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JESUS OF NAZARETH IN MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT

AND ITS BACKGROUNDS

a PhD thesis presented by

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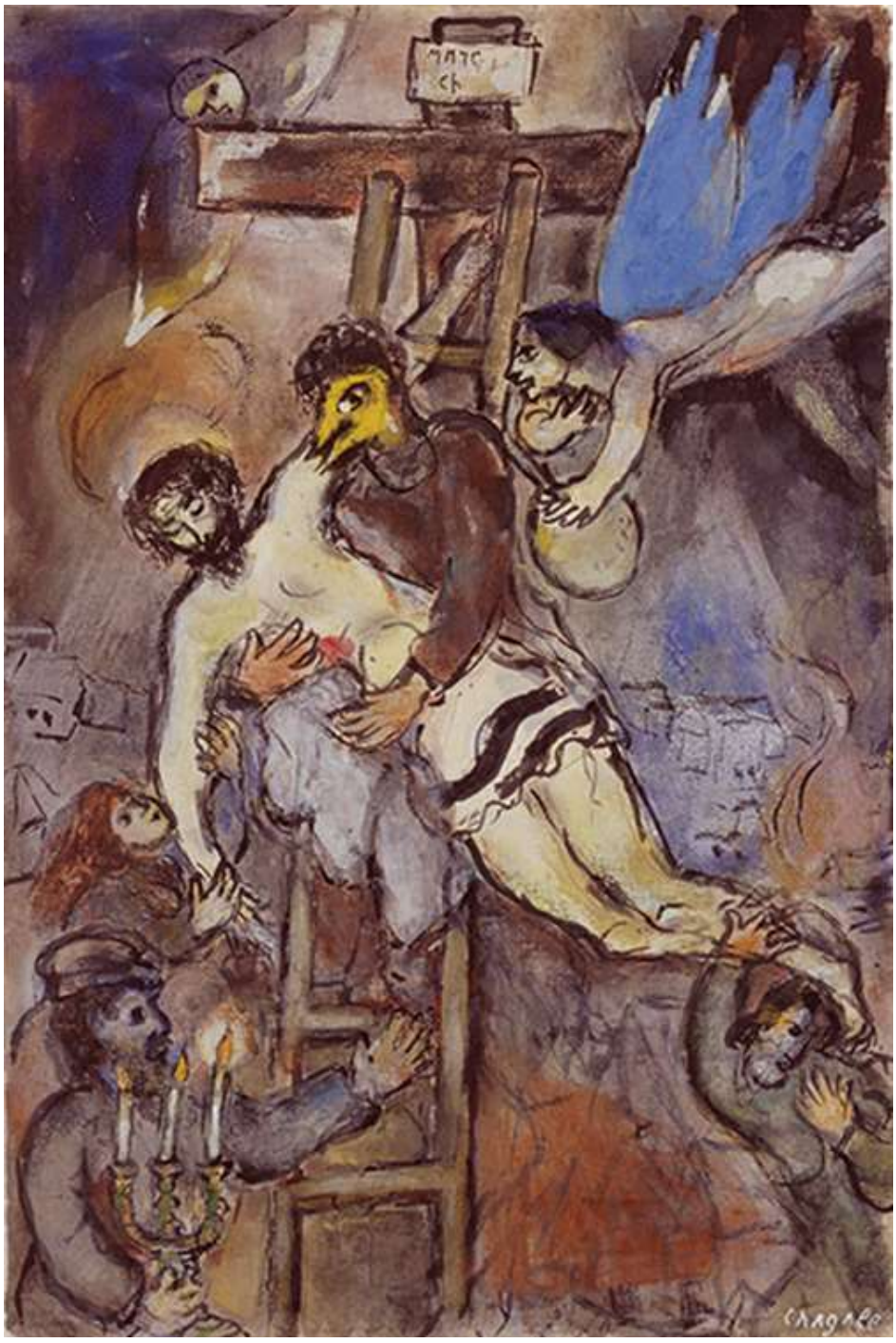
ויאמר להם יש״ו ואתם מה אומרים בשבילי

Matthew 16:15 in *Even Boḥan* by Shem-Tov ibn Shaprut (1385)



Marc Chagall: Descent from the Cross (1941)

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1. Introduction

1.1. Relevance of the topic

In March 2011, the Center for Christian and Jewish Learning of Boston College held a conference titled *"Are Jews and Christians Living in a Post-Polemical World?" Toward a Comparison of Medieval and Modern Christian-Jewish Encounters*. In its rationale, the organizers pointed out that the contemporary changes in Christian-Jewish relations brought about a more nuanced and multifaceted scholarly assessment of the polemical literature both Jews and Christians produced over the centuries of their coexistence. This shift of attitude manifests itself in an openness about the mutual past, resulting in a "post-polemical" world, marked by dialogue rather than disputation, "allowing a freer, more objective and less emotional examination of the past as well as a deep and challenging dialogue over difficult issues in the present and of the present". However, the authors of the document highlighted that old habits die hard because Jews and Christians still composed polemical literature.[1]

Since the conference, at least the Catholic Church has formally given up Jewish mission in the document titled *"The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable" (Rom 11:29)*,[2] issued by the Holy See in 2015 for the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and its declaration titled *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Age) on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions.[3] The 2015 document expresses a theological shift of the Catholic Church according to which salvation in the Christian sense is *and has always been* open to Jews "without confessing Christ explicitly", and the document delegates the answer to how it is possible when according to the New Testament, salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ (Acts of Apostles 4:12) to the realm of "unfathomable divine mystery". Pursuant to this new theology, while maintaining the fundamental importance of mission for the Church, Section 40 of the document makes it explicit that "in concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews". The document reiterates the wish of the Church to serve God together with the Jews "shoulder to shoulder" (Zephaniah 3:9).

Weeks later, an international group of Orthodox rabbis issued a document titled *To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians*[4] in the spirit of *Dabru Emet* (Speak Truth) issued in 2000 and signed by over 200 Jewish scholars and rabbis in

[1] 'Are Jews and Christians Living in a Post-Polemical World?', 1.
[2] '"The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable" (Rom 11:29)'.
[3] 'Nostra Aetate'.
[4] 'To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven'.

response to *Nostra Aetate*.[5] The signatories recognize their historic opportunity to "accept the hand" the Church offers to work together as partners for the welfare of humankind in redeeming the world. Following Maimonides, Yehudah Halevi and Rabbi Jacob Emden, the rabbis acknowledge "that the emergence of Christianity in human history is neither an accident nor an error, but the willed divine outcome and gift to the nations", moreover, that "neither of us can achieve G-d's mission in this world alone". The document even cites the 19th-century Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berliner who was convinced that "Jews and Christians are destined by G-d to be loving partners". The document affirms that since "the official teachings of the Catholic Church about Judaism have changed fundamentally and irrevocably", "Jews can acknowledge the ongoing constructive validity of Christianity as [their] partner in world redemption, without any fear that this will be exploited for missionary purposes". Although the rabbis understand the hesitation of both Jews and Christians as to its practical implications, they encourage their communities to overcome fears "in order to establish a relationship of trust and respect". Ultimately, the signatories expressed their wish to give up polemics with Christianity.

These documents are important steps towards mutual understanding between Jews and Christians as the Church and the Synagogue can reach many people within the Christian and Jewish communities with their messages. In the academic field, there are more and more conferences and programs that foster Jewish-Christian dialogue. For example, in 2017, the University of Vienna organized a conference together with the Pázmány Péter Catholic University of Hungary with the title *"Can Polemics Innovate?" Change and Continuity in Jewish–Christian Polemics from Late Antiquity to Modernity*. The schools I teach in are also involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue. The Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies has recently started a common Comparative History of Religion program with the St Athanasius Greek Catholic Theological Institute and the Theology MA program of the Pentecostal Theological College has an Apologetics specialization with a course on "Postbiblical Judaism", which is unique among Hungarian Christian theology schools.

Personally, I am fascinated by the encounters of different cultures and by how they interpret each other's phenomena and categories in their own terms. The encounter of different cultures is always exciting in itself and raises extremely interesting scholarly questions. It is particularly fascinating in the case of Judaism and Christianity, which on the one hand share a common Biblical foundation, but on the other hand have created cultures based on theological premises, views of God and man, and ethics that are in many ways contradictory, although they have interacted in countless ways over almost two thousand years of coexistence, often without the

[5] 'Dabru Emet'.

leaders or members of the two communities being aware of it. The study of the statements of modern Jewish thinkers on Jesus of Nazareth is relevant and worthy of researching from several points of view.

First, it promotes interfaith dialogue. Understanding how different religious traditions interpret and engage with figures like Jesus fosters meaningful interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding. It allows for deeper conversations about shared values, historical perspectives, and theological interpretations, and not only in the relationship of Judaism and Christianity but in a wider context as well. Second, it reveals the complex process of identity formation within the Jewish community. Exploring how Jews have interpreted Jesus throughout history sheds light on evolving Jewish self-perception, internal diversity, and responses to external pressures. Third, examining the historical context of Jewish interpretations of Jesus provides insights into broader social, cultural, and political dynamics. It offers a nuanced understanding of how Jews navigated their relationships with Christianity and the wider societies in which they lived. Fourth, the Jewish interpretations of Jesus raise profound theological questions about the nature of Messiahship, redemption, suffering, and covenantal relationships. These reflections contribute to ongoing theological discourse between Judaism and Christianity and within the traditions themselves. Fifth, the topic has cultural ramifications beyond theological and religious spheres. It has influenced literature, art, philosophy, and even popular culture, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards Judaism, Christianity, and religious diversity.

The relevance of this study is further underscored by the fact that Several Jewish scholars around the world are studying this topic, and sometimes they say things for which they would probably have been excommunicated from many communities in the premodern era.[6] I am aware that the subject is a very delicate one, and that many people, both Jews and Christians, may be sensitive to it, but my aim is not to make a value judgment or a religious statement, but to present an extremely interesting phenomenon in the history of culture and thought. I believe that this dissertation is another step towards an open and brave Jewish-Christian dialogue as its topic offers a rich tapestry of historical, theological, and cultural insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of both Jewish and Christian traditions, as well as the complex dynamics of interfaith relations.

[6] For example, the orthodox Jewish Daniel Boyarin argues that the germs of the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation were already present in Judaism before the first century, and that Jesus was not a religious innovator or reformer, but on the contrary, the leader of a highly conservative and traditionalist type of Judaism, who vehemently defended the Torah he knew against the perceived threats of the innovations of the Scribes and the Pharisees based on the Oral Torah. (Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 102–6.).

Over the last 25 years, awareness Jesus of Nazareth played in the formation of modern Jewish identity has begun to reach the general public from the scholarly discourse. A decade after the book *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* by Matthew Hoffman was published in 2007, the Israel Museum had an exhibition from Christmas 2016 to Easter 2017 entitled "Behold the Man: Jesus in Israeli Art".[7] The exhibition was based on the PhD dissertation of Amitai Mendelsohn written in 2014 at Ben-Gurion University under the title *Dmuto shel yeshu ba'amanut hayisraelit* (The Image of Jesus in Israeli Art), which was also published as a book in Hebrew and English.[8] Through the efforts of these scholars, the role of Jesus in the formation of contemporary Israeli and Jewish culture and identity is becoming increasingly apparent. Besides Mendelsohn, the theme of the Jewish Jesus has been the subject of many non-academic books written by Jewish authors over the last 25 years and, on the wake of the pioneering scholarship of Susannah Heschel (*Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus,* 1998), the female perspective is increasingly coming to the fore.[9]

1.2. The problem

The term "Jewish reclamation of Jesus" was coined by Samuel Sandmel in 1965, and he claimed that the phenomenon originated in the 19th century on the wake of the emerging Protestant scholarship of the historical Jesus.[10] Subsequent scholarly literature has consistently suggested that the Jewish reclamation of Jesus is an entirely new phenomenon that appeared without precedence after the Enlightenment following a premodern hostile Jewish view of Jesus. For example, in *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*, Donald Hagner claims that "the modern Jewish attitude [to Jesus] is essentially the result of the assimilation of Jews into European life and culture", which "necessitated a new and distinctively Jewish position regarding the question of

[7] 'Behold the Man: Jesus in Israeli Art'.

[8] Mendelsohn, Amitai. 'Dmuto shel yeshu ba'amanut hayisraelit'. PhD dissertation, Ben-Gurion University, 2014. Mendelsohn, Amitai. *Zeh ha'ish: yeshu ba'amanut hayisraelit / Behold the Man: Jesus in Israeli Art*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2017.

[9] In chronological order, books by Jewish authors popularizing the topic from the last 30 years include Susannah Heschel: *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (1998); Paula Fredriksen: *Jesus of Nazareth; King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (1999) and *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Christ* (2000); Schalom Ben-Chorin: *Brother Jesus: The Nazarene Through Jewish Eyes* (2001); a collection of essays edited by Beatrice Bruteau entitled *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes: Rabbis and Scholars Engage an Ancient Brother in a New Conversation* (2001); Adele Reinhartz: *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (2002); Hyam Maccoby: *Jesus the Pharisee* (2003); Lena Einhorn: *The Jesus Mystery: Astonishing Clues to the True Identities of Jesus and Paul* (2007); Matthew Hoffman: *From Rebel to Rabbi: Raclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (2007); Amy-Jill Levine: *The Misunderstood Jew* (2006); *Short Stories by Jesus* (2014); and *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week* (2018); Shmuley Boteach: *Kosher Jesus* (2012); by Rabbi Evan Moffic: *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Jewishness of Jesus* (2015); and Rivi Litvin: *Presenting Jesus the Son of Israel: A Jewish Commentary of the Gospels I-II* (2017, 2023).

[10] Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 51.

Jesus".[11] He argues that the attitude of premodern Judaism was consistently defensive, respondent and self-protective, and thus it developed a negative and destructive attitude to Jesus at worst and a coldly neutral one at best.[12] Thus, the phenomenon of reclamation was something entirely and surprisingly new "that hitherto was virtually impossible".[13]

In *From Rebel to Rabbi*, Matthew Hoffman asserts that the Jewish reclamation of Jesus originates in "the Berlin Haskalah circle of Moses Mendelssohn in the 1780s", furthered by the Jewish process of modernization and reform after the enlightenment because of the integration of the formerly separated Jews into the Christian society. He claims it was mainly due to the work of Moses Mendelssohn, Heinrich Graetz and Abraham Geiger, who "unanimously rejected the traditional Jewish view of Jesus as a rebellious heretic and saw him as integrally related to Jews and Judaism". The Jewish stance became "increasingly sympathetic" so that "by the end of the nineteenth century [...] there developed a widespread fascination with the figure of Jesus among European Jewish intellectuals". Hoffman contrasts this "positive Jesus of modern apologetics [...] of Jewish self-assertion" with "the negative Jesus of medieval Jewish polemics, created in self-defense", suggesting the about-face Jewish intellectuals took concerning Jesus after the Enlightenment and the resulting break between the premodern and modern Jewish attitudes to Jesus, which Hoffman calls "a tremendous change in Jewish cultural discourse".[14] In *Jesus Reclaimed: Jewish Perspectives on the Nazarene*, Walter Homolka asserts that "the Jewish reclamation of Jesus began in nineteenth-century Prussia".[15]

However, Susannah Heschel notes that with Maimonides, a shift started in the evaluation of Jesus and Muhammad with Maimonides and premodern Jewish intellectuals after him such as Isaac ben Abraham of Troki (1533–1594), Leon Modena (1571–1648), and Jacob Emden (1697–1776).[16] Homolka writes about the same premodern authors all of whom he considers "precursor[s] to the Jewish quest for the Historical Jesus".[17] Also, during my research, I was struck by one of Israel Jacob Yuval's ideas, according to which the rivalry between the two faiths basically took two forms. One is open hostility, when the members of a religious community try to "remove from the rival the sanctity he attributes to his symbols and to destroy it". For example, medieval Hebrew literature contains countless insulting expressions for the elements of Christianity, mostly about Jesus.[18] The other strategy Yuval mentions "is to adopt the Christian language and to 'Judaize' it, as if saying 'ours is greater than yours', thereby to expropriate and take control of the opponent's symbols". Yuval also remarks that more attention should be paid

[11] Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*, 59–60.
[12] Ibid., 53.
[13] Ibid., 24.
[14] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 1–15.
[15] Homolka, *Jewish Jesus Research*, 61.
[16] Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 131.
[17] Homolka, *Jesus Reclaimed*, 29–31.
[18] See Kiss, "'You Are Children of Lust and Your Deity Is a Crucified Bastard"'.

to the second tendency of internalizing the opponent's religious discourse and symbols because the spectacular form of polemics is a smokescreen whereas "the real polemics took place in small 'smugglings' underneath the fence".[19]

Since the Jewish reclamation of Jesus can be regarded as an appropriation or adoption of the most important religious symbol of Western civilization for the sake of identity-building through polemics, it seems to fit Yuval's description of the second strategy, the question arose as to whether it is possible that the Jewish reclamation of Jesus did not begin with the Enlightenment, but was a continuation of a premodern phenomenon, which might be called the premodern Jewish reclamation of Jesus for the sake of Yuval's Judaizing polemics. This implies that Judaism was not as hermetically sealed off from Christianity as it might at first appear. Following this line, more and more evidence has emerged that the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus has premodern antecedents, and even dynamics or paradigms going back to antiquity, and that at its core it is in fact a polemic against the culturally dominant surrounding society, in our case Christian civilization, and an attempt to culturally and/or religiously legitimize the Jewish minority. This, of course, presupposes that, despite its apparent isolation, premodern Jewry was also much more closely connected to the surrounding Christian society than it might at first appear, for which we have ample evidence. One example, which shows how Judaism was able to Judaize elements of the Christian religion in minor details, is the medieval Ashkenazi Jewish practice of penitential fasting. According to Elisheva Baumgarten's analysis, this is in fact a Judaization of the Christian practice of confession and penitence, a rabbinic innovation that the rabbis justified by confirming that it was already a practice in the times of the patriarchs.[20]

Along Yuval's line of thought, it is also conceivable that the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus was highly motivated and permeated by polemics. Concerning Abraham Geiger, Heschel argues that his project was a mainly apologetical and polemical "act of Jewish self-empowerment", and by presenting the hero of Christianity as a Jew, he intended to make it easier for Jews to assimilate into German society.[21] However, as a side effect, he managed to infuriate Christian scholars by denying originality to Jesus, thus Christianity. Hoffman also highlight the double purpose of the Jewish reclamation of Jesus. On the one hand, by using Jesus as a "model for the contemporary Reform, Conservative, Zionist, etc. Jew", the aim of post-Haskalah thinkers was to create a new Jewish identity by defining "the essence and meaning of Judaism, Jewishness, and Jewish history for the modern age".[22] At the same time, Hoffman understands the Jewish reclamation of Jesus as "a modern form of anti-Christian polemics", "a way of Judaizing Christianity and, by extension, Western civilization". In support, he emphasizes that "the assertion of

[19] Yuval, *Two Nations*, 203–4.
[20] Baumgarten, 'Appropriation and Differentiation'.
[21] Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 3–4.
[22] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 15–17.

the Jewishness of Jesus is often accompanied with the implication that Christians, from Paul on, have misinterpreted and misappropriated Jesus' intrinsically Jewish teachings".[23] For Homolka, the Jewish study of Jesus "came from an apologetic impulse: the desire to participate in the general society without renunciation of one's Jewish identity".[24]

What these scholars leave out of consideration is that not only did Jewish thinkers reclaim the figure of Jesus but also adopted the language Christians talked about Jesus and put it into the service of Jewish interests, which seems to be a real "smuggling underneath the fence" as Yuval put it. Also, reading the scholarly literature, I had a feeling that much as these scholars tried to connect the Jewish reclamation to the Christian quest, they do it only superficially, not shedding enough light on how deeply the two projects are intertwined, and also how organically the Jewish quest is rooted in the premodern Jewish strategy of incorporating resistance against the majority culture.

