

JACOB'S  
YOUNGER  
BROTHER

# JACOB'S YOUNGER BROTHER

*Christian-Jewish Relations  
after Vatican II*

Karma Ben-Johanan

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*To Tomehr, with love*

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## Note on Translation and Transliteration

Quotations from the Hebrew Bible are from *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, published in 1917 by the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia. New Testament quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

For citations from the Talmud, I relied on *The Babylonian Talmud: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary, and Indices* (London: Soncino Press, 1935–), with minor adaptations.

For translations of the works of Maimonides, I have followed the Yale edition where possible (*The Code of Maimonides*, 14 vols., Yale Judaica Series [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949–]). Where translations from the Yale series were not available (such as for the *Book of Science*), I relied on Chabad's translation, with my own adaptations ([https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/682956/jewish/Mishneh-Torah.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/682956/jewish/Mishneh-Torah.htm)). In the case of the *Laws of Idolatry*, I turned to the translation available in Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam J. Zohar, and Ari Ackerman, eds., *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 2, *Membership* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 480–482, with some adaptations.

All other translations, except where otherwise indicated, are my own.

For transliteration from Hebrew, I have followed the guidelines established by the Academy of the Hebrew Language in 2011 (<https://hebrew-academy.org.il/wp-content/uploads/taatik-ivrit-latinit-1-1.pdf>), with the exception that common nouns are styled in lowercase.

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## Introduction

The events of the twentieth century shook Western civilization to its core. The ruin of two world wars—especially the horrors of World War II, with its ideologically justified bloodshed and institutionalized slaughter of those regarded as Others, perpetrated by the very paragons of high European culture—had left Europe reeling from a sense of moral failure. The cultural achievements of the century before had all too easily given way to barbarity. Regard for the Other became the cornerstone of the West’s attempt to rebuild a moral foundation and redefine its values. Where universal reason, progress, and objective truth had once commanded center stage, the protagonists in the postwar period were now pluralism and the discourse of human rights.

In view of the iniquities that had defiled Europe, the Holocaust in particular, the Christian world had to contend with difficult and penetrating questions: Why had the Christian churches failed to save Europe from the abyss of cruelty? Had they fallen prey to secular regimes, or had Europe’s Christian legacy itself sown the seeds of destruction? Was it even possible to “speak theology” after such a catastrophe, or was it better to finally depart from doctrinal obsessions? In the latter half of the twentieth century, Western Christianity grappled with the ethical challenge posed by—to use Emmanuel Levinas’s words—the face of the Other.

Yet those same Others—that is, the Jews—were also called on to adjust to the new ethical challenge that had crystallized in response to their torment. Which face should Jews present to the West, with its new moral sensibilities?



Must that face remain anguished and subjugated, or was it now permissible to bare some teeth? And when facing their own Others—when facing Christians—must Jews assimilate the West's new ethical imperative and play by the rules formulated by those who had only yesterday been their murderers? Would the Jews embrace the lessons that had been learned from their own torment, or would they refuse, once again, to participate in the Western project, reluctant to adopt the new gospel of reconciliation as their own?

*Jacob's Younger Brother* focuses on the relation to the Other as a key component in the consolidation of religious identities in the second half of the twentieth century. It concentrates on mutual perceptions of Christians and Jews after they rose from the debacle of the world wars and reorganized themselves in a postmodern, multicultural, and liberal reality in which Jews have become sovereign in their own state and the Catholic Church has largely accepted the separation of church and state and withdrawn from many of its historical political aspirations.

It is in this context that the book discusses the religious literatures of two specific communities: the Roman Catholic community and the Orthodox Jewish community. Under the term *Roman Catholic*, I subsume the Christian communities that see themselves as subject to the spiritual authority of the pope. Under the term *Orthodox Jewish*, I subsume a diverse group of Jewish communities (from Modern Orthodox to ultra-Orthodox) that regard themselves as faithful representatives of Jewish tradition and as having an obligation to preserve it, especially through their commitment to halakha—the evolved (and evolving) body of laws, derived from the written and the oral Torah, that guide Jewish life and religious observance.

