

CHAPTER 3

MUTUAL PERCEPTIONS
AND ATTITUDES

DAVID BERGER

Medieval Jews and Christians lived in an environment where the Other mattered profoundly. That Christians were a source of concern for Jews hardly needs to be noted, let alone demonstrated. The legal and political dimensions of the Jewish condition were virtually determined by the dominant society, the social life of the minority was profoundly affected by the majority, and cultural influences were deeper and more pervasive than historians imagined less than a half-century ago. That Jews were a source of concern for Christians is more striking and, for an observer who comes to the subject with expectations formed by an abstract analysis based on the “objective” importance of Jews in medieval Christian Europe, nothing less than startling.

The manifest structural significance of Judaism for Christianity goes a long way toward explaining this concern. The Jewish Scriptures are a key element standing at the core of Christianity, and the people of that Book served simultaneously as buttress and challenge for the bearers of the younger faith. R. Isaac Arama, a fifteenth-century Spanish Jewish thinker, expressed keen awareness of Judaism’s significance for Christians and saw it as a crucial component of the divine economy. God, he wrote, exiled Jews to two societies – Christian and Muslim – where Judaism matters. Had Jews found themselves in lands where the ruling society had no interest in their religion, the knowledge of the Torah would have been lost. When those who define the environment in which a minority lives care about the culture of that minority – even if the concern manifests itself through distortion and hostility – the objects of such attention remain confident of their importance and retain their commitment to a beleaguered tradition.¹

Let us begin, then, with Christian perceptions of Jews. That Jews were responsible for the execution of Jesus was, of course, axiomatic. Medieval Christians did not entertain questions about the historicity of New Testament accounts of the crucifixion, and however they reconciled

¹ Isaac Arama, *Sefer Akedat Yitzhak* (Pressburg, 1849), ch. 88, 16a–16b.

some of the tensions among the Gospel narratives, the central role of the Jews was not in question. Nonetheless, those tensions played a role in problematizing the dimensions of Jewish culpability. Matthew's Jews famously endorse the declaration that the blood of Jesus is destined to remain on their heads and those of their children, but, as some medieval Jews noted, a presumably greater authority than Pilate or the crowd prayed, on the cross, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

This last formulation raised the related question of whether the Jews acted in knowledge or in ignorance. On this point as well, conflicting evidence could be cited from Christian Scripture, and medieval Christians did not reach uniform conclusions as they examined that evidence. Augustine affirmed that the Jews were ignorant of both the messiahship and the divinity of Jesus. In the eleventh century, Anselm reinforced this position with the assertion that no one would knowingly desire to kill God. In the twelfth, Abelard went so far as to say that, given their lack of awareness of Jesus' true nature, the Jews would have "sinned more gravely" had they refrained from killing him and persecuting his Apostles. The trope of Jewish blindness, rooted in II Corinthians 3:13–18 and Romans 11:7–10, was nearly ubiquitous. In medieval art, the veil of Corinthians regularly identified the synagogue, most famously in a classic sculpture at a church in Strasbourg, while Christian authors not only emphasized this characteristic and demonstrated its validity through additional proof-texts but occasionally cited it in exasperation to explain Jewish imperviousness to reasoned argument.

While the position that Jews acted in ignorance had manifest advantages over the view that they knowingly killed the divine Messiah, it often provided scant consolation. Since a developed intellect is the hallmark of the distinction between human beings and animals, profound, systemic, ingrained stupidity can raise questions about the proper classification of human-like creatures who exemplify it. Bernard of Clairvaux spoke of the Jews' "bovine intellect," and some of his contemporaries and successors laid special emphasis on this characteristic. Moreover, there was a substantial history of rhetoric describing Jews in bestial terms that went beyond mere stupidity and crossed the line into malevolence: wild beasts, serpents, wild asses, dogs, wolves, and more.² As we shall see, even this imagery did not capture the full measure of willful Jewish evil, so that Jews came to be depicted – with profound practical consequences – in literally diabolical terms.

² See the discussion and references in David Berger, *Persecution, Polemic and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations* (Boston, 2010), 257, 268–9. See also Kenneth R. Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and its Interpreters: Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* (Stanford, CA, 2006).

It is not surprising, then, that the perception that they acted out of ignorance did not necessarily carry the day. Peter Lombard maintained that they knew that Jesus was the messiah, though they did not know that he was God. Aquinas agreed with respect to the Jewish elite, but went on to say that ignorance of Jesus' divinity provides no exculpation since the evidence of that divinity is so blatant that it could have been resisted only out of hatred and jealousy.³

Perhaps the deepest tension in the discourse about Jewish culpability was the necessity that Christian theology assigned to the act in question. Jesus had, after all, come to the earth for the purpose of undergoing an atoning death. The Jewish sin, then, was a *felix culpa* – so felicitous, in fact, that its very designation as a sin became problematic. A few Christian thinkers were so impressed by this question that they ascribed Jewish exile and suffering not to the crucifixion but to the persecution of the Apostles. More commonly, the happy consequences were severed from the moral evaluation of what the Jews had done. Like the ancient Assyrian hordes, who acted as the rod of God's anger but were motivated only by the urge to destroy (Isaiah 10), the Jews had no inkling of the divine mission that they were bringing to fruition; rather, they were driven by the unalloyed desire to kill. It is a matter of no small interest that Jews employed precisely this reasoning as they looked forward to God's eschatological vengeance against Christians. Since exile was widely understood as divine punishment for sin, why should Christians suffer for carrying out a mission orchestrated by God? The answer, said some Jews, is expressed in a verse excoriating the enemies of Israel: "I am very angry with the nations that are at ease; for I was only angry a little, but they overdid the punishment" (Zechariah 1:15).⁴

Important as this discussion can be in determining the appropriate treatment of the Jewish collective, which is necessarily played out in this world, the fundamental fate of individual Jews in the hereafter was sealed, whatever position one took regarding the degree of their responsibility for the crucifixion. Perhaps the extent and intensity of the torments awaiting them could be affected, but, like other non-believers, they were included in the circle of the damned. How much the awareness of your neighbor's ultimate damnation colors your everyday relations is an intriguing question and, of course, differs from individual to individual. Today, Christians who believe this about Jews can nonetheless feel genuine

³ For an analysis of this theme, see Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (New York, 2007), 73–92.

