

JEWS AND CHRISTIANITY

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For two thousand years, Jews rejected the claim that Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the dogmatic claims about him made by the Church Fathers – that he was born of a virgin, the son of God, part of a divine Trinity, and was resurrected after his death. Why Christians chose to form a religion about a Jewish preacher from the Galilee has long puzzled his fellow Jews, and the doctrines formed by Christians about him – the incarnation, Trinity, virgin birth, bodily resurrection – seemed to contradict the basic tenets of the Hebrew Bible, including its monotheism and the prophets' depiction of the messiah and the messianic era.

For two thousand years, a central wish of Christianity was to be the object of desire by Jews, whose baptism would affirm that Jesus had fulfilled the biblical prophecies of their own Scriptures. Christianity did not arise to eradicate Judaism, but to claim Jewish scriptures and teachings for Christian purposes, all the while claiming that Judaism was no longer in covenant with God. This supersessionism was a theological colonialism: that is, an annexation, subjugation, and appropriation of Judaism's Bible for Christian purposes – though not the destruction of either the Bible or the Jews. The dual quality marking supersessionism, in which the Old Testament is preserved as the record of a divine covenant, but one superseded by the New, is expressed in Romans 11:28, and informs Augustine's important definition of Jews as witnesses to Christian truth by living in a subservient status. Supersessionism guaranteed a centrality within Christianity of certain Jewish teachings, such as covenant, messiah, and the Old Testament itself, a Jewish presence that often discomfited Christian theologians even as they drew upon it for their own theological purposes.

While Judaism had no comparable theological need of Christianity, it was certainly influenced and even shaped by some Christian ideas over the course of the centuries. Jewish theology frequently found itself in a defensive posture, expressed in polemics against Christianity for its

trinitarianism, which some Jews regarded as polytheistic idolatry, but Jews also experienced a fascination with Christianity that was not mirrored by a comparable fascination with other religions. Jews often adopted Christian motifs. For example, the medieval adoration of the Virgin Mary was translated in Jewish mysticism into its understanding of the Shekhinah, the divine presence, as female.

Yet Jewish views of Christianity in the pre-modern era tended to be explicitly negative. The great Jewish legal authority and philosopher Moses Maimonides, who lived in Egypt during the twelfth century, viewed Christianity as idolatrous because of its worship of the Trinity. On the other hand, many other rabbinical authorities recognized Christian claims that the Trinity was actually a unity and not idolatry. Maimonides was typical of a Jewish tradition of anti-Christian polemics that were often composed by Jews living in Muslim realms. Nonetheless, there also were Jews in the medieval and early modern eras who regarded Christians as handmaidens of Judaism, bringing the Bible and the God of Israel to the pagan world, thus preparing for the advent of the messiah.

Modern Judaism continued both postures, of polemic and fascination, but added new dimensions. New intellectual developments stemming from the European Enlightenment, historicism, emancipation, liberalism and antisemitism, and political movements such as nationalism and imperialism, all shaped modern theology, including Jewish self-understanding and Jewish views of Christianity. After World War II, Judaism and Christianity reconfigured their views of each other in light of the Holocaust, the blossoming of ecumenism, and the shift of the Jewish–Christian dialogue from Europe to America, with its political principles of democracy and its cultural commitment to religious tolerance.

Most significant in the modern period was the growing number of Jewish historians who examined the historical roots of Christianity within Judaism, with particular interest in the figure of the historical Jesus and the theology of Paul. In addition, some Jewish artists and poets began to use Christian symbols, particularly the crucifixion, to represent Jewish suffering under persecution and the Holocaust. Jewish scholars also began investigating examples of Christian influence on Judaism. Already in the nineteenth century, a new Jewish narrative of Christian origins developed: Jesus was a pious Jew who never intended to start a new religion, whereas Paul was the founder of Christianity, a religion *about* Jesus but not the faith *of* Jesus. Whereas Jesus taught Jewish monotheism and ethics, Paul mixed up those teachings with Greek pagan ideas, resulting in a non-biblical set of doctrines that became mandatory dogma for Christians. Jewish scholars further claimed that a proper understanding

of the New Testament texts was only possible when its contents were examined in the context of early Judaism and its rabbinic writings.

Christianity became not only a topic in modern Judaism, but also a tool for Jewish theological reflection on the role of Judaism in Western civilization. Rather than a desiccated, discarded branch of Western, Christian civilization, Judaism was presented by Jewish historians such as Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) as the tree trunk of the West, with Christianity and Islam as two of its branches. Jewish history in Diaspora was not an experience of travail, but of mission: bringing Jewish monotheism to the pagan world, a task for which Christians and Muslims served as handmaidens.¹

European Christianity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served as the context in which Jews made their case for political and social emancipation, often by promoting the growing interest in religious tolerance and the similarities between Jewish and Christian faith. In Germany, Christian theologians engaged in the debates over Jewish emancipation, usually depicting Judaism in negative terms and Jews as unsuitable for full membership in German society. What Jewish thinkers came to recognize was that the “secularization” of Europe was a modernization of Christian commitments, not a repudiation of them. Debates over Jewish membership in the nations of Europe reiterated older Christian theological arguments regarding the trustworthiness of Jews. The Protestant biblical scholar Johann Michaelis, in the late eighteenth century, opposed emancipation, questioning whether Jews would demonstrate sufficient national loyalty to serve in the German armed forces, based on his reading of biblical claims to Jewish national exclusivity in relation to God. Over a hundred years later, the Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen had to formulate defenses of Jewish national loyalty during the First World War.

Yet there were supporters. The philosopher Gotthold Lessing, one of the major figures of the German Enlightenment, presented an admirably wise, tolerant and gentle Jew in the figure of his friend, the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), in an influential play entitled, *Nathan the Wise*. David Friedlaender, a disciple of Mendelssohn’s, proposed a mass conversion of the Jews to Christianity – as long as Christianity gave up its doctrines and adopted Deism – a proposal Christians in early nineteenth-century Germany rejected.

Christianity was also the context that influenced Jewish reforms of their religious practices, synagogue liturgies, and identity as Jews. Organs were installed in synagogues, church music was used during services, and rabbis adopted the black robes and white collars worn by Protestant pastors and

¹ That view was already expressed by the medieval Jewish philosopher and legal expert Moses Maimonides in his “Epistle to Yemen.”

began giving weekly hortatory sermons.² Yet this era was not simply about Jews assimilating into Europe, or synagogues becoming Christianized in their liturgies. Rather, Jews in Europe expressed a tone of rebellion in their insistence on Judaism as the “mother” religion of Christianity, which they portrayed as derivative and unoriginal.

During the long nineteenth century, Jews were gradually winning political acceptance in most of the Western and Central European countries in which they lived, while at the same time they witnessed the rise of racism and antisemitism on the intellectual as well as political level. In France, which was the first country to declare the Jews emancipated, integration seemed to proceed smoothly during the course of the nineteenth century, until the Dreyfus Affair of the 1890s turned France into a hotbed of anti-semitic, politicized discourse. Whereas Jews were given professorships in France, often engaging in research on Jewish history and philosophy, some noted German professors, such as Leopold von Ranke and Heinrich Treitschke, declared that scholarship was a Christian endeavor, and that Jewish Studies did not belong in the university.³ Toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the rise of racial theory and its infiltration into academic disciplines, efforts to eradicate Jewishness began to be undertaken by some Christian theologians. Some theologians remained immune to Nazi antisemitism, while others sought to Nazify Christian theology by deJudaizing Christianity, and voices of Christian protest against Nazi antisemitism were rare and heard primarily outside Germany.⁴ After the Holocaust, a nascent positive reevaluation of Judaism by some Christian theologians began to take shape, and a thoughtful dialogue began with some Jewish theologians, particularly in Germany, Britain, and the United States, who sought a more serious engagement with Christianity.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century debates over Jewish emancipation raised the question of whether Judaism was a religion appropriate for integration into the modern nations and empires of Europe. Leora Batnitzky recently pointed out that the emergence of nation-states in Europe required a corresponding redefinition of Jewishness, from a complex of ethnic, cultural, and religious identities into a religion, Judaism, a set of beliefs and practices that would permit ethnic and cultural identification with a particular nation-state, whether France, Germany, England,

² Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

³ Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Discourse in Wilhelmine Germany*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

⁴ Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

and so forth. For Jews, the redefinition meant they needed to win acceptance from Christians and, at the same time, formulate a definition of Jewish identity that would discourage conversion to Christianity without denigrating Christianity. Discussions of Christianity by Jewish theologians had to be cautious: calling attention to Jesus's Jewishness could arouse mockery or even anger from those Christians who viewed Judaism as an inferior religion. In an unpublished note written in 1770, Mendelssohn observed: "It is a disgrace that we should reproach Socrates and Plato because they were pagans! Was this a flaw in their morals? And Jesus a Jew? – And what if, as I believe, he never wanted to give up Judaism? One can only imagine where this remark would lead me." The answer: into dangerous waters, no doubt, given the generally negative views Christians at the time had of Judaism. The Jewishness of Jesus was known, but not to be publicized.