I chose to focus on these communities for several reasons. First, they have tremendous influence on contemporary religious identities. The Catholic Church is one of the most influential religious institutions in the world, and Jewish Orthodoxy fills a crucial role in defining Jewish identity for Jews both inside and outside the Orthodox community. In Israel, it holds a hegemonic position.

Second, there is a prominent common denominator that makes looking at these otherwise so different communities together eye-opening: Orthodox Jewish and Catholic leaders negotiate their traditions in the modern setting in a similar way. Unlike other Christian and Jewish denominations that often openly reject significant swaths of their traditions that are incompatible with contemporary value systems, Orthodox rabbis and Catholic priests and theologians define themselves as fully obligated to maintain the entire scope

of their religious heritage. They can resort only to reinterpretation, not rejection.

Finally, the Christian-Jewish dialogue of recent decades is often represented by the images of a cardinal in a red cape and a bearded Orthodox rabbi—probably because these two specific communities symbolize “thick,” traditional religious identities and are associated in Western memory with the historical Christian-Jewish rivalry that the contemporary phase of modernity seeks to solve. The problematization of this image—of religious tradition as the arena of conflict and of contemporary dialogue as this conflict’s ultimate overcoming—is one of the objectives of this book.

The choice to focus on Catholic Christianity and Orthodox Judaism does not imply that Orthodox Jewish and Roman Catholic mutual perceptions are the only factors that define the direction of the Christian-Jewish relationship today, nor that these communities are more important than others. There are other fascinating and lively aspects of this relationship that are worthy of their own research.

This work focuses on the relations between Jews and Christians in the age of reconciliation. More specifically, it concentrates on the time between the Second Vatican Council’s declaration *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI (2013).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, several sections of the book are dedicated to earlier periods in the twentieth century, revolving especially around the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel. Developments that occurred later than 2013 are discussed only briefly, in the Epilogue. In the fourth paragraph of *Nostra Aetate*, the Catholic Church turned its back on its anti-Jewish heritage and paved the way toward rapprochement between the church and the Jewish people. The political independence of Jews in Israel has also removed many of the problems that characterized Christian-Jewish coexistence in the past. Yet these fundamental changes have not rescinded the ambivalence that has characterized the Christian-Jewish relationship throughout history. For many Catholics, the reconciliation with the Jews caused a theological avalanche and disorder. For many Orthodox Jews, the demand to adapt themselves to the conciliatory perceptions of Christians seemed to be another attempt to force a Christian agenda and a Christian timetable on them, this time with a liberal flavor. The process of reconciliation led, in both cases, to complex consequences. This book inquires into the elements that constitute the Christian-Jewish rapprochement of recent decades and the identity transformations that that rapprochement has demanded from each of the parties.

The book examines the discourse within each of the religious communities with respect to the other—that is, what Orthodox Jewish rabbis tell Jews about Christianity, and what Catholic theologians and priests tell Christians about Judaism. This focus reveals layers within the Christian-Jewish relationship that do not find expression in the explicit interreligious dialogue that is currently taking place between Jewish and Christian official representatives and that is careful about political correctness. I am interested mainly in the closed conversations in which one community discusses the other without diplomatic considerations.

To describe these internal discourses within both faith communities, I analyze a diverse body of sources that spans magisterial pronouncements, official declarations, journal articles, well-known halakhic rulings, and obscure internet discussions. I evaluate the texts not according to their official standing but according to the weight they carry in Catholic and Orthodox Jewish discourses as a whole. This strategy is central to the book, since it brings to the surface the tensions between what is done and thought officially and what is done and thought unofficially, a tension that is present in both communities' preoccupations with the relationship between them.