1.3. Hypotheses

Based on the above, my hypotheses concerning the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus are as follows:

1. Although the *overt* claiming of Jesus for the Jewish people was a new phenomenon indeed, I hypothesize that there is a *covert* Jewish "Christological" tradition going back to the initial rivalry between the nascent Judaism and Christianity in antiquity following the destruction of the Second Temple. Thus, I contend that we can speak about a premodern reclamation of Jesus almost right from the start.
2. The modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus and its premodern predecessor is part of a Jewish strategy of resistance against foreign cultural and religious influence, which is the most prominent in Hellenism but demonstrably goes back to the Neo-Assyrian period, and probably even earlier. The goal of this paradigm is preserving Jewish identity by internalizing competitive foreign cultural elements and integrating them into Judaism.
3. Although the Jewish reclamation of Jesus seems like an act of acceptance on the part of Jewish thinkers, no doubt intended to facilitate the integration of Jews into the majority societies after the emancipation, it still has a strong apologetic and polemical thrust that did not achieve the intended goal. Embracing Jesus as a Jew who said nothing else than the "normative" Judaism of the age resulted in the delegitimization of Christianity, basically claiming the achievements of the Western civilization to Judaism, which only increased anti-Semitism.

[23] Ibid., 19–20.

[24] Homolka, *Jesus Reclaimed*, 47.

4. Modern Jewish thinkers adopted not only the subject of the discourse (Jesus) but also its form and content, similar to the way the medieval counter-gospel *Toledot Yeshu* uses the same topics as the New Testament gospels but with an opposite meaning. The philosophical foundations, the supersessionist worldview of the parties, and the theological "language" of the discourse seem to be identical. Therefore, the adoption took place at least at two different levels as not only the figure of Jesus was adopted by Jewish thinkers overtly but covertly its theologically loaded Christological language and symbolism as well. With this, besides the Jewish reclamation of Jesus as a human figure, we can speak about the Jewish reclamation of Christ, i.e. the Christian theological concept as well.
5. The modern but even the premodern Jewish reclamation of Jesus cannot be fully understood without considering the way Christians interpreted and used the figure Jesus and without the knowledge of Christian theology and symbolism, similarly to the way 19th-century Jewish thinkers argued that Jesus and his legacy cannot be understood without the knowledge of Jewish sources.

1.4. Methods and theoretical background

1.4.1. Methods

The bulk of my research included a close reading and analysis of the primary literature by Jewish thinkers of Jesus and of the scholarly literature on the Jewish reclamation of Jesus, the relationship of the Jews with the surrounding non-Jewish world, as well as on the role of Jesus in Christian thought. During this, I paid special attention to anything that sounds "odd" in the text (words, expressions, symbols) that could provide clues for clandestine smuggling of ideas beneath the fence, as Yuval put it. My Christian background helped me identify topics, words, and phrases that "rang a bell" that the given author was probably alluding to symbols of Christianity. This way I could identify points and connect them together into a coherent picture. Finally, for volume constraints, I decided to concentrate on two case studies that characteristically support my hypotheses. One is the description of first-century Judah and Galilee and the roles attributed by Jewish and Christian thinkers to their supposed antagonism, based on shared assumptions about the role historical and geographical reconstruction and the Romantic idea of landscape influencing character. The other one is the figure of the enigmatic Servant of the Lord or Suffering Servant in the Biblical book of Isaiah, which demonstrates how deeply Jewish authors were aware of Christological claims and language even in premodern times, and the double-layer apologetical and polemical reclamation of Jesus through the covert use of Christian religious symbolism.

I am attempting to support my hypotheses through two case studies. The first is the Jewish interpretation of an enigmatic figure in the Biblical book of Isaiah, commonly called the "Suffering Servant", which Christianity understands as prefiguring Jesus Christ but since Maimonides, it has been regularly interpreted by Jewish intellectuals as representing Israel and remained throughout the premodern and the modern periods illustrating the connection between Jewish reclamations of Jesus in these periods. The second one is the Jewish binary understanding of Galilee and Jerusalem and their imagined conflict, which appeared with the modern age, mirroring the Christian understanding based on commonly shared theoretical premises but with opposite conclusions, although its dynamic has preliminaries in medieval Jewish philosophical polemics against Christianity, where Jewish and Christian thinkers polemicized upon shared conceptual premises.[25]

1.4.2. Cultural hybridity

Susannah Heschel understands the premodern relationship of Judaism and Christianity in the context of colonization where Christianity has presented itself in the theological position of the colonizer, annexing, subjecting and controlling "Jewish scriptures and central religious ideas" right from the first century. She points out that even the name "Judaism" is a Christian colonialist construct for what the Jews called Torah and *mitzvot*.[26] Although the large picture is definitely much more complicated and nuanced, postcolonial studies shed additional light on the dynamics of Jewish cultural resistance by adoption in general (see Chapter 2) and the Jewish reclamation of Jesus in particular, which might as well be understood as an attempt to "counter-colonialize" Christianity theologically and intellectually, presenting a "counter-history of the Christian counter-history".[27] Hoffman refers to the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha, asserting that his "ideas about minority cultural construction can be helpful" in understanding the role of the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus, and he considers the figure of Jesus as a "cultural hybrid".[28] Bhabha argues that cultural identity is not fixed or predetermined but is constantly being constructed and reconstructed through interactions between dominant and subaltern cultures, whereby both cultures change. This way cultural hybrids are created, which means the blending of different cultural identities and traditions. Bhabha calls the process of creating hybrids mimicry, meaning "the way in which a person or group adopts an idea from another culture".[29] Per Bhabha, mimicry is the "appropriation" of the Other by thew Self to show their power, becoming a sort of resistance, which is "a secret art of revenge" through simultaneous

[25] See footnote 263 on page 59.
[26] Heschel, 'Revolt of the Colonized', 61–62.
[27] Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 14.
[28] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 6–7.
[29] Fay and Haydon, *An Analysis of The Location of Culture*, 11.

"resemblance and menace", challenging traditional notions of purity, authenticity, and superiority.[30] Hybrids are created through mimicry in "in-between" or liminal spaces between cultures, where new forms of identity and meaning can emerge, challenging our binary categories.[31] This mimicking cultural resistance of the subaltern and the creation of cultural hybrids in liminal spaces seems to perfectly describe the premodern and modern Jewish reclamations of Jesus, as well as the Christian Quest for the historical Jesus as Christian scholars were unable to unsee the evidence for Jesus' thorough Jewishness presented by Jewish authors and were forced to react. A most extreme cultural hybrid presented by Christian scholars in response to the Jewish quest was the so-called "Aryan Jesus".

Essays in a book titled *Regional Identities and Cultures of Medieval Jews* explore various dimensions of Jewish life, traditions, and intellectual pursuits during the medieval period, shedding light on how Jewish communities were influenced by and interacted with surrounding non-Jewish cultures. The authors argue that Jewish communities across Europe and the Mediterranean developed distinct identities, cultural practices, legal interpretations, and philosophical outlooks not in isolation but through continuous interaction with both their Jewish and non-Jewish (Christian and Islamic) neighbours, whose ideas, traditions, and practices were adapted and integrated into the local Jewish cultures, resulting in distinct subcultures within Judaism, characterized not only by their geographical locations but also by their different ways of interaction with the surrounding non-Jewish cultures, both sides influencing and contributing to the broader intellectual and religious landscapes of the medieval world. Similarly to Homi Bhabha, the essays maintain the position that Jewish regional identities were not static or monolithic but were instead dynamic and evolving, shaped by a variety of internal and external influences.[32]

Based on Homi Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity, Melissa Weininger, in her doctoral dissertation, interprets the figure of Jesus as a "cultural hybrid", suggesting that "the interest in hybridity is not uniquely modern and that there may indeed be some continuity between premodern and modern representations of Jesus in Jewish literature". Weininger argues that Jews have always struggled with the dual nature, identity and cultural hybridity of Jesus since premodern times. Jesus was also a powerful symbol for Judaism as a Jewish man who became a symbol of the Christianity that oppressed Judaism.[33] Apart from Judaism being a cultural hybrid by incorporating elements from surrounding cultures as we have seen earlier in this chapter,

[30] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 56, 86.
[31] Ibid., 3.
[32] Castaño, Fishman, and Kanarfogel, *Regional Identities and Cultures of Medieval Jews*, 1–17.
[33] Weininger, 'Imagining Jesus, Imagining Jews', 19–20.

Weininger points out that *am Yisrael* is also cultural hybrid in the sense that it occupies an intermediate place between our binary categories. It is neither an ethnicity nor a religion in the modern sense of the word, and yet it is both, characterized only by the combination of the two categories, and cannot be separated from either. Judaism exists across our current categories, being both yet neither, but something third for which we have no category. Therefore, hybridity has apparently been a central characteristic of the Jewish tradition since antiquity.

Susannah Heschel points out that Jesus is "a Jew and the first Christian, yet neither a Jew nor a Christian"[34] but a third category, and hence his uncomfortable character for both sides. Standing on the border between Judaism and Christianity, the figure of Jesus allows the two sides to binarize and mutually negate each other. To this end, Jews have sought to separate the figure of Jesus from Christianity, and Christians from Judaism, and have done so through an examination and interpretation of the historical context of the time. Each examined the history and society of the first century through the interpretation of which they interpreted Jesus.[35] As a result, the figure of Jesus became a historical construct, standing on the border between Judaism and Christianity, which Heschel deems imaginary constructs.[36] This scholarly construct of Jesus made of the historical construct of the first century is what Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls "Historical-Jesus".[37] What seems to happen is that cultural hybrids (Judaism and Christianity) use their respective historical constructs of first-century Judaism based on their contemporary historical setting to construct Historical-Jesus as a cultural hybrid to make sense in their own setting, thus creating a multiply constructed cultural metahybrid. Homi Bhabha is saying that such a phenomenon occupies "in-between spaces" or "no-man's-lands" between constructed categories, which "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself".[38]

[34] Heschel, 'Jesus as Theological Transvestite', 194.

[35] This is very similar to what Lasker writes about philosophical polemics in the Middle Ages between Jews and Christians. See footnote 263 on page 59. Concerning the relationship between parents and children, Elisheva Baumgarten also points out that medieval Jewish-Christian coexistence was characterized by shared models and value systems, although the conclusions drawn from them were contradictory. For example, the phenomenon of "maternal cruelty" manifested in mothers abandoning their children by entering convents in the Christian society while the Hebrew Chronicles of the Rhineland Massacres during the first Crusade in 1096 praise mothers who killed their children rather than letting them to be baptized (Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children*, 178–81.) See also Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, 111, 238–39, 258–59.

[36] Heschel, 'Jesus as Theological Transvestite', 191.

[37] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 2.

[38] Weininger, 'Imagining Jesus, Imagining Jews', 43; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1–2.

1.4.3. Counter-history as "inward acculturation"

In her analysis of the relationship of Abraham Geiger to Jesus, Susannah Heschel calls Geiger's "Judaization" of Jesus a "counter-history" based on the scholarship of Amos Funkenstein and David Biale.[39] Funkenstein and Biale took the term from Michel Foucault, who understood it as the alternative historiography of the oppressed that challenges the mainstream histories of kings and sovereignty "as a protest, a critique, an oppositional discourse",[40] and coined it with Walter Benjamin's definition of the historian's task: "to brush history against the grain".[41] Biale understands counter-history as "a type of revisionist historiography, but where the revisionist proposes a new theory or finds new facts, the counter-historian transvalues old ones"[42] and for Funkenstein, the term covers a "systematic exploitation of the adversary's most trusted sources against their grain", i.e. its originally intended purpose, the aim of which is the formation of a counter-identity by the "distortion of the adversary's self-image, of his identity, through the deconstruction of his memory".[43] Although Heschel understand it as Yuval's desecrating overt polemics like the counter-gospel *Toledot Yeshu,* it seems that the covert expropriating polemics Yuval is talking about also fits the definition of counter-history, intended to build a counter-identity and legitimate one's own tradition.

According to Weininger, from the Talmudic period onwards, the fictional Jesus was a necessary symbol of Jewish thought and art. As we shall see in chapter 4, rabbinic and medieval Jewish literature overtly and covertly emphasises the ordinariness of Jesus and the Jewishness of his teachings, effectively reclaiming Jesus for the community. Jesus became a Janus-faced figure who is both part of the Jewish tradition and a heretic, both "them" and "us," whose figure presents difficulties for the creation of rabbinic Jewish identity and culture.[44] Weininger argues that a key element in the construction of identity is the establishment of boundaries between outside and inside, and "us" and "them". This is a negative self-definition, but apparently, identity can only be created in relation to the other.[45]

In the modern context, Neta Stahl points out that Jesus' seemingly contradictory identity-forming role is explained by Hegel's thesis that "a self-conscious being […] exists only as a being that's recognized, […] sees itself in the other," which is an "interactive dynamic of one self-conscious being with another".[46] This means that we depend on an encounter with the "Other"

[39] Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 14.
[40] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 71.
[41] Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', 257.
[42] Biale, *Kabbalah and Counter-History*, 11.
[43] Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 36–38.
[44] Weininger, 'Imagining Jesus, Imagining Jews', 21–24.
[45] Ibid., 36.
[46] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 91–92. A decade earlier, Fichte also formulated that self-consciousness becomes possibly only in opposition to

separate from us to create our own self. Stahl also cites Homi Bhabha, according to whom "'otherness' […]is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity"[47] and says that "Jesus's Otherness served as an object of desire for Hebrew writers at the turn of the twentieth century and became a fantasy of their origin and identity."[48] For example, in the Talmud, 'the other' is not merely an adversary but a means of self-definition: 'the other' appears as an aspect of the self.[49]

Apparently, for both Jewish and Christian authors, Jesus' otherness also served as an object of desire and contempt at the same time and became a fantasy of European origins and identity, albeit with an opposite sign: Christians emphasized his Gentile origins (spiritual or even physical) and downplayed his Jewishness as "otherness" while Jews emphasized his total Jewishness and denied any "other" (i.e. Gentile) heritage. In doing so, Jewish thinkers claimed a position of power over Christianity when they rewrote the Christian story, thus creating a counter-history, even though they themselves believed that the Christian thinkers' version was a counter-history and theirs was the real one.

1.4.4. Polemomania vs. polemophobia

Throughout in this dissertation, I argue that the Jewish reclamation of Jesus and the paradigm of Jewish engaging with the surrounding majority culture is basically of a hidden polemical nature, which might easily seem like an exaggeration or oversimplification, rejecting the possibility of independent internal development or genuine Jewish interest in the surrounding culture, which latter was demonstrably present both in the Antiquity and in the Middle Ages.[50] Not excluding these factors, I still wish to present this phenomenon as polemical because it serves the reinforcement of distinct Jewish identity vis-à-vis the dominant and anti-Judaist culture of Christianity and Western civilization.[51]

The tradition of denying or softening polemical dependence in Jewish engagement with the non-Jewish world goes back to Samuel Sandmel, who created the word "parallelomania", which he defines as "that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection

"something that does not have its ground in the rational being", i.e. vis-à-vis "the Other". (Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, 19–21.)

[47] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 67.

[48] Stahl, 'Jesus as the New Jew: Zionism and the Literary Representation of Jesus', 2.

[49] Weininger, 'Imagining Jesus, Imagining Jews', 46. Weininger cites Benjamin Harshav, according to whom, in Talmudic discourse, the "other" is not merely an adversary but an important element of identity representing the opposite alternative of the self (Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, 16.).

[50] Fredriksen and Irshai, 'Christian Anti-Judaism', 4:1006-1007. In: CHJ; Dan, 'Literature, Hebrew, Europe and the Mediterranean', 407–8. In: Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia.

[51] For the detailed analysis of the history of anti-Judaism in Western civilization, see Nirenberg, David. *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. New York / London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013.

flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction".[52] Questioning the significance of even undeniable parallels,[53] Sandmel presents an extremely strong, almost abusive moral judgment on scholars having a mindset of discovering relations between texts of cultures that are otherwise interrelated, basically representing their way of thinking as exaggerated fantasies revealing pathological attention-seeking and agenda-driven behaviour, through which they cover their creative bankruptcy.

Taking up on Sandmel's position, Alon Goshen-Gottstein published his study titled *Polemomaniyah: hirhurim metodiyim al ḥeker havikuaḥ hayehudi-notsri beikvot perushei ḥazal veorigenes leshir-hashirim* (Polemomania: Methodological Reflections on the Study of the Judeo-Christian Controversy between the Talmudic Sages and Origen over the Interpretation of the Song of Songs) against reading too much polemic into Jewish and Christian statements about the same topic but reaching opposite conclusions. Goshen-Gottstein attempts to formulate criteria according to which a polemical relationship can be established between two texts.

In his definition, polemic is a two-way interaction created by a shared ideological foundation accompanied by historical context.[54] The mere historical context is necessary but not sufficient to assume polemic but the following factors mut be demonstrated: the polemicist must be conscious of what they are doing, be aware of the other party's existence (either physically or in the realm of reference), communicate with a polemical intent, and the target audience must clearly understand the message as polemical. Goshen-Gottstein seems to be concerned that once every interpretive statement is read as potentially polemical, we will undermine the very foundations of our methodology because everything becomes polemic and the hermeneutical venture sinks into voluntarism.[55]

Besides carrying on the stigmatizing word "mania", my problem with Goshen-Gottstein's approach is that it restricts the meaning of polemics to such an extent that it becomes useless and unrealistic, reducing it to a sort of friendly exchange of ideas between equal parties conscious of what they are doing. Apart from that, Goshen-Gottstein's definition is overly narrow as it rules out the possibility of hidden one-way polemic of speaking against the majority outgroup understandable only for members of the minority ingroup to reinforce its distinct identity.

First, polemics is seldom a two-way interaction if there is as power imbalance between the parties involved. Jews might have been on a par with Christians in Origen's time, but they were definitely not equals after the Constantinian turn. Therefore, this criterion does not hold for Jewish-Christian relations at the time of the compilation of the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu*,

[52] Sandmel, 'Parallelomania', 1.
[53] Ibid., 3.
[54] Goshen-Gottstein, 'Polemomania', 134–35.
[55] Ibid., 138–39.

when Jewish disagreement with a state religion, one of the basic tenets of which is the rejection of Judaism, needed to be formulated without expecting interaction: in secret or using a secretive language but obviously not loudly enough to be heard. According to Goshen-Gottstein's criteria, even the *Toledot Yeshu* cannot be considered polemical because a note found in one of its manuscripts warns against making its contents known to Gentiles, even to Jews with a caution, and mentions that it is strictly forbidden to publish it.[56] Second, polemical *intent* (and any intent for that matter) cannot be proven or demonstrated objectively, only presumed. It seems that Goshen-Gottstein expects too much overtness and consciousness and, again, leaves no room for hidden polemic, in which case the goal is to hide even polemical intent itself. Thus, the theory collapses under its own strictness, and the result is that if anything, only the harshest communication can be considered polemic. However, Jews were very well aware of the possible catastrophic results of formulating overt polemics against Christianity.[57]

Goshen-Gottstein's fear of interpreting everything as polemics is understandable but this attitude ignores the situation where the entire cultural or theological milieu is polemical as in the case of Christianity. Jews were constantly reminded of their inferiority at every turn, which is polemics according to Goshen-Gottstein's criteria: conscious communication with a polemical intent understood by the target audience. Why is it then that any Jewish expression about the same topic is not polemic? Again, Goshen-Gottstein seems to look down on scholars with this mindset as he argues that their focus on polemic marks the sources with a conceptual and

[56] "This pamphlet, the contents of which have been transmitted orally from one person to another and only for reproduction by hand – not in print. Therefore the enlightened ones of the generation will see it and keep quiet, for this is a critical time; he will keep quiet because the Exile is so bitter. God forbid that he should read it in public or in the presence of light-minded young girls, and certainly not in the presence of Gentiles who understand the German language. … It is strictly forbidden to put it into print and it should be shown only to people of discretion for one never knows what the morrow may bring. *One does not trust even in His holy ones, etc.* I copied it from three different pamphlets, from three different countries – not just one. The contents of all these pamphlets were identical, except that I wrote it in the language of prudence [i. e., Hebrew, which the Gentiles did not understand], because " [God] chose us from among the nations and gave us a prudent tongue." (Carmilly-Weinberger, *Censorship and Freedom of Expression*, 185. The sentence in italics is not in the translation. For the Hebrew original, see Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 10–11.

