into a divinity; on the other, his words were cited as testimony that later Christians distorted a message that was in large measure authentically Jewish. This last approach, which was to be particularly influential in the modern peri-

od, was developed most notably in Profiat Duran's impressive and sophisticated *Kelimat ha-goyim*.

THE ISSUES OF JEWISH EXILE AND THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY. The effect of increased Jewish familiarity with the New Testament and growing Christian awareness of the Talmud is but one example of the way in which a largely static debate could undergo dynamic transformation under the impact of historical change. Debates about interest taking, the blood libel, heresy, icons, worship of the saints, confession, priestly celibacy, the Crusades, and more all made their way into the polemical literature. Perhaps the most fundamental effect of the historical situation lay in the Jewish need to explain exile and suffering on grounds other than God's rejection of the Jews. Since Jewish polemicists insisted on the moral superiority of Jews to Christians, the standard explanation of exile as punishment was especially uncomfortable in this context. Consequently, there is found a whole array of efforts to turn the fact of suffering to polemical advantage: the Bible says that the truth would be hurled to the ground (*Dn.* 8:12); God is prolonging the exile so that the sin of the Christian oppressors should accumulate to a point where their utter destruction will be appropriate (cf. *Gn.* 15:16); God is punishing the Jews not for crucifying Jesus but for producing him. In a striking naturalistic argument, Yitshaq Polgar noted that Jewish suffering demonstrates that Christians and Jews stand in the same moral relationship as a bully and his victim.

Pressures ranging from the physical and economic to the moral and intellectual also led to transformations in the tone of Jewish polemics as well as to a reexamination of the role and religious standing of Christianity itself. This last development took place largely outside the context of medieval polemics, but its impact on later Jewish thought, including apologetic literature, was exceptionally significant. Medieval Jews generally regarded Christianity as an idolatrous religion. Nevertheless, in certain narrow legal contexts phrases such as "the gentiles among us do not worship idolatry" were used as an *ad hoc* justification for Jewish business dealings with Christians that were pursued despite injunctions against such interactions with idolaters. Menaḥem ha-Me'iri of Perpignan (1249–1316) created a new legal category that can roughly be characterized as "civilized people" in order to distinguish Christians from ancient idolaters. Without addressing the issue of idolatry in this context, Maimonides and other authorities had assigned to Christianity and Islam the positive role of spreading knowledge of Torah and thus preparing the world for the Messiah. By the sixteenth century, some major Jewish figures had begun to misread a statement of the medieval French tosafists to mean that Noahides are not forbidden to associate another divinity with the true God; hence, although Christianity is surely idolatry for Jews, it is not so regarded for gentiles.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS. Some polemical works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reflect the aforementioned and other changes, while others remain true to standard me-

dieval views. The major works of this period include the following.

- Sixteenth century: Avraham Farissol, *Magen Avraham* (Shield of Abraham), Italy; Ya'ir ben Shabbetai of Correggio, *Herev pifyyyot* (Double-edged sword), Italy; Meshullam ben Uri, *Zikbron sefer nitsahon* (Commemoration of the Book of Polemic), provenance uncertain; *Kevod Elohim* (Glory of God), author and provenance uncertain; Yitshaq of Troki, *Ḥizzuq emunah* (Faith strengthened), Poland.
- Seventeenth century: 'Azri'el Petahiah Alatino, *Vikkuaḥ* (Disputation), Italy; Yehudah Aryeh de Modena, *Magen va-herav* (Shield and sword), Italy; Yitshaq Lupis, *Kur matsref ha-emunot u-mar'eh ha-emet* (The crucible of beliefs and demonstrator of the truth), Syria.

Perhaps the most striking example of a more positive attitude toward Christianity is Avraham Farissol's remark that Jesus might well be regarded as a messiah for the Gentiles. Despite Maimonides' assessment of Christianity's place in the divine scheme, this assertion, highly unusual even around 1500, was virtually unimaginable in the high Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century, Shelomoh de Modena denied the idolatrous character of Christianity by equating incarnation with anthropomorphism and noting that the latter doctrine had been declared nonheretical (although also not true) by the twelfth-century authority Avraham ben David of Posquières. There was also a shift in the Jewish attitude with respect to certain moral questions. In the Middle Ages, for example, most Jews vigorously denied that there was anything unethical about taking interest on loans; in seventeenth-century Italy, both Simone Luzzatto and Yehudah Aryeh de Modena insisted that Jewish—and not just Christian—morality frowns on this activity, but that there is no avoiding cruel economic necessity. Closer Jewish-Christian contacts in Italy also led to greater Christian familiarity with Jewish literature, including the increasingly popular qabbalistic texts, and Jews now found themselves confronted with not only Talmudic but also qabbalistic passages that were supposed to demonstrate Christian doctrines.

Initially Jewish reactions to the Reformation were positive and hopeful. Aside from messianic hopes that were briefly kindled at the prospect of division in what Jews considered the biblical fourth kingdom (cf. *Dn.* 2:41), there was a feeling that many doctrinal points in the various forms of Protestantism seemed rather "Jewish": the rejection of papal authority, indulgences, transubstantiation, and clerical celibacy, as well as a return to the authority of the Bible. Moreover, there was the early work of Luther, *Dass Jesus ein geborener Jude Sei* (That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew; 1523), which appeared to portend an amelioration of the Jewish condition under Protestant rule. When Luther later dashed these hopes, Jewish attitudes changed, and Jews living in Roman Catholic countries now looked to Catholic doctrines that could demonstrate the affinity of Judaism to Catholicism: the emphasis on works, the combination of scripture

and tradition, the affirmation of free will and rejection of strict predestinarianism, and the retention of the traditional language of prayer. Needless to say, both Protestants and Catholics continued to affirm the central Christian beliefs that Judaism rejected, and when the Karaite Yitshaq of Troki wrote his *summa* of the traditional anti-Christian arguments the work became a standard reference even in the majority Rabbinite community.

The next, even more crucial turning point took place in the eighteenth century, when Jewish history moved into the modern period and Jewish-Christian relations underwent fundamental transformations. Even outside the orbit of the Jewish Enlightenment, Ya'aqov Emden of Germany maintained that Jesus and even Paul were perfectly good Jews whose purpose was to spread the seven Noahic laws to the gentiles; like Farissol's stance, this is a highly idiosyncratic position that nonetheless reflected a broader phenomenon. The central figure, however, who both foreshadows and exemplifies modern Jewish attitudes to Christianity, is Moses Mendelssohn.

A Christian theologian named Johann Kaspar Lavater publicly challenged Mendelssohn to refute a defense of Christianity that Lavater had translated, or to do what Socrates would have done had he read the book and found it irrefutable. Mendelssohn, who for reasons of ideology, practicality, and temperament was not inclined to engage in polemic, responded reluctantly and cautiously. He had indeed expressed respect for Jesus in light of a conviction that the latter had made no claims to divinity. This did not mean that he was inclined to abandon Judaism, which is in perfect harmony with natural morality and religion, for a faith that contains irrational dogmas. Nevertheless, not all "prejudices" are equally harmful, and Judaism's teaching that righteous gentiles have a portion in the world to come renders missionary activity unnecessary and undesirable. This emphasis on Judaism's tolerance, rationality, morality, and respect for Christianity became the hallmark of modern Jewish discussions of Christianity, but these developments were not without ironic potential for reviving tension and polemic along new and unexpected lines.

Nineteenth-century Reform Judaism and liberal Protestantism arose out of the same environment and shared the fundamental conviction that the central message of religion is ethical. Reform Jews did away with much of the ritual component in Judaism, while liberal Protestants had grave misgivings about much of the dogmatic component of Christianity. What remained in each case was ethical monotheism. This sort of agreement, however, can lead to discord, since in the absence of a religious merger, each faith must claim that it is the quintessential bearer of the ethical message whose basic content is endorsed by both sides.

And precisely such discord developed. Christians complained about the "tasteless gibberish" spouted by Jews who claimed that theirs was the ethical religion *par excellence*, and they insisted that Jesus had introduced an advanced ethic

into a Jewish society beset by dry, narrow legalism. This issue exploded into controversy after Adolf von Harnack propounded such views in his lecture series on the essence of Christianity in the winter of 1899–1900, but Jews were upset not only with Harnack but with a number of Christian historians whose scholarly work revealed the same sort of bias against Talmudic religion. The Jewish response was swift, vigorous, and international. In Germany, Leo Baeck's *Das Wesen des Judentums*, Joseph Eschelbacher's *Das Judentum und das Wesen des Christentums*, and Moritz Güdemann's *Jüdische Apologetik* denounced this Christian approach as motivated by considerations that had little to do with objective scholarship. In England, the articles of Israel Abrahams, Claude Montefiore, and Solomon Schechter pursued the same arguments. Somewhat later, Gerald Friedlander's *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount* reflected a systematic apologetic effort to compare rabbinic morality with that of Jesus, and Joseph Bloch's *Israel und die Völker* was one of several efforts to counter Christian attacks on Talmudic morality.

This last work really addressed arguments of a more medieval sort, and it should not be assumed that such polemic simply disappeared in the modern period. Vigorous Christian missionary efforts in late eighteenth-century England inspired David Levi's rebuttals, *Letters to Dr. Priestly* and *Dissertations on the Prophecies of the Old Testament*; nineteenth-century challenges led Isaac Ber Levinsohn to write his *Abiyyah ha-shiloni* and other apologetic works. As recently as the 1970s, the activities of the "Jews for Jesus" and similar groups led the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York to commission *Jews and "Jewish Christianity"* by myself and Michael Wyschogrod. The tone and occasionally the content of such works can reflect modern developments in scholarship, argumentation, and civility; some of them, however, deal with arguments that are largely unchanged since the Middle Ages.

In the wake of the Holocaust, and especially since the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s, a concerted effort has been made to replace polemics with dialogue. Even in such discussions, however, there are subtle pressures that produce the sort of advocacy that is not altogether alien to polemics. Before Vatican II, Jules Isaac and other Jewish leaders asked Christian groups to reevaluate, on moral as well as on more narrowly theological grounds, the traditional ascription of ongoing guilt to Jews for their role in the crucifixion. This time Jewish arguments fell on receptive ears, and precisely such a reevaluation took place.

With the passage of time, however, some Christian participants in dialogue have begun to inquire about the possibilities of a Jewish reevaluation of the standing of Jesus and the role of Christianity. These inquiries are rooted in the awareness that twentieth-century Jewish scholars like Joseph Klausner, Claude Montefiore, David Flusser, and Pinchas Lapide have provided—with varying degrees of enthusiasm—a positive portrait of a fundamentally Jewish Jesus.

Moreover, Franz Rosenzweig spoke of Christianity as a manifestation of a divine covenant with the gentiles. Even Jewish ecumenists, however, are often wary of far-reaching revisions in their evaluation of Jesus, and it is unlikely that dialogue will produce a perception of Jesus as a quasi messiah or mitigate the historic Jewish distaste for the central dogmas of traditional Christianity.

Finally, a uniquely contemporary dimension has been injected into Jewish-Christian discussions by the establishment of the state of Israel. On the one hand, the establishment of Israel has undercut the old Christian argument based on the Jewish exile; on the other hand, it fits perfectly into some scenarios of the second coming of Jesus that are popular among Christian fundamentalists. In the context of dialogue, Jews have often attempted to explain the theological centrality of the Land of Israel in Judaism, and they have sometimes argued that Christian theology itself should lead to a recognition of the significance of the state of Israel in the divine plan. This delicate balance of politics and theology has produced both understanding and tension. It is but the most recent example of the effect of historical events on a relationship that reflects the unchanging disputes of two venerable traditions as well as the dynamic interplay of two communities acting and reacting in an ever changing world.

SEE ALSO Christianity; Jesus; Judaism; Paul the Apostle.

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POLEMICS: MUSLIM-JEWISH POLEMICS

Down to the eighteenth century the majority of Jews lived in countries under Muslim rule, where they shared with Christians the status of "protected" minorities, tolerated on sufferance and subject at times and in certain areas to discrimination, ill will, abuse, and assault.

Arabic literature, the classical repository of theological lore in Islam, expresses and reflects the situation over centuries. While most of this lore is of Muslim origin, Jews and Christians have contributed to it upon occasion with Arabic writings added to their literary output in Hebrew and Syriac, respectively.

The vast Arabic literature that developed in the early centuries of Islam included works on religion, sectarianism,