At the same time, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment saw the emergence of Christian critiques of the church, as well as new formulations of Christianity: not a rejection of Christianity, but a reformulation in what David Sorkin has termed a "religious enlightenment."⁵ A broad movement of Unitarianism, under various guises, such as Deism and Socinianism, argued that Jesus was not a divine incarnation, but an inspiring religious teacher. In England, the Deist John Toland, whose work was known to Mendelssohn, denied the divinity of Jesus and insisted that he had had no intention of abolishing Jewish law.⁶ In Germany, the quest for the historical Jesus was launched by Herman Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), a Protestant theologian and teacher of Oriental languages at a high school in Hamburg. Reimarus, a Deist who rejected the miracles and revelatory status of the Bible in favor of a natural religion compatible with reason, left a long, unpublished manuscript at his death, fragments of which were published posthumously and anonymously by Gotthold Lessing from 1774 to 1778. In those so-called *Wolfenbüttel Fragmente*, Reimarus argued that Jesus was a Jewish reformer who sought nothing more than the revitalization of his Jewish faith, and that Christianity was invented after his death by his disciples in a deliberate and deceitful effort to serve their own ambitions.⁷ The publication launched an outcry among conservative theologians, for whom Jesus was not simply an inspiring religious leader but rather

⁵ David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁶ Moshe Pelli, "The Impact of Deism on the Hebrew Literature of the Enlightenment in Germany," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 6 (1972): 35–59.

⁷ Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Fragments*, trans. Ralph S. Fraser, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

the son of God, and it also launched, according to Albert Schweitzer, the movement known as the “quest for the historical Jesus,” a scholarly effort to recover the historicity of Christian origins and the life and teachings of Jesus.

Christian reconsiderations of the historical Jesus found an echo among Jewish thinkers, from Orthodox rabbis to Reformers. Adam Ferziger has pointed out that some Orthodox rabbis of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expressed positive appreciation of Christianity even as they polemicized against the nascent movement of Reform Judaism.⁸ Jacob Emden (1698–1776), a leading Orthodox rabbi in Germany in the late eighteenth century, expressed a positive appreciation of Jesus, stressing the commonalities between his teachings and those of other rabbis of antiquity, but also insisting on Jesus’s human, non-divine character.⁹ Emden’s goal, however, was not to encourage Jews to take a more positive view of Christianity; rather, as the historian Maciejko has demonstrated, Emden’s motivation was to curry favor with Catholic church authorities in Poland, in hopes they would collaborate with him in opposing Jewish heretical movements that were adopting Christian rituals, notably the Frankists.¹⁰ As a harsh polemicist against liberal Jews and religious reforms, Emden, writes Maciejko, “deeply interiorized the Christian understanding of heresy and theological error and became for Judaism what Irenaeus and Hippolytus had become for Christianity: a chief heresiologist.”¹¹

That Jesus was a Jewish reformer, not a divine being, whose goal was the revitalization of Judaism, not the creation of a new religion, was the common view shared by most Jewish thinkers and liberal Protestant theologians. Mendelssohn insisted that Jesus taught nothing more than Judaism, and that there was no evidence to support claims to his divine incarnation. He wrote, in his widely known defense of Jewish emancipation, *Jerusalem: or, On Religious Power and Judaism* (1783), “Jesus of Nazareth himself observed not only the law of Moses, but also the ordinances of

⁸ Adam Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁹ Blu Greenberg, “Jacob Emden: The Views of an Enlightened Traditionalist on Christianity,” *Judaism* 27, no. 3 (1978): 351–363; Harvey Falk, “Rabbi Jacob Emden’s Views on Christianity and *The Noachide Commandments*,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 105–111.

¹⁰ See Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

¹¹ Pawel Maciejko, “The Peril of Heresy, the Birth of a New Faith: The Quest for a Common Jewish–Christian Front against Franksim,” in *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*, ed. Glenn Dynner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 244.

the rabbis; and whatever seems to contradict this in the speeches and acts ascribed to him appears to do so only at first glance. Closely examined, everything is in complete agreement not only with Scripture, but also with the tradition.” Mendelssohn not only viewed Jesus as a Jew, he also presented Judaism as the basis for Christianity: “Now Christianity, as you know, is built on Judaism, and if the latter falls, it must necessarily collapse with it into one heap of ruins.”¹² The theological legitimacy of Christianity, he suggests in a motif that has continued among Jewish thinkers until the present day, depends upon the flourishing of Judaism.

Jewish views of Christianity in the modern era stressed the dependence of Christianity on Judaism: Judaism was described as the “mother” religion, Christianity as the “daughter” religion, Jesus as a Jew and Pharisaic religion as the context in which he was nurtured. When the metaphor was invoked in an address to Christian theologians in the 1960s by Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972), the image was received warmly as an indication of religious intimacy. Heschel wrote, “The children did not arise to call the mother blessed; instead, they called the mother blind. . . . Judaism is the mother of the Christian faith. It has a stake in the destiny of Christianity. Should a mother ignore her child, even a wayward, rebellious one?”¹³

During the course of the modern era, however, the metaphor of Christianity as Judaism’s daughter religion and the claim of Jesus’s Jewish (not Christian!) identity shifted in implications and audience. Mendelssohn thought Jesus was not an original figure but a good Jew, yet kept his views mostly private to avoid debates with Christian theologians; some decades later, Geiger expressed similar views in public and was reviled by Christian theologians; a generation later, Martin Buber (1878–1965) claimed Jesus as his younger brother and was heralded, while Heschel avoided the topic of Jesus altogether and focused instead on commonalities between Jewish and Christian religious experiences, which he termed “depth theology.”

The dilemma that haunted the modern period is the gauntlet Mendelssohn threw down: Jesus was a faithful Jew in every respect. What, then, is the purpose of Christianity? If it is the religion of Jesus, how is it distinguished from Judaism? And if the teachings of Jesus are those of liberal Pharisaic religion, what created the rigid legal system of the Talmud? Mendelssohn’s comments emphasizing Jesus’s adherence to Judaism seemed to be a way to build bridges to Christianity, but the claim also

¹² Michah Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn’s Theological-Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79.

¹³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion is an Island,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 242.

suggested that Christianity itself was not the creation of Jesus, but a religion subsequently constructed about him. Judaism was the faith of Jesus, Christianity the religion about Jesus.

The next generation of Jewish thinkers, writing in the nineteenth century, used historicism as their method of understanding both Jewish identity and Christianity's dependence on Judaism. The *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the historical study of Judaism, emphasized scholarship on the Second Temple period and early rabbinic Judaism. Participants in this movement sought not only to elucidate developments in Jewish history, but also to demonstrate how early Christian texts can best be clarified with reference to Jewish sources, particularly rabbinic texts. Scholars representing this movement include Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), Joseph Salvador (1796–1873), Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), Levi Herzfeld (1810–1884), Joseph Derenbourg (1811–1895), Joseph Eschelbacher (1848–1916), and Felix Perles (1874–1933), among others. In arguing that Jesus can best be understood by studying the gospel texts in the context of Jewish sources, these scholars were engaging in a radical reversal of the gaze: instead of Christians examining Judaism and its history, Jews were now placing Christianity under the microscope of historicism and arriving at conclusions that frequently discomfited Christian theologians. Christian theologians, long accustomed to writing treatises dissecting the history and nature of Judaism, were unaccustomed to their own religion being placed for scrutiny under the gaze of a Jewish theologian. For them, this was the height of insolence and incivility.