I do not pretend to cover the entire set of opinions of all Orthodox Jewish and Catholic thinkers on the issue. My objective in writing this book was to extract dominant trajectories out of a vast mixture of diverse phenomena. Moreover, I dedicate particular attention to the aspects of Orthodox Jewish and Catholic reciprocal perceptions that have remained underexplored in contemporary scholarship. My assumption is that the fruitful and overt dialogue that has been taking place between Orthodox Jewish rabbis and Catholic priests and theologians in the last decades is already known to the reader. The book thus seeks to bring to the surface precisely the points of resistance to Christian-Jewish dialogue, especially within the Orthodox Jewish world, and the sophisticated means by which the deepest questions raised by reconciliation are avoided, especially within the Catholic world. In other words, this book is about the problems of rapprochement and not about its successes.

The book, then, tells two different stories, a Catholic one and an Orthodox Jewish one, that progress in parallel and often with the agents of each group being unaware of the details of the other story. Part I deals with the way in which Catholic theologians and church officials have treated the Christian-Jewish relationship after the Holocaust, in particular after the Second Vatican Council.

As an introduction to Part I, Chapter 1 begins by examining the Catholic position on Jews from the early centuries of Christianity to the Holocaust. It connects the transformations in the church's attitude toward Jews and Judaism in the twentieth century with the transitions in the church's attitude toward modernity in general. It then analyzes the "Jewish section" of *Nostra Aetate* and the theological challenges it posed for postconciliar Catholicism.

Chapter 2 discusses the way theologians and clergy attempted to deal with Jewish matters in the first two decades after the council (1965–1985) and the complex implications that the discourse on Jews and Judaism had for the self-conception of the church, for Roman Catholic identity, and for Catholic theology as a whole. This chapter focuses on the efforts of theologians to reimagine early Christianity as constituting a continuation of Judaism rather than a rupture with it, on the position of the church on post-crucifixion Jews, and on the theological meaning of the Holocaust and the State of Israel. The chapter also discusses the question of the Jews' salvation and whether the church should be proactive in converting them. I argue that the theological discussion during these years posed a threat to the stability of the Catholic tradition, caused inner-Catholic polarization, and was often at odds with Jewish sensibilities. For these reasons, it did not maintain the same level of vitality in the following decades.

Chapter 3 deals with the turn in the ecclesiastical position regarding Jews and Judaism during John Paul II's pontificate, from 1978 to 2005. The first decades after the council had been characterized by a vibrant and poignant debate on theological matters, and John Paul II was concerned that theological adjustments instigated after Vatican II were hasty and might place the very foundations of the church at risk. Taking a conservative turn, he preferred to block further theological attempts to redefine Christian faith and to shift the conciliation between Christians and Jews to what he perceived to be a more effective and less risky platform. John Paul II availed himself of grand historical gestures that left their imprint on both Jews and Christians while circumventing the debate on doctrinal issues. The chapter thus explains the enigmatic tension between John Paul II's doctrinal conservatism and his pastoral progressiveness in the realm of Christian-Jewish relations.

Chapter 4 addresses the position of Joseph Ratzinger on Jews and Judaism in his capacities as a theologian, as a cardinal serving as John Paul II's right-hand man (1981–2005), and as Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013). Whereas Catholic discourse in the era of John Paul II had shunted aside the heavy

theological issues in favor of grand gestures, Ratzinger grappled with these issues directly, to the displeasure of many Jews and liberal Catholics. This chapter examines the public discourse surrounding Ratzinger's actions and writings as a way to understand the deep tensions prevailing in the Catholic community regarding Jews and Judaism, the church's self-perception, and its conception of history. I argue that Ratzinger's attempts to theologize the Christian-Jewish relationship were largely experienced as harmful by Christians and Jews alike, both of whom preferred to avoid head-on theological polemics and to pursue their dialogue in non-theological terms.