[57] For example, the Hebrew chronicle of the 1088 Rhineland massacres during the first crusade relate a scene where a certain David ben Rabbi Nathaniel, in the face of certain death, deliberately polemicized with the crusaders with clear polemical intent in a way the physically present opponent understood, using details taken from the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu*: "You are the children of lust. You believe in a deity who was a bastard and was crucified. […] I know the truth. If you kill me, my soul will reside in paradise, in the light of life. But you will descend to the nethermost pit, to everlasting abhorrence. In hell you shall be judged along with your deity and in boiling excrement, for he is the son of a harlot." Unfortunately, the dialogue between equals was prevented by the immediate slaughter of David and his family. (Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, 262.). Although the story might be fiction, it reveals that Jews entertained such thoughts and were aware that saying them aloud is dangerous.

ideological charge that that may lead scholars to overlooking the unique content of the sources because this approach makes scholars blind to the intended message.[58]

The self-professed polemomaniac Israel Jacob Yuval argues convincingly that no need of direct proof to assume polemic because historical plausibility as circumstantial evidence is sufficient to interpret Jewish and Christian religious phenomena as being polemically related. Building his argument on James Scott's concept of "hidden transcripts", which are disguised acts of ideological insubordination created by each subordinated group as "a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant",[59] Yuval emphasizes that a text cannot be separated from the historical context in which it was created. He argues that the antagonistic conditions experienced by a minority are, in themselves, enough to imply a polemical stance—even the simple act of emphasizing uniqueness can be perceived as a challenge to the dominant majority. In the case of Christianity and Judaism after the Constantinian turn, this dynamic meant that anti-Christian Jewish polemic was often conducted in veiled ways, sometimes even by omitting any mention of the rival faith. Yet beneath this surface silence, a vibrant and complex dialogue continued between the two sister religions. He also asks the question as to whether it is realistic to "imagine the emergence of a rival religion that appropriated to itself all the components of Judaism's own identity without this arousing opposition".[60]

Yuval, with a bit of counter-stigmatization, calls the opposite mindset "parallelophobia" and highlights its fundamental flaws by pointing out that while scholars have no problems acknowledging the deep interconnection between Jewish and Christian cultures in the Middle Ages, they are hesitant to do the same when examining rabbinic literature from late antiquity. However, they have no issue recognizing the impact of Greek thought on Jewish culture, even presenting Hellenistic influence as a transformative force in Judaism's evolution after the Biblical era. This reluctance to associate Talmudic material with Christianity is striking in light of the historical reality that in the Talmudic era, the land of Israel was dominated by Christianity and not by Greco-Roman culture,[61] and there was also a strong Christian presence in Babylonia exactly at the time of the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud.[62] Yuval also points out that the "phobic" perspective sees culture as a self-contained entity that evolves in isolation. However, as we have seen in section 1.4.2, cultural identities are never formed solely from within; rather,

[58] Goshen-Gottstein, 'Polemomania', 139.
[59] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, xii–xiii.
[60] Yuval, 'Christianity in Talmud and Midrash', 55–57, 66.
[61] Ibid., 54.
[62] Following the Ecumenical Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), where Nestorius was repeatedly condemned as heretic, Nestorian Christians, scholars and laypeople alike, sought refuge in Persia, giving impetus to the Churches of the East, which became active and successful in missionizing, reaching even Sri Lanka and China. (González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2010, 1:307.)

they emerge through continuous interaction, where a culture defines itself in contrast to a neighbouring one. In the course of this dynamic and unceasing process, ethnic identities arise through continual exchanges of rejection and assimilation, resulting in the inherent interconnectedness of conflict and dialogue.[63]

Since neither the "polemomaniac" nor the "polemophobic" approach can be proven by direct evidence, both are equally valid hermeneutical principles as long as we do not deny the opposite possibility. However, without the "maniac" (i.e. intuitive, therefore "unscientific") approach, literary and movie criticism and even psychology would be impossible as we would need to ignore allusions, echoes, resonances, and implicit references. Finally, curiously enough, it is not the "phobic" but the "maniac" attitude that comes with the benefit of deeper understanding Judaism, Christianity, and their relations. Obviously, for volume constraints, here I need to risk simplification and one-sidedness, bearing in mind what Philip R. Davies wrote in his book about our limitations concerning the process of canonization of the Hebrew Scripture: "Most of what we assert about the past is not "knowledge" in the sense that we can claim it as reliable fact. It is a conclusion which data, method, and reasoning have led us to assert as knowledge."[64]

1.4.5.Jesus' multiply dual nature

Interestingly, there is a striking similarity between the duality of Jesus in Christian theology and the cultural hybridity of his figure. According to Christian theology, Jesus Christ is both a divine person and a human being,[65] capable of transcending the boundary between transcendence and immanence, functioning as a kind of mediator or interface between the Godhead and the material world as the Logos or *Memra* in the Second Temple period (see page 82). Apparently, Judaism and Christianity is also held together by the dual nature of Historical-Jesus, who became a kind of communication interface between the two traditions and became a vehicle for both to help forming communal and individual identity.

While Christianity embraced the duality of Jesus as a divine and human being, it had problems accepting his dual nature of a Jewish preacher and the originator of Christianity, mediating between the two traditions. Judaism has a similar problem but the other way round. However, there seems to be an intriguing way out of this dilemma, which might allow to perceive each

[63] Yuval, 'Christianity in Talmud and Midrash', 69.
[64] Davies, *Scribes and Schools*, 1.
[65] The hypostatic union as articulated by the Chalcedonian Definition endows Jesus with a dual (hence liminal) nature by saying that "Jesus Christ is one and the same God, perfect in divinity, and perfect in humanity, true God and true human, with a rational soul and a body, of one substance with the Father in his divinity, and of one substance with us in his humanity, [...] manifested in two natures without any confusion, change, division or separation. The union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each are kept, and both are joined in one person and hypostasis." (cited and translated by González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2010, 1:301.)

other's traditions as equally valid. The theoretical physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne shows an draws attention to the parallel of the paradoxical wave/particle duality in physics and the human/divine duality of Jesus in Christian theology, and he advises theology to be encouraged by theoretical physics, which allows possibilities held strictly apart by our classical thinking.[66] Without wishing to delve into the question of relevance of theoretical physics to theology, especially because Polkinghorne is highly controversial,[67] there is an aesthetic appeal in converting his idea to Jesus' cultural duality or hybridity. Schweitzer's "the-Jesus-you-want-is-the-Jesus-you-get" observation, although characterizing the Christian Quest, seems to be true even if we include the Jewish context: the intention of observing Jesus as a Jew will give a Jewish-like answer and wishing to see Jesus as belonging to Christianity will give a Christian-like answer. Moreover, on combining the Chalcedonian definition with quantum physics, there is no constraint to regard Jesus regarded as *fully Jew and fully Christian* at the same time. Like the contradictory "natures" of the electron, it sounds rather counter-intuitive, but at least it is consistent with the "post-polemical world" heralded by Israel Jacob Yuval and Daniel Lasker[68] and could lead to real dialogue and a fuller understanding of both traditions, instead of trying to sever Jesus' connection with "the other side". Beneath the surface phenomena of Historical-Jesus within the binary context of Judaism and Christianity, there might be an underlying reality, which is very difficult to grasp in lack of appropriate experience and language. However, as

[66] Polkinghorne, *Quantum Physics and Theology*, 24, 92. This is demonstrated by the so-called "double slit experiment", in which elementary particles such as electrons, traditionally thought of as little "balls" of matter, are fired one by one through two slits onto a detector screen, and the resulting pattern looks as if the electrons were waves, which is striking because in classical Newtonian physics, matter and wave are mutually exclusive categories. The experiment proves that the electron has a wave/particle duality: individually it behaves like a particle while its collective behaviour shows wave-like interference. What is more, the experiment shows that the electron passes through both slits simultaneously, which is impossible in Newtonian physics. To add to the "mystery", the behaviour observed depends on the question asked, as asking a particle-like question will give a particle-like answer, while asking a wave-like question will give a wave-like answer (Polkinghorne, *Quantum Theory*, 22–25.). The experiment implies that elementary particles are something third the underlying reality of which we cannot grasp directly, and in everyday language we can only talk about them in contradictory terms, which are equally valid according to our intention.

[67] For example, the English philosopher Simon Blackburne is highly critical about Polkinghorne's venture of fixing up theology with science, highlighting that it is rather the theologizing of science than the scientizing of theology. He also points out that ultimately Polkinghorne's position promotes that one can believe everything they want without the need of justification but with serious consequences for those who do not believe accordingly, citing Hume, who said that errors in philosophy are only ridiculous whereas errors in religion are dangerous (Blackburn, 'An Unbeautiful Mind'; Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 272.). In addition, although the theoretical physicist and mathematician Freeman Dyson calls Polkinghorne's arguments "polished and logically coherent", he critiques Polkinghorne for overlooking an important difference between science and theology: while physics is universally applicable across all countries and cultures, theology is specific to a single culture only, thus Polkinghorne's problems do not make sense outside the Christian world (Dyson, 'Is God in the Lab?').

[68] Yuval, *Two Nations*, 21; Lasker, 'The Jewish Critique of Christianity'.

all magic comes with a price, it may lead to uncomfortable consequences because we would have to deal with the thought that theologically, Judaism and Christianity might be equally valid representations of the same underlying reality connected by the figure of Historical-Jesus, irrespective of the veracity of the theological Christ and the actual identity and intentions of the first-century Galilean Jewish itinerant preacher called Yeshua ben Yosef.

1.5. Assumptions and limitations

I am writing this dissertation as a Protestant Christian living in Eastern Europe in the 21st century. Although I am trying to be as objective as I can be, I am aware that total objectivity is impossible because, like everyone else, I am also the child of my age and cultural and religious socialization. I believe that during my previous experience with Jews and Jewish culture, and my studies at the Doctoral School of the Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies have made me capable of looking at the Jewish and Christian traditions both critically and acceptingly enough to be able to produce a dissertation that is the least possible biased in either direction. This task required to critically transcend my religious beliefs and accept what "the other side" has to say about its central hero, for which I consciously trained myself from the beginning of my studies. Allowing oneself to look into the mirror held up by another culture, what is more, an opponent of sorts, and accepting what one sees is always a difficult task, but its benefits outweigh the pains of the effort. Also, it is very difficult to articulate objectively the complex exchange of ideas between Judaism and Christianity through the centuries as even world class scholars are struggling with it. Although I sometimes need to formulate Christian theology, its deliberate intent is information and clarification only.

Also, I am not intending to imply that Judaism would be inferior in any way by only appropriating everything from the surrounding cultures without returning anything and has no intrinsic value. This is sheer anti-Semitism overlooking that the much-admired creativity of Japanese culture is no less inferior although it did nearly the same as the Jewry to ensure the survival of their culture by creating a cultural hybrid (see page 49). I acknowledge that it is comfortable to believe in the traditional narrative of total segregation of Judaism and Christianity, as if Jews and Christians were living in isolation from another with only hostile interactions,[69] excluding any hybridity between them. We got used to it because this view was almost equivocally shared by both Jewish and Christian historians until the late 1970s,[70] and both religious traditions have

[69] Reed and Becker, 'Introduction', 2.

[70] Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 182.

a doctrinal interest in maintaining this myth.[71] However, as Reed and Becker note, "much of our evidence simply does not fit into this appealing and clear-cut narrative".[72]

I am aware that understanding past is limited by our contemporary experience and mindset. People who lived in the past had a different mindset from what we have, which makes it very difficult for us to imagine how they perceived their world—and their own past for that matter. Citing the 19th-century German historian Johan Gustav Droysen, who argues for viewing Alexander's time "as a mirror of the present", James Porter notes that probably the past cannot be understood in any other way.[73] It resonates with Benedetto Croce's proposition that "every true history is contemporary history",[74] meaning that every representation of the past is anachronistic to some extent. Husserl, who argues that all historical knowledge is inherently relative as it is always seen from the "present" of the historian; therefore, a historiography presenting merely the facts of the past is incomprehensible because it does not engage with the deeper structures of meaning that connect past events to the present situation, without which no genuine insight and understanding is possible.[75] What Gadamer writes, inspired by Husserl, about our understanding of past works of art seems to be true for historical texts, events, and persons as well. Paraphrasing him, what historians recover from the past is not the past itself, but a version shaped by present perspectives, taking on a derivative cultural or political significance. In other words, According to Gadamer, "all such [artistic or historical] understanding is ultimately self-understanding" and we might question whether our interpretations truly reflect the past as it was or our understanding history is, in some sense, a new act of creation.[76]

Avi Sagi, in his article "Halakhic Praxis and the Word of God", explores the relationship between divine revelation and human interpretation within the context of *halakha*, with far-reaching theoretical consequences. Sagi focuses on the tension between two concepts: "Torah from Heaven", implying divine origin, and "Torah is not in Heaven",[77] signifying human interpretive authority, and his article examines two models addressing this tension. One is the "Discovery Model", emphasizes correspondence between human decisions and divine will, asserting that halakhic interpretation merely uncovers divine truths already embedded in the divine revelation in a concealed manner, waiting to be discovered. This model grapples with the issue of disagreements between sages, explaining these as consequences of human limitations or different applications of divine law to varied circumstances. In contrast, the "Creative Model" views

[71] Poorthuis, Schwartz, and Turner, *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity*, 1.
[72] Reed and Becker, 'Introduction', 18.
[73] Porter, 'Hellenism and Modernity', 10–11; Droysen, 'Review of Commentarius Geographicus', 471–72.
[74] Croce, *History*, 12.
[75] Husserl, *Crisis*, 371–72.
[76] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 159, 251.
[77] Deuteronomy 30:12, and see also the story of Akhnai's oven in b*Bava Metzia* 59a-b.

Halakha as a human enterprise by asserting that halakhic truth is not a discovery of divine law but a creation by the sages by human deliberation, interpretation, and legal reasoning. Thus, while halakhic rulings are rooted in divine revelation, human role is central in shaping them. This model embraces the possibility of conflict between divine truth and Halakhic decisions, emphasizing that God intended the law to be shaped by human sages, which view also allows for their disagreements.

Sagi's models also have implications for Christian Biblical exegesis, the interpretation of the sacred texts in other religious traditions, and secular historiography as well by raising the question whether what theologians and historians present to us is what they discovered in the raw data or they themselves created.[78] This dissertation pinpoints a certain trend in the Jewish reclamation of Jesus but since the topic is immensely vast and inexhaustible, it is inevitably selective and thus tendentious. Ultimately, there is no way of telling whether what I emphasize and argue for is a discovery or a creation.

From the writings of premodern and modern Jewish and Christian historians, it is easy to see that they created different "historical Jesuses" interpreted within the framework of their recreation of Second Temple Judaism, reflecting their own contemporary historical settings and western, Eurocentric, middle class, male ideals, and concerns to make Jesus meaningful in their present. The post-colonialist and feminist scholar Kwok Pui-Lan notes that they (note the wordplay) "re-presented" past in modern idiom to make the distant near and the strange familiar, whereby their "lives of Jesus" were more cultural products of their times than "factual" accounts of the life of Jesus.[79]

Kwok critiques 19th-century authors by highlighting how their work on the historical Jesus was deeply influenced by the colonial and empire-building ethos of Europe, rather than being purely objective or scientific. She argues that these authors projected Western, bourgeois, and colonialist concerns onto their studies, which distorted their understanding of Jesus and Christianity by framing it through the lens of European superiority and colonial ideologies. Kwok argues that these 19th-century scholars did not merely engage in academic study but participated in a project of cultural domination, using their studies of Jesus to legitimize European colonial control and to reinforce the notion that Europe was the pinnacle of civilization. Through her lens, the quest for the historical Jesus becomes part of a larger effort to understand and control both the "natives" of the past and the colonized people of the present. It is easy to understand

[78] Probably what we have is a spectrum with Discovery and Creation at its two ends, which are very difficult or probably impossible to attain, and each exegetical and historiographical activity is somewhere on the spectrum, blending the two to some extent.

[79] Kwok, 'Jesus/The Native', 78.

Kwok's analysis as suggesting that their Eurocentric class interests were conscious and stronger than their sincere academic interest in deciphering who Jesus really could have been while it seems that they were only unaware of being the children of their age.

This raises the question whether we are any different when we deal with *them* and evaluate what they said. Living in the myth of demythologization and the grand narrative of lack of grand narratives, we must be cautious about attributing ulterior motives to these scholars by misunderstanding their alignment with their myths and grand narratives. The same way as we are unable to identify with their modernist mindset, we must not expect them to comply with our postmodern or post-postmodern values. This would be unfair to them, just as those who hold what is considered a scientific approach today find it unfair when those who believe in grand narratives label them subversive or destructive. We must be at least aware of our tendency of imposing our contemporary views anachronistically on 19th century scholars the same way as they did on Jesus. After all, as a famous person said, it is easy to see to see the speck in our neighbour's eyes and forget about the beam in our own.

1.6. Notes on terminology

1.6.1. Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus of Nazareth is the Galilean-born itinerant teacher and miracle-maker operating in the Land of Israel during the late Second Temple period, whose life, teachings, execution, and resurrection are told by the four Gospels in the New Testament, and whom Christians consider the Messiah of Israel and the redeemer of humankind. Since in Christian theology, Jesus is also a resurrected and glorified divine being, it is important to clarify that this dissertation is about what Jewish thinkers said about Jesus as a human being and not about what happened to him after his death. When talking about the historical human being or his scholarly representation, I use the name "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus" and when about the Christian theological concept, I sometimes use "Jesus Christ" or "Christ".

1.6.2. Judaism / Jewry / Jewishness / Judean

In this dissertation, I am using the following words with the following meanings: "Judaism" is the Jewish religious and cultural traditions, customs, attitudes, and way of life; sometimes "Jewry" or "Jews" is the people who practise or follow Judaism, or consider themselves part of the Jewish tradition or simply "a Jew"; "Jewishness" is the state of being Jewish, including Jewish identity; and "Judean" is someone living in, or something related to, the ancient Judea.

Since there is a notorious lack of a universally accepted singular definition of being a Jew, for the purposes of this dissertation "Jewish thinkers" are intellectuals who either identify themselves as Jews and are also considered as such by others, and whose activities promoted Jewish interests, primarily continued religious or secular existence in the Diaspora or national existence in a separate state. Converting to Christianity, either with or without the denial of the Jewish legacy, is not considered a Jewish interest here. Besides, irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or cultural affiliation or their self-proclaimed or imposed identity, no author is considered Jewish who accepted and promoted Christian theological views on Jesus, with or without their own formal conversion to Christianity. Such authors include Joseph Rabinowitz (1837–1899), who was born from a Hasidic family but established a Messianic Jewish community called 'Israelites of the New Covenant' in the Land of Israel with articles of faith and a service book mixing Jewish and Christian liturgical elements. Another example is Isaac (Ignatz) Lichtenstein (1825–1908), a Hungarian rabbi, who started to believe in and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah of Israel without ever converting. Finally, he was accused of heresy and removed from his rabbinical position.[80] A third example is the German-born American Talmudic scholar Max Reich (1867–1945), the late president of the Hebrew Christian Alliance (now Messianic Jewish Alliance of America).[81] Although these authors are definitely interesting from a scholarly point of view, I excluded them from this study because despite they worked for what they thought to be the benefit of the Jewish people, they spread Christian theological views on Jesus.

Jews who wrote about Jesus and converted to Christianity later are a borderline case and they are also excluded from this study for volume constraints. Such a thinker is Israel Zoller (1881–1956), who wrote *The Nazarene: Studies of New Testament Exegesis in the Light of Aramaic and Rabbinic Thought* in 1935, when he was the rabbi of Trieste. In 1939, Zoller became the Chief Rabbi of Rome but converted to Catholicism in 1945, took the name Eugenio Zolli and taught at the Sapienza University of Rome and the Pontifical Biblical Institute. The only ambiguous case preserved in this dissertation is Joseph Salvador, whose mother was Catholic, so halakhically he was not Jewish, but was considered as a Jew by himself and his environment; is counted among the precursors of Zionism by Zionist historians;[82] scholars on the topic list him among Jewish authors;[83] and wrote about Jesus from a Jewish perspective, polemicizing

[80] Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 18–24. Lichtenstein was moved by the solidarity of prominent Christians with the Jews, who, during the Tiszaeszlár blood libel case, denounced the anti-Jewish accusations and sentiments using arguments from the New Testament (Lichtenstein, *A Jewish Mirror*, 4–5.).

[81] Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 35.

[82] Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 2; Skolnik and Berenbaum, 'Salvador, Joseph', 17:712 in: EJ.