Whereas the general Christian view portrayed late Second Temple Judaism as moribund, ossified, heartless, and spiritless, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* presented a Judaism of depth and vitality. Instead of viewing the New Testament as a text that attempts to negate Judaism, they placed it within the context of ongoing, inner-Jewish religious debates. Jesus's arguments with Sadducees and Pharisees were not his effort to destroy those Jewish sects, but rather part of the heated controversies between them.

The most significant Jewish reevaluation of Christianity emerged with the groundbreaking work of Abraham Geiger, one of the most original and creative figures of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and a leader in the nineteenth-century movement of liberal (Reform) Judaism. Trained originally in Arabic studies at the University of Bonn, Geiger's first book, *What did Muhammad Take from Judaism?*, published in 1833, demonstrated the numerous parallels between Qur'anic and rabbinic texts. His study was the first to demonstrate the close affinities between Qur'anic readings of the Hebrew Bible and those of rabbinic (especially midrashic) literature, and the book was hailed all over Europe as opening a new way to understand the origins of Islam: its Jewish context. Almost thirty years later,

when Geiger made similar arguments about the New Testament, however, his work – still widely read throughout Europe by Christian theologians – was reviled and condemned. Geiger was less interested in building bridges between Synagogue and Church than in changing the prevailing Christian view of Jewish history and religion. Nearly all subsequent Jewish thinkers followed his interpretation of Christian origins, but only in the second half of the twentieth century, after World War II, did his claims become accepted by Christians as well.

Geiger's argument began with his revisionist view of Jewish history during the Second Temple era, presented in his highly technical magnum opus, the *Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel* (The Original Text and Translations of the Bible), published in 1857, one of the nineteenth century's most important works of Jewish scholarship. In that book, Geiger defined two tendencies in early Judaism: the liberal, progressive, democratizing movement led by the Pharisees, who struggled against the Sadducees, the conservative, aristocratic Temple priests who were anxious to preserve their prerogatives and authority. Geiger depicted the Pharisees with great sympathy as the reformers of Judaism of their day. Far from being the figures of hypocrisy and rigid adherence to religious law depicted in the New Testament, the Pharisees considered every Jew the equal of a priest, and the rabbinic literature that they began to compose eased the religious observances prescribed by the Bible and offered teachings that exhorted virtuous and pious behavior similar to those of the Gospels.

In his subsequent survey of Jewish history, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte* (Judaism and its History), Geiger declared that while the Greeks had had a genius for philosophy, Jews have a genius for religion. In a passage that offended many contemporary Protestant theologians, Geiger wrote that Jesus

was a Jew, a Pharisaic Jew with Galilean coloring – a man who shared the hopes of his time and who believed that these hopes were fulfilled in him. He did not utter a new thought, nor did he break down the barriers of nationality.... He did not abolish any part of Judaism; he was a Pharisee who walked in the way of Hillel.¹⁴

Geiger's argument was radical: Jesus said nothing new or original, Paul invented a religion about him, and the true heirs of Jesus's own religious tradition – that of liberal, progressive Pharisaism – were modern-day Reform Jews, seeking to liberalize Judaism. Those wishing to follow the

¹⁴ Abraham Geiger, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, 3 volumes (Breslau, 1865–71); English translation, *Judaism and Its History*, trans. by Charles Newburgh (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1911), 131.

example of Jesus – the faith of Jesus, rather than the religion about him – ought to convert to liberal Judaism!

While classical Hellenic culture had ultimately deteriorated into an impure Hellenism, Geiger argued that Jewish monotheism was preserved by Jews, along with a strict adherence to ethics. Christianity and Islam had both started as monotheistic religions, but Christianity had incorporated Greek, pagan teachings that corrupted Jewish monotheism and transformed the faith of Jesus into a religion that demanded belief in irrational dogma. Such demands of dogmatic belief, in contrast to demands regarding ethical behavior, ran contrary to modernity's openness to science and the free exercise of reason. Since Judaism demanded only ethical behavior, rather than belief in dogma, Judaism was better suited to modernity, Geiger claimed, than was Christianity. Indeed, the faith of Jesus was precisely what liberal Protestants claimed they wanted as part of the purging of Christianity of dogma, miracles, and church doctrine. Reimarus had already noted the absence of significant difference between Jesus's teachings and those of Judaism.

When the same kind of argument was put forward by Geiger, the Jewish theologian, a hundred years later, the hostile reactions of Christian theologians came swiftly and sharply. His work was widely read and discussed, and widely condemned by Christian theologians. While acknowledging the legitimacy of his historical studies, Christian scholars were discomfited by his conclusions. Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890), for example, a conservative theologian whose life's goal was winning Jewish love for Jesus, thought Geiger had misrepresented the Pharisees and defamed Jesus. Citing a Talmudic passage which reports that Hillel taught that one should always tell a bride she is beautiful, even if she is not, Delitzsch wrote that this shows that "Hillel sometimes transgressed the bounds of truth."¹⁵ Geiger had elevated Hillel, Delitzsch wrote, "in order to rank Jesus below him ... Hillel, however, left everything as he found it ... All history, on the other hand, proclaims what Jesus has become."¹⁶ "The tendencies of these two diverged as widely as heaven from earth. The teaching of Hillel is juristic, casuistic, and narrow-mindedly national, while that of Jesus is universally religious, moral, and humane."¹⁷

Probably the most important and lasting critique of Geiger's work came from the young Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), who became one of the most influential biblical scholars of the modern era. Wellhausen devoted a

¹⁵ Franz Delitzsch, *Jesus und Hillel: Mit Rücksicht auf Renan und Geiger* (Erlangen: Verlag von Andreas Deichert, 1866), 178; Talmud Bavli, tractate Ketubot, pages 16b–17a.

¹⁶ Delitzsch, *Jesus und Hillel*, 178.

¹⁷ Delitzsch, *Jesus und Hillel*, 161.

book to attacking Geiger's view of the Pharisees. He rejected out of hand Geiger's claim that Pharisaism constituted a liberalization of Jewish religious practice, and rejected Geiger's use of the sources. Even the early rabbinic texts, such as the Mishnah, were unacceptable sources, according to Wellhausen, for reconstructing first-century Judaism. Rather, he relied on the gospel polemics against the Pharisees, such as Matthew 23, as historically reliable representations of Pharisaic religion. What characterizes the Pharisees is their "religious materialism."¹⁸ They "killed nature through the commandments. 613 written commandments and 1000 other laws and they leave no room for conscience. One forgot God and the way to him in the Torah."¹⁹

Despite Wellhausen's critique, affirming Jesus and Pharisaic religion while demoting Christianity became a popular Jewish formulation, reiterated in the work of numerous Jewish historians and rabbis well into the twentieth century, including Kaufmann Kohler, Samuel Hirsch, and Samuel Sandmel, among many others. Still another, contrasting viewpoint was developed by Heinrich Graetz, whose eleven-volume narrative, *History of the Jews*, tried to marginalize Jesus within first-century Judaism. Graetz argued that Jesus stemmed from the Galilee, a region dominated by simple, uneducated Jews not properly versed in rabbinic teachings. Furthermore, according to Graetz, Jesus was an Essene, and therefore uninvolved in the highly sophisticated, intellectual Pharisaic movement that ultimately developed into rabbinic Judaism. From the Essenes – or at least, the Essenes as described by the first-century Jewish historian Josephus – Jesus adopted baptism and promoted apocalypticism, which, Graetz claimed, was otherwise foreign to Judaism, though popular among the simple-minded Galilean Jews. It should be noted that Graetz's chapter on Jesus was withheld by the publisher of the first edition of volume three of his *History*, printed in 1856, out of fear that it would stimulate a hostile reaction, and it only appeared in the book's second printing, in 1863.²⁰ Apparently Mendelssohn's worries about speaking openly about Jesus retained validity nearly a century later.

¹⁸ Julius Wellhausen, *Die Pharisäer und die Sadducäer. Eine Untersuchung zur inneren jüdischen Geschichte* (Greifswald/Bamberg 1874; Hannover 1924; Göttingen 1967), 19; *The Pharisees and the Sadducees: An Examination of Internal Jewish History*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Wellhausen, *Die Pharisäer und die Sadducäer*, 19.

²⁰ The chapter also appeared as an appendix to Moses Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem: Die letzte Nationalitätsfrage*, published in 1862. Hess had revised the manuscript of *Rom und Jerusalem*, a proto-Zionist work, while a guest in Graetz's home for several months in the spring and summer of 1862. See Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 136 and 273.