Part II focuses on Orthodox Jewish rabbis and Torah scholars' perceptions of Christianity after the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel, as reflected in rabbinic commentaries, halakhic tractates, and theological discussions. Chapter 5 addresses the variety of halakhic traditions and rabbinical theologies pertaining to Christianity from its beginnings to late modernity. Chapter 6 deals with contemporary halakhic discussions of Christianity and Christians; it points to a distinct halakhic turn in recent decades, over the course of which more moderate or tolerant positions on Christianity were marginalized and the halakhic perception of Christianity became increasingly inimical. Chapter 7 is devoted to a discussion of Christianity in religious Zionist circles affiliated with the theological school of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. It also brings to light an intense theological discourse among the Kooks' Franco-phone disciples, who imported their acquaintance with French philosophy and Catholic theology into Kookist thought to develop a sophisticated anti-Christian dialectic of history. These discussions within the Kooks' school, which has greatly developed in recent decades, attempt to revitalize the ancient anti-Christian polemics from late antiquity to medieval times. Chapter 8 is devoted to the internal controversies within the Orthodox Jewish community on the issue of interfaith dialogue with Christians, mostly taking place within Modern Orthodox circles in the United States and their extension in Israel. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the official dialogue that has been conducted between the Vatican and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel since the year 2000.

My intention is not to take sides or provide moral evaluations. This book was written from the point of view of a historian, not a partner in Christian-Jewish dialogue. From this perspective, I am looking into the paradoxes, asymmetries, and discrepancies of the Christian-Jewish relationship in its

new garb and exploring how the two groups are adapting themselves to the postwar era of interfaith encounters.

With its gradual withdrawal from anti-Jewish perceptions, the Catholic Church sought to put an end to a long tradition of exploiting Judaism to meet Christianity's needs, especially that of maintaining Christianity's hegemony. Drawing on Susannah Heschel's metaphor, this move can be understood as a process of decolonization of Judaism, which is now entitled to its own self-definition.<sup>2</sup> Yet it can also be seen as a new attempt to reappropriate Judaism for the benefit of the changing cultural and political needs of Catholicism in the postwar era. To put it differently, contemporary Catholic theologians and church officials strive to dissolve the asymmetrical power relations in which the Jews have been the subordinated victims of the superior Christian religion for generations and to replace them with a relationship of dignity in which both parties have equal standing. Nevertheless, the Catholic-Jewish dialogue itself remains a Christian initiative dictated by Christian moral standards, adapted to Christian political sensibilities, and inaugurated at the very moment in which much of the tension of Christian-Jewish coexistence in the West had already been resolved, because Europe had lost most of its Jews through their destruction in the Holocaust. In this sense, Christian-Jewish dialogue preserves the imbalance in power relations, albeit in a conciliatory form and within a different world order.

The Orthodox Jewish response to the rapprochement initiative, as described in this book, corresponds to the Christian ambivalence with an ambivalence of its own. On the one hand, Orthodox rabbis and Torah scholars are embracing this long-awaited moment of self-definition, in which they can shed the customs imposed on them by Christian constructions and meet Christians as equal partners. Yet many of them experience the interreligious dialogue in itself as a construction of this kind, in that it instrumentalizes Jews as witnesses to Christianity's new progressive faith. The invigorated hostility found in parts of contemporary Orthodox Jewish literature toward Christianity represents an attempt to reappropriate Judaism to Judaism's own needs. Nevertheless, this reappropriation is done precisely through the conflictual subjectivity of the colonized, who continue to imagine themselves through the internalization of the Christian gaze and cannot give up vengeful acts of (literary) violence.<sup>3</sup> Instead of joining the flow of Christian-Jewish dialogue, many Orthodox currents have reverted to those old anti-Christian traditions that were most offensive to Christians and that were used against them during various anti-Jewish campaigns throughout the ages. Paradoxically,

this sort of resistance to the Christian conciliatory initiative preserves Christian-Jewish rivalry and could raise precisely the kind of hostility from which Jews (and Christians) have sought to release themselves. This complicated dynamic is the prism through which I attempt to analyze the Christian-Jewish reconciliation of recent decades.