[83] Salvador, *J. Salvador*, 23–26; Singer, 'Salvador, Joseph', 662–63; Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 56–58; Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 1–2; Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*, 239; Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 134; Skolnik and Berenbaum, 'Salvador, Joseph', 17:712 in: EJ.

against Christianity. I did not exclude anyone from this study, who was suspected with unproven missionary activity because of positive views on Jesus, for example Rabbi Eliyahu Soloveitchik (1805–1881), who was heavily criticized for his positive attitude to Jesus, and the Zionist writer Aharon Kabak, whose positive attitude to Jesus was criticized by Joseph Klausner as promulgating foreign ideals that endanger Judaism.[84]

1.6.3. Modernity

Being aware of the difficulties of delineating historical eras and the legitimacy of such demarcations. In this dissertation I follow the periodization of *The Cambridge History of Judaism,* which understands the Middle Ages as lasting from 500 to 1500, the "early modern" age from 1500 to 1815, the year when the Napoleonic wars ended, to be followed by the "modern era" or "modernity".[85] The beginning of this period coincides with the emergence of the secular nation states after the collapse of the *Ancien Régime,* the Christian quest for the historical Jesus, as well as the emergence of full-scale European colonialism and accelerated Christian mission. However, for CHJ, the key difference of modernism is individual choice of identity.[86] Although its volume 8 titled *The Modern World* ends in 2000, for volume constraints all the authors reviewed published their thoughts on Jesus of Nazareth before the Second World War, except Eliezer Berkovits (see page 173).

1.6.4. Appropriation vs. adoption

Writing about the Jews of Medieval Ashkenaz, Ivan Marcus calls the phenomenon of the Judaizing and expropriating polemics Yuval is talking about "inward acculturation", which is internalization of elements of Christian culture and their transformation "in a polemical, parodic, or neutralized manner" to reinforce Jewish identity. Marcus notes that "Jews absorbed into their Judaism aspects of majority culture and understood the products to be part and parcel of their Judaism, and they continued to think of themselves as being completely Jewish". He contrasts identity-strengthening premodern "inward acculturation" with modern "outward acculturation" where a blurring of identity occurs, for example in Jewish assimilation.[87] In this sense, both the premodern and the modern Jewish reclamations of Jesus can be regarded as examples of inward acculturation.

Analysing the medieval Ashkenazi rabbinic innovation of penitential fasting taken over from Christianity, Elisheva Baumgarten notes that scholarship has been struggling with naming

[84] Sadan, *Basar mibsarenu*, 179–80.
[85] Chazan, 'Introduction', 6:1-6. in: CHJ; Karp and Sutcliffe, 'Introduction', 7:1-11. in: CHJ.
[86] Hart and Michels, 'Introduction', 8:3-4. in: CHJ.
[87] Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 11–12.

the transfer of ideas or practices during the encounter of different religious, ethnic, or social groups and suggests the term 'appropriation' to describe the process. She draws attention that 'influence' suggests that the one taking over an element of another culture is a passive participant in the process whereas the takeover of penitential fasting and the Judaization of Jesus was not imposed on the Jews—they did it on their own initiative. For Baumgarten, 'exchange', although suggests multi-directionality, does not contain the sense of taking possession and internalizing, which evidently takes place in the case of penitential fasting and the reclamation of Jesus. Her problem with Marcus' 'inward acculturation' is that it contains a direction (inward) and the word 'culture', which restrict the use of term (and suggests passivity and subconsciousness). Therefore, she proposes the term 'appropriation' because it is flexible enough to be used for a wider range of cultural tenets, practices and discourses, and suggests active and ongoing taking ownership.[88]

However, Baumgarten seems to misunderstand the way Marcus uses the words 'inward' and 'outward' and uses a disputable term. First, Marcus apparently means that inward vs. outward dichotomy is not about the direction of acculturation itself but of its manifestation or the place where it occurs (Baumgarten overlooks that outward acculturation does not make sense in her understanding), "inward" being a synonym for 'internal'.[89] In this sense, inward acculturation means that based on their behaviour or thinking, individuals continue to be perceived as strangers or aliens by their environment, even by themselves and not to be acculturated. Ashkenazi Jews who inwardly acculturated to the majority society with the takeover of penitential fasting outwardly looked and behaved and continued to be perceived and perceive themselves as "strangers" the same as before the takeover whereas assimilated Jews became indistinguishable from the majority society in their looks and behaviour. Hence, inward acculturation strengthens the minority identity whereas outward acculturation weakens it even if leaves the core personality unaffected. Second, in everyday use, 'appropriation' has a meaning of taking or making use of without authority or right to do so, therefore has a negative connotation as if the

[88] Baumgarten, 'Appropriation and Differentiation', 40–41.

[89] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the primary meaning of 'inward' is "belonging or connected to the inside" especially "mental or spiritual conditions and actions, as distinguished from bodily or external phenomena" and in this sense it is a synonym of 'interior' and 'intrinsic', and only its secondary meaning refers to direction or motion (Simpson and Weiner, *OED*, 8:58-59.). As an opposite in this sense, 'outward' refers to "actions, looks, and other externally visible manifestations, as opposed to internal feelings, spiritual or mental states or processes, etc.; of or pertaining to outer form as opposed to inner substance", especially concerning "one's relations with other persons and external circumstances", being a synonym of 'formal', 'external'. (Ibid., 10:1048-1049.) See also Sinclair, *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary*, 771, 1023; Mish, *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 637, 839.

act was illegal, although it is not represented in the Oxford English Dictionary.[90] Yuval's term, expropriation, suggests a power relation when the party taking over is in a higher power position, which was not true in the case of Judaism in respect to Christianity.

However, such legal terms denoting deprivation of property rights do not seem to make sense in the context of cultural encounters and takeovers as cultural products are not unalienable properties of the communities that developed them. Probably there is no single word to describe the process, and the terms 'internalization', 'adoption', and 'incorporation' equally denote active takeover and processing without legal or criminal connotations. In the case of Jesus, 'reclamation' conveys the idea of a successful repossession of something that has been lost, disavowed, or taken away, assuming that Jesus has been taken away from and disavowed by the Jewish people, and needs to be "repatriated". In the case of 'adoption', the recipient is not a passive subject of external influence but the initiator of the process during which a cultural product is actively *selected, taken over, transformed, represented* by the adopting party as one's own, and *used* for their purposes, thus agency is maintained during the entire process. Therefore, I am striving to use this term as much as possible in this dissertation.[91]

1.6.5. The Jewish reclamation of Jesus

Based on the above, I understand the Jewish reclamation of Jesus to be the assertion of the Jewishness of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth on the part of Jewish thinkers from 1815 to 1945. This intellectual phenomenon claims that Jesus is an integral part of Jewish history, and uses his figure built from the New Testament Gospels and the reconstructed historical setting of first-century Judaism in Jewish thought, literature, and art to convey inherently Jewish messages by presenting him as a hero of Judaism. The aim of the Jewish reclamation of Jesus is not to propagate Christianity among the Jews but to use his figure, severed from Christianity,

[90] Mish, *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 98; Sinclair, *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary*, 61. cf. Simpson and Weiner, *OED*, 1:586-587.

[91] Analysing the rise of the significance of Miriam, Moses' sister, in Medieval Ashkenaz as a Jewish reaction to the emerging Marian devotion to neutralize the power of the virgin and her cult, used extensively as an aid to convert Jews, Ephraim Shoham-Steiner talks about a phenomenon he calls "inner self-empowerment" and defines it a third way beside Yuval's dichotomic view of polemic. He argues that it is neither rejection nor appropriation but the reworking and reinterpreting of familiar figures from the Jewish tradition and attributing new and powerful meanings to them to help Jews meet new challenges (Shoham-Steiner, 'The Virgin Mary, Miriam, and Jewish Reactions', 77, 81.). This phenomenon seems to be more apologetic than polemical; however, the dynamics this (semi-)hidden "reclamation of Mary" is different from the reclamation of Jesus because in the latter case what is employed is not an Old Testament figure (such as the conquest leader Joshua or the first postexilic High Priest Jeshua) to deflect the power of the central figure of the Christian faith but Jesus himself, together with his Christian symbolism such as the Suffering Servant, grafted into the Jewish tradition.

as an individual and a collective identity model and legitimate collective Jewish existence against the individualizing forces of the secular nation state.

1.6.6. The "Land of Israel"

In scholarly literature, the ancient homeland of the Jewish people is often referred to as Palestine, even by Jewish scholars, such as Heinrich Graetz throughout his *History of the Jews*, and also by Zionists, for example Joseph Klausner in *Jesus of Nazareth*. However, considering the political controversy around the legitimacy of this name following the founding of the State of Israel, and especially after the tragic events of 7 October 2023, referring to the Land of Israel by the name "Palestine" is avoided in this dissertation although preserved in direct quotations and when it refers to political or administrative units such as the Roman *Syria Palæstina* and the British Mandatory Palestine. In other instances, the expression "Land of Israel" or *Eretz Yisrael* is used, noting that similarly to the concept of the "Holy Land", this name is also a construct of historical geography.

1.6.7. The "Old Testament"

Although I am accustomed to the use of the term "Old Testament" to name the Scriptures what the Jewish tradition calls *Tanakh* or just simply Bible, and it is regularly used in even Jewish scholarly literature, I acknowledge that the use of this name might rightfully hurt sensibilities because of the implicit Christian supersessionism it carries. Considering the arguments for and against the different designations, and whether the Jewish *Tanakh* can be considered the same as the Christian Old Testament(s),[92] in this dissertation, except in direct quotations, I will call the set of the Scriptures regarded as sacred by both Jewish and Christian traditions as the "Hebrew Bible". In doing so, for the sake of brevity, I choose to ignore the fact that the Hebrew Bible contains sections in Aramaic as well.

1.6.8. Christology

Pertaining to my hypothesis that Jewish thinkers covertly apply Christological language to the historical sufferings of the Jewish people, an important clarification must be made concerning the term "Christology". In Christian theology, this term is defined as the study and account of the person and identity of Jesus of Nazareth, particularly the union of his divine and human

[92] Brettler, Enns, and Harrington, *The Bible and the Believer*, 23, 67–68, 81–82, 119.

natures, his relation to God, and his significance for Christian faith.[93] In addition to references to this part of Christian dogmatics, I am also using this term to describe a Jewish interpretation of the position of the people of Israel vis-à-vis God and the Gentiles in a manner strikingly resembling Christian Christology or its close relative, Soteriology. The term "Messianic" would be too broad here as it includes Jewish messianism as well, which is a different category and excludes the concept of the Christian Messiah in general and Jesus in particular, whereas it is specifically his person and the role he plays in Christian theology that are concerned. Labelling it "Christological", I would like to emphasize the oddity and uniqueness of the phenomenon of attributing a redemptive significance to the Jewish people by Jewish authors in a manner similar to the role assigned to Jesus in Christianity. My use of this term in this sense is substantiated, among others, by Walsh and Loewe's note in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* according to which the term "Christology" has now shifted towards a broader approach to communicate the redemptive significance of Christ in a way that is meaningful within today's cultural context. In addition, this type of usage seems to be accepted in scholarly literature. For example, Joel Rembaum talks about the "Christological meaning" of passages about the Isaian Suffering Servant, the "Christological overtones" of their Jewish interpretation, and "Christological imagery" associated with Jewish suffering. Alon Goshen-Gottstein writes about the "Christological uses" (*shimushim kristologiyim*) of religious motifs, and Alan Sigal about the "christological [sic] meaning" of certain religious content.[94]

1.6.9. Abbreviations

b	Babylonian Talmud (before the name of a tractate, e.g. b*Shabbat*)
CHC	*The Cambridge History of Christianity*
CHJ	*The Cambridge History of Judaism*
EJ	*Encyclopedia Judaica*
JE	*The Jewish Encyclopedia*
LXX	The Septuagint
TY	*Toledot Yeshu*
y	Jerusalem Talmud (before the name of a tractate, e.g. y*Sanhedrin*)

[93] Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 336; Walsh and Loewe, 'Christology', 3:559. In: New Catholic Encyclopedia; Higton, 'Christology'.

[94] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 291–92, 308; Goshen-Gottstein, 'Polemomania', 142; Sigal, *Isaiah 53*, 93.

1.7. Notes on transliteration

When not in direct quotations, Hebrew words are transliterated according to the system of the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.[95] In proper names and Hebrew words that have accepted English orthography, the letter ח (*ḥet*) is transcribed as 'h', the letter צ (*tsadi*) as 'tz', and double consonants are retained, such as in Hayyim, Tzvi, Hanukkah, Hasid, rabbi, tzaddik, and mitzvah (Littman: *Ḥayim, Tsvi, ḥanukah, ḥasid, rabi, tsadik,* and *mitsvah*), even if they retained their Hebrew plural forms in English (Hasidim, tzaddikim, mitzvot), except in the direct transliteration of Hebrew texts or titles of works. The vocal shwa is always transliterated as 'e'. In titles of works, only the first letter is capitalized even if they contain proper names such as *Basar mibsarenu: yeshua minatzrat bahagut hatsiyonit,* except those capitalized in English scholarly literature, for example *Mishneh Torah, Pesikta Rabbati,* and *Toledot Yeshu*. Yiddish words, if any, are transcribed according to the system of orthography of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research[96] unless they have accepted English orthography, for example "Soloveitchik" instead of the Yiddish *Salaveytsik* (סאלאווייציק) or the Modern Hebrew *Soloveytshik* (סולובייצ׳יק). All other non-Latin writing systems are transcribed according to the romanization standards of the American Library Association – Library of Congress.[97] All non-English words written in Latin characters are italicized.

1.8. Bible translation used

Unless indicated otherwise, biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Although NRSVue is a Christian translation, it contains the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha and the New Testament in a uniform style, the advantage of which can obviously be debated, but I accept it for practical reasons. This translation is intended to be as ecumenical as possible representing Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, and the translation committee included Professor Harry Orlinsky, the Editor-in-Chief of the JPS Tanakh,[98] to ensure that the Hebrew Bible "would contain nothing offensive" to Jews,[99] and it often has the same or similar solutions as the JPS Tanakh.[100] Also, the New Revised Standard Version is the translation used in the New Oxford Annotated Bible, one of the editors of which is Marc Zvi Brettler, and its contributors include Jewish scholars such as Yairah Amit, Adele Berlin, Rabbi Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Amy-Jill Levine, Bernard M. Levinson, Daniel R.

[95] See for example Castaño, Fishman, and Kanarfogel, *Regional Identities and Cultures of Medieval Jews*, ix.
[96] https://www.yivo.org/Yiddish-Alphabet
[97] https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/roman.html
[98] Garber, 'Orlinsky, Harry Meyer'. In: EJ.
[99] Metzger, Dentan, and Harrelson, *The Making of the NRSV*, 11.
[100] For examples, see Ibid., 16–19.

Schwartz, and Yair Zakovitch.[101] However, reference is made to the 1985 version of the JPS Tanakh where that translation differs significantly or can provide additional clarification. In naming the books of the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament, I use the spelling of NRSVue.

1.9. What the chapters are about

Chapter 2 explores how Jewish culture historically resisted dominant civilizations by selectively adopting and transforming their elements. It argues that the modern "Jewish reclamation of Jesus" is part of a longstanding pattern of cultural resistance through adaptation. Beginning with Hellenism, Jews presented their traditions using Greek forms, a strategy seen in 2Maccabees and the Hasmonean dynasty. Similar dynamics occurred under Persian and Assyrian rule, and possibly even in the Canaanite environment, shaping Jewish identity and practices. Later it became a paradigm as medieval and modern Jewish cultural and religious phenomena sometimes mirrored Christian and Islamic elements while maintaining Jewish distinctiveness. This strategy of polemical appropriation, common in subaltern cultures, enabled Judaism to survive and evolve while resisting complete assimilation.

Chapter 3 outlines the Jewish perceptions of Jesus from late antiquity to modernity, highlighting the diversity of opinion and the evolution of thought from medieval polemics to modern intellectual engagement and emphasizing the nuanced views that have emerged beyond the traditional polemics. It discusses how the popular premodern Jewish view of Jesus was shaped by the Talmud, arguing that what matters is how the scattered and ambiguous references to Jesus were understood in later times, especially in the counter-gospel *Toledot Yeshu,* the only source of knowledge about Jesus for the medieval Jewish masses. Next, it examines how Jesus appears in medieval Jewish exegetical, philosophical, and historiographical polemics and in the alternative views of individual Jewish thinkers "from Moses to Moses" (Maimonides to Mendelssohn), foreshadowing the 19th-century reclamation.

Chapter 4 explores the covert ways in which premodern Jewish traditions reclaimed Jesus, often through polemical reinterpretation. While Jewish narratives, such as the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu,* overtly depicted Jesus negatively, they simultaneously asserted his Jewish identity and sometimes used his figure to covertly but powerfully criticize social norms and leadership within Jewish society. Constituting a form of internal polemics, a Talmudic story and a version of the *Toledot Yeshu* portray Jesus as a talented but outcast Jewish scholar and blame his rejection by the Jewish society for his eventual heresy resulting in Jewish suffering. Rabbinic

[101] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, v.

literature and medieval Hebrew chronicles sometimes depicted Jewish sages and rabbis as Christ-like figures as righteous martyrs, and the Hasidic concept of the *tzaddik* as an intermediary between God and humanity also seems to draw heavily from Christology. Additionally, Midrashic texts such as the early medieval *Pesikta Rabbati* describe a suffering messianic figure with striking parallels to Jesus. The chapter includes a case study of the premodern Jewish reclamation of the Suffering Servant highlighting the evolution of the interpretations of this figure in Judaism and Christianity from the Second Temple period to the end of the premodern period, which foreshadowed the nineteenth-century views presented in chapter 6. These examples demonstrate a complex dynamic where Jewish thinkers engaged with and reshaped Christian ideas to affirm Jewish identity and counter external theological claims.

Based on the proposition the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus cannot be fully understood apart from the Christian scholarly context, Chapter 5 argues that despite their apparent differences, the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus is deeply connected and fundamentally similar to the Christian quest for the historical Jesus. It highlights how Jesus and his 1st-century setting was interpreted by both Christian and Jewish thinkers in the light of 19th and 20th-century social, cultural, and nationalistic movements. The chapter summarizes the historical evolution of the Christian view of Jesus, then explores the influence of Hegel's philosophy of history on Christian scholarship. Further, the chapter delves into how key Christian thinkers in Germany, France, and Britain reinterpreted Jesus as a national figure aligning with contemporary social values. The chapter closes with a case study of how both Christian and Jewish scholars projected contemporary ideological, social and political struggles onto their historical interpretations of the constructed "Holy Land" as spiritual homeland. Influenced by the Romantic concept of geographical determinism, they argued that the features of the Holy Land were embodied in Jesus' character and morals, making him a national identity model. This case study reveals how allegedly objective scholarly interpretations reflected broader cultural values and conflicts of their times both on the Christian and the Jewish side.

Chapter 6 explores how modern Jewish thinkers reclaimed Jesus through the concept of the Suffering Servant, using Christological language to reinterpret Jewish suffering and identity. Jewish scholars, influenced by Christian messianic interpretations of the Servant, Rashi's exegesis, and the Hegelian idea of Volksgeist, positioned the Jewish people as a collective Christ figure—redeemers of the world through their suffering. The thinkers cited in the chapter use philosophical, theological, and historical arguments to position the Jewish experience of suffering as not just a series of unfortunate events but as a central aspect of Jewish identity and mission in the world, suggesting that the trials faced by the Jewish people have redemptive significance for humankind, representing Israel as a "Christ-people". This reclamation of the Suffering

Servant serves as a counter-narrative to Christian interpretations and aims to legitimize Jewish communal existence. The adoption of Christian values and language appear in influential writers such as Aaron Abraham Kabak, one of whose novels portrays Jesus as an idealized Zionist pioneer, popularizing nationalist themes through his figure.

1.10. Concluding remarks

Marc Chagall's *Descent from the Cross* depicts a dead Jesus who is carefully taken off from the cross by Jewish figures and angels, holding his body in a Pietà-like manner. As in many of Chagall's paintings, his loin is covered by a *talit*, a Jewish prayer shawl, also used to shroud the deceased before funeral. Jesus is treated gently as a member of a family in the *shtetl*, the local Jewish community. On top of the cross, where the INRI inscription is found in Christian iconography,[102] we read "Marc Ch", whereby Chagall identifies himself with the tortured and crucified Jesus. The crucifix appears in many of his paintings in scenes where Jews are persecuted, where the crucified Jesus also functions as the symbol of the sufferings of the Jewish people, thus a figure of collective Jewish identity.[103] Chagall's crucifixes can also be regarded as mirrors to the persecutors saying that they are acting against their own professed faith by killing and abusing the very people among whom Jesus was born, thus they are the true Christ-killers. Therefore, like many other Jewish intellectuals, Chagall also used the image of the crucified Jesus as a polemical tool against Christianity and a symbol of collective Jewish identity.