What were Jews permitted and expected to say about Jesus and Christianity? The concerns of Mendelssohn's and Graetz's publishers, and the many hostile reactions to Geiger's work from Christian theologians, indicate that Jews were treading on thin ice. Perhaps the Christian reactions perceived the radical nature of the Jewish assertions about Jesus. In writing their own version of Jesus and Christian origins, Jews were staking a radical political claim. Whereas Judaism had long been under Christian scrutiny, the gaze was now reversed: Jews were examining Christian texts and formulating their own conclusions regarding the origins of Christianity. Claiming there was nothing new or original in Jesus's teachings was not simply a denial or negation, but an attempt to overthrow Christian hegemony over Western culture; it was a revolt of the colonized.²¹ Christianity was transformed into a daughter religion, serving Judaism's own interests by bringing Jewish monotheism to the pagan world.

Overarching claims to Judaism's superiority extended further, to a widespread insistence by modern Jewish thinkers that Judaism was better suited to modernity than was Christianity. Judaism, claimed Mendelssohn, Geiger, Cohen, and others, was a religion of reason, not dogma. Free to believe or not, and to arrive at religious beliefs through the exercise of reason, meant that Judaism did not seek intellectual constraints as did Christianity, which Paul had shaped into a set of dogma that often contradicted reason, yet were essential to defining Christian identity. These included the incarnation, Trinity, and virgin birth. Such Jewish claims that Christianity rested on beliefs contrary to reason were carried over from the Middle Ages, when Jews, sometimes in alliance with Muslims, painted Christianity as a religion of absurd doctrines.

Not all Jewish thinkers approached Christianity through a historicist lens. Nineteenth-century German-Jewish philosophers, such as Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889) and Salomon Formstecher (1808–1889), developed a theological model of incorporation, in which both Judaism and Christianity became components of a single whole. These philosophers transformed the contemporary philosophical methods of Schelling and Hegel that had been used to guarantee the dominance of Christianity over Judaism into systems in which, through the identical philosophical methods, Judaism emerged as theologically superior to Christianity. That superiority was identified primarily as Judaism's monotheism and its ethics, enshrined in religious law. Christianity's task was to spread Jewish monotheism to the Greco-Roman pagan world. The so-called 'mission theory'

²¹ Susannah Heschel, "Revolt of the Colonized: Abraham Geiger's *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a Challenge to Christian Hegemony in the Academy," *New German Critique* 77 (1999): 61–86.

of nineteenth-century liberal Jewish thought may well be, as Stephen Poppel has argued, a reinvestment of the contemporary understanding of the “Pauline” distinction between Jewish particularism and Christian universalism with a positive valuation: Christianity becomes the vehicle by which Judaism is able to reach the pagan world.²² According to this mission theory, which has some precedents in pre-modern Jewish thought, Christianity, as a kind of Jewish messenger, inevitably fell victim to syncretism, developing rigid dogma alien to its Jewish roots, while Judaism retained itself pure of corrupt influences.

Other Jewish historians and theologians turned to the study of Islam and made similar arguments about its missionary function. Starting in the 1830s with the publication of Geiger’s study of rabbinic influences on the Qur’an, Jewish philologists argued that Islam originated from Judaism. Whereas Christianity had corrupted Jewish monotheism with Greco-Roman pagan ideas, Islam remained closer to Judaism by preserving a strict monotheism, rejecting anthropomorphism, and proclaiming a religious law that enshrined a strict ethics. Ultimately, these arguments imply, it is Judaism that gave rise to all three monotheisms and, through them, to Western civilization. Rather than a religion that “died” with the birth of Christ, or a desiccated system of law, Judaism forms the tree trunk, with Christianity and Islam as two of its branches. Indeed, most modern Jewish thinkers favored Islam, claiming it remained closer to its roots in Judaism, but both religions depended on the health of the trunk of Judaism for their own survival. Such Jewish arguments incorporated both universalism with particularism: Judaism was the universal religion, giving birth to Christianity and Islam, but in its Jewish particularism preserved the true religion better than either of its daughters.

These well-developed tenets of modern Jewish thought managed to cross the boundaries between Liberal and Orthodox Judaism, and also crossed the ocean from Germany to the United States, as German-born liberal rabbis, such as Samuel Hirsch, David Einhorn, and Kaufmann Kohler, immigrated during the second half of the nineteenth century.²³ They

²² Michael A. Meyer, “Universalism and Jewish Unity in the Thought of Abraham Geiger” and Stephen Poppel, “Response to Michael Meyer,” both in *The Role of Religion in Modern Jewish History*, ed. Jacob Katz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

²³ Gershom Scholem has pointed out ways in which the *Wissenschaft vom Judentum* leveled many of the differences between liberal and Orthodox during the second half of the nineteenth century. See “Mi-Tokh Hirhurim `al Hokhmat Yisra’el,” *Luah ha-Ares 1944–45*; repr. *Devarim be-Go 2* (Tel Aviv, 1982), 385–403; abbreviated trans. by the author, “Wissenschaft vom Judentum einst und jetzt,” *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts 9* (1960): 10–20; repr. in *Judaica 1* (Frankfurt am Main, 1963), 147–64. The American

popularized the argument that Jesus was a good Jew, Paul was a Jewish heretic and the real founder of Christianity, and Christianity had betrayed the teachings of Jesus and was really the religion of Paul. While focusing primarily on the Gospels, they tended to ignore the Pauline writings, and, as the historian Uriel Tal has noted, they presented Christianity as a religion of dogma even though most Protestants of their day had in fact renounced supernatural miracles and dogma in favor of a historical Jesus as a teacher and preacher.²⁴

By the turn of the century, liberal Jews began to declare Jesus one of Judaism's great religious leaders as part of the ongoing effort to de-Christianize him. Martin Buber was representative of the tendency when he proclaimed:

From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother. That Christianity has regarded and does regard him as God and Saviour has always appeared to me a fact of the highest importance which, for his sake and my own, I must endeavor to understand ... I am more than certain that a great place belongs to him in Israel's history of faith and that this place cannot be described by any of the usual categories.²⁵

Buber's impact on Jews in Europe during the years before and after World War I was enormous, and his influence extended to social theorists and Christian theologians as well. His books on Hasidism, written for a non-religious audience, presented that pietistic movement as engaged in the same existentialist quest as philosophers. His most famous work, *I and Thou*, published in 1922, de-exoticized religious experience and presented it as a relationship of profundity independent of religious doctrine, tradition, or even community. Buber's work was influential, wrote the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, because he presented "mysticism as an element within prophetic religion," and maintained a "relation between prophetic religion and culture, especially in the social and political realms."²⁶ Indeed, Buber was an active member in the binational Zionist movement, Brit Shalom, and moved to Palestine after losing his position at the University of Frankfurt during the Third Reich.²⁷

rabbinate attracted the more radical reformers within the German rabbinate, those who had difficulties securing a rabbinical post within Germany.

²⁴ Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany*, trans. Noah Jacobs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976).

²⁵ Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (New York: Collier Books, 1951), 12–13.

²⁶ Paul Tillich, "Martin Buber and Christian Thought," *Commentary* 5, no. 6 (1948): 516.