The Christian-Jewish relationship is so deeply marked by a history of struggle and abuse that it could not be expected to be completely mended, purified of ambivalence, and cleansed of resentment—certainly not in a few decades. Yet *Jacob's Younger Brother* does not end with a pessimistic conclusion regarding Christian-Jewish rapprochement. The unresolvable tensions do not dominate the Christian-Jewish relationship in its entirety. They are confined to specific realms of writing and thinking, to the doctrinal and halakhic cores of the respective traditions. Halakha and theology are where the demons abide, those demons that stubbornly resist supersession. This, however, is not because these realms are inherently irrational and frenzied, but precisely the opposite; it is because these are the realms that are less tolerant of contradictions, equivocal arguments, and loose ends and compromises. Perhaps there is no better alternative than a peaceful coexistence with those demons. Yet in other realms of human activity, whether religious or secular, new horizons of exchange, even of friendship, have been opened.

## **PART I**

# Judaism in Catholic Theology



# 1

## Historical and Theological Transitions

In order to evaluate the theological and practical transitions in the Catholic Church's attitude to Jews and Judaism after Vatican II, we need some historical background. This chapter offers a concise overview of the evolution of Catholic teaching on the Jews through the centuries. The scholarly literature focusing on the place of Jews in Catholic theology is extremely rich, and I will discuss here only those points that are especially helpful for the central discussion of this book, on post-Vatican II perceptions. Following a brief historical overview, the second section discusses the modern turn within the Catholic Church, as this provides an essential context to the church's discussion of Jews and Judaism both at the council and in its aftermath. Section 3 focuses on how the church coped with modern antisemitism and the Holocaust, which served as the immediate background to the doctrinal turn with regard to Jews and Judaism in the 1960s. Section 4 focuses on the "Jewish section" in *Nostra aetate*, particularly on the theological deliberations that stood behind its formulation.

### A Brief Historical Survey

For hundreds of years, Christian tradition was inherently ambivalent toward Judaism, and attitudes were often blatantly hostile. This charged tradition was based on a specific hermeneutical system of reading the New Testament and on the conviction that an unbridgeable rift separated Christianity from Judaism.

However, the biblical basis for this traditional hermeneutical position has been deeply contested in the past few decades. Biblical studies and historical scholarship on the first centuries CE have introduced a paradigm shift in the understanding of early Christian texts. At the heart of this transformation is the scholarly effort to contextualize the New Testament in its original historical milieu. Beginning in the 1970s (with some precedents before that time), historians have been attempting to ground Jesus and his disciples in the historical context of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the “new perspective on Paul” has allowed scholars to recover Paul’s Jewish convictions and sensibilities and challenge the common presumption that he had an anti-Jewish agenda.<sup>2</sup> This anchoring of the New Testament within the Jewish context of its time has in turn called for an examination of the origins of traditional anti-Jewish readings of Scripture that assume a clear-cut separation between Judaism and Christianity. Accepting that Christianity and Judaism were not separate and were certainly not opposed to each other at the very beginning, scholars have begun to look for a later moment of separation, no longer viewing the antagonism between Judaism and Christianity as a timeless historical fact. Recent studies on the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity challenge the historical beliefs about an early separation and depict a much longer and more complex process than had previously been assumed, at times pushing the “final” departure to the ninth century.<sup>3</sup>

These projects of contextualization recover a Jewish landscape that was shared by Jews who followed Jesus and Jews who did not and reveal a complex entanglement of Jewish and Christian identities in the Roman Empire of the first centuries CE. Apart from the transparent historical logic of relocating Christianity within Judaism, this scholarly trajectory has also had the added value of questioning the allegedly inherited anti-Jewish characteristics of early Christian texts and stripping the interfaith hostility from these texts. If the scientific focus of the nineteenth and early twentieth century’s historical, biblical, and philological scholarship was the dejudaization of Christianity (a scientific effort which was intertwined with an antisemitic worldview), the scientific focus of contemporary scholarship is precisely the opposite: by regarding the separation between Judaism and Christianity as a much later construction, contemporary scholars see early Christianity as mainly a Jewish phenomenon.