Chagall's painting perfectly demonstrates the dynamic of what happened during the Jewish reclamation of Jesus: it seems that once liberal Protestant intellectuals successfully separated his figure from Church dogma, Jewish thinkers took him off from the cross entirely, separating him even from Christianity itself, and embraced him as one of theirs, a fully Jewish figure of personal and collective identification, representing the thinker himself and the Jewish people or a part of it. Representing Jesus as fully embedded in the Jewish society and intellectual milieu of the Second Temple period was a powerful polemical thrust aimed at the originality and legitimacy of the Christian tradition, in many cases probably unintended by the authors. During the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus, Jewish thinkers engaged with Jesus not only by overtly Judaizing and de-Christianizing his figure, which amounts to covert anti-Christian polemics at the same time. Following their premodern predecessors, they also did it covertly by adopting Christological language, ideas and symbols from Christianity to describe the historical mission of Israel, making the reclamation of the figure of Jesus operative on a third level.

[102] *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum,* the way the Vulgate renders the three-language inscription "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" Pilate put on the top of the cross according to John 19:19.

[103] Mendelsohn, *Behold the Man*, 55–57.

2. The paradigm of cultural resistance by adoption

One of the theses of this dissertation is that the modern "Jewish reclamation of Jesus" is ultimately not an entirely novel phenomenon but seems to fit into the dynamics of Jewish covert or incorporating resistance to the influence of the surrounding dominant majority culture, which has apparently been present in Judaism since at least the age of Hellenism but goes back to earlier times.

Although Ben-Sasson claims that Hellenistic culture had little effect on Judea beyond material culture,[104] scholars dealing with the encounter of Judaism and Hellenism[105] have regularly been highlighting a paradoxical feature of Jewish cultural resistance against Hellenism. What they point out is that Jews resisted the influence of Greek culture by presenting Jewish content in Greek forms, thus adopting and Judaizing Greek cultural elements for polemical purposes. Fischel notes that "[a] significant trend in recent scholarship considers much of Jewish literature between Alexander the Great and the conquest of Islam as spiritual or religious resistance" and that "[t]he resistant writer freely added materials from foreign literature".[106] The strategy adopted by the Jews, as summarized by Erich Gruen, was "to present Judaic traditions and express their own self-definition through the media of the Greeks—and to make those media their own".[107] According to Meyers, "the letters are Hebrew but the language is Greek",[108] meaning Jewish content is represented in Greek forms. Martha Himmelfarb argues that Greek categories are not simply borrowed but rather transformed and integrated into Judaism, representing Judaism as a counter-Hellenism by understanding the Jewish community in Greek political categories piety.[109] Fischel notes that "Greco-Roman elements were adopted to the needs of Jewish culture".[110]

Meyers argues that the relationship between Jewish reaction to the dominance of the Hellenistic culture became paradigmatic for future Jewish engagement with other dominant civilizations, in that "Jews developed new identities that were also to become paradigms for Jewish

[104] Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 197.
[105] Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*; Shimoff, 'Hellenization Among the Rabbis'; Himmelfarb, 'Judaism and Hellenism in 2 Maccabees'; Hengel, 'The Interpenetration of Judaism and Hellenism'; Shavit, *Athens in Jerusalem*; Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*; Barclay, 'Using and Refusing'; Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism'; Fischel, 'Hellenism: Spiritual Reststance'; Gruen, 'Hebraism and Hellenism'; Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 62–88.
[106] Fischel, 'Hellenism: Spiritual Reststance', 8:790. in: EJ.
[107] Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 80.
[108] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 146.
[109] Himmelfarb, 'Judaism and Hellenism in 2 Maccabees', 19, 31.
[110] Fischel, 'Prolegomenon', XVIII.

identity in the coming millennia".[111] Gruen points out that the Macedonian conquest had a momentous and "long-term impact on Jewish culture".[112] Efron, Lehmann and Weitzman argue that "the Jewish culture that emerges over the course of the Hellenistic period is the product of interaction with Greek culture, […] in one way or another transformed by the process of Hellenization", even claiming that "Judaism is an outgrowth of the Hellenistic culture".[113] These arguments give the impression that Hellenism was the first culture that transformed Judaism substantially. However, although the challenge of Hellenism was new in many respects (see below), the paradigmatic Jewish reaction was not without preliminaries as apparently, Hellenism was not the earliest culture from which Jews absorbed cultural and religious elements for polemical purposes to reaffirm their distinct identity. My contention is that that this kind of resistance that the Israelites / Jews employed to preserve their traditions and not to amalgamate into a dominant culture surrounding them had already been an existing paradigm for centuries, the examples of which are discussed later.[114]

I do not wish to define Hellenism here because it is a highly diverse cultural phenomenon very difficult if not impossible to define substantively. What is more, as James Porter notes, it is a retrospective imaginary construct the same way as modernity.[115] For the sake of simplicity, I consider it rather a historical period, similarly to "modernism" (see 1.6.3.), and accept the periodization of Efron, Lehmann and Weitzman, according to which the Hellenistic age lasted from 331 BCE when Alexander the Great defeated Darius III at Gaugamela until the Roman conquest of the Middle East in the 1st century BCE[116] (more specifically to the fall of Jerusalem to Pompey in 63 BCE), although they say that Hellenistic cultural "impact on Jewish life was intensified and broadened by the [thoroughly Hellenized] Romans"[117]. The *CHJ* dates the beginning of the period for the same year but puts its end to the codification of the Mishnah (about 250 CE).[118] The *EJ* dates the period "from the death of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.E.) to the death of Cleopatra and the incorporation of Egypt in the Roman Empire in 30 B.C.E".[119] For us, the beginning is more important, in which all three sources tie to Alexander.

Another circumstance that complicates the picture is that Hellenism did not reach the Near East overnight with the conquests of Alexander the Great. Meyers draws attention to archaeological evidence that Greek cultural influence predated Alexander and only increased after

[111] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 136.
[112] Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 77.
[113] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 63, 87.
[114] See section 2.2 on page 41 for pre-Hellenistic examples.
[115] Porter, 'Hellenism and Modernity', 8.
[116] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 62. The time after the Roman conquest is often referred to as the Greco-Roman period.
[117] Ibid., 87, 89.
[118] Davies and Finkelstein, 'Preface', vii.
[119] Momigliano, 'Hellenism', 784.

him.[120] Concerning the encounter of Hellenism and Judaism, we need to oversimplify the situation to make our point understandable and not to get lost in the details. We must be aware, however, that neither Judaism nor Hellenism were uniform cultures, but, as Erich Gruen put it, they are "umbrella terms for highly complex and elastic cultural phenomena" with local varieties. Also, since an encounter between two cultures is always a bidirectional process irrespective of their power relations, Hellenism obviously absorbed elements from the cultures of the conquered peoples (thus from Jews) to a significant degree.[121] Gruen notes that in Hellenism, "the Greek ingredient was a conspicuous presence rather than a monopoly",[122] and we can rather speak about local "Hellenisms"—using the terminology of Homi Bhabha's terminology, cultural hybrids of Greek and local cultures. The same can be said concerning Judaism, in which the Jewish/Judean ingredient was a conspicuous presence rather than a monopoly. As we shall see, it was not a "pure" culture but had already absorbed and internalized foreign elements. Also important to note that besides local Hellenisms, there were local "Judaisms" as in the Hellenistic age, Jews were dispersed in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, and the Diaspora population outnumbered those in the Land of Israel.[123]

However, apart from acknowledging these facts, the differentiation of local Hellenisms and Judaisms, the possible backward influence of Jewish culture on Hellenism (maybe in the form of Christianity), and the diachronic treatment of the subject is out of the scope of this dissertation. For the sake of convenience, we treat them as uniform cultures and focus on how Judaism as a minority culture has changed in its confrontation with a dominant and supersessionist majority culture around it and gave birth to rabbinic Judaism. The paradigm that developed is crucial in understanding the inherent Jewish nature of the modern reclamation of Jesus.

2.1. The challenge of Hellenism

Hellenistic culture was new in many respects, which required Jews to respond to new challenges. It seems that this novelty lies more in its form rather than in its content. In this section, we shall examine three such challenges to Second Temple Judaism: Hellenistic cultural supremacy, the redefinition of ethnic identity, and the Greek cultural concept of *haireisis*.

[120] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 140.
[121] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 65.
[122] Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 79–80.
[123] Ibid., 117.

2.1.1.Cultural supremacy

In scholarly literature, the more peaceful Jewish encounter with Persian culture is regularly contrasted with the one with Hellenism, which is characterized by confrontation that provoked resistance. Hengel argues that the mere survival of the Biblical genre of "court history" (Joseph, Esther, Daniel) proves the Jewish acknowledgement of the "predominantly friendly attitude of the Persian king towards the Jews" whereas the advent of the Greeks resulted in a "profound shock" for the Jewish people, which engendered "an outspokenly hostile attitude to the pagan state".[124] Shavit argues that while the Achaemenids allowed the peoples they ruled to maintain complete religious and cultural independence without trying to enforce their own culture on them, so "borrowing and assimilation from Persian culture occurred without any outside coercion, without any internal struggles". On the other hand, Hellenism was an assimilative civilization with a cosmopolitan outlook lacking national or ethnic boundaries that pursued a cultural agenda. Thus, Hellenistic culture was spread not just through inevitable interactions between different groups but also through intentional efforts.[125] Barclay highlights that the Hellenization of Jews was not simply a voluntary cultural decision but was closely tied to the political, social, and economic frameworks established by the Hellenistic kingdoms. To be acknowledged as "intelligent" or "civilized", one had to receive a specifically Greek education. For Jews seeking social, political, and cultural recognition, it was necessary to adopt the language and thinking of the dominant culture.[126] Gruen argues that as opposed to a relatively light, benign, and distant Persian rule, Hellenism came close to Jews and was overwhelming and oppressive undermining the Jews' sense of cultural security.[127] The *EJ* talks about the tolerant attitude of the Persian rulers toward the Jews and the gratitude they felt toward the Achaemenids[128] whereas Hellenism provoked a "spiritual or religious resistance"[129] Efron, Lehmann and Weitzman note that Jews considered Persians as "benign supporters" whereas Hellenistic rule and its culture was perceived as oppressive, socially humiliating and economically oppressing.[130]

Greek culture was attractive and dangerous at the same time—as the *CHJ* puts it, it was "a smiling tiger: an enemy to be resisted as a threat to [the Jews'] religion and very existence",[131] to which Jews responded in a way that became paradigmatic even for the modern reclamation of Jesus. The paradigm is probably the most visible in the apocryphal book of 2Maccabees, which

[124] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1:5, 30.
[125] Shavit, *Athens in Jerusalem*, 292.
[126] Barclay, 'Using and Refusing', 17.
[127] Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 77, 95. However, later he argued against an acute "clash of cultures" between Judaism and Hellenism, see Gruen, 'Hebraism and Hellenism'.
[128] Fischel, 'Persia: Pre-Islamic Persia', 785.
[129] Fischel, 'Hellenism: Spiritual Reststance', 790.
[130] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 35, 63.
[131] Davies and Finkelstein, 'Preface', viii.

attacks Greek cultural values through their internalization.[132] Martha Himmelfarb notes that it is "at once Jewish in its piety and Greek in its mode of expression",[133] and demonstrates in detail the examples of Hellenisms in 2Maccabees in terms of vocabulary and adoption of Greek cultural values, and claims that the author did not simply let himself influenced by Hellenist culture but he knew what he was doing: despite claiming a binary and antagonistic opposition between Judaism and Hellenism on the surface, he actively and consciously transformed Greek values and made them "central aspects of Judaism".[134] According to the introduction to 2Maccabees of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha,* 2Maccabees is "a fascinating blend of Hellenism and Judaism […] composed in the literary Greek of its day […], and has numerous allusions to Greek literature".[135] Thus, 2Maccabees demonstrates the same behaviour against which it was written: it was written in Greek in a highly eloquent rhetorical style and praises Jewish heroes, especially martyrs, on the basis of Greek standards, and as Gruen notes, the Hellenized Jewish author of 2Maccabees applies the term *barbaroi* to the Greeks themselves,[136] which the *New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* calls "a calculated reversal",[137] thus not just a "slip of the pen". Greeks are plainly called barbarians, and Jewish heroes are represented as embodying the values the Greeks professed, so they are the real civilized people, superior to the Greeks according to Greek standards.

After the Hasmoneans defeated the Seleucids in the Maccabean Revolt, the phenomenon of resistance by adoption increased and apparently became a royal policy. Meyers notes that "despite their ideology of ethnic and religious nationalism, the Hasmonaeans had no qualms about conforming to the conventions of the Hellenistic world". He points out that while Hasmoneans sought political independence from the Hellenistic Seleucid empire, in fact they themselves "became the new sponsors of Hellenistic culture". He mentions the forced conversion of conquered ethnic groups such as the Edomites by the Hasmoneans into Judaism and

[132] However, Gruen notes that 2Maccabees is "highly exceptional rather than representative" in this respect and it does not represent Hellenism and Judaism as opposites. He reminds that the Hellenizing Hasmonean Kingdom was never accused of betraying the legacy of the Maccabean revolt. (Gruen, 'Hebraism and Hellenism', 131.) Jewish reaction to Hellenism is obviously a highly complex phenomenon of selective adoption and rejection (Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 95.), but here we concentrate on one that can be considered a paradigmatic precursor of the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus.

[133] Himmelfarb, 'Judaism and Hellenism in 2 Maccabees', 20.

[134] Ibid., 38.

[135] For example "the author compares Antiochus's arrogance to that of the Persian king Xerxes (5.21; 9.8), portrays his heroes as complete Hellenistic gentlemen (4.37; 15.12,30), depicts his central martyr as a Jewish Socrates, and throughout the story, focuses upon Jerusalem as the Jews' *polis*, portraying Antiochus as a "barbarian" who tried to change the city's "constitution" and forbid Jews to "act as citizens" (6.1)" (Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1599–1600.).

[136] Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 95. The forces of Antiochus Epiphanes are called "the barbarian hordes" (*ta barbara plēthē*) in 2Maccabees 2:21.

[137] Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1603.

the introduction of the festival of Hanukkah, a new holiday celebrating the restoration of traditional Judaism, by which "the Maccabeans departed from Jewish practice and imitated their Hellenistic enemies".[138] Concerning its relationship with Hellenism, David Carr calls the Hasmonean dynasty "a hybrid Hellenistic regional kingdom that put special stock in their status as *anti*-Hellenistic liberators". For Carr, Hasmonean hybridity means "the use of Hellenistic concepts in the service of anti-Hellenistic ideology".[139] In addition, Martin Hengel notes that "a preference for Greek names and culture among the Hasmonean upper classes increased", even among conservative Jews.[140]

This resistance by adoption led to the penetration of Hellenism deeper into Judaism than the defenders of Jewish tradition probably wished and reached its very core so deeply that even some words used for key features of Judaism are of Greek origin, e.g. the concept of "Judaism" itself (the Hebrew word *yahadut* is a post-biblical derivation), synagogue, Diaspora, Sanhedrin (note that even the name of the Jewish religious court and the title of a Talmudic tractate is Greek), *afikomen*, *bimah,* and *zugot.*[141] It is a commonplace that the Passover meal "shares many traits with the customs of the Greek symposium", the ritualized philosophical banquet of the Greeks.[142] Thus, in their resistance against Hellenism, Jews created a "counter-Hellenism", which culminated in the Hasmonean Kingdom and Jewish religious fractions in the late Second Temple period.

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[138] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 137, 145–46.

[139] Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 155, 160. Carr goes as far as to suggest that even the emerging Hebrew Bible itself was "a hybrid, indigenous response of Judean royal-temple elites to Greek textuality and education … [that] … originated in the second century B.C.E. as a purportedly pre-Hellenistic deposit of sacred Hebrew texts, a deposit initially standing opposed to and distinguished from the corpus of Greek educational texts." (Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 253.) Carr notes that the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible corresponds to the twenty-four books of Homer's epic (Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 165.). Even the Mishnah, in Yadayim 4:6, refers to the books of Homer (*sifrey homeris*) in connection with the Holy Scriptures (Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 105–14.).

[140] Hengel, 'The Interpenetration of Judaism and Hellenism', 217–18. A remarkable example of such "fighting Hellenism with Greekness" is the Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the gigantic statue in Daniel 2. Here, the Greek idea of imperial succession and the Greek or Persian ideas of gradual degeneration represented by metals of decreasing value is uniquely combined to convey an inherently Jewish and pro-Hasmonean message: "the God of Heaven will establish a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, a kingdom that shall not be transferred to another people. It will crush and wipe out all these kingdoms, but shall itself last forever" (2:44). See Collins, *Daniel*, 162–64; Momigliano, 'Daniel and the Greek Theory of Imperial Succession'; Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 12.

[141] Klein, *Etymological Dictionary*, 255, 47, 71, 195, 450.

[142] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 86.

2.1.2. Identity detached from geography and descent

One of the most important innovations of Hellenism was the redefinition of Greek identity. Jonathan Hall notes that as opposed to the Archaic period, when Greek identity was based on "fictive kin relationships", the Hellenistic definition of Greekness was defined "oppositionally" against the barbarians, who "were viewed as a homogenous category with little or no internal differentiation".[143] This means that since "Barbarian" was a cultural category, "Greek" also became one, and thus Greek identity shifted to be based on common cultural values, making it available not only to those of a Greek descent or a particular birthplace but also to any non-Greek who adopted Greek language and culture—at least in theory.[144] Efron, Lehmann and Weitzman conclude that the Hellenistic definition of Greekness "allowed for the possibility of someone not born into a community to become a member of it by adopting its laws".[145]

By saying that as a result of Hellenism, "Jews developed new identities that were also to become paradigms for Jewish identity in the coming millennia",[146] Meyers suggests that this paradigm has been primarily an issue of identity. Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann note that "the very conception of Jewish identity itself [...] that Jews were trying to preserve" was fashioned after Hellenism, and the constructed Jewish-Greek dichotomy echoes the Greek "proto-racist"[147] binary construct of Hellenes vs. Barbarians.[148] The concept of Jewishness was born whereby Jewish identity became disconnected from "an ethnic group connected to a particular geographical location" and gave way to a religious or cultural identity "that was not geographically or even ethnically limited".[149] Thus, one of the most important innovations of the Hellenistic period was that the definition of Jewish identity changed from something fixed and determined by descent and geography to something flexible that can be changed via conversion and following a Jewish way of life.[150] This switchable identity was later codified in the Talmud as *giyur,* conversion, which Meyers calls a "revolutionary development" whereby "one could

[143] Hall, *Hellenicity*, 179.
[144] Stephens, 'Hellenistic Culture', 88, 90; Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 63.
[145] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 79. Interestingly, in the passage on the origins of Hanukkah in b*Shabbat* 21b, *yevanim* are not necessarily ethnic Greeks but can also mean Hellenizing Jews, who became technically Gentiles by reversing the circumcision and abandoning the Torah (1Maccabeans 1:10–15).
[146] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 136.
[147] Isaac, 'Ethnic Prejudice and Racism', 329.
[148] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 79.
[149] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 136–37.
[150] Josephus Flavius claims that this innovation is actually as old as Judaism itself. In *Against Apion* 2.210, he traces back to Moses the idea that identity is a matter of personal decision: "[t]o those who wish to come and live under the same laws as us he [i.e. Moses] gives a friendly welcome, reckoning that affinity is not only a matter of birth but also of choice in life style." (Flavius, *Against Apion*, 291.)

become a Jew, even if one were not born one".[151] Fischel draws attention that even the role of those who promoted resistance against the influence of Hellenism and defined the boundaries of Jewishness originates in Greek culture the Jewish *Ḥakham,* the sage, parallels the Greek *sophos* and the Roman *sapiens,* all of whom were "the central intellectual figure[s] of the age" combining the characteristics of scholar-bureaucrat and philosopher-rhetorician".[152]

2.1.3. Sectarian culture

Another Hellenistic ideal that took root in Judaism is the emergence of religious fractions similar to Greek philosophical schools called *haireiseis* ('heresies'). The classical meaning of the word was something like 'chosen course of action', and in Hellenism and later it meant "any group of people perceived to have a clear doctrinal identity".[153] The existence of such schools and the practice of choosing one, i.e. an *internal* identity was an important feature of Greek culture. Such schools were for example Cynicism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism, and during the period of Hellenism, similar religious-philosophical schools emerged in Judaism as well.

[151] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 136–37. On the broader context on Jewish identity in the Hellenistic period, see Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*. The word *giyur* is a postbiblical derivation of *ger* (Klein, *Etymological Dictionary*, 97.), which meant 'dweller' or 'resident alien' in the Torah, a non-Israelite who dwells within the Israelite community as a legally protected immigrant with restricted rights, never to become a full Israelite (Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 201.). It had geographical and legal implications, suggested temporariness as the *ger* did not become an Israelite. However, in Rabbinic usage, *ger* took on the new meaning of 'convert' (Klein, *Etymological Dictionary*, 107.) and new derivations were coined for its verbal form in the meanings of 'make someone a proselyte' and 'become a proselyte'. (Jastrow, *Dictionary of Targumim, Talmudim and Midrash*, 263; Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, 114.) In the Mishnah *ger* already means a convert into Judaism as well, which implies a permanent cultural-religious change of identity. The change of meaning of the word reflected that of the concept of identity from geographical to cultural/religious. The Biblical *ger* was in a socially subordinate position and "could not enjoy the privileges of the native" while proselytes become Israelites with full rights. (Rabinowitz and Eichhorn, 'Proselytes', 16:587. in: EJ; Lieber, 'Strangers and Gentiles', 19:242. in: EJ.) However, according to Mishnah *Horayot* 3:8, when decision must be made whose life is more important to be saved in an emergency, a proselyte is the last but one before the freed slave (Danby, *The Mishnah*, 466.). Interestingly, the Greek *prosēlytos* underwent a similar change of meaning: the word is a coinage of the Septuagint for the Hebrew *ger*, denoting an alien who has come to the Israelites from somewhere else, therefore a geographical identity: in Exodus 12:49, *tō proselthonti prosēlytō en hymin* literally means 'for the guest among you who has drawn near', (Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1519; Pietersma and Wright, *NETS*, 60.). However, in Matthew 23:15, the word *prosēlytos* already means 'convert', and in Acts 2:10, *prosēlytoi* are contrasted with *Ioudaioi*, in parallel with the Rabbinic usage for religious identity.

[152] Fischel, 'Prolegomenon', XIII. See also Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*, 131. However, Israel Jacob Yuval maintains that the figure of the Talmudic sage is internalized from Christianity as the Judaization of the church fathers. (Yuval, *Two Nations*, 23.) It is also highly probable both the figure of the Christian bishop is the adoption of the Hellenistic *sophos* or *rhetor*. For example, Margaret Mitchell notes that Paul's letters contain "complex and highly developed arguments which are much closer to the literary letters of the orators and philosophers and Hellenistic Jewish authors" (Mitchell, 'The Emergence of the Written Record', 1:182 in: CHC.) and St. John Chrysostom was trained by a famous pagan orator. (González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2010, 1:225.)

[153] von Staden, 'Hairesis and Heresy', 76.

Josephus mentions Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, which he calls *haireiseis*.[154] Efron, Lehmann, and Weitzman note that even ultra-traditionalist groups such as the Qumran community were born of this Hellenistic sense of internal identity, together with initiation and excommunication rites,[155] demonstrating the extent of adoption of Hellenist values.

Although the Greek *heireiseis* might have disagreed in fundamental concepts, they did not deny that other schools are part of the same common Greek cultural heritage just like the Jewish religious fractions did not deny that the followers of other schools were Jewish.[156] Meyers notes that they "in no way disturbed the essential religious and communal unity of the Jewish people, certainly no more than did the divisions among the Greeks between Cynics, Epicureans, and Pythagoreans" and that under the surface of sectarianism, there was a "common Judaism", by which he means "certain common ideas and practices, based on biblical sources, [that] pointed ahead toward later rabbinic Judaism".[157] Thus, not only Jewish identity became a matter of choice as opposed to "external" (e.g. Greek) identities, but the choice of an "internal identity" also became an aspect of Jewish culture, both on the model of Hellenism.

2.2. Pre-Hellenistic examples

2.2.1.Achaemenid Persian

As early as in 1906, *The Jewish Encyclopedia* noted that "[t]he points of resemblance between Zoroastrianism and Judaism, and hence also between the former and Christianity, are many and striking".[158] The *Encyclopedia Judaica* notes that ever since Judaism encountered Zoroastrianism, it polemicized against its dualism, which apparently took the form of Judaization of foreign concepts.[159] The *Cambridge History of Judaism* mentions additional themes and trends that emerged in Judaism upon Zoroastrian influence and later found their way into Christianity as well.[160] Shaked also lists "cognate themes and parallels" which might have developed under

[154] *Antiquities* 13:171–173 (Josephus, *Antiquities XII-XIV*, 310–13.). Josephus talks about the situation at the time of the Maccabean Revolt. However, in *Antiquities* 18:1, when describing the period 150 years later, he includes an unnamed "fourth philosophy" in the list. Here he calls the various groups *philosophiai* and not *haireiseis*. (Josephus, *Antiquities XVIII-XIX*, 9.) Note that Josephus does not explicitly identify the "fourth philosophy" with the Zealots (Ibid., 21, footnote 'c'.).

[155] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 80–86.

[156] Although the Qumran community considered itself as the "True Israel" (Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 151.)

[157] Ibid., 152–53.

[158] Jackson, 'Zoroastrianism', 696–97. in: JE.

[159] Jacobs, 'Judaism', 11:515. in: EJ. Examples are the identifiable but incorporeal angels, Satan as the personification of evil, the belief in evil demons and the resurrection of the dead.

[160] Boyce, 'Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age', 1:300-301. in: CHJ. Such concepts include resurrection and afterlife in heaven and hell (note that even the word Paradise is a Persian loanword), the belief in a world saviour and his kingdom following a last judgment.

Iranian influence.[161] Efron, Lehmann, and Weitzman highlight that it was in the Persian period when "Judahites" first turned to the sacred texts that eventually became the Bible to preserve their ancestral culture. They note that on the surface it was a highly conservative move, but in fact it was a new phase that marked the beginning of Judaism as "a scripture-based culture, a culture generated through the reading and interpretation of sacred texts",[162] which the Persians may have further encouraged as they had an interest in organizing the communities under their rule, and took efforts to codify laws in various regions of the Persian Empire.[163] Meyers notes that ironically, the creation of the Hebrew Bible on the basis of which Jews asserted their uniqueness is partly initiated by a foreign imperial policy,[164] based upon the sacred and unchangeable canon of the Avesta.[165]

2.2.2. Neo-Assyrian

Eric Meyers claims that Jewish culture started to change significantly following the destruction of the First Temple, when Israel started to live under the dominance of foreign empires.[166] Carr also argues persuasively that it goes back to the Neo-Assyrian period when Judah and Israel started to be dominated by foreign empires. He notes that "Judean attitudes toward foreign influence became remarkably ambivalent from the Neo-Assyrian period onward, as Judah underwent rule by the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, Persian, and various Hellenistic kings, and this is reflected in the ways biblical writings clearly dated to those periods often invert, parody, and

[161] Shaked, 'Iranian Influence on Judaism', 1:314-324. in: CHJ. Such themes are Satan as God's archenemy, an elaborate demonology and angelology, predestination at cosmic and individual levels, a predetermined sequence of periods in the existence of the universe (a possible precursor of Christian dispensationalism), an elaborate eschatology including end-time judgments, tribulations, resurrection, and salvation, preceded by specific signs, and a general resurrection of humankind for a last judgment. Boyce argues that Jews were receptive to these ideas because they were grateful for the benevolence of Persian rulers (Boyce, 'Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age', 1:298. in: CHJ.), who, according to Efron, Lehman, and Weitzmann, are remembered in the Bible as benevolent supporters of Judaism. The authors note that in the story of Esther, it is exactly the Jews' close connection to the Persian king is what saves them from destruction. What is more, Cyrus the Great is even given the titles "shepherd" and "anointed" in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1, reserved for Judah's kings, suggesting that he is a king similar to David, even a Messiah. The authors claim that these takeovers amount to a "downplaying or reinterpreting [Judahite] culture to avoid a confrontation" (Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 35–37.) but it is possible that they consider it this way only because apparently Jews displayed no hostility towards the Persians and did not polemicize with them overtly—at least we have no information that they did not.

[162] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 38–39.

[163] Ibid., 49. The authors note that we have a document from Egypt about Darius I who commanded his Egyptian satrap to set up a committee of local scribes with the task of documenting in writing all the ancient laws of Egypt up until the period of Persia's domination.

[164] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 139.

[165] Boyce, 'Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age', 1:303 in: CHJ; Shaked, 'Iranian Influence on Judaism', 1:312 in: CHJ.

[166] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 136.

otherwise oppose foreign traditions".[167] He also concludes that "inversion or anti-foreign rhetoric typical of later Israelite engagement with foreign tradition".[168] This Judean strategy of identity preservation does not exhaust in passive borrowing of foreign genres and motifs but it is complemented with active "inversive reappropriation" utilized against Neo-Assyrian royal ideology. Carr argues that certain elements of the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to 2Kings, the Royal Psalms, and the Song of Songs "Judaize" Assyrian religion and politics this way against the ideological domination of the foreign power.[169]

Eckart Otto understands the Moses and Exodus tradition a "subversive reception" (*subversive Rezeption*) of Esarhaddon's loyalty oath, which challenges and "Judaizes" Neo-Assyrian royal theology at multiple levels. First, goes Otto's argument, it delegitimizes Neo-Assyrian power by transferring the demand for loyalty to *Yhwh*, the God of Judah by adopting central texts of Assyrian legitimacy and repurposing them as counter-texts (*Gegentexten*). Second, by leaving royal functions vacant or by projecting them to Moses, who serves as a mask for the Judean king, the tradition withdraws these functions from the control of the Neo-Assyrian state. Third, Assyrian rule is further challenged by "separating church and state", i.e. not associating Moses with any priestly function as opposed to Assyria, where the king is a priest at the same time.[170] Understood this way, the incorporation or "Judaization" of foreign elements, and making them a central myth of origin, is an integral part of the affirming pre-exilic Judean state identity and legitimacy.

Along these lines, Römer argues convincingly that Joshua 6–12 seems to be a "Judaization" of Neo-Assyrian conquest accounts with the purpose of legitimizing Juda's autonomy and delegitimizing Assyrian power at the same time. He also argues that "this phenomenon can only be explained by literary dependence" where the scribes in Jerusalem deliberately imitated Neo-Assyrian documents "in their attempt to create a literature of conquest legitimizing Judah's national autonomy".[171]

2.2.3.Canaanite

The first chapter and the beginning of the second one in Genesis is an interesting case in this respect as it might indicate that the strategy of polemical adoption whereby elements from

[167] Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 409.
[168] Ibid., 465.
[169] Ibid., 307–38. He mentions several examples of this internalization, for example the stories of the Tower of Babel and of Moses' birth, the parts of Deuteronomy sanctioning idolatry as treason, parts of the curse section in Deuteronomy 28, and the pious royal historiography in 1–2 Kings.
[170] Otto, 'Mose als Antitypus', 11–33. See also: Otto, 'The Judean Legitimation of Royal Rulers in Its Ancient Near Eastern Contexts'.
[171] Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 83–86. Quotations are from pages 84 and 86.

surrounding Canaanite and Mesopotamian cultures are covertly absorbed into the very core of Israel's religious tradition with the aim of constructing and maintaining a distinctive religious identity. The *Cambridge History of Judaism* claims that the Priestly parts of the Torah, especially the first creation account in Genesis (1:1 to 2:4a, as opposed to the second non-Priestly one in Genesis 2:4b–4:26) possibly exhibits Zoroastrian influence in its language.[172] As to its content, Gerhard Hasel analysed the anti-mythical use of Near Eastern mythological terms and motifs in the cosmology of Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a, claiming that they are direct, conscious, and purposeful anti-mythical polemics meant to undermine prevailing Egyptian, Babylonian, and Canaanite mythological concepts.[173] It seems that Genesis incorporates the language and themes of "ideologically and theologically incompatible predecessors", which are partly selected deliberately to contrast with similar ancient Near Eastern mythological cosmologies, resulting in a deliberate and conscious anti-mythical argument that undermines the existing mythological cosmologies.[174] Thus, according to Hasel, the Israelites, from a very early age, consciously developed their religious identity by incorporating the elements of the surrounding majority cultures and used them in a polemical way to build their religious tradition. This is in line with Carr, who tentatively dates the passage under discussion as pre-exilic.[175] Based upon this argument, we might assume that this part of Hebrew Bible and the traditions based on it might be the products of early pre-exilic adoptions from surrounding cultures to build a distinctive Israelite/Judahite religious culture.

2.3. Later premodern and modern examples

2.3.1. Premodern

When Meyers argues that the relationship between Jewish reaction to the dominance of the Hellenistic culture became paradigmatic for future Jewish engagement with other dominant civilizations, he unfortunately does not cite specific examples of this paradigm from the various contexts he mentions. The only thing he mentions is that "[a]s a result of this confrontation with a world culture, Jews developed new identities that were also to become paradigms for Jewish identity in the coming millennia".[176] thus considering it primarily an issue of identity.

[172] Boyce, 'Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age', 1:300 in: CHJ. As striking parallels it mentions the opening "great declaration" in Genesis 1:1–2, the "Spirit of God" associated with creativity, and the division of the creative acts in seven stages.

[173] Such as *tehom* ("the deep"), *taninim* ("sea monsters"), the separation of heaven and earth, the creation and function of heavenly luminaries, the purpose and creation of man, and creation by word.

[174] Hasel, 'The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology', 91.

[175] Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 294. For more details, see Fishbane, 'Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13'.

[176] Meyers, 'Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine', 136.

Concerning later developments, scholars highlight that the difference between rabbinic cultures in the Christian-Roman Palestine and the Zoroastrian Babylonia in late Antiquity / early Middle Ages reflect the ways Jews adopted elements of those dominant cultures. Richard Kalmin observes that Jewish society in both Palestine and Babylonia was similar to, and likely influenced by, the dominant cultures—Greco-Roman and Persian—within which the rabbis lived. The Babylonian rabbis' "obsession with genealogy", which significantly motivated their elitist detachment from broader Jewish society reflects the Persian emphasis on lineage and strict hierarchical divisions. In contrast, class distinctions in the Roman Empire were less rigid, leading to a closer relationship between rabbis and non-rabbis and even Gentiles in the Land of Israel, reflecting a broader trend within the empire.[177]

Concerning the same period, Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann mention the different sexual ethics of the sages and the different use of magic in the two locations, reflecting the differences between Christian and Zoroastrian sexuality and magical practices.[178] As regards medieval Islamic rule, they highlight the reverence for the Hebrew language as the "holy tongue" of the Bible, which appears to be the Judaization of the concept of *arabiyya,* the veneration of Arabic language as the perfect, divine language of the *Qur'an* by the Arab grammarians and poets of medieval al-Andalus.[179] Although they seem to lack the overt polemical thrust, they can be interpreted as adoptive resistance because of the "we-also-have-it-so-we-don't-need-yours" identity-building element in them.

In the context of the Jewish experience within medieval Christianity, Ivan Marcus extensively analyses the medieval Jewish rituals of childhood, and concludes that *bar mitzvah* developed from an Ashkenazi Jewish school initiation ritual[180] during which children were made eat honeyed wafer representing the Torah.[181] Per Marcus, the ritual mirrors the Catholic First Communion, which became a rite of passage for school initiation around the 13th century, and he calls it a "social polemics", where the use of the wafer is a vehicle "denying the truth of the eucharistic devotion and to affirm that the Torah, not Jesus, is the true bread, the true manna, the true gift of milk and honey from a loving God".[182] Despite unattested in Biblical, rabbinic or even early medieval Jewish sources, Ashkenazic Jews claimed that it was *minhag avoteinu,* an

[177] Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*, 5, 7–8.
[178] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 128.
[179] Ibid., 167.
[180] Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 103–4.
[181] Ibid., 26–28, 87; Roth, *Medieval Jewish Civilization*, 229–30. The ritual seems to have been separated later into *bar mitzvah* and *areinfirinish,* the latter being a ceremony for the initiation of three-year old boys into their Torah studies in the *ḥeder,* still practised by haredi communities, including Chabad Hasidism, often at the same time with *upsherin,* the first haircut at the age of three. During the ceremony, the child is given a tablet with Hebrew letters covered in honey. The boy must taste the honey and say the names of the Hebrew letters.
[182] Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 109.

ancestral custom going back to pre-rabbinic Judea and provided Biblical prooftexts as support.[183] Elisheva Baumgarten analyses the phenomenon of penitential fasting in medieval Ashkenaz, which was an innovative practice adopted from Christianity and, similarly to the boys' school initiation rite, legitimized using Biblical and Talmudic prooftexts but seeming "to reflect northern European Christian norms more closely than previously established Jewish customs".[184] A medieval example of adopting Christian values, ideals and language is the Hebrew chronicles of the 1096 Rhineland pogroms during the First Crusade, where the pattern is strikingly similar to what we saw in 2Maccabees. David Biale observes that "often the theology of the texts sounds explicitly Christian" and that they "derive much of their imagery [...] from those they explicitly call heretics".[185]

2.3.2. Modern

In chapter 11 titled "Modern Transformations" of *The Jews: A History,* Efron, Lehmann and Weitzman list several additional elements of modern Jewish religious culture that has parallels in Christianity. Such include Hasidism (parallelling Christian Pietism), Mitnaggdism (parallelling Orthodox Protestantism), the Haskalah itself, secular Jewish education, literary salons, the *Wissenschaft of Judentums* modelled on Western European critical scholarship, including Jewish historiography with its standards of scientificity, Reform Judaism (parallelling liberal Protestantism), and synagogue architecture, which has been a fertile ground for inward acculturation since premodern times.[186] Meyer mentions that medieval "synagogues in the Muslim world copied the style of mosques, those in Christian Europe were modelled on local churches".[187] Concerning modernity, Efron, Lehmann and Weitzman note that in the nineteenth century, small places of Jewish worship and study (long unlike their Mediterranean predecessors) were replaced by monumental synagogues built in eclectic styles with the Eternal Light, organs and towers, often modelled on churches, although sometimes in neo-Islamic style, like the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest.[188] The adoption of local architecture for synagogues is important because places of worship are closely linked to religious identity and, for example, mosques or Hindu temples in Europe do not generally follow local architecture but retain much from their place of origin.

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[183] Ibid., 26, 33, 104.

[184] Baumgarten, 'Appropriation and Differentiation', 45–49.

[185] Biale, 'Historical Heresies and Modern Jewish Identity', 118–19. For more examples for the premodern Jewish adoption of cultural and religious ideas and practices under both Muslim and Christian rule, see Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 6–9.

[186] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 290–333.

[187] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 8.

[188] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 332–33.

Leora Batnitzky points out an additional Jewish religious acculturation that affects the very core of Judaism. It is the acceptance for Judaism the Protestant category of religion as a system of personal belief, which in the premodern times only meant "the performance of ritual practices", basically claiming that the concept of "Jewish religion" is a modern invention, just like Reform Judaism, Modern Orthodoxy, concerning which she notes that "the historical irony is that Hirsch's orthodoxy is not only modern but rather in a certain sense the most modern of modern Judaisms in moulding itself as a religion on the German Protestant model".[189]

In the realm of philosophy, modern Jewish thinkers adopted the concept of Hegelian *Volksgeist,* the teleological view of history instead of the rabbinic circular one, and the idea of national mission.[190] For example, Zionists interpreted the Jewish historical experience as a special national mission and understood the Jewish state as a "light to the nations", which allowed "the propagation of the national idea with a character and meaning beyond its immediate objectives".[191] As we shall see, in their interpretation of the Diaspora existence, Jewish thinkers adopted the Christian idea that it has a function and end. However, its traditional Christian interpretation as a punishment for the rejection of Jesus and the mass repentance of the Jews in the end times was reversed and came to be interpreted as a blessing that prepares the Jewish people for messianic redemption,[192] thus adopting a Christian concept to construct Jewish communal identity. It is my contention that the Jewish reclamation of Jesus fits into this paradigm in its philosophy, theology, language, and content.

2.4. Conclusions

It seems that in Hellenism, and possibly even earlier, Jews successfully employed the strategy of adopting the Greek (and Persian, Assyrian, and Canaanite) cultural language and to "Judaize" it, thereby "expropriating and taking control of the opponent's symbols"[193] and values to defend their identity against intellectual domination. Postcolonial studies reveal that this kind of "resistant adaptation" is not unique to the Jews but the incorporation of elements of the majority culture and integrating them into the minority culture to use them for building and supporting minority identity regularly appears in subaltern cultures.

Sandra Shimoff notes that when two cultural systems start to compete for the minds of the same population, one of them will inevitably become weaker and must respond to the situation. Three responses are possible: the first total rejection of foreign influence, which will preserve

[189] Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, 1–2, 43.
[190] See Introduction in Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 53–65.
[191] Shapira, *Land and Power*, 27; Brenner, *In Search of Israel*, 13–14.
[192] Luz, "'Jewish Ethics" as an Argument', 134.
[193] Yuval, *Two Nations*, 203.

the cultural system but proves ineffective against such an overwhelming military and social strength Hellenistic cultural imperialism had. The second is unconditional surrender, whereby the weaker culture becomes fossilized and ceases to influence later generations. The third way that Jews adopted against Hellenism is a middle road of "adopting some features, yet retaining essential identity" was the only one that enabled them to successfully encounter Greek cultural imperialism[194] and "to establish their own secure place within a Hellenistic framework and to make it clear that they were not swallowed up by that prevailing cultural environment".[195]

John Collins argues that a response to cultural domination is more complex than the binary division between acceptance and rejection. Instead, there is a struggle to differentiate between elements that are acceptable from those that must be rejected.[196] John Barclay points out that the selective adoption of the discourse and mindset of the dominant culture is not a free choice but the only way to be recognized as "civilized". Barclay mentions that one of the most important contributions of current post-colonial theory is recognizing that adopting certain aspects of the dominant culture can also *empower* subordinate cultures to shape their own destinies and identities, and present themselves to others, sometimes with undertones of subversion. He cites the book *The Empire Writes Back* by Aschroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, which delves into how previously colonized societies (such as those in Africa, India, or South America) employ the dominant discourse of British or Spanish culture to reaffirm their own cultural heritage and identity.[197] The only reason we find it strange in the case of the Jews is the simplified popular view still held by many that they were hermetically segregated from the majority society and were not interested in the majority culture.

Although this kind of polemical identity-building through the adoption of foreign ideas is a normal behaviour of politically and culturally "colonized" minorities, so it is not a uniquely Jewish strategy, we might find it surprising in the case of Jews, probably because the traditional narrative, supported by Jewish traditionalism and Christian supersessionism, represents Judaism as unaffected by foreign influences apparently because of the theological and political interests vested in them.[198] Also, allowing the thought that Judaism has survived until today by adopting cultural elements from the surrounding majority society might sound like an

[194] Shimoff, 'Hellenization Among the Rabbis', 168.
[195] Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 95.
[196] Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 24–25.
[197] Barclay, 'Using and Refusing', 17–18. Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out that colonial "power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice […] by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 7.). This is exactly what happens in 2Maccabees.
[198] Poorthuis, Schwartz, and Turner, *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity*, 1.

attribution of weakness, unoriginality and even shrewd thievery, traditional accusations against the Jews, which, once admitted, would undermine the esteem of the Jewish people and Judaism.

However, Fischel argues that the resistance to such cultural comparisons and the admitting of foreign influence is "undoubtedly based on emotion", and instead of being a sign of weakness and unoriginality, such resistance via adoption proves the strength, vitality, and creativity of the Jewish people (and any other minority group opting for this strategy for that matter) and does not diminish its unalienable uniqueness.[199] Jews was not hermetically isolated from the environment they lived in but came into a thorough interaction with it, and far from being passive objects of history, Jews actively and creatively engaged with their environment and took over elements from the surrounding culture they deemed useful for preserving their tradition. At the same time, they were powerful enough to turn the tables on the politically and culturally dominating group by representing them as if they were the backward subalterns in the light of their own standards, such as calling the Greeks *barbaroi* in 2Maccabees, a work thoroughly permeated by Greek historiography.[200]

A similar dynamic is observable for example in Japan, which has been incorporating and "Japanizing" foreign cultural elements for some two millennia now. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* notes that Japan has consistently engaged in a pattern of selectively incorporating foreign cultural norms and systems, subsequently integrating them into existing native customs, particularly during periods of relative seclusion.[201] Consequently, while external ideas were incorporated, the fundamental essence of Japanese identity remained intact. As a result, a characteristically Japanese cultural hybrid was created, exemplified by the adoption of Buddhist deities into the Shinto pantheon but the most strikingly visible in their writing system, which took over Chinese characters designed for the isolating Chinese language and combined them with the originally Japanese syllabaries to fit the agglutinating nature of the Japanese language. The result is a uniquely Japanese hybrid writing of logograms (*kanji*) and syllabaries (*kana*) in which *kanji* (the logograms) are considered no less Japanese than *kana* (the syllabaries).

Such cultural takeovers cannot be regarded as passive *influence* but active *adoption* (see page 26). The *Cambridge History of Judaism* observes that the strategy of adoption and transformation of foreign concepts enabled ancient Judaism to come out of its struggle with Hellenism as a winner. Jews managed to "withstand the strength of a seductive foreign culture" and uphold their religious heritage by embracing new language, thoughts, and expressions while

[199] Fischel, 'Prolegomenon', XX–XXI.
[200] Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 95.
[201] Notehelfer et al., 'Japan'. in: Encyclopedia Britannica.

safeguarding its core values.[202] Erich Gruen notes that "Jews forever refashioned their identity and adjusted their self-perception with an eye to the cultural milieu in which they found themselves" and by adopting instead of assimilating, Jews "successfully negotiated their own place within the world of Greco-Roman society".[203] Shimoff observes that paradoxically, Hellenization did not weaken the Jewish community but contributed to the vitality and liveliness of Judaism as it developed its distinct identity. This paradox highlights the significance of the ancient interaction between Hellenism and Judaism, making it relevant even in contemporary times.[204] The covert adoption of Hellenism or Hellenist values was a way of preserving Jewish identity just like medieval Judaization of "the" Christian Symbol and the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus.

[202] Hengel, 'The Interpenetration of Judaism and Hellenism', 227.
[203] Gruen, 'Hellenistic Judaism', 123–24.
[204] Shimoff, 'Hellenization Among the Rabbis', 186–87.

3. Jesus in premodern Jewish thought

As a backdrop to the modern Jewish perception of Jesus, this chapter aims to review the premodern Jewish views. First, the popular hostile view based on the Talmudic references, which manifested itself in the popular medieval counter-gospel entitled *Toledot Yeshu* and the Hebrew chronicles of the Rhineland massacres of 1096. I then examine how Jesus appears in the anti-Christian polemics of intellectuals and finally, look at the more positive assessment of Jesus by various Jewish thinkers.

3.1. The popular Jewish view

The popular pre-Haskalah Jewish views on Jesus took shape largely on the intellectual-spiritual basis of Talmudic and early rabbinic literature and were expressed in a series of extremely popular counter-gospels or gospel parodies, collectively referred to as the *Toledot Yeshu,* the most important source of popular Jewish knowledge about Jesus.[205] However, Jesus himself was not a major theme in premodern Jewish literature. Furthermore, even we are talking about a period of about 1000 years, the views of everyday Jews of Jesus seem to have changed very little.[206]

3.1.1.Jesus in the Talmud

The most striking feature of the Talmudic description of Jesus of Nazareth[207] is its fragmented and extremely enigmatic nature. Among its many millions of words, only about half a dozen times does it mention, in scattered loci, a certain Yeshu (ישו or ישו"), traditionally identified with Jesus of Nazareth,[208] and the name *Yeshu hanotsri* (ישו הנוצרי) appears even more rarely.[209] Yeshu does not appear at all in the Mishnah, the redaction of which is believed to have been completed around 200 CE, and in other rabbinic literature, including the Jerusalem Talmud.[210] What we have, however, is not an independent narrative but references scattered throughout a large corpus of literature in the Gemara part of the Babylonian Talmud. As Schäfer notes, "the Jesus passages in the Talmud are the proverbial drop of water in the ocean, neither quantitatively significant nor presented in a coherent manner nor, in many cases, a subject of

[205] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 3. About the *Toledot Yeshu,* see Dan, 'Toledot Yeshu', 20:28-29. in: EJ.
[206] See Shapiro, 'Torah Study on Christmas Eve'.
[207] This topic has considerable literature, the most important being Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*; Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*; Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*; Lauterbach, 'Jesus in the Talmud'; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud.*
[208] Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 27.
[209] b*Avodah Zarah* 17a, b*Berakhot* 17b, b*Sanhedrin* 43a, b*Sanhedrin* 103a, b*Sotah* 47a.
[210] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 113.

their own".[211] Instead, Jesus is often mentioned as a side note, subordinated to another, more important topic, which in many cases has nothing to do with Jesus or Christianity.[212]

Since the 13th century, there has been much discussion about the identity of this Yeshu, or even whether this name covers a single character. The issue was prominent in public disputations organized by the Christian ecclesiastical and secular authorities, which were akin to criminal proceedings to prove that the Talmud is blasphemous against Christianity. The first such occasion was the Disputation of Paris in 1240 upon the report of the Jewish convert Nicholas Donin. In the disputation, Rabbi Yehiel ben Joseph of Paris, the principal Jewish speaker, attempted to cast doubt on the idea that all Yeshu characters were identical with Jesus of Nazareth.[213] Although, according to the not so surprising decision of the Christian judges, the Jewish side lost the disputation, Yehiel's tactic worked at least with Jewish polemicists, who, after the Paris dispute, could not agree on whether the Talmudic Yeshu refers to the Christian Jesus, as Daniel Lasker points out.[214] However, in the Middle Ages, passages that openly mentioned Yeshu were subject to papal censorship because of the Talmud's extremely negative portrayal of him.[215]

Until recently, "Jesus in the Talmud" scholarship has taken a fundamentally positivist direction, examining whether the fragmented references in the Talmud can be used as sources for reconstructing the life of the historical Jesus and evaluating the results from the perspective of historical truth. However, as Yerushalmi argues, this approach seems to painfully miss the point that, for reasons of the characteristics of the Talmud and the rabbinic conception of history, the Talmud does not even intend to preserve historical information, as we understand it, about virtually anything, including Jesus and Christianity.[216] Van Voorst argues that the Sages' primary concern was preserving the Jews in the Torah, not discussing historical events for their own sake.[217] Schäfer notes that they were aware of this latter option, but disapproved of the positivist approach with their disdainful *may dehava hava* ("what happened, happened") expression in Aramaic. He claims that the rabbis wanted to tell a story that was "not just fiction but their interpretation of 'what happened' in their peculiar and highly idiosyncratic way".[218] No wonder that the Talmudic texts associated with Jesus are sometimes historically contradictory: one places Jesus in the time of the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus around 100 BCE and

[211] Ibid., 10.
[212] Ibid., 95.
[213] Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 21, 26.
[214] Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 175.
[215] Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, 333; Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 18; Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 106; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 132.
[216] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 21–25.
[217] Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 104, 130.
[218] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 96.

another presents him as a contemporary of Rabbi Akiva in the 2nd century CE,[219] but strikingly, as Van Voorst notes, he never appears as someone who lived in the first century.[220]

This understanding of the Talmud as a literary text led to an alternative conceptual approach, according to which the Talmud does not refer to Jesus of Nazareth under the name Yeshu, but rather the Talmudic allusions are actually polemical reflections of the emerging early Christian Church and its traditions,[221] therefore the figure of Yeshu is to be understood as an allegory for early Christianity. According to this line of thought, Talmudic stories reflect not the objective but the subjective reality by describing not what happened but how the rabbis interpreted what took place.[222] Thus, as Schäfer emphasizes, the Talmudic accounts of Jesus cannot be rejected as nonsense or complete fiction[223] but rather, as Lauterbach notes, they are the production of a conscious adaptation for polemical purposes.[224] For this reason, the Sages and the editors of the Talmud took the Gospel stories at face value and, in their polemics against Christianity, did not resort to denying the existence of Jesus in order to invalidate Christianity by casting doubt on the historicity of its founder. As Van Voorst notes, no Jewish source argues that Jesus never existed but was conceived by early Christians.[225]

Given the literary nature of the Talmud, Peter Schäfer describes any attempts to reconstruct history from the Talmud "naïve" and "futile" because by using false standards, they misjudge the literary character of the rabbinic sources (and thus also of the New Testament), fail to appreciate the intellectual abilities of their authors, and as John Meier put it, "ask the wrong question of a body of literature with its own valid concerns".[226] Rather, as Schäfer posits, by asking the right questions, a different kind of "historical truth" emerges from the Talmudic Jesus passages, which he views as "a literary answer to a literary text", namely the New Testament.[227] I agree with Peter Schäfer that approaching the issue from this perspective will provide us with more useful answers than examining how the Talmudic texts relate to the historical Jesus.

From the perspective of the present study, it is completely irrelevant who the Yeshu figure in the Talmud actually is, whether a single person or several people, whether ever existed or not, and if yes, when, and how reliable the Talmudic stories about him are, and what they prove or disprove. What is important is who the Jews of later times understood these passages to be about. As Hyam Maccoby points out, regardless of who the Talmudic Jesus passages originally

[219] Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, 37, 52; Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 22, 31; Lauterbach, 'Jesus in the Talmud', 487, 529; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 17, 35. See b*Sanhedrin* 107b/b*Sotah* 47a and b*Shabbat* 104b/b*Sanhedrin* 67a.
[220] Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 120.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Lauterbach, 'Jesus in the Talmud', 480.
[223] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 95.
[224] Lauterbach, 'Jesus in the Talmud', 497.
[225] Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 133–34.
[226] Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1:92; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 16.
[227] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 97.

referred to, medieval Jews understood that they were referring to the Jesus of the Christian faith.[228] For Peter Schäfer, it is also irrelevant that the information on Jesus is scattered across a huge corpus of literature. He calls the fragmentary and scattered texts in the Babylonian Talmud "a deliberate and careful retelling of the New Testament narrative"[229] and thus "a daring and powerful counter-Gospel"[230] which, irrespective of whether they were combined into a single narrative in the Sages' minds or were used later to construct a popular Jewish image of Jesus.

From the scattered Talmudic references to Jesus, the following coherent narrative can be pieced together:[231] Jesus lived in the beginning of the 1st century BCE, at the time of the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus.[232] His mother's name was Miriam, a descendant of princes, who fornicated with carpenters.[233] Jesus' biological father was Miriam's lover, a certain Yosef Pandera.[234] Therefore, Jesus was conceived out of wedlock,[235] when Miriam was on her period.[236] In his youth, Jesus was a rebellious rabbinical student, who turned away from Judaism to idolatry.[237] He set himself against Judaism and smuggled magic spells in cuts in his body.[238] He performed miracles by uttering the name of God,[239] gathered disciples,[240] practiced magic and misled everyone by mocking the words of the Sages.[241] Because of his sins, the Sanhedrin condemned him to death and he was executed by stoning on a Friday when Passover fell on Shabbat.[242] In the afterlife, Jesus is being punished in boiling excrement in hell.[243] With this portrayal, the Talmud sharply attacks the Christian doctrine of the virgin birth and the Davidic genealogy of Jesus to exclude him as the Son of God and the Davidic Messiah and to transform him into an impostor and deceiver, together with the entire Christianity, which covers up the obvious truth that Mary had a secret lover and Jesus is an illegitimate child.[244]

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[228] For example, Moses Nahmanides claimed in the Barcelona Disputation of 1273, that Jesus was actually the disciple of Yehoshua ben Perahyah (*b.*Sanhedrin 107b) and even believed that the Talmudic dating of his life in the 1st century BCE is correct in contrast to the dating in the New Testament. Maccoby notes that unlike Yehiel of Paris, Nahmanides did not need to protect the Talmud from burning because at that time, Christians already needed it as a source of their new strategy of anti-Jewish polemic. He also mentions that an early Jewish historiography, *Sefer ha-Kabbalah,* written by Abraham ibn Daud in 1160-61, claimed that the disciple of Joshua ben Perahyah was the Jesus of Christianity (Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 28–29.).

[229] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 96-97.

[230] Ibid., 129.

[231] See also Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, 348–49; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 133–41.

[232] b*Sanhedrin* 107b; b*Sotah* 47a

[233] b*Sanhedrin* 106a

[234] b*Shabbat* 104b See

[235] b*Yevamot* 49b

[236] b*Kallah* minor (extracanonical) tractate, 51a

[237] b*Sanhedrin* 107b

[238] b*Shabbat* 104b; b*Sanhedrin* 67a

[239] b*Sanhedrin* 106a

[240] b*Sanhedrin* 43a

[241] b*Sanhedrin* 107b

[242] b*Sanhedrin* 43a

[243] b*Gittin* 56b-57a

[244] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 22.

3.1.2. The Toledot Yeshu

The *Toledot Yeshu,* the only premodern coherent Jewish narrative about Jesus of Nazareth,[245] is essentially a counter-gospel, which survived not a single text but in several versions.[246] Its title translates roughly as "Story of Jesus", and the word *toledot* (originally "generations") is used in Genesis to introduce the life stories of patriarchs such as Adam (5:1), Noah (6:9), Isaac (25:19), Ishmael (25:12), Jacob (37:2), or Esau (36:1), or even the heavens and the earth (2:4). Since some of its motifs are strikingly similar to those in early Christian Antichrist legends,[247] and for this reason, the Catholic Church strictly banned its distribution in the Middle Ages. Meerson and Schäfer mention that it was "officially banned by a bull of [the Avignon anti-]Pope Benedict XIII" in the beginning of the 15th century.[248]

The work was successfully used for anti-Semitic incitement even in the 20th century. Jews themselves endeavoured to keep it out of Christian hands as much as possible[249] due to its extremely hostile, defamatory, and fictional content, which is unacceptable to most modern Jewish denominations. Many concluded that it was as much an anti-Semitic Christian forgery as "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion", with the sole purpose of inciting hatred against Jews. Klausner, however, mentions that "our mothers knew its content through hearsay—naturally with all sorts of textual corruption, modifications, omissions, and imaginative additions—and passed it on orally to their children".[250] He also notes that Jews regularly studied it around Christmas, which aligns with accounts by medieval Jewish converts describing their former customs, so from the perspective of the image of Jesus that developed in medieval Judaism, it can be considered authentic. However, despite its negative content, the *Toledot Yeshu* is extremely valuable philologically as it is a testimony of how the scattered Talmudic stories, along with canonical and apocryphal Christian texts, pagan anti-Christian writings and grotesque folk tale elements, are brought together into a single coherent narrative, which does not deny the stories of the Gospels but simply turns them on their head and "merely changes evil to good and good to evil".[251]

A common feature of this tradition is that it portrays Jesus in an extremely negative light, even more so than the Talmud, and mocks him as someone unacceptable to the Jews in every way. It attacks the Christian beliefs that Jesus was born to a virgin conceived by the Holy Spirit,

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[245] More on *Toledot Yeshu*: Schäfer, Meerson, and Deutsch, eds. *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011; and Meerson and Schäfer, eds. *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*. Vols. I–II. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.

[246] Akin to the Christian Gospel, which also survived in many different canonical and extracanonical versions.

[247] For example that the Antichrist is the child of a wandering Jewish virgin and a Roman man. (Krauss, 'Jesus of Nazareth in Jewish Legend', 7:173 in: JE.")

[248] Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:15.

[249] Carmilly-Weinberger, *Censorship and Freedom of Expression*, 185; Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 10–11.

[250] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 48.

[251] Ibid., 51.

completely fulfilled the Torah, and that after his death, he was resurrected and went to heaven. In doing so, the *TY* uses Jesus, the founder and object of a new faith, the most sensitive point of Christianity, to denigrate and invalidate that faith, and in portraying Jesus as someone with extraordinary abilities but unacceptable to the Jewish people as he was born out of wedlock and violated multiple *mitzvot* of the Torah. In addition, he was a malevolent sorcerer, who was disrespectful of the Sages, committed apostasy and led Israel astray, therefore cannot be a valid religious authority but is being punished in the Gehenna for his sins. Ultimately, a zombie-like bogeyman was created, whom one must be afraid of because he crawls the latrines and sewers at Christmas time hunting for Jews,[252] and from whom it is better to stay away as much as possible.

3.1.3. Medieval Jewish historiography

The premodern Jewish negative attitude to Jesus was also manifested in the everyday language of the Jews as attested in medieval Jewish historiography. Although they knew that it was dangerous to strike an openly disrespectful tone, and even private expressions of anti-Christian sentiment could be dangerous,[253] it does not mean that they did not have their own hate speech just as Christians did.[254] Medieval Hebrew was rich in derogatory and often vulgar expressions against elements of the Christian religion. For example, the Hebrew chronicles of the Rhineland pogroms of 1096 at the beginning of the First Crusade use extremely denigrating vocabulary, especially for Jesus, since the entire crusade that led to the massacre or forced conversion of the Jews was initiated in his name. In the chronicles, expressions such as "bastard" (ממזר), "disgusting offshoot" (נצר נתעב), "son of the menstruant" (בן הנידה), "son of lust" (בן הזימה), "trampled corpse" (פגר מובס), "the abomination" (השיקוץ), "the defiled and detestable hanged man" (התלוי המחולל והמשוקץ).[255] Later, in the twelfth or thirteenth-century Book of Hasidim, less harsh expressions such as "corpse" (פגר) and "idol/image" (צלם) are used.[256] The language of

[252] Shapiro, 'Torah Study on Christmas Eve', 334–35. Note the allusion to Jesus' punishment in hell according to the Talmud. Shapiro notes that Children were not allowed to go to the privy, which custom might be a reflection of the blood libels.

[253] Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity*, 282.

[254] Anna Sapir Abulafia notes that Christians routinely used insults against their religious opponents, which was a common feature of 11th and 12th-century religious debates (Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 123.). See also Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs*; Dahan, *The Christian Polemic*; Sapir Abulafia, *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews*; Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart*, 89–115. For examples of Christian anti-Jewish invectives, see *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians* by St John Chrysostom and *On the Jews and Their Lies* by Martin Luther. Note also the blood libels and accusations of deicide, well-poisoning, cannibalism, and the desecration of the host. See also Kiss, '"You Are Children of Lust"', 195.

[255] Sapir Abulafia, 'Invectives against Christianity', 66. See also Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*; Haberman, *Sefer gezerot ashkenaz vetsarfat*, 24-60 (כד-ס).

[256] Parma 3280 H Manuscript, paragraphs 35, 63, 131, 250, 272, 305, 756, 816, 826, 953, 1084, 1349,

the anonymous 13th century anti-Christian apologetic work entitled *Sefer nitsaḥon yashan* or *Niẓẓahon Vetus* is not explicitly vulgar regarding Jesus, but still uses the pejorative term "that man" (אותו האיש) treating him like Voldemort in Harry Potter, "He Who Must Not Be Named".[257]

However, because Jews did not use Hebrew for everyday communication, we have little information about how Jews spoke about Jesus in the vernacular. Matthew Hoffman cites the popular Yiddish name for Jesus as *Yoyzl Pandrek*. The first name sounds like a nickname, and the last name seems to be a distortion of *Pandera,* Jesus' alleged father according to the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu*. Hoffman points out that the last name also means "Mr. Shit", referring to the boiling excrement in which Jesus is being punished for his sins according to the Talmud, and also the medieval Jewish superstition about him according to which he haunts the latrines in Christmas time.[258] Marc Shapiro reports that, according to writings by Jewish apostates in the 16th century, medieval Jews believed that "Jesus is condemned to crawl through the latrines on Christmas eve", and Jews, especially children, were afraid to go out to do their business for fear of Jesus to harass them.[259] Thus, medieval Jews constructed a conscious and direct counternarrative to the Christian Jesus tradition, in which the founder of the rival majority faith is a hideous zombie-like bogeyman who wants to destroy Jewish souls, so from whom it is best to keep away as far as possible.

3.2. Jesus in medieval Jewish polemics

Interestingly, unlike some Christians, Jews never denied the Jewishness of Jesus, and not all Jews stayed as far away from him as possible. As Jewish-Christian polemics intensified in the High Middle Ages, Jewish intellectuals engaged seriously with the Gospels and delivered anti-Christian polemics based on Old and New Testament exegesis, philosophy, and later history. Following the Talmudic and *Toledot Yeshu* tradition, they treated him as a Jew responsible for violating the Torah, emphasizing that his actions contradicted his own teachings. Other polemicists argued that Christian claims about Jesus contradicted the philosophical principles shared with Christians, and others claimed that the Jewish Jesus was not whom the church claimed he was, including the Gospel traditions.

1355, 1359, 1361, 1436, 1514, 1531, 1646, 1651, 1791, 1878 in 'Parma 3280 H'.

[257] For a full list of medieval Jewish invectives against Christinaity, see Breuer, *Sefer Nitzaḥon Yashan*, 195.

[258] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 5.

[259] Shapiro, 'Torah Study on Christmas Eve', 334–44.

3.2.1. Exegetical polemics

Premodern anti-Christian Jewish exegetical criticism was predominantly directed against the behaviour and ethical teachings of Jesus as represented in the Gospels. Robert Chazan mentions two Jewish polemicists, the Sephardi Jacob ben Reuben and the Ashkenazi Meir ben Simeon of Narbonne, who lived in the 12th and 13th centuries, respectively, and who severely criticized the moral character of Jesus based on their exegesis of the Gospel narratives and the Hebrew Bible. Jacob ben Reuben, in his book *Milḥamot hashem* (God's Wars), condemned Jesus' actions, interactions, and teachings as inconsistent with the Hebrew Bible, sound moral standards, and even Jesus' own ethical principles. He particularly criticized Jesus' refusal to test God, his explanation of speaking in parables, his statement that he was sent only to Israel, and his cursing of a barren fig tree, an event analysed extensively also by other Jewish polemicists. Jacob ben Reuben ultimately judges Jesus to be a childish, dictatorial, and unreasonable person, whose actions are simply inconsistent contradictory to "the obvious dictates of right thinking or moral behaviour".[260]

Rabbi Meir ben Simeon, who firmly believed in the importance and effectiveness of miracles, criticized the Jesus of the Gospels primarily from this perspective and supplemented his criticism with innovative historical reflections. The main argument of his *Milḥemet mitzvah* (Mandatory War) is that Jesus failed to perform miracles powerful enough to convince everyone. For Rabbi Meir, it is also a moral failing that makes him inferior to Moses, whose miracles before the Pharaoh were so impressive that they even convinced the Egyptian magicians. Rabbi Meir concludes that, even if Jesus was the promised Messiah, Jesus alone is responsible for his own misjudgement and death by not using his supposed divine powers convincingly enough. He claims that contemporary Jews, unconvinced of Jesus' weak miracles, rightly assumed that he was simply an accidental miracle worker and were not at fault when they sentenced him to death. The Jews of later times were also right when they questioned the divinity of Jesus, because the Gospels attribute to him defects and feelings that a divine being cannot have or feel. He is repeatedly accused of a lack of prior knowledge (as in the case of the fig tree and the misjudgement of Judas Iscariot) and in particular of his recurring fears of his enemies, which characterizes Jesus as a God-forsaken person. Chazan notes that Rabbi Meir's critical remarks about Jesus' moral and intellectual/emotional deficiencies are "an unusual attack on Jesus made on the basis of historical considerations".[261]

[260] Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity*, 286–88.

[261] Ibid., 292–96.

3.2.2. Philosophical polemics

Although indirectly related to the topic of this dissertation the Jesus Christ of Christian theology appears prominently in medieval Jewish anti-Christian philosophical polemics.[262] Lasker analyses philosophical polemics in four subject areas most criticized by Jewish philosophers: Trinity, Incarnation, Transubstantiation, and Virgin Birth. In their philosophical polemics, medieval Jewish authors treated Jesus exclusively as a theological concept of Christianity rather than as a historical person. They seriously considered Christological claims based on a detailed knowledge of Christian theology and refuted them on the basis of philosophical principles commonly shared with Christians, regardless of what their "private" views might have been. Their writings are far less hostile than one might have expected based on the popular medieval Jewish image of Jesus, and they show an intensive engagement with Christian ideas. This "neutrality" could be because they were scholars who could distance themselves from their subject, or because they were not interested in non-philosophical arguments, or because they knew that their works would be read by Christians. The phenomenon is still important because philosophical polemicists agreed in the underlying concepts but interpreted them differently, just like scholars in the 19th century. Lasker notes that it was possible to have meaningful polemics rather than missing the other's point only when both Jewish and Christian apologists agreed on the philosophical fundamentals and polemicized only on "whether or not mutually agreed upon philosophical doctrines refuted theological claims".[263] Likewise, in the 19th century, both Jewish and Christian scholars agreed on the philosophical and methodological premises but came to opposite conclusions about the figure of Jesus.

3.2.3. Historical polemics

David Berger, who "investigates the ways in which medieval Jews applied their sense of history to the polemical construction of the image of Jesus",[264] notes that alongside philosophy and exegesis, historiography also played a significant role in pre-modern Jewish polemics against Jesus. He even articulated that it is not an anachronism to speak of a pre-modern Jewish search for the historical Jesus, which developed from "hostile legends and unsystematic

[262] For a comprehensive overview of this topic, see Daniel Lasker: *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages*. Oxford / Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007; Eisenstein, Julius (Judah David), ed. *Oẓar Wikuḥim: A Collection of Polemics and Disputations with Introduction, Annotations and Index*. New York: J.D. Eisenstein, 1922; Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 3–37.; García-Arenal, Mercedes, and Gerard Wiegers, eds. *Polemical Encounters: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019.

[263] Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 10–11, 108.

[264] Myers, 'Preface', xiv.

criticisms" to attempts "of genuine historical reconstructions".[265] At first, Berger claims, statements about Jesus relied primarily on internal Jewish sources: "scattered remarks in rabbinic texts" and the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition, and the "depiction of an idolatrous enticer and bastard sorcerer who was hanged from a stalk of cabbage" accepted as historical truth. By the twelfth century, however, more information from Christian sources was available to them, and Jewish study of the figure of Jesus focused primarily on two central concerns: his attitude towards the Torah and his self-perception, in which Jews found that Jesus did not intend to abolish the Torah (Matthew 5:17-18), and he never considered himself God. However, the Jews did not welcome him as an observant Jew but criticized him for "psychological and polemical reasons", and Ashkenazi polemicists did not attempt to paint a coherent picture of Jesus but resorted to ad-hoc criticisms with no interest in his psyche whatsoever.[266]

3.3. Alternative premodern Jewish views of Jesus

This section aims at demonstrating that although the popular premodern Jewish view of Jesus was overwhelmingly negative, there were Jewish intellectuals who began to express more nuanced and positive views and criticized the popular tradition on Jesus. In doing so, they formulated alternative interpretations of Jesus and represented him as a loyal Jew by splitting him off from Christianity and used him as an anti-Christian argument to support their respective positions. Berger notes that polemicists of later periods portrayed Jesus in a particularly "Jewish" light to highlight the distinction between the Christian dogma and Jesus in terms of his self-image.[267] Talya Fishman even speaks of an active "medieval Jewish reclamation of Jesus" "as a loyal son of Israel" that began in the late 14th or early 15th century,[268] or even earlier, with Maimonides.

3.3.1.Maimonides

In the 12th century, Jewish perceptions of the figure of Jesus and his role in history began to change. In his *Epistle to Yemen,* Rambam (1138–1204) expresses a negative assessment of Jesus, although somewhat different from the popular view presented in *Toledot Yeshu,* calling him a legitimate Jew, who is "only figuratively termed an illegitimate child" because of his false teachings.[269] Thus, Jesus is a "kosher Jew",[270] and writing him off by labelling him a *mamzer* only increases his danger. For Maimonides, Jesus was not even a miracle worker but rather a false

[265] Berger, 'On the Uses of History', 25–26.
[266] Ibid., 26–29.
[267] Ibid., 31.
[268] Fishman, 'Changing Early Modern Jewish Discourse about Christianity', 160, 166. Based on an e-mail from Professor Fishman dated 26 August 2020.
[269] Maimonides, 'Epistle to Yemen'.
[270] Maimonides, 'Iggeres Teiman', 9.

prophet, a wolf in sheep's clothing, the very thing Jesus warned about in Matthew 7:15. For Maimonides, Jesus was neither a delusional Gentile like Muhammad nor a Jewish madman like the Yemenite messianic claimant about whom the letter was written but a destroyer of Israel. Therefore, Maimonides considers Matthew 5:17 to be a lie. However, the sages discovered his plan to undermine the abolition of the Torah, and "meted out fitting punishment to him",[271] causing Maimonides to accept and justify Jewish responsibility for Jesus' execution as presented in the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu*.

On the other hand, in the *Mishneh Torah,* written concurrently with the Epistle to Yemen, Maimonides articulates a dialectical view of the historical role of Jesus and Muhammad in preparing the Messianic Age, which, as Aviezer Ravitzky noted, became a "recurring motif in medieval Jewish writing".[272] In Halacha 4 of Chapter 11 of *Hilkhot melakhim umilḥamoteihem* (Laws of Kings and their Wars), Maimonides writes the that "[u]ltimately, all the deeds of Jesus of Nazareth and that Ishmaelite [Muhammad] who arose after him will only serve to prepare the way for Mashiach's coming and the improvement of the entire world, motivating the nations to serve God together [… and …] they will all return and realize that their ancestors endowed them with a false heritage and their prophets and ancestors caused them to err".[273] Thus, Maimonides presents Christianity and Islam as instruments of the divine will to prepare the nations for the messianic age through the spread of monotheism, the Torah, and the concept of messianism.

Maimonides considers Jesus to be a false messianic claimant who was lawfully executed by the Sanhedrin and counts him among the "the lawless sons of your people", mentioned in Daniel 11:14 (JPS). However, his actions and subsequent Christian proselytizing made it possible for the Torah to be known throughout the earth, improving the spiritual condition of the Gentiles in the present and making it easier for them to accept the rule of the true Messiah in the future. This is a reversal (possibly an intentional one) of the Christian interpretation of the Torah, which according to Galatians 3:24, "was our guardian until the Messiah came" (International Standard Version), by saying that it still functions as such, and this is partly due to the actions of Jesus of Nazareth.[274]

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[271] Maimonides, 'Epistle to Yemen'.

[272] Ravitzky, 'Judaism Views Other Religions', 83.

[273] Maimonides, 'Mishneh Torah: Sefer Shoftim: Kings and Wars: Chapter 11'.

[274] Ravitzky, 'Judaism Views Other Religions', 83. The idea seems to come from Judah Halevi, who, without specifically mentioning Jesus, claims that it is "God's secret and wise design" is that "[t]he nations merely serve to introduce and pave the way for the expected Messiah", and when he comes, they will unite "they will become one tree" with Israel". (Kuzari IV:23. Ha-Levi, *Kitab Al Khazari*, 226–27.) Note the tree image, like the one in Romans 11:17–24, depicting Gentile Christians as "wild olive shoots" grafted into the "cultivated olive tree" of Israel. See also Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 61; Ravitzky, 'Judaism Views Other Religions', 83.)

3.3.2. Profiat Duran

According to Berger, a breakthrough in the assessment of Jesus was made at the end of the 14th century by Profiat Duran (c. 1350–c. 1415),[275] who, in stark contrast to Maimonides, portrayed Jesus as a Jew who was fully committed to the written and oral Torah, which his disciples rejected, and so the Church betrayed their founder's heritage. Duran was the first Jewish thinker to distinguish between the historical Jesus, who probably never declared himself to be God, and the Jesus of the Christian church, who did. According to Hyam Maccoby, this distinction later became the basis for an independent Jewish study of Jesus and his conscious reclamation for Judaism, since Jews had until then assumed that the historical Jesus claimed to be God just as the Church communicated.[276] Levinger and Garbell note that this distinction was made possible by the fact that in the Renaissance and early modern period, the availability of historical sources, the fascination with history, and a critical approach to the past changed at least certain historical writings.[277] One of them was Duran's *Kelimat hagoyim* (The Shame of the Gentiles), the first anti-Christian Jewish polemical work to use historical-critical methods.[278] Berger considers *Kelimat hagoyim* to be a "breakthrough toward a Jewish picture of Jesus" and notes that Duran attempted to reconcile all the contradictory evidence in the Gospels to make them consistent with his portrayal of Jesus as observing the Torah. He also points out that that Duran's position was an open defence of the historical Jesus against ecclesiastical tradition,[279] with which the desecration of his figure began to give way to the more subtle counternarrative polemics through re-Judaization. So, with Duran, Jesus begins to become a "good guy" whom the Christians, the "bad guys", desecrated.

3.3.3. Isaac Troki

Duran's innovation is continued by Isaac ben Abraham Troki (c.1533–c.1594), a Lithuanian Karaite scholar, whose knowledge of Latin and Polish enabled him to converse with Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox clergy. These disputes led to his apologetic work entitled *Ḥizuk emunah* (Faith Strengthened). Johannes Christoph Wagenseil published its Latin translation and refutation along with those of *Toledot Yeshu* in *Tela ignæa Satanae* (The Flaming Arrows of Satan) in 1681, and the book also influenced Voltaire's anti-clerical ideas.[280] In the first part of the book, Troki rejects Christian objections to Judaism and the second part is a

[275] Levinger and Garbell, 'Duran, Profiat'. in: EJ, vol. 6.
[276] Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 28.
[277] Berger, 'On the Uses of History', 30–35.
[278] Levinger and Garbell, 'Duran, Profiat', 6:56-57. in: EJ.
[279] Berger, 'On the Uses of History', 30.
[280] Nemoy, 'Troki, Isaac Ben Abraham', 20:155. in: EJ.

detailed analysis of the Christian interpretation of the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation. Interestingly, the work is a polemic primarily against Christian teachings and not against the person of Jesus, or even the apostles.

Based on an exegetical analysis, Troki claims that the Christian portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah and a person of the Trinity contradicts the testimony of the Gospels, Jesus' self-perception and the faith of the apostles. He says that "Jesus gave no new law but merely confirmed the commandments given through Moses"[281] and concludes that the Church deviated from Jesus' original teachings, particularly regarding the validity of the Torah, and accuses Christians of being "partly guided by the Mosaic code, and partly by human enactments at various periods. They make changes and alterations, accommodating them to the customs of the day, and render established principle subservient to temporary wants and arbitrary innovations".[282]

Barker and Gregg note that Troki "represents a shift in Jewish perceptions of Jesus: it is the Church and not Jesus who is responsible for the heresy of worshipping a mere mortal," and the 'original Jesus' "would have been shocked to learn that he was a member of the trinity." In *Ḥizuk emunah,* Troki lists the differences of Christian doctrine, practice, and ethics, from the teachings of Jesus (and his apostles) as we know from the New Testament, the first being Jesus' divine nature.[283] Although Troki does not interpret Jesus on his own right but only in refuting the claims of Christianity, he asserts that Jesus' (and the apostles') teachings and practice were in perfect harmony with Judaism. With this claim, he not only separates Jesus (and the early church) from contemporary Christianity, but also, together with Profiat Duran, seems to indirectly justify Jesus against what he considers Christian misrepresentations, thereby reclaiming him for Judaism. Strikingly, he even argues that the name *Yeshu* is not of Jewish but of Christian origin.[284] With this move, he also manages to deflect the accusation that Jews made up a denigratingly distorted name for Jesus.

3.3.4.Leon Modena

Leon Modena (1571–1648), the unofficial chief rabbi of Venice and the most popular preacher of the Venetian ghetto of the time, was well versed in Jewish and Christian philosophy, literature, church history and the Latin (and possibly Greek) language.[285] His sermons were

[281] Troki, *Faith Strengthened*, 93.
[282] Ibid., 90–91.
[283] Ibid., 223–24. Troki asserts that this doctrine got powerful support from "the Chrisian copyist Jerome" (המעתיק הנוצרי ירונימוס), who, according to his custom of deliberately misinterpreting Scripture, adjusted the wording of the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 9 to provide support for the doctrine of Jesus' divinity (Ibid., 106; Troki, *Ḥizuk emunah*, 43 (מג).).
[284] Troki, *Faith Strengthened*, 104. Troki claims it was the Christians who did not pronounce the *ayin*.
[285] For more on Modena and his polemics, see: Dobos and Montskó, 'Polemics with Strange Overtones'.

regularly attended by high-ranking churchmen and nobles,[286] including once "the brother of the king of France [Louis XIII], who was accompanied by some French noblemen and five of the most important Christian preachers" and another time by Henri Duc de Rohan, a prominent Huguenot refugee.[287] Modena actively interacted and even cooperated with Christian scholars of the time,[288] attended Christian sermons,[289] and his library included collections of sermons by both rabbis and priests.[290]

Modena formulates his views on Jesus in an incomplete and unpublished treatise entitled *Magen vaḥerev* (Shield and Sword), which was circulated in Hebrew-language manuscripts.[291] Although it is an anti-Christian polemic that follows the classic models of medieval Jewish anti-Christian polemical literature[292] addressing the original sin, the Trinity, the incarnation, the virgin birth and the Messiah,[293] Modena's writing is unique in many ways. First, he rejects the Talmudic Jesus material and the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition as "mockery and lies, composed by some man who was opposed to him [Jesus]"[294] and that "it is a disgrace for any Jew to believe it",[295] by which statement he formulates a sharp criticism of his fellow Jews.

Modena is revolutionary because he not only rejects the negative Jewish traditions about Jesus, but also examines him as a historical figure