²⁷ Paul Mendes-Flohr, ed., *Martin Buber: A Land of Two Peoples* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

While affirming the Jewishness of Jesus, Buber nonetheless was highly critical of Christianity. In his comparative study, *Two Types of Faith*, he distinguished between “emunah,” the Hebrew word for faith that he said characterized biblical and Pharisaic religion, and “pistis,” the Greek word for belief (in a proposition) that he claimed characterized Christian teaching as derived from the Pauline epistles and Greek philosophy. Jesus, he claimed, stood entirely within the Jewish context, an expression of Jewish religiosity. With frequent lectures to Protestant groups in post-war Germany, Buber became a highly acclaimed and influential figure in Christian circles, and radically altered the depiction of Judaism for his readers.²⁸

Other Zionists also wrote in positive terms about Jesus. The American rabbi and Zionist leader Stephen Wise echoed Buber when he declared, “Jesus was a Jew, Hebrew of Hebrews ... Jesus did not teach or wish to teach a new religion.”²⁹ Still others sought a more forthright diminution of Christianity. Arthur Marmorstein compared the New Testament with rabbinic texts, and concluded his study by claiming that Jesus said nothing new.³⁰ Claude Montefiore (1858–1938), a British scholar who served as one of the leaders of the liberal Jewish community in England, immersed himself in Christian scholarship on the New Testament. He concluded that Jesus may not have been original, but that he brought to the fore prophetic teachings of Judaism that had been neglected by other Jews. Montefiore sought to mitigate Paul’s criticisms of the law by arguing that Paul misunderstood Judaism: “The early religion of Paul was more somber and gloomy than Rabbinic Judaism; the world was a more miserable and God-forsaken place.”³¹ Daniel Chwolson (1819–1911), a Jewish convert to Christianity who became a noted scholar of early Judaism and a professor in Russia, commented: “A Jew reading the gospels feels at home.”³²

Among Orthodox rabbis, similar views were also expressed, at least prior to World War I; they include Zwi Perez Chajes (1876–1927), and Elias Soloweyczyk (1801–1885), who echoed the kinds of arguments put forward

²⁸ Buber, *Two Types of Faith*.

²⁹ Stephen Wise, *Challenging Years: The Autobiography of Stephen Wise* (New York: Putnam, 1929), 281.

³⁰ Arthur Marmorstein, *Talmud und Neues Testament* (Jamnitz: Selbstverlag, 1908), 29.

³¹ Claude Montefiore, *Judaism and St. Paul* (London: M. Goshen, 1914), 81f; cited by Walter Jacob, *Christianity through Jewish Eyes* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974).

³² Daniel Chwolson, *Das letzte Passahmahl Christi und der Tag seines Todes nach den in Übereinstimmung gebrachten Berichten der Synoptiker und des Evangelium Johannis* (St. Petersburg: M. Eggers, 1892), 88.

by reformers such as Geiger.³³ Chajes, who served as chief rabbi of Vienna, and was also a Zionist leader and a Bible scholar, wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Gospel of Mark in 1899, and subsequently argued that “You have to be a rabbinical Jew, to know Midrash, if you wish to fathom the spirit of Christianity in its earliest years. Above all, you must read the Gospels in the Hebrew translation.”³⁴ Soloweyczyk, a member of a distinguished Lithuanian rabbinical family, published a Hebrew translation and commentary on the Gospel of Matthew in 1869, later translated into French, German, and English, presenting verse-by-verse parallels with rabbinic literature and proclaiming: “Jesus had no other end in view than to animate men with faith in the one God and to urge them on to the practice of all the neighborly virtues and love for everyone, even enemies. May God grant us all, Jews and Christians, that we may follow the teaching of Jesus and his shining example, for our well-being in this world and our salvation in the next.”³⁵

The liberal rabbi and scholar Leo Baeck (1873–1956), writing in Germany during the 1920s, followed Geiger’s lead on the Pharisees and Jesus, and emphasized the degeneracy that resulted from Paul’s departure from Jesus’s own adherence to rabbinic Judaism. The result, according to Baeck, is that Judaism maintained itself as a “classical religion” of ethics, but Christianity had deteriorated into a “romantic religion” of effeminate spirituality:

In this ecstatic abandonment, which wants so much to be seized and embraced and would like to pass away in the roaring ocean of the world, the distinctive character of romantic religion stands revealed – the feminine trait that marks it. There is something passive about its piety; it feels so touchingly helpless and weary; it wants to be seized and inspired from above, embraced by a flood of grace which should descend upon it to consecrate it and possess it – a will-less instrument of the wondrous ways of God.³⁶

³³ Eliyahu Tsevi Soloweyczyk, *Kol Kore, o, Ha-Talmud ve'ha-Berit ba-Hadashah* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies and Research, 1985; originally, Paris, 1869); Elias Soloweyczyk, *Die Bibel, der Talmud, und das Evangelium*, trans. Moritz Gruenwald (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1877); Aron Kaminka, *Studien zur Geschichte Galiläas* (Berlin: H. Engel, 1890).

³⁴ Hirsch Peretz Chajes, “Jüdisches in den Evangelien,” dated November 6, 1919, in *Reden und Vorträge*, ed. Moritz Rosenfeld (Vienna: Selbstverlag, 1932), 271. See also his *Markus-Studien* (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1899).

³⁵ Soloweyczyk, *Kol Kore*, 9.

³⁶ Leo Baeck “Romantic Religion,” in *Judaism and Christianity: Essays by Leo Baeck*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958), 192, 189–292; originally Leo Baeck, “Romantische Religion,” *Festschrift zum 50 jährigen Bestehen der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin, 1922), 1–48.

Christianity is effeminate, Baeck argued, and therefore lacks ethics and moral responsibility, whereas Judaism is a masculine religion that places ethical commandments at the forefront and makes no demands that its adherents accept irrational dogma.

The efforts by Jews to demonstrate the affinities between the teachings of Jesus and those of the rabbis of his day led some Jews and Christians of liberal theological persuasion to recognize that the boundaries between the two religions had become blurred. Both liberal Jews and liberal Protestants were advocating a religion purified of the obligations of law and dogma, respectively, and were creating a set of religious teachings that sounded remarkably similar. The absence of a clear-cut boundary encouraged new efforts to disparage one another's religious claims in order to forge the distinctiveness of one's own.

The great German-Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) serves as an important transitional figure in Jewish views of Christianity. His work presents both a culmination of the historical arguments put forth by Geiger and those who followed his lead, and a strong philosophical argument that affirmed Christianity, but presented Judaism as ethically superior. Cohen acknowledged the influence of Protestantism on modern Reform Judaism, which “discarded the obligatory character of the Talmud as they [Protestants] have the traditions of the church.... We think and feel much more deeply in a Protestant spirit on all spiritual questions of religion.”³⁷ In his study of Cohen's work, John C. Lyden sees incarnational elements in Cohen's critique of Christianity. Continuing in the tradition inaugurated by Geiger, Cohen viewed Christianity as the product of Greek polytheism combined with Jewish monotheism that resulted in non-rational doctrines such as the incarnation, God becoming man. By contrast, he emphasized Judaism's rejection of anthropomorphism, a position he viewed as philosophically superior. For ethical judgment to occur, Cohen argued, following Kantian principles, human autonomy was necessary. Yet the incarnation was both a humanization of God and a divinization of man. As Lyden writes, for Cohen Christianity has undermined moral autonomy: “Morality is then not based in our own freedom but in our dissolution into God in Christ.”³⁸ The incarnation makes Jesus into a moral ideal that human beings

³⁷ Hermann Cohen, “Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage,” *Jüdische Schriften* (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1924), vol. II, 93. Cohen is here referring to the liberal Protestant rejection of numerous doctrines, such as the incarnation and virgin birth of Jesus, whom they affirmed as an ideal person with a unique and extraordinary religious subjectivity, rather than a divinely incarnate being.

³⁸ John C. Lyden, “Hermann Cohen's Relationship to Christian Thought,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1994): 279–301.

can never achieve: “If Christ grounds morality as an historical person ... then there is a distinction made between the unique human and all other humans. This distinction becomes a new impediment to the idea of moral autonomy. Only if the unique human indicates the idea of humanity, only then will moral autonomy not be lost.”³⁹

The contamination of Jewish monotheism with Greek myth, then, not only was the founding moment of Christianity, but also a betrayal of Jesus’s own faith and the compromise of human moral autonomy. The martyrdom of Jesus is a Jewish story, according to Cohen, a prefiguration of Jews suffering in Diaspora. The irony, writes Robert Erlewine, “is that if Christians charge that Jews were blind to the Messiah in their midst and killed him, Cohen is charging that Christians fail to see that Jesus is not only part and parcel of the Jewish testimony to the messianic ideal, but that it is the Christians who torture and kill those who bear witness in their assault on Jews in the name of the charge of deicide.”⁴⁰ While critical of Christianity as a religion of myth that was therefore philosophically erroneous and incapable of morality, Cohen saw affinities between Judaism and Islam, writing, “The Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages does not grow so much out of Islam as out of the original monotheism. The more intimate relationship between Judaism and Islam – more intimate than with other monotheistic religions – can be explained by the kinship that exists between the mother and daughter religion.”⁴¹ Perceived affinities between Judaism and Islam by Jewish thinkers functioned at times as tools for marking distinctions between Judaism and Christianity.