This scholarly trajectory is made possible by the Christian-Jewish post-Holocaust process of rapprochement, a process that freed scholars to study

sources without assuming a clear-cut separation between the two traditions.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the historiographical transformation is not just the fruit of the process of Christian-Jewish reconciliation; it also nourishes and facilitates it. The tools that scholars offer for reading and interpreting religious sources often serve the religious communities themselves by providing, in John Gager's words, "a new set of images" that "may have a liberating effect not only on scholars, with their specialized concerns, but also on the culture of which they are a part."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the scholarly reform and the religious reform of Christian-Jewish relations are closely intertwined. In this chapter I will briefly describe the new scholarly paradigms and the evolution of traditional perceptions that they seek to challenge, since an acquaintance with these traditions is necessary for understanding the current reform in Christian-Jewish relations.

Many Gospel passages describe quarrels and strife between Jesus and his disciples and other Jewish groups such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes (or sometimes the Jews in general, as we often find in John). These Jewish communities are presented as faithless, blind God-haters, stubborn and callous (John 12:37–40; Matt. 13:13–14, 19:8; Mark 10:5; Acts 7:51), sycophantic hypocrites (Matt. 15:7), sons of serpents (Luke 3:7), devil spawn who want to kill the Messiah (John 8:37–44), and informers and murderers (Acts 7:52). Famously, the Jewish crowd demands that Pilate crucify Jesus (John 19:6–7), calling out "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matt. 27:25), a cry that was used by Christians over the centuries as evidence for the collective and transgenerational Jewish guilt for the crucifixion.

Before the latter half of the twentieth century, such passages were largely read as supporting the idea of a split between Judaism and Christianity that emerged from Jesus's critique of the ossified Judaism of his time, a split that deepened after his crucifixion and resurrection. Notwithstanding Jesus's ethnic affiliation to the Jewish people (an affiliation that was contested only by certain Nazi-inclined theologies in the twentieth century), Jesus and his disciples were seen as harbingers of a new religious community, a new affiliation, and a new gospel that were essentially different from those of Judaism. In other words, the New Testament, with regard to its relationship with Judaism, was traditionally read—by both Jews and Christians—as an anti-Jewish text.

Contemporary scholars, seeking to depart from this tradition, read the New Testament as a Jewish text written (mainly) by Jewish authors and reflecting (mainly) intra-Jewish controversies, conflicts, and sensibilities.

Instead of assuming a dichotomy between the “new” message of Christianity and the “old” ways of Judaism, these scholars point to the diversity of Jewish ideas and practices in the Roman Empire, a diversity that is also reflected in New Testament texts.

A similar dynamic is reflected in the reading of Paul’s epistles. As the man who undertook the mission of spreading Christ’s Gospel among the gentiles, Paul has been traditionally perceived as the founder of Christianity as an independent religion fundamentally different from Judaism. He has also been considered as the father of “replacement theology,” or “supersessionism,” that is, the perception that the Christian Church had replaced the Jewish people as God’s chosen people. Many of Paul’s statements have been interpreted, from the second century on, as a solidified and systematic approach to Judaism as an obsolete religion: his apparent polarization between the letter and the spirit, between the “old” covenant, which was made with the Jewish people according to the flesh and written in stone, and the “new covenant,” which was written “on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3–6); his discussion of the “spiritual” affiliation with the seed of Abraham through faith rather than through heredity, the flesh, and the keeping of the commandments (Rom. 9:7); his critique of the overwhelmingly prominent preoccupation with the law, that is, with the observance of the Torah’s commandments (Rom. 2:25–29, 3:9, 4:16, and 5:20–21; Phil. 3:2–10; and elsewhere); and his reference to the law as a prelude to the new covenant, such that the law now lost its justification (Gal. 3:24–26). The church, as opposed to the obsolete synagogue, was presented as the true heir of biblical promises. Moreover, Paul’s depiction of the veil that covers Jews’ eyes when they are reading their scriptures (2 Cor. 3:13–18) became for later Christians a paradigmatic prism through which to understand Judaism—as blind and stubborn, refusing to concede the true spiritual significance of the Bible and adhering, instead, to the literal interpretation of the law, as slaves to the written word, to this world and its rules.