⁴ See David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1979), 293–4.

affection toward them; some sincerely want to save their Jewish friends not only because of a general religious imperative but because they are genuinely distressed about the terrible fate awaiting them. Even in a medieval environment, it is not to be ruled out that a nontrivial number of Christians harbored similar sentiments.

However that may be, ordinary Christians, who were, of course, unfamiliar with the niceties of sophisticated discourse, formed their impressions of Jews based on sermons, stories, prevailing superstitions, and, in some instances, personal contacts. Such contacts could take the form of economic interaction as well as the common experiences of people living in close proximity in small towns and nascent cities. We have only indirect access to the attitudes of the non-literate masses, which can be assessed primarily through reports of malevolent or benevolent actions, although plausible deductions about cordial or hostile images can be drawn from the depiction of Jews in art, in legends, and in historical narratives.

On the whole, Jews in early medieval Europe were permitted to live in relative security, and there is little evidence that the masses resented this state of affairs. At some point in the eleventh or twelfth century, a shift toward increased hostility gathered momentum. The contrast between the early and High Middle Ages with respect to this issue should not be overstated, as it sometimes is, to the point where we see the earlier period – with the exception of seventh-century Visigothic Spain – as one marked by almost unalloyed toleration. One needs to resist the temptation to see the centuries before the First Crusade through the prism of the enhanced hostility of a later age, thereby understating the sense of alienation, disdain, and – from the Jewish perspective – persecution that already obtained. Thus, some scholars assume that a particular commentary by Rashi, who lived from 1040 to 1105, must have been written after 1096 because it presents the condition of Jews in exile as one of degradation and misery. But Ashkenazic liturgical poems written before the crusade clearly and wrenchingly reflect precisely such an assessment. While such literature should of course not be taken as a definitive portrait of the Jewish condition, it certainly provides meaningful evidence of attitudes, images, and perceptions.

Just as we should not idealize the status of Jews in the early Middle Ages, we should not see the later period as one of unrelieved suffering. Setting religious convictions aside, the typical late medieval Jew, at least in ordinary times, would probably not have chosen to trade places with the typical Christian peasant. Nonetheless, there is little question that both elite and popular attitudes toward Jews did become more hostile as the Middle Ages wore on. R. I. Moore's influential study entitled *The Formation of*

*a Persecuting Society*⁵ has argued that persecution of Jews was spawned by a sense of threat posed not by Jewish ignorance or stupidity but precisely by the existence of a literate group with a developed intellectual/religious tradition that posed a challenge to the Christian faith. Whether or not this concern really explains the larger transformation, it is probably fair to say that the image of the intellectually deficient Jew was at least in part a means of neutralizing such a challenge. This is all the more likely to be the case in light of persuasive indications that some Jews in northern Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries aggressively confronted Christians with questions and arguments designed to demonstrate the superiority of Judaism to the dominant faith.⁶

A similar approach has been proposed to explain the rise of grotesque libels against Jews beginning in the twelfth century. Gavin Langmuir regards what he labels “chimerical” accusations – i.e., assertions that Jews do things that no one has ever seen a Jew do – as responses to inner doubts by Christians regarding the rationality of their own religion.⁷ The accusations in question – ritual murder and consumption of the victim’s blood, desecration of the host, and well poisoning – have also been connected to the conception of the Jew as an ally or instrument of the Devil.⁸ The association between the Devil and the Jew has roots in early Christian texts, but it reached maturity (or the fullness of immaturity) in the latter part of the Middle Ages. John (8:44) already spoke of the Jews’ “father the Devil.” Revelations (2:9 and 3:9) introduced the phrase “synagogue of Satan.” John Chrysostom understood the verse “Their own sons and daughters they sacrificed to demons” (Psalms 106:37) as a reference to the Jews. Artistic depictions reinforced these literary texts. To take one thirteenth-century French example that has been subjected to careful analysis, the illuminations in the *Bible Moralisée* are suffused with images of the Jew in routine alliance with the Devil and the Antichrist.⁹

This association led to dehumanization of the Jew in forms far more serious than intellectual inadequacy. Jews, like the Devil, had horns –

⁵ R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford, 1987).

⁶ See Berger, *Persecution, Polemic and Dialogue*, 177–98.

⁷ This thesis is a central element of Langmuir’s overarching analysis presented in his twin volumes, *History, Religion and Anti-Semitism* and *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism* (Berkeley, 1990).

⁸ The key themes and texts bearing on this conception were surveyed more than a half-century ago in a work of continuing relevance. See Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (New Haven, 1943).

⁹ Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance: The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible moralisée* (Berkeley, 1999).

which, it needs to be noted, have little or nothing to do with the Moses of medieval art, whose horns resulted from the Vulgate's mistranslation of the Hebrew term for the rays of light emanating from the lawgiver's face. The *foetor judaicus* was a stench that could be removed only through baptism. Jewish men menstruated. We find isolated assertions in the late Middle Ages that Jews are descended from a union between Adam and either animals or a demon,¹⁰ and that they emerged not from Abraham's seed but from his excrement.¹¹ The depiction of the *Judensau*, which showed a Jew suckling a female pig, originated in the thirteenth century and became widespread by the late fifteenth.¹²

This perception of a less than human figure with telltale physical characteristics could not help but be associated with diabolical behavior. Thus, Jewish physicians poisoned their patients, sometimes with poisons that took effect only months later. It is virtually impossible to determine whether this assertion was simply a result of the perception of a hate-filled Jew in league with the Devil or if it was also born out of the desire to stop Christians from patronizing, and hence supporting, Jewish doctors. Medicine was a field in which Jews were disproportionately represented even in northern Europe, perhaps because it was difficult to dissuade Christians from seeking the help of people whom they regarded as best qualified to treat their maladies. This, then, is an instance in which anti-Jewish ideology was trumped by self-interest. The most effective means of achieving the daunting goal of detaching Christian patients from their Jewish physicians would presumably have been to persuade them that patronizing those Jews would not improve their health but endanger it.