Other German Jews took a different approach. Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), one of the most complex philosophers of Judaism in Germany, had a complex relationship to Christianity. During the course of his close friendship with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888–1973), they debated the merits of Judaism and Christianity, and in 1913 Rosenzweig, at the age of 27, at

³⁹ Hermann Cohen, “Religion und Sittlichkeit,” in *Jüdische Schriften*, vol. III, 156–157.

⁴⁰ Robert Erlewine, “From Exclusivity to Partnership: Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Legacy of Liberal Judaism,” paper delivered at the American Academy of Religion meetings, San Francisco, CA, November 2011.

⁴¹ Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (New York: F. Ungar, 1972), 92; “Die jüdische Philosophie des Mittelalters erwächst nicht sowohl aus dem Monotheismus des Islam, als vielmehr aus dem ursprünglichen Monotheismus, und höchstens kann die Verwandtschaft, die zwischen dieser Tochterreligion und der der Mutter besteht, die innige Beziehung verständlich machen, welche intimer als sonstwo zwischen Judentum und Islam sich anbahnt.” Hermann Cohen, *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Leipzig: G. Fock, 1919), 107–108.

first considered converting to Protestantism, then decided he would not. A variety of factors led him to change his mind and dedicate his life to the study of Judaism instead, and he even declined a prestigious professorship at a German university in the field of philosophy to pursue his Jewish interests. While undertaking military service during World War I, Rosenzweig continued his discussions with Rosenstock-Huussy via exchange of letters, later published, and also began what became his magnum opus, *The Star of Redemption*, published in 1921, a book that is often misunderstood as sympathetic to Christianity, according to Batnitzky.⁴²

In *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig argued that Judaism and Christianity were on separate but complementary and intertwined paths (without Islam), and that their ultimate truth could not be determined until the messianic era. Until then, they would remain enmeshed in a conflict and enmity that had been deliberately established between them by God. He writes, "Before God, then, Jew and Christian both labor at the same task. ... [However, God] has set enmity between the two for all time and has withal most intimately bound each to each."⁴³ Like Cohen, Rosenzweig affirmed Judaism's mission of preserving pure monotheism. That is, the rejection of Judaism is a necessary component of Christian theological self-affirmation, and it quickly develops into a hatred of the Jews.⁴⁴ As Batnitzky has pointed out, for Rosenzweig, relations between Judaism and Christianity are not constituted by mutuality and tolerance, but asymmetry and judgment.⁴⁵ Dialogue can only take place between positions that are different, and must maintain the differences if each participant is to retain its identity, so that identity is built on the negation of the other. While both Jews and Christians seek a relationship with God the Father, Jews are condescending toward Christians for thinking they need a third person, Jesus Christ, to mediate between them and God: "every Jew feels in the depths of his soul that the Christian relation to God, and so in a sense their religion, is particularly and extremely pitiful, poverty-stricken, and ceremonious."⁴⁶

⁴² Leora Batnitzky, "Dialogue as Judgment, Not Mutual Affirmation: A New Look at Franz Rosenzweig's Dialogical Philosophy," *Journal of Religion* 79, no. 4 (1999): 523–544.

⁴³ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 415–416.

⁴⁴ Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy and Franz Rosenzweig, *Judaism Despite Christianity*, trans. Dorothy M. Emmet (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 112.

⁴⁵ Batnitzky, "Dialogue as Judgment."

⁴⁶ Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huussy, *Judaism Despite Christianity*, 113. Gregory Kaplan, "In the End Shall Christians Become Jews and Jews, Christians? On Rosenzweig's Apocalyptic Eschatology," *Cross Currents* 53, no. 4 (2004): 511–529.

An example of a Jewish rejection of Christianity is Rosenzweig's claim that it is Judaism, not Christianity, that represents a theological universalism. The Jewish God is open to all people, without requiring access via Jesus, the church, or particular doctrines, as does Christianity. Jewish particularism, for Rosenzweig, has a protective, rather than exclusive, function. Yet Christianity also has a positive function for Judaism. Rosenzweig uses the image of the "star" to convey an inward force within Judaism and an outward force that drives Christianity that complement each other. Ultimately, which of the two is the true religion, preferred by God, will not be known until the messianic era.

Rosenzweig is a unique voice whose work appeared on the eve of doom, just a few years before Hitler came to power and Jews first in Germany, then throughout Europe, began to lose their rights, emigrate, and ultimately were deported and murdered. His work was revived after the war, and came into influence and prominence, among Christians as well as Jews, toward the end of the century. On the more popular level, however, Jews retained a primary focus on the older narrative, that Jesus was a loyal Jew, and Paul the founder of Christianity.

The dialogue of judgment, not tolerance, that Rosenzweig advocated, is implicit in modern Jewish discussions of Jesus. By divorcing Jesus from Christian understandings of him, and transforming him into a symbol of Jewish historical experience, Jews were attempting to reverse Christian supersessionist theology; theirs was a revolt of the colonized, a politicized theological engagement. Claiming a Jewish Jesus, then, is not a Christianization of Judaism, but more frequently stands in polemical relationship to that religion, and serves as an assertion of Jewish interests in a society dominated by (secularized) Christian culture. For that reason, it is not surprising to find positive statements about Jesus in the writings of Zionists, Reform and Orthodox rabbis, liberals and conservatives.

In their effort to recover a strong, vibrant Jewish history, Zionists sought to reclaim Jesus by arguing that he did not seek a dissolution of Jewish nationalism. Sweden's chief rabbi, Gottlieb Klein (1852–1914), wrote that in the gospels, "a Jew is speaking, no cult hero, but a Jew with a marked national consciousness."⁴⁷ In 1922, the Zionist Joseph Klausner (1874–1960) published his *Jesus of Nazareth*, the first book on Jesus written in modern Hebrew, both in order to make his contribution to the world of New Testament scholarship, and to affirm a central role for Jewish beliefs

⁴⁷ Gottlieb Klein, *Ist Jesus eine historische Persönlichkeit?* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1910), 27; cf. "Zur Erläuterung der Evangelien aus Talmud und Midrasch," *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 5 (1904): 144–153.

in the course of Western history.⁴⁸ Klausner was well-versed in scholarly debates over Jesus and Second Temple Judaism, but his attempt at an original interpretation did not exert an influence in the scholarly community. Jesus, in his view, was a humble and pious Pharisee who had departed the boundaries of Jewish nationhood, making him unsuitable to Jews, while Paul was the real founder of Christianity.⁴⁹ The implication for modern Jews unsure of Zionism is clear: to reject Jewish nationalism is to end up like Jesus, as a Christian. Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889–1963), a Bible scholar and philosopher in the State of Israel who wrote a nationalist version of Jewish biblical history, attributed Christianity's success to the Jewishness of its message. That message could not be accepted by the pagan world directly from Judaism, because the Jews were in a state of exile and dispersion; "Christianity acted as the messenger of Judaism."⁵⁰ Kaufmann diverged somewhat from other Jewish writers on Jesus, arguing for apocalyptic elements in his teachings, but he drew no significant conclusions from that point.⁵¹ While the claims of these Jewish historians regarding Jesus exerted little impact on the Christian New Testament scholarship of their day, they did ultimately become conventional understandings of the early Jesus movement by the late twentieth century.

Among Jews in Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jesus was often invoked as a figure of literary and artistic interest. During the 1880s, Eva-Maria Kaffanke has noted, German artistic representations of Jesus began to be criticized for being "too Jewish," so that artists made efforts to find "Oriental" models, at first Muslims and then Germans.⁵² By contrast, Jewish artists emphasized visual identifications of Jesus as a Jew. The Jesus of "Ecce Homo," a sculpture by the Russian Jewish artist Mark Matveevich Antokol'skii (1841–1902), wears a skullcap and sidecurls, and Antokol'skii explained that Jesus "was and died a Jew for truth and brotherhood."⁵³ Drawing on the Gospel of John, the

⁴⁸ Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. by Herbert Danby (New York: Macmillan, 1925).

⁴⁹ Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, trans. W. F. Stinespring (New York: Macmillan, 1943).

⁵⁰ David Berger, "Religion, Nationalism, and Historiography: Yehezkel Kaufmann's Account of Jesus and Early Christianity," in *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction Between Judaism and Other Cultures*, ed. Leo Landmann (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1990), 164.