Many of the components of this Pauline picture have been contested in the past five decades, with a new intuition that is often traced back to Krister Stendahl’s seminal article “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West.”<sup>6</sup> Stendahl argued that the popular reading of Paul, which has far-reaching implications for Christian-Jewish relations, is an anachronistic projection of Martin Luther’s sensibilities onto the Pauline sources. Reading Paul “in the framework of late medieval piety,” which has roots in Augustine’s reading of Paul, leads to a false understanding of Paul’s

attitude to the law as a component in the drama of the individual conscience—a component that must be overcome on the way to “justification by faith,” just as Judaism, by analogy, must be overcome by Christianity. Paul, according to Stendahl, was in fact “grappling with the question about the place of the Gentiles in the Church and in the plan of God, with the problem Jew/Gentiles or Jewish Christians/Gentile Christians, which had driven him to that interpretation of the Law which was to become his in a unique way.”

This change of framework was adopted by prominent Pauline scholars, who introduced a paradigmatic shift in the reading of Paul. Instead of seeing Paul as a convert from Judaism to Christianity, such scholars stress the continuity of Paul’s Jewish affiliation and the conversion as his taking up his mission to the gentiles. Scholars may argue about the precise understanding of Paul’s differentiation between Jews and gentiles or about the universality of his critique of the law, but the main pillars of the new paradigm are shared by many.<sup>7</sup> In addition to this new trajectory, as we shall see in later chapters, Paul’s discussions of Israel in Romans 9–11 are no longer regarded as an appendix to his other interventions but as the paradigmatic key to understanding his perception of Judaism.

A strong ambivalence toward Judaism, based on how the New Testament was read, characterizes the early Christian literature that was written during the long process of the crystallization of Christianity. Both proto-orthodox and heterodox Christian authors have often deliberated on the relationship between the Christian Gospel and Jewish tradition and sought to differentiate between them. The second-century Marcion of Sinope, who made an immense contribution to the process of the canonization of the Christian scriptures, claimed that the Hebrew scriptures, in whole or in part, express a materialistic conception of religion that is incompatible with the spiritual love of Jesus and Paul.<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew books were written under the inspiration of the God of the Jews, an inferior material God, who completely differs from the spiritual God of the new gospel. Marcion was of the opinion that Christians should adhere to only some parts of the New Testament (Paul’s epistles and the Gospel according to Luke) as scripture.

The proto-orthodox approach of the church fathers was different. The church rejected Marcion’s position as heresy (144 CE) and sanctified the Hebrew Bible as part of the Christian canon. It adopted the Jewish scriptures but extensively reinterpreted them in allegorical fashion as prophecies about Christ and the end of days. The church fathers considered the problem to

be not the Hebrew Bible (or its author) but its Jewish commentators. Anti-Jewish literature (*adversus Judaeos*), which was mostly based on the interpretation of sections from the Old Testament, was a widespread patristic genre.<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew Bible was cited as evidence of the history of Jewish treacherousness, and it already presaged, according to Christian tradition, the future replacement of the Jewish people with the congregation of gentiles, which was, in the language of Justin Martyr, *verus Israel*—the true Israel.