The poisoning physician could destroy his victims only individual by individual. The Jew as mass poisoner emerged primarily, though not exclusively, in the context of the well poisoning said to have engendered the Black Death of the mid fourteenth century. We have some recipes providing ingredients of the alleged poisons, and, while they are not very palatable, many of them, such as Christian hearts and sacred hosts, do not have the capacity to kill in naturalistic fashion. These are, rather, concoctions that bear the mark of the black arts, where Jews, who were often depicted as deeply involved in witchcraft, could exercise their special expertise. That Jews were not actually brought to trial for witchcraft is

¹⁰ So Alonso de Espina, *Fortalitium fidei, consideratio*, vol. II (Nuremberg, 1494), fol. 79, col. d. See David Nirenberg, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *Past and Present* 174 (Feb. 2002), 26.

¹¹ So Jakoubek of Stribro. See Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes from the Life of a European City* (New York, 1997), 168.

¹² Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau: A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and its History* (London, 1974).

probably a result of the very pervasiveness of their presumed involvement in this activity, to the point where it could not be separated from their essential nature. To try Jews for witchcraft would be to revoke even the minimal toleration that was a deep-seated component of Church law governing the Jews.¹³ As to the Black Death itself, the “plausibility” of the well poisoning accusation is sometimes connected with a purportedly lower death rate from the plague among Jews, a phenomenon explained by a wide array of conjectures ranging from sanitary practices to laws of kosher food consumption. None of these conjectures is especially compelling, and the reality that they attempt to explain is far from established. The Jewish mortality rate may well have been indistinguishable from that of Christians.

And so we turn to the remaining “chimerical” accusations, which could be generated without reference to wholesale death and illness. The longest-lasting of these was the accusation of ritual murder.¹⁴ The first instance of this libel occurred in mid-twelfth-century England, though reference to the case appeared almost instantaneously on the Continent, where additional accusations arose within a few decades with far more serious consequences. By the 1230s – and perhaps even earlier – the initial accusation that Jews, after an annual meeting to determine the appropriate location, ritually murder a Christian child in imitation of the crucifixion was transformed into the assertion that Jewish law requires the ingestion of the blood (or, much more rarely, the heart) of a murdered Christian. The precise ritual use of the blood could vary. Most often it was to be baked into Passover *matzah*; sometimes it was to be used in the Passover food known as *haroset* (a paste made from wine, nuts, and apples or other fruit) sometimes it was to be mixed into wine used at the *seder*, and sometimes it was intended for medicinal rather than ritual purposes. In some sources, the medicinal use was for the treatment of the Jewish disease of male menstruation, where one type of blood could counteract the other.

Modern readers roll their eyes when they see this accusation, and they wonder how large numbers of people could have believed it. It is

¹³ This point was made by Anna Foa, “The Witch and the Jew: Two Alikes that Were Not the Same,” in Jeremy Cohen, ed., *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 373–4.

¹⁴ For a recent discussion of the persistence of this accusation, see Stow, *Jewish Dogs*. On its origins, see John M. McCulloh, “Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth,” *Speculum* 72 (1997), 698–740. For my view of Israel Yuval’s stimulating but highly controversial article on this issue (“Ha-Nakam ve-ha-kehalah, ha-Dam ve-ha-Alilah,” *Zion* 58 (1992/3), 33–90) and the literature that it spawned, see Berger, *Persecution, Polemic and Dialogue*, 31–7.

consequently important that we force ourselves to recognize that, for medieval, especially late medieval, Christians, two elements crucial for the nurturing and dissemination of this belief carried weight that they do not for most 21st-century observers. First, the Devil was a real, even constant, presence. Second, there appeared to be considerable evidence that Jews indeed practiced such rituals. It is true that thirteenth-century investigations by the papacy and by the Holy Roman Emperor had concluded that there was in fact no such Jewish practice, but alongside these conclusions there was a growing body of evidence from judicial investigations and proceedings that ruled in case after case that Jews were guilty of such behavior. The use of torture or the threat of torture to elicit confessions did not offend medieval sensibilities or render the results suspect in medieval minds, so that the perception by many Christians that their Jewish neighbors were a threat to their children became widespread and deeply entrenched. If we succeed in internalizing an appreciation of this psychological reality, we will attain a much better understanding of the degree to which this libel could have poisoned Jewish–Christian relations at the core.

The task of historical imagination has regrettably been made easier by the resurgence of the blood libel in the contemporary Middle East, where it is affirmed on government-sponsored television networks, and, to a lesser degree, even elsewhere. Beyond this, we live in a world where untold millions of people believe that the thousands of Jews working in the World Trade Center absented themselves on that fateful September 11, so that there were no Jewish casualties. If this can happen in an age where irrefutable counter-evidence is available with the press of a computer key (though, of course, the fantasy itself is similarly available), we should not be surprised by the spread of chimerical imaginings in pre-modern times, and we should not underestimate their impact.

The final chimerical accusation was that of host desecration, which was facilitated by the formalization in the thirteenth century of the doctrine of transubstantiation. In this instance, Langmuir's suggestion that these accusations were a function of inner Christian doubts achieves its highest level of plausibility, and it is consequently no surprise that, with specific reference to this libel, the point was made before him. Jews purportedly succeeded in obtaining consecrated hosts that they proceeded to mistreat in various ways – stabbing, stomping, boiling, and the like. Some of these stories presumably assume Jewish recognition that this is indeed the body of Jesus, but even when this is not the case, the miraculous transformation of the host into the visible baby Jesus, as well as the other wondrous events that characterize many of these accounts, could well have served to

strengthen the faith of Christians in this particularly problematic doctrine.¹⁵

Even when Christians did not attribute diabolical or subhuman characteristics to Jews, they appear to have seen them as physically inferior. The evidence here comes primarily from northern European Jewish sources, which speak of Christian perceptions of Jewish ugliness. Strikingly, these Jewish texts accept the aesthetic judgment and struggle to explain the phenomenon in ways that will neutralize its sting. Notwithstanding the cleverness of some of these explanations, there is no avoiding the fact that they reflect a psyche deeply wounded by the disdain of a dominant culture.¹⁶

The essentializing of the difference between Christians and Jews could also have legal ramifications. In fifteenth-century Spain, as substantial numbers of Jews converted to Christianity under the impact of attacks as well as persuasion, the welcome (such as it was) normally extended to converts came under ever greater stress. It was one thing to embrace individuals who had come to see the light; it was quite a different matter to welcome as equals masses of Jews whom you viewed until now with undifferentiated distaste and whose sincerity was in many cases suspect. In this environment, the sense of essential difference, even if it did not reach the level of full demonization, engendered legal distinctions between new Christians and those of “pure blood.” Such distinctions were highly problematic in the light of standard law, theology, and practice, but learned scholars, invoking innovative racial categories as well as transient precedents going back to the Visigoths, succeeded to some degree in establishing discriminatory norms that disadvantaged *conversos* for generations.¹⁷

At roughly the same time that the ritual murder and host desecration accusations were born, perceptions of Jewish hostility to Christians were further nourished by a very different development. The classic Christian argument for tolerating Jews had been formulated by Augustine. Jews, said the greatest of the Church Fathers, testify to the truth of Christianity both

¹⁵ See Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, 1999).

¹⁶ See Berger, *Persecution, Polemic and Dialogue*, III–14.

¹⁷ See Nirenberg, “Mass Conversion.” For a detailed analysis of the debate regarding this question, see B. Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York, 1995), 381–627. Irven M. Resnick has now presented a detailed survey and analysis of the evidence for a medieval perception of Jews as physically distinct from Christians. See his *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington, DC, 2012). For an assessment, see my review in *AJS Review* 37 (2013), 392–5.

through their suffering and through their preservation and observance of the Hebrew Bible. Beginning in the twelfth century and rising to prominence in the thirteenth, Christian awareness of a different Jewish work generated both a selective examination of the content of that work and a reassessment of the centrality of the Bible for Judaism.

The Talmud came to the attention of Christians largely as a result of the work of Jewish converts. In the early twelfth century, Petrus Alphonsi's apologia for his conversion cited talmudic passages that he considered theologically problematic, and in the middle of the century Peter the Venerable subjected several selections from the Talmud to scathing mockery and denunciation. But the assertion that the Talmud exemplifies Jewish hatred of gentiles in general and Christians in particular came to the fore in a campaign pursued by the French convert Nicholas Donin in the 1230s and 1240s, whose dramatic apogee was a 1240 disputation with Rabbi Yehiel of Paris that was essentially a trial of the Talmud. Donin pointed to the Talmud's hostile depictions of Jesus as well as laws that discriminate against non-Jews, many of which he interpreted reasonably. At the same time, his intense hatred of his former co-religionists led him to present a talmudic assertion that "the best of the Gentiles should be killed" as a normative, universal ruling, though he had to have known that no medieval Jew understood this as a legal injunction to be applied outside a wartime situation.

Beyond Donin's ascription to the Talmud of blasphemy, discrimination, and even incitement to murder, his portrayal of the work as "another law" inconsistent with the Bible, and his assertion that it was the former and not the latter that Jews observed, called into question the very core of the Augustinian argument for tolerating Jews. While the Church never embraced Donin's argument in its fullness, its force was not entirely neutralized, and the image of the Jew as the devotee of a sacred text that was not only different from the Bible but replete with evil contributed in no small measure to growing hostility, initially among intellectuals but eventually among the masses as well.¹⁸

The mixed success of these accusations is also evident in the fate of the Talmud itself in medieval and early modern Europe. On several occasions, including the aftermath of the Paris disputation, it was burned. For the

¹⁸ See Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY, 1982). For an example of the preservation of the unalloyed Augustinian teaching of toleration in a pastoral guidebook written in Germany two decades after the widespread killing of Jews during the initial outbreak of the Black Death, see Deana Copeland Klepper, "Pastoral Literature in Local Context: Albert of Diessen's *Mirror of Priests* on Christian-Jewish Coexistence," *Speculum* 92 (2017), 692-723.

most part, however, Jews were allowed to preserve and study it, although a process of censorship and self-censorship led to the elimination or modification of some passages about Jesus, as well as the terminology for gentiles. In two notable instances, the liturgy itself was changed, so that a curse against heretics came to be aimed at informers, and a declaration that non-Jews “prostrate themselves before vanity and emptiness and pray to a god who does not save” was eliminated entirely from many texts.¹⁹

The image of the Jews in Christian eyes was also adversely affected by their disproportionate concentration in moneylending. Shakespeare has succeeded in illustrating the dangers of this profession for interfaith amity far better than any historian could, and the fundamental reality of these dangers is unassailable. At the same time, Joseph Shatzmiller has provided us with a study entitled *Shylock Reconsidered*,²⁰ which reminds us of a different reality with wider ramifications for the entire discourse of this chapter. As I have already noted in passing, personal relationships across religious and ethnic lines can often be amicable, even when the other group as an abstraction is seen through the darkest lens. Moreover, even the darkness of the lens can sometimes be moderated under the influence of such relationships. We are accustomed to dismissing the response of people accused of anti-Semitism that “some of my best friends are Jews” (or, in Karl Lueger’s well-known formulation, “I decide who is a Jew”), and for the most part this dismissive attitude is more than justified. At the same time, even in cases where personal relationships do not undermine generic hostility, it remains important to remember that the rhythms of everyday life in routine times can be marked by cordiality and, yes, even friendship. Shatzmiller’s study introduces us to a Jewish moneylender brought before a court, who produced apparently sincere character witnesses from his Christian clientele. In less fraught business contexts, cordial relationships were all the more likely to develop, and the thirteenth-century *Sefer Hasidim* [The Book of the Pious] urges a Jew to defend an innocent Christian even against a Jewish attacker.²¹

How then did Jews perceive their Christian neighbors and the faith to which they adhered? The two components of this question are inextricably – or at least deeply – intertwined, and we must consequently address the second before turning to the first.

Rabbinic Judaism referred to the practices associated with polytheistic religions as *‘avodah zarah*, literally “foreign worship.” Almost all

¹⁹ See Ruth Langer, *Cursing the Christians? A History of the Birkat HaMinim* (New York, 2011).

²⁰ Joseph Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered* (Berkeley, 1990).

²¹ *Sefer Hasidim*, ed. J. Wistinetzky, 2nd edn. (Frankfurt am Main, 1924), no. 1849, 445.

manifestations of *'avodah zarah* can be subsumed under a rough definition – to wit, the formal recognition or worship as God of an entity that is in fact not God. Since Christians worshipped Jesus of Nazareth as God, and Jews believed that he was in fact not God, it followed ineluctably that Christianity should be classified as *'avodah zarah*. This was no small matter. The legal category evoked the idolatries of old; various biblical verses have exceedingly pejorative things to say about the practitioners of those idolatries; and once a religion was classified under this rubric, embracing it was to be resisted even under threat of death.

There is no question that the dominant medieval Jewish attitude toward Christianity was driven by these considerations. When crusading armies forced Jews to choose between conversion to Christianity and death, some died and some converted, but none argued that apostasy is permissible under duress because Christianity is not *'avodah zarah*. The liturgical poems commemorating these martyrdoms explicitly designate Christianity as such; Jews, they affirm, gave their lives “so as not to bow before *'avodah zarah*.”²² In a famous story associated with a central prayer of the High Holiday season, a Jew is wracked by guilt for asking a Christian nobleman for time to consider the latter’s proposal that he “deny the living God” by accepting Christianity.²³ The very fact that Jews died to avoid Christian *'avodah zarah* reinforced this perception of Christianity and strengthened the hostility that it evoked.

In Ashkenaz, one finds invective and insulting terminology describing Christian sancta explicitly justified by an appeal to a rabbinic principle that one should assign pejorative names to *'avodah zarah*; one text extends this practice beyond inanimate objects to encompass Christian personalities, on the basis of the verse, “Those who make them [i.e., idols] should be like them” (Psalms 115:8). Thus, Jesus is the hanged one, Christian graves are pits, saints (*kedoshim*) are sacred prostitutes (*kedeshim*), baptismal water is the water of impurity, and so on. The formal justification for such terminology was clearly not the primary explanation for this practice, which served as an outlet for a subordinated and suffering people yearning for defiance. Finally, though the classification of the Other as less than human played a much smaller role in the discourse of medieval Jews than in that of Christians, we find occasional affirmations to this effect as well.²⁴

²² R. Avrohom Chaim Feuer and R. Avie Gold, *Zakhor le-Avraham: The Complete Tishah B'Av Service* (New York, 1991) #22, 296/297.

²³ R. Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, *Sefer Or Zarua*, vol. II (Jerusalem, 2010), *Hilkhot Rosh ha-Shanah* #276, 342.

²⁴ Mordechai Breuer provided a list of pejorative terms in his *Sefer Nitsahon Yashan* (Ramat Gan, 1978), 195. See too Anna Sapir Abulafia, “Invectives against Christianity in the Hebrew Chronicles of the First Crusade,” in Peter W. Edbury, ed., *Crusade and*

Did such manifestations of hostility restrict themselves to verbal expression? Since there is no reason to believe that any Jew ever desecrated a host, I did not hesitate to utilize Langmuir's classification of this accusation under the rubric "chimerical." Nevertheless, some medieval Jews were perfectly capable of treating Christian symbols with extreme disrespect. We cannot, of course, take all Christian stories about such actions at face value, but when a Jewish text tells us with considerable satisfaction that a Jew urinated on a cross and produced a clever justification when caught in the act, our resistance to the historicity of such accounts must surely be affected.²⁵

The status of the Christian religion and that of its practitioners bore implications that were not restricted to the extraordinary circumstances surrounding martyrdom. Jewish law forbids deriving benefit from objects dedicated to *'avodah zarah*, which raised serious questions about the sale of objects consecrated in the context of Christian worship. Rabbinic law prohibited gentile wine as "wine of libation," which appeared to place it in the same category as such religious objects. Moreover, the Talmud forbade doing business with idolaters on their holidays. Given the large number of Christian holy days in medieval Europe, not to speak of the fact that the Talmud specifically identified what appears to be the Christian Sunday as one of those prohibited days, the economic impact of this regulation was potentially devastating. On the one hand, these prohibitions strengthened the sense of alienation, even revulsion, evoked by Christianity and its symbols. On the other, the economic difficulties engendered by this constellation of debilitating restrictions impelled Jews to take a second look at their scope and applicability. Sometimes, that reexamination produced a partial reassessment of the religious status of Christianity itself.

The talmudic prohibition of commerce on pagan holidays was rooted in the concern that the idolater was more likely to thank his god for the consummation of a transaction if it took place on a religious festival. Medieval Jewish decisors confronting the consequences of this ruling suggested various strategies to render it inapplicable to medieval

Settlement (Cardiff, 1985), 66–72. The argument from the verse in Psalms appears in *Sefer Hasidim*, no. 193, 74. For the analogy between non-Jews and animals, see R. Abraham b. David of Posquière's comment on Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Avot ha-Tumah* 2:10.

²⁵ See Joseph Official, *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane'*, ed. Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 1970), 14. See, too, Elliott Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, 2006), which provides valuable discussion relevant to our question; nonetheless, despite the implication of the title, it points to vanishingly few incidents of genuine violence on the part of medieval Jews.

Christian Europe. Some of these have no relevance to the evaluation of Christianity, or even of the religious status of medieval Christians. Thus, the prohibition does not apply if observing it would create hostility toward Jews. Alternatively, it was never intended to apply where Jewish livelihoods would be entirely undermined.

Other strategies, however, carried at least the potential for transformed perceptions of broader significance. Thus, the major eleventh-century authority R. Gershom of Mainz cited an unelaborated talmudic assertion that gentiles outside the Land of Israel are not worshippers of *'avodah zarah*; rather, they follow the customs of their ancestors. Divining the meaning of this talmudic statement is a daunting task, but while it cannot reasonably be taken as an assertion that the intrinsic character of a religion changes because of a geographical change, it can serve to mitigate the most pejorative evaluation of the status of its worshippers.

In the twelfth century, the northern European talmudic commentators known as the Tosafists went on to suggest that the transactions prohibited in talmudic times were now permissible because "we know that the gentiles among us do not worship *'avodah zarah*." At first glance, this can be understood as a characterization of Christianity as a religion. It is, however, highly unlikely that this was the intention of the Tosafists; rather, they almost surely meant, as other medieval authorities explicitly assert, that their Christian neighbors are not so devout. Thus, the fact that a transaction took place on a holiday did not substantially increase the likelihood that they would go their house of worship to recite a prayer of thanksgiving. Still, even this understanding goes some moderate distance toward mitigating the image of medieval Christians as idolaters.²⁶

Far more important is another *Tosafot* that really does say something deeply meaningful about Christianity itself, though the most significant sentence there for an understanding of medieval Jewish assessments of Christianity is not the one that is usually cited. The Talmud forbade business partnerships with idolaters lest a dispute between the partners lead to a court proceeding in which the non-Jew would take an oath in the name of his god. In such a case, the Jew would violate what the rabbis understood as a biblical injunction against causing someone to invoke the name of another deity. Thus, it appeared that a Jew in medieval Europe would be precluded from entering into a partnership with a Christian.

A major Tosafist ruled that this is not the case; rather, a Jew may in fact "accept" such an oath from a Christian. First of all, Christians swear in the name of the saints, whom they do not see as deities. Second, even though

²⁶ Many of these issues are addressed in Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Oxford, 1961).

the oath invokes God as well as the saints, and when Christians say “God” they have in mind Jesus of Nazareth, they are not actually pronouncing the name of Jesus; moreover, “their intention is to the Creator of heaven [and earth].” Finally, the concern that the Christian is nonetheless “associating the name of God with something else” is neutralized by the fact that “association” is not forbidden to gentiles.

The affirmation that gentiles are not obligated to refrain from “association” produced an entire literature beginning in the sixteenth century, when highly influential authorities began to understand it as an assertion that even Christian worship is permitted to non-Jews. Once again, it is exceedingly improbable that the “liberal” reading, whose impact endures to this day, accords with the intention of the Tosafists. They almost certainly meant either that an oath in the name of God taken by one who is thinking – or also thinking – of Jesus of Nazareth is permitted to non-Jews, or that an oath in which both God and the saints are mentioned is permitted to them. Actual worship remains forbidden. At the same time, the preceding affirmation that Christians have in mind the (true) Creator of heaven and earth when they say “God” is unambiguous, and it demonstrates that some medieval Jews of great stature, while continuing to classify Christianity as *‘avodah zarah* even for gentiles, recognized that it differs in a critical sense from the paganism of Antiquity. Among the Jews of northern Europe, this remained an isolated observation with little impact on visceral Jewish instincts, but its significance is real and revealing.²⁷

One major medieval talmudist pushed the envelope considerably further, and his views have attracted much attention among modern scholars, as well as among traditional Jews seeking a model for interfaith relations more favorable to Christianity than the medieval standard. R. Menahem ha-Meiri of Perpignan (1249–1316) made two distinct but related affirmations: (1) *‘avodah zarah* is not to be found in our environs; (2) talmudic legislation that discriminates against non-Jews does not apply to “nations restricted by the ways of religions.” While the precise understanding of his position remains the subject of lively debate, his approach appears to have been driven by the conviction that believers in a cosmic deity, whatever the conception of his exact nature may be, are likely to live in accordance with ethical rules that produce a civilized society. Not only is civil discrimination inapplicable to the members of such a society, even some prohibitions connected with *‘avodah zarah* do not apply.²⁸

²⁷ See *Tosafot Sanhedrin* 63b, under *asur*.

²⁸ See Moshe Halbertal, *Between Torah and Wisdom: Rabbi Menachem ha-Meiri and the Maimonidean Halakhists in Provence* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2000), 80–108.

As we have already seen, Nicholas Donin had confronted R. Yehiel of Paris with citations illustrating discriminatory talmudic legislation. R. Yehiel did not construct an all-embracing theory along the lines of ha-Meiri's, but he did argue without equivocation that the laws in question applied only to ancient pagans. After all, he said, you see that we do not observe the prohibition that banned commerce with idolaters on their festivals, and you also see that we are so devoted to our religion that we martyr ourselves rather than abandon it. Thus, you cannot legitimately question my sincerity when I declare that these laws do not apply to you. R. Yehiel went on to argue that the handful of pejorative statements in the Talmud about Jesus refer to a somewhat earlier figure of the same name and not to the founder of Christianity. Despite the argument from martyrdom, R. Yehiel's sincerity cannot be accepted uncritically. Nonetheless, we may be – and probably are – witness to an ironic and important development. In response to attacks leveled against their texts by increasingly hostile persecutors, Jews formulated a more tolerant understanding of those texts, and some of those Jews ultimately internalized that understanding. Thus, at least in this case, a more favorable attitude toward Christians was born not out of an atmosphere of enhanced openness and cordiality but precisely out of a new and potentially deadly offensive.

Donin is a particularly striking and dangerous example of the phenomenon of Jewish conversion to Christianity, which is the most extreme illustration of the fact that, along with revulsion toward Christian symbols and faith, medieval Jews could feel attraction that spilled over into seductive temptation. Scholars have begun to recognize that, even in Ashkenaz, whose image – and self-image – was molded by the martyrdoms engendered by the crusades, Jews could be sorely tempted by the regnant religion – and not only for pragmatic reasons. Rabbi Jacob Tam – the greatest rabbi in twelfth-century northern Europe – reported that he was familiar with more than twenty divorce documents issued to their wives by Jewish converts to Christianity. Even though an authority of R. Tam's stature would know of documents prepared across a relatively broad geographic area, this is an impressive number. The communities of the North were quite small, many conversions no doubt involved both spouses and would consequently not generate a divorce, some (many? – most?) converts would refuse to provide a divorce to wives who would not join them, and routine documents would not have to be brought to a major rabbi at all.

Jews often persuaded themselves that the motivations of converts were in fact rooted in self-interest rather than sincere faith, and one Ashkenazic text – the polemical *Nitsahon vetus* – speaks of the apostate's desire to experience various pleasures of the flesh denied to him or to her by Judaism

but permitted – or effectively permitted – in Christian society. But even in northern Europe we find the story of a Jew who committed suicide in order to frustrate the efforts of a demon enticing him to embrace Christianity, and the polemical literature produced in that community, while largely intended to boost morale, was also designed to provide protection against the temptations of apostasy.²⁹

In late medieval Iberia, the effectiveness of Christian missionizing is even clearer. In that community, we begin with a very different cultural profile. Ashkenazic tradition tended, at least at the level of intellectual discourse, to treat Christianity and Christian society with hostility and contempt. Sephardic Jews, on the other hand, were heirs to a cultural orientation going back to Muslim Spain that saw much of the surrounding culture in a far more positive, even admiring, light. Indeed, philosophically oriented Jews in late medieval Spain expressed concern that the resistance of some of their co-religionists to the study of philosophy led learned Christians to denigrate the intellectual standing of the Jewish people. It may well be that this openness weakened the instinctive resistance that would have prevented a Christian missionary from progressing beyond the initial defenses of a medieval Jew. Then there was the increasing sophistication of the Christian mission, which elaborated upon an approach to the Talmud considerably deeper and more nuanced than that of Nicholas Donin.

Here, too, the initiator and chief protagonist was a Jewish convert to Christianity. In a public disputation in Barcelona in 1263, Pablo Christiani and Nahmanides debated Pablo's contention that the core doctrines of Christianity can be found in the Talmud itself. Nahmanides argued that the very fact that the talmudic rabbis did not embrace Christianity was sufficient to refute Pablo's contention, but the new approach was not to be deflected so easily. Even though Nahmanides acquitted himself impressively, to the point where Jewish morale was reinforced in the short run, the long-term impact was damaging. Raymund Martini, a friar who had been present at the disputation, wrote what became a classic polemical work entitled *Pugio fidei*, in which he honed Pablo's argument with a plethora of rabbinic references, and, during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth

²⁹ On converts, see Chaviva Levin's dissertation, "Jewish Conversion to Christianity in Medieval Northern Europe Encountered and Imagined, 1100–1300" (New York University, 2006). See, too, Avraham Grossman, *Hakhmei Tsarfat ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1995), 502–4, who makes the key points about R. Tam; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Jewish Converts to Christianity in Medieval Europe, 1200–1500," in Michael Goodich, Sophia Menache, and Sylvia Schein, eds., *Cross Cultural Convergences in the Crusader Period* (New York, 1995), 297–318. For the passage in the *Nitsahon vetus*, see Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 206–7.

centuries, several distinguished Jewish converts to Christianity not only developed these arguments but also served as role models for Jews attracted to the dominant faith.³⁰ Once a trickle of converts turned into a stream, what was once a remote, almost unthinkable prospect became a realistic psychological option, even in ordinary times. When pressures mounted – as they did during the 1391 and 1412 violence, as well as in the wake of the Tortosa disputation of 1413–14 – conversion became all the more difficult to resist, and significant numbers of Jews relented, driven in many cases by entirely pragmatic considerations, but sometimes by genuine doubts and, ultimately, by sincere conviction.

Most Jews, of course, did not succumb to the attractions of the environment to this extent. Nonetheless – as I have already noted – overarching rationales for hostility – whether theological, typological, economic, or even demonological – cannot always serve as an impenetrable barrier to social intercourse containing at least a component of cordiality and friendship. Such relationships, with their complex intermingling of contradictory impulses, can produce influences that sometimes mirror those complexities. Scholars in the last generation have provided a series of suggestions regarding Christian influences on Jewish thought, ritual, and behavior. Some of these suggestions posit simple borrowing; others speak of polemical inversion. Theories of this sort usually remain in the realm of speculation, and they range from far-fetched to plausible to probable to persuasive to compelling. In the aggregate, however, they provide a strong case for interaction across a wide spectrum of cultural and social life.

Here, then, are some salient examples of purported influences, which I provide without elaboration and without assignment to one or another of the classifications of plausibility:

- Jewish biblical interpretation was deeply influenced, even permeated, by the spirit of the twelfth-century Renaissance as well as the imperative of responding to Christian exegesis, and the dialectical approach of the Tosafists to talmudic study was influenced by the similar techniques utilized by students of canon law.³¹
- Rituals ranging from elements of the Passover *hagadah* to the initiation ceremony when a child begins to study Torah, to the celebration associated with

³⁰ See Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and its Aftermath* (Berkeley, 1992), and my review essay reprinted in Berger, *Persecution, Polemic and Dialogue*, 199–208; Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley, 1989).

³¹ Elazar Touitou, “Shitato ha-Parshanit shel ha-Rashbam al Reka’ ha-Metzi’ut ha-Historit shel Zemano,” in Y. Gilat, ed., *‘Iyunim be-Sifrut Hazal, ba-Mikra u-be-Toledot Yisrael: Mukdash le-Prof. E. Z. Melammed* (Ramat Gan, 1982), 48–74; Jose Faur, “The Legal Thinking of the Tosafot,” *Dinei Israel* 6 (1975), 43–72.

reaching the age of bar mitzvah, to an array of activities associated with birth and its aftermath were a conscious or unconscious reaction to Christian ceremonies, folk beliefs, or doctrines.³²

- The role of women in marriage, in society, and in ritual varied in accordance with conditions in the surrounding Christian culture.³³
- Expressions of religiosity, including the penances of German Pietists and even the actions and exhortations of Jewish martyrs, owe much to Christian models.³⁴
- The use of mystical images, including nothing less than the prominence accorded to the feminine manifestation (the *Shekhinah*) of God himself, is a polemical response to Christian imagery – in this case, the increasing role of Mary in Christian piety.³⁵

Many more examples can be cited, and those that appear persuasive reinforce the clear-cut evidence provided by the overt polemical, liturgical, and legal works that engage the challenge of the Christian world directly.

None of these manifestations of complexity – and even attraction – should obscure the fact that the norm remained one in which Christians were seen as persecutors, and Christianity as *'avodah zarah*. This norm was reinforced as anti-Jewish measures increased, chimerical accusations multiplied, and eruptions of violence intensified. A bedrock symbol of Christendom was the biblical Esau, who lived by the sword, pursued only physical pleasures, and sought to kill his brother Jacob. This perception grew out of the rabbinic characterization of Rome as Edom/Esau, followed by the Christianization of the Empire. On an even deeper theological level, Rome–Christendom was seen as the fourth kingdom of Daniel's eschatological vision, a kingdom destined to be destroyed as the end of history is ushered in. It is a matter of no small interest that

³² Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. B. Harshav and J. Chipman (Berkeley, 2006); Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, 1996); Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 2004).

³³ Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children*; Avraham Grossman, *Hasidot u-Moredot: Nashim Yehudiyot be-Eropah hi-Yemei ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem, 2001) (abridged English translation: *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* [Waltham, 2004]).

³⁴ Talya Fishman, "The Penitential System of Hasidei Ashkenaz and the Problem of Cultural Boundaries," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999), 201–29; Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley, 1987), as well as his later works on this subject.

³⁵ Arthur Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context," *AJS Review* 26 (2002), 1–52; Peter Schafer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton, 2002), 118–72, esp. 169–72.

Christians reciprocated this typology, so that Esau, as the older brother, represented the Synagogue, and the younger Jacob embodied the Church.³⁶ Since God told Rebecca that the elder would serve the younger, this identification led to the conclusion that Jews must not exercise any authority over Christians. While this rule was often honored more in the breach than in the observance, observance was by no means unknown. Jews could be excluded from positions of even marginal power, to the point where the employment of Christian domestics, let alone the exercise of authority on a broader scale, could occasionally be met with opposition.

The destruction of the fourth kingdom poses the question of the ultimate destiny of Christians. We have already noted that, in medieval Christian theology, individual Jews, like all non-believers, were condemned to damnation. In accordance with Romans 11:25–6, the remnant of the Jewish collective that will survive at the culmination of the eschatological scenario will recognize the truth of Christianity and be saved.

The corresponding Jewish perceptions of the fate of Christians were considerably more complex. On the individual level, Judaism left open a path for what Christians called salvation and Jews described as a portion in the world to come, even for those who did not embrace Judaism in its fullness. This path was the observance of the seven laws that, according to rabbinic tradition, were revealed by God to Noah and bind all his descendants. Maimonides restricted this opportunity by insisting that gentiles must accept these laws as revelation (in his formulation, to Moses) in order to benefit from their salvific value. Much of the Noahide covenant consists of ethical norms that would be imposed at least in their broad outlines by any civilized society, but the exception most relevant to Christianity is the prohibition against *'avodah zarah*. We have already seen that, with the notable exception of ha-Meiri, medieval Jews took for granted that Christians transgressed this norm. It follows that Christians would not have a portion in the world to come.

This question was raised explicitly in the fraught context of the Paris disputation. Can we, asked the Christian participants, achieve a portion in the world to come through our faith? In an awkward exchange, R. Yehiel made reference to the Noahide covenant and more or less allowed the Christian participants to conclude that Judaism affirms their entry into the world to come.³⁷ While a careful reading of the tenor of the passage strongly suggests that R. Yehiel did not share this position, the question

³⁶ Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 19–48.

³⁷ *Vikuaḥ Rabenu Yehiel mi-Paris*, ed. Reuven Margaliyot (Lvov, [1868]), 22–3; John Friedman, Jean Connell Huff, and Robert Chazan, *The Trial of the Talmud*:

itself reflects the degree to which the dynamics of intergroup relations can be affected by what the Other believes about one's chances of salvation.

And so we turn to the destiny of the Christian collective at the end of days. Here the issue of *'avodah zarah* mingled with another, no less critical, concern – to wit, Christendom's unrelenting persecution of the Jewish people. (This consideration is, of course, not entirely irrelevant to discussions of the posthumous punishment awaiting individual Christians as well.) Let us begin with the obvious. Despite the impression that might be created by Micah 4:5 (“All peoples may walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever”), medieval Jews, like medieval Christians, could not imagine a messianic era with significant religious diversity. At the end of days, the truth will be known, and the bearers of false religions will recognize their error. The question is which, and how many, adherents of such religions will survive to acknowledge the true faith.

Notwithstanding several isolated passages in Ashkenazic works, Jews did not envision the utter destruction of the nations of the world. Some, however, in both Ashkenaz and Sepharad, did expect Christendom to be wiped out. The reason usually provided was not the persecution of the Jewish people but the sin of *'avodah zarah*. Nonetheless, when R. Isaac Abravanel insisted on this point, while simultaneously affirming that pagan nations will survive to recognize the God of Israel, the purely theological explanation that he formulated to account for this distinction is less than compelling. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that his affirmation of the ultimate destruction of the collective that expelled him from Spain and inflicted untold anguish upon his people was not rooted in theology alone.

At the same time, although most Jews – once again in both Ashkenaz and Sepharad – expected widespread eschatological destruction of the enemies of Israel, as God would avenge the blood of his people, they did not anticipate total destruction even within the ranks of Christendom. The vision of universal recognition of the true God appears in standard prayers inherited from late Antiquity, and medieval Jews provided further elaboration. Thus, an Ashkenazic hymn recited on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and arranged according to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, provided twenty-two expressions of this vision with repeated reference to all the nations of the world. With some exceptions, even Jews who spoke most positively about the embrace of the God of Israel by all of humanity did not envision the complete eradication of national distinctions. The nations of the world would serve the people of

Israel, whose religious superiority would now be translated into political as well as spiritual dominance.³⁸

Eschatological expectations and perceptions rooted in faith could not be tested before the end of history; nonetheless, they mattered profoundly even in the real world. For the dominant culture, images of the Other could be and often were translated into policy and practice; it is not by choice but by necessity that this chapter has frequently moved, however fleetingly, from the world of ideas to that of actions and events. But even for a group bereft of power, perceptions of the Other could and did affect real life, not only by determining legal and cultural norms but by providing the psychological framework in which the identity of a downtrodden people could be preserved and nurtured in the face of the most severe adversity.

³⁸ See Berger, *Persecution, Polemic and Dialogue*, 117–38.

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VOLUME EDITOR

ROBERT CHAZAN