⁵¹ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Golah VeNekhar* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1929), 355–379.

⁵² Eva-Maria Kaffanke, *Der deutsche Heiland Christusdarstellungen um 1900 im Kontext der völkischen Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2001), 192. Discussions of Jesus's appearance occurred during the 1930s in scholarly and pseudo-scholarly forums. See Hans F. K. Günther, "Wie sah Jesus aus?", *Volk und Rasse 2* (1932): 118–119.

⁵³ Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Origins of the Jewish Jesus," in *Complex Identities: Jewish Consciousness and Modern Art*, ed. Matthew Baigell and Milly Heyd (New

sculpture's title comes from the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate's presentation of a scourged Jesus to the Jewish community of Jerusalem just before he was taken away to be crucified. Yet Antokol'skii's Jesus has no crown of thorns or wounds, and is thus divorced from a Christian context, as Olga Litvak has pointed out. He is not the suffering Christian savior, but the dignified representative of the Jewish spirit. Litvak has explained Antokol'skii's strategy as not so much about Jesus being Jewish as about the viewers of the sculpture being forced to look at Jesus from a Jewish viewpoint.⁵⁴ It was one of the first attempts at visualizing a Jesus figure that would express what Jewish scholars, from Geiger to Baeck, had been suggesting. Similar depictions of Jesus as a Jew, best understood by Jews, are also found in the paintings and sculptures of Jesus by other Jewish artists, such as Maurycy Gottlieb.⁵⁵

Not only is Jesus depicted as a Jew, he also came to be a symbol for Jewish suffering. The 1909 story by the Yiddish writer Sholem Asch (1880–1957), “In a Carnival Night,” describes a papal procession in sixteenth-century Rome that includes the beating of eight Jews. But then, Asch writes, “Jesus climbs down from the cross in St. Peter’s Cathedral to become one of the Jewish martyrs persecuted by the Church. The Virgin Mary joins Mother Rachel in sewing the shrouds.”⁵⁶ In other words, Jesus has remembered his Jewish roots, even if Christians have forgotten them.

The artist Marc Chagall (1887–1985) frequently painted crucifixion scenes, and his most famous, the 1938 “White Crucifixion,” depicts Jesus wrapped in a prayer shawl and nailed to the cross, while around him Jews flee persecution. The death of Jesus does not bring a messianic end to human suffering, but inaugurates a new era of misery for Jews. Chagall’s 1944 “The Crucified” depicts a village with fully clothed Jews hanging from a series of crosses. The Holocaust is the crucifixion, and the Crucifixion is a mass murder of Jews.

Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 51–86; here 58; idem, “Faith, Ethics, and the Holocaust: Christological Symbolism of the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3, no. 4 (1988): 457–481.

⁵⁴ Olga Litvak, “Rome and Jerusalem: The Figure of Jesus in the Creation of Mark Antokol'skii,” in *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*, ed. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 228–254.

⁵⁵ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Painting a People: Maurycy Gottlieb and Jewish Art* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002).

⁵⁶ See the discussion in David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

With the Holocaust, Jews move from affirming Jesus as a Jewish teacher, one of the many rabbis of his day, to viewing him in his crucifixion as the symbol for Jewish suffering. In the Holocaust memoir of Elie Wiesel, *Night*, writes David Roskies, “the Holocaust survivor was compared to Christ.”⁵⁷ The central image of the book is Wiesel’s description of three Jews hanging on the gallows at Auschwitz, the middle victim a young child who is too light to break his neck and so dies agonizingly slowly.⁵⁸ An anonymous voice asks, “Where is God now?” And another answers, “Where is He? Here He is. He is hanging here on this gallows.” There is a kind of Christ envy that emerges from the image; the suffering of the Jews is explained by appeal to Christianity and by claiming superiority to it: the Jews are the greatest victims, and Jesus is a poor imitation. For Wiesel, Jesus was indeed a Jew, but his death suggested not the crucifixion of the first Christian at the hands of the Jews, but the crucifixion of all Jews at the hands of Christians.

Jesus could no longer serve simply as the signifier of Christian supremacy and Jewish subordination; now he represented, in Jewish art and literature, the degeneracy of the Christian religion and its wanton destruction of Jewish lives. Who was actually crucifying whom? As much as the religion about Jesus may have led to antisemitic pogroms, the faith of Jesus would have placed him, Asch, Chagall, and Wiesel imply, among the murdered Jews.

In the first decades after the Holocaust, Christians (theologians and historians) in Germany presented the German churches, both Protestant and Catholic, as victims of National Socialism. While many pastors and priests had been targets of Nazi wrath, others sought a compromise or even a theological synthesis with National Socialism. That most often took the form of a racial theology that rejected the Old Testament as a “Jewish” book inappropriate for Christians; proclaimed Jesus an Aryan, not a Jew; and sought a deJudaization of Christianity. Hitler was said to be avenging Jesus’s death at the hands of the Jews, and one group of Protestant theologians even developed a synthesis of Nazism and Christianity. The political uses of this construction became particularly intense during the Third Reich: for example, the Jewishness of Jesus was used as an argument within Nazism against Christianity, at the same time that some Nazi-supported research institutions attempted to prove the Aryan purity of Jesus.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 262.

⁵⁸ Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Stella Rodway (New York, Hill and Wang, 1960).

⁵⁹ Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

After the war, that history tended to be “forgotten” or denied by Christian theologians in Germany. The theologian Richard Rubenstein (b. 1924) was shocked when he met with Protestant pastor Heinrich Gruber in 1961. Gruber had been imprisoned during the Third Reich in Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps for three years as punishment for having provided assistance to non-Aryan Christians and Jews seeking help escaping the Reich. Gruber told Rubenstein that in his understanding of Old Testament theology, Germany had simply served as the instrument of God’s wrath toward the Jews; their murder was, he told Rubenstein, “part of God’s plan.”⁶⁰ Rubenstein, appalled by Gruber’s statements, concluded that a radical reconsideration of theology, within both Jewish and Christian contexts, was necessary, and he also broke with earlier Jewish affirmations of Jesus: “At the heart of the problem is the fact that it may be impossible for Christians to remain Christians without regarding Jews in mythic, magic, and theological categories.”⁶¹

Among Roman Catholics, as the historian John Connelly has demonstrated, recognition of the racism within the Catholic church that viewed baptized Jews as inferior Christians spurred efforts, led by John Oesterreicher, to make the Vatican reconsider Catholic teachings regarding Judaism.⁶² *Nostra Aetate*, a 1965 declaration of the Second Vatican Council regarding the church’s relations with other religions, presented Judaism as holding continued validity in the eyes of God, renounced charges of deicide against all Jews, and condemned antisemitism. That was the first and most radical Christian affirmation of Judaism in its day. Some years later, in 1980, a synod of the Protestant church of the Rhineland declared that it would no longer seek to missionize Jews, a radical shift in the history of Christianity, which had always prayed for the conversion of the Jews – and often sought their forced conversion.⁶³

One of the most influential Jewish thinkers of the post-war era, whose work was widely read by Christians and who influenced *Nostra Aetate*, was Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972). Born into a distinguished family of Hasidic leaders, a pietistic movement in Eastern Europe, he studied and

⁶⁰ Richard L. Rubenstein, “The Dean and the Chosen People,” in *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 54.

⁶¹ Rubenstein, “The Dean and the Chosen People,” 56.