After the Christianization of the Roman Empire, this conception of Judaism became an orthodox Christian position. The fact that Christianity became the religion of the empire and was disseminated among many nations was perceived as the realization of the prophecies about the founding of the kingdom of God. The church of the gentiles was thus proven to be the true church. The Jews remained an empty vessel, and their messianic hopes for a political and religious hegemony were forever repudiated.

Yet contemporary scholarship complicates the uniformity of this historical picture, which focuses mainly on the writings of the church fathers. Instead of assuming the emergence of Christianity out of Judaism during the first or second century at the latest, contemporary scholars maintain that such a separation was alien to the context of the Roman Empire in late antiquity and to the plethora of identities inhabiting it.<sup>10</sup> Not only should the final separation between the two religious communities be dated to a much later period, but even the idea of differentiating Jewish ideas and affiliations from Christian ones is a later construction. As Daniel Boyarin argued while comparing rabbinic sources and patristic heresiologies, Judaism and Christianity were defined during the struggle of various identity options over the right to declare what should be regarded as orthodoxy. In this process, not only were Christianity and Judaism separated from each other; they were also “invented” as religions.<sup>11</sup> Drawing on postcolonial studies, scholars have argued that sources from late antiquity which seem to clearly define Jewish and Christian identities should be read “against the grain,” as reflecting the motivations of the authors (which eventually became hegemonic) and not as depicting the objective historical reality, which is often very different.<sup>12</sup>

In the evolution of the Christian tradition’s attitude to Judaism in late antiquity, a unique place is reserved for Augustine. Despite writing within the hostile *adversus Judaeos* tradition, Augustine developed a theological justification for the existence of Jews within Christian society (a “defense of Jews and Judaism,” in Paula Fredriksen’s words), a justification that was applied in

Europe throughout most of the Middle Ages.<sup>13</sup> In evaluating the historical persistence of the Jews in a Christian world, even though they murdered Christ and rejected his gospel, Augustine concluded that Jews survive because their existence is beneficial to the church; their blind adherence to the Old Testament and their refusal to understand its true significance are evidence that the texts, which every reasonable person can see presage the coming of Christ, were not faked by Christians. To the contrary, the greatest enemies of the Christians testify to the reliability of the texts. Augustine also thought that the miserable status of the Jews represented the just wages of those who reject Christ and indicated that the divine prophecies of success were intended not for them but for Christians. It was therefore fitting to humiliate the Jews and deride them, but they should not be physically harmed or killed, nor should they be forbidden from observing their ritual laws, for they should be allowed to fulfill their role as witnesses.<sup>14</sup>

Augustine's theological justification enabled the Jews of Europe to live in relative safety among their Christian hosts up until the twelfth century and even to enjoy a certain measure of religious tolerance. Following Gregory I in the sixth century, the popes of the Middle Ages issued papal bulls (*sicut Judaeis*) that safeguarded the status of Jews in Christian lands and prohibited harming Jews, taking their property, intervening in their religious rituals, or forcing them to convert.<sup>15</sup> The popes also determined that the Jews had to retain their inferior status vis-à-vis their Christian neighbors and that they should be humiliated and constrained in various ways. The protection of church authorities allowed Jews to exist (sometimes even thrive) within Christian society. They were the only minority that had such a status, while other religious minorities did not survive.

The coexistence of Jews and Christians encountered a crisis beginning in the eleventh century. The call to unify Europe under the cross raised questions about the status of marginal groups within Christian society. Institutional persecutions of heathens, Jews, homosexuals, and other groups defined as deviant began.<sup>16</sup> The fast integration of the Jews within the new market economy as moneylenders generated increasing hostility among the Christian masses. During the First Crusade, the Crusaders wished to first settle accounts with the enemies of Christ at home, so they slaughtered Jews on the way to the Holy Land (during the Rhineland Massacres of 1096). Other Jews were forcibly baptized.

In the twelfth century, Christian scholars began to display a deep interest in post-biblical Jewish tradition, and in particular in the Talmud, which until

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