⁶² John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁶³ Susannah Heschel, “Confronting the Past: Post-1945 German Protestant Theology and the Fate of the Jews,” in *The Protestant–Jewish Conundrum*, Studies in Contemporary Jewry 24, eds. Jonathan Frankel and Ezra Mendelsohn (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2010), 46–70.

taught in Berlin and Frankfurt from 1927 to 1938, where he witnessed Hitler's rise to power and Christian accommodations of National Socialism. Able to flee Nazi Europe in the summer of 1939, Heschel became an important theological voice in the United States, and was deeply engaged with Christian as well as Jewish colleagues; indeed, his work was initially received with greater acclaim by Christian theologians, such as Reinhold Niebuhr. Unlike his Jewish theological predecessors, from Mendelssohn to Buber, Heschel said virtually nothing about Jesus, and rarely discussed, in public, the history of Christian antisemitism, including the role of the churches and the Vatican during the Holocaust. At his meetings with Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Augustin Bea, and other leading Catholics during the Second Vatican Council, he focused on what he felt Jews and Christians share: the Hebrew Bible, experiences of prayer, belief in God's presence in their lives. When asked by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in 1962 to help draft a memorandum that would alter the tone of discussions concerning Catholic-Jewish relations, he wrote:

"With humility and in the spirit of commitment to the prophets of Israel, let us consider the grave problems that confront us all as the children of God. Both Judaism and Christianity share the prophets' belief that God chooses agents through whom His will is made known and His work done throughout history. Both Judaism and Christianity live in the certainty that mankind is in need of ultimate redemption, that God is involved in human history, that in relations between man and man, God is at stake."⁶⁴

In a remarkable statement that goes against the grain of modern Jewish views of Christianity, Heschel reminded his Jewish readers of the debt they owed to Christianity for preserving ancient Jewish texts, such as the apocrypha and the writings of Philo, and for the art and music that inspires all religious people. Insisting that "no religion is an island," Heschel noted that attacks against one religion ultimately undermine all religions: "Jews must realize that the spokesmen of the Enlightenment who attacked Christianity were no less negative in their attitude toward Judaism." Self-reliance, he wrote, has been replaced by interdependence: "sharing insights, confessing inadequacy."⁶⁵

Heschel's engagement with Catholic theologians was repudiated in an article published in 1964 in the Orthodox Jewish journal, *Tradition*, by the leading Orthodox rabbi of the era, Joseph Soloveitchik.⁶⁶ A leading

⁶⁴ Quoted in Gary Spruch, *Wide Horizons: Abraham Joshua Heschel, AJC, and the Spirit of Nostra Aetate* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2008), 10.

⁶⁵ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," in *Moral Grandeur*, ed. Heschel, 236; 239.

⁶⁶ Joseph Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* (1964), 5–29.

authority on Jewish law and professor at Yeshiva University, Soloveitchik insisted that discussion between Jews and Christians must avoid theological exchange. Neither side should ask the other to change any of its beliefs, and the Vatican Council should only be asked to condemn antisemitism. Yet as Reuven Kimelman has pointed out in an article comparing the positions of Heschel and Soloveitchik, their positions concerning interfaith dialogue are not far apart.⁶⁷ Both insisted that Judaism's religious independence be recognized by Christians. Soloveitchik argued that Christians should not be asked to alter any doctrinal principles, whereas Heschel requested that antisemitism and charges of deicide against all Jews be condemned by the Church as a false teaching. Both met with cardinals and other church officials during the Second Vatican Council, both were widely read and influenced by Christian thought, and both delivered some of their most important lectures to Christian audiences. Nonetheless, many leading Orthodox rabbis and rabbinical organizations have concluded that Soloveitchik's position was a prohibition on theological dialogue with Christians, and have refused such engagement.

By contrast, Heschel argued that the modern era's emancipation of Jews has conveyed rights, but also obligations, including working with Christians to strengthen the faith of all people. By contrast, Michael Wyschogrod (1928–2015) has engaged Christian theologians on precisely the topics Heschel sought to avoid: Jesus, Paul, and Christian doctrine. Wyschogrod has been widely read by Christian theologians and deeply engaged in dialogue with what he has called "the Judaism of the Gentiles."⁶⁸ His work revives many of the themes present in classical and modern Jewish thought regarding Christianity, such as its role as a handmaiden, spreading Jewish monotheism to the Gentile world, and in rejecting Christian supersessionism. However, he departs radically in his affirmation of incarnation: "My claim is that the Christian teaching represents an intensification of the teaching of the in-dwelling God in Israel by concentrating that in-dwelling in one Jew rather than leaving it diffused in the people of Israel as a whole."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Reuven Kimelman, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish–Christian Relations," *The Edah Journal* 4, no. 2 (2004): 1–21.

⁶⁸ Michael Wyschogrod, "A Jewish Perspective on Incarnation," *Modern Theology* 12, no. 2 (1996): 195–209.

⁶⁹ Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish–Christian Relations*, ed. with an introduction by R. Kendall Soulen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 187. See also Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God and the People Israel* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000).

By this, Wyschogrod means that God's indwelling in the community of Israel, God's entrance into human history, is analogous to the indwelling of the soul in the body, as he explains in his book, *The Body of Faith*. Jews as a people are not divine, but in preserving their existence as a people, a task Wyschogrod considers a central Jewish obligation, Jews embody the presence of God, a principle in tune with God's incarnation in the human body of Jesus. In contrast to many other Jewish thinkers, Wyschogrod does not see a link between Christianity and the Jewish people based on the historical Jesus's Jewish identity, but on a theological claim regarding Jesus's incarnation, a topic most other Jewish thinkers tend to avoid. What Wyschogrod expects is a Christian cessation of supersessionism, and its recognition of the continued and undiminished validity of Judaism. By contrast, the Jewish theologian David Novak argues that supersessionism need not be abandoned, but reformulated.⁷⁰ The effort to present a more tolerant Jewish approach to Christianity can also be found among Orthodox rabbinical figures. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, chief rabbi of Efrat, Israel, has issued some highly positive statements about Jesus as a loyal Jew that became controversial within the Orthodox community. In an earlier generation, the distinguished expert on rabbinic law, Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, expressed concern that "More than Christianity hates Judaism, Judaism hates Christianity."⁷¹

Wyschogrod's efforts to mitigate the negative judgment of Jewish theology concerning Christian doctrines, especially incarnation, are undertaken by him philosophically, but other Jewish scholars have used historical methods to demonstrate not that Christianity was derived from Judaism, but that Judaism was also shaped in significant ways through the ages by Christian belief and practice. In antiquity, historians such as Daniel Boyarin argue, both Judaism and Christianity emerge in a relationship of mutual influence, and that mutuality continues, as the medieval historian Israel Yuval has demonstrated, in their liturgies, festival celebrations, and self-understandings.⁷² Such mutuality is central to the contemporary

⁷⁰ David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁷¹ Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, letter to Samuel Atlas, dated November 15, 1965; cited by Marc B. Shapiro, ed., "Scholars and Friends: Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg and Professor Samuel Atlas," *Torah U-Madda Journal* 7 (1997): 105–121; here 117.

⁷² Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

agenda of key figures studying Judaism and Christianity in antiquity, and increasingly scholars of medieval Jewish history are also turning away from a lachrymose account of persecutions toward narratives of coexistence and shared religious concerns.

In the year 2000, a small group of five Jewish scholars formulated a set of eight principles of Jewish views of Christianity, “Dabru Emet,” (Speak the Truth) that was endorsed by over 200 Jewish intellectuals and rabbis. Some of the principles expressed classical liberal positions: Jews and Christians worship the same God, share the same moral principles, and seek justice and peace. Other principles sounded as though a bargain had been struck: “Christians can respect the claim of the Jews on the land of Israel” and “Nazism is not a Christian phenomenon.” “Dabru Emet” was welcomed primarily by Christian groups, especially in Europe, whereas its resonance among Jews was limited. Jon Levenson, for example, criticized the statement for asserting commonalities that are little more than platitudes, while ignoring serious theological differences.⁷³ Ultimately, the statement did not resolve disputes between Jewish and Christian groups over Zionism and the State of Israel, nor did it convince historians that Christianity was not central to the success of Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust.

At the outset of the modern era, Jews still felt the conversionary pressures of Christians who believed Christianity was the sole path to heaven and the highest embodiment of religious truth. Jewish theologians such as Abraham Geiger recognized that it is not Jews who desire Christianity, but Christian theologians who require a myth of Jewish desire in order to legitimate Christianity. Yet Geiger’s own scholarship awakened a Jewish desire for Jesus the Jew, and that desire, inchoate in his own work, eventually came to be a dominant mode of expressing modern Jewish identity in the writings of numerous theologians, writers, and artists, both before and after the Holocaust. In the second half of the twentieth century, as Jewish and Christian historians and theologians engaged in dialogue and joint research projects, and as the Holocaust loomed as an insistent rupture of past polemics, we see efforts at a new affirmation of one another’s faith, a reliance on each other’s scholarship, and a recognition that interfaith may be as important as faith itself.

⁷³ Jon D. Levenson, “How Not to Conduct Jewish–Christian Dialogue,” *Commentary* 112, no. 5 (2001): 31–37; see also idem, “The Agenda of Dabru Emet,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 7 (2004): 1–26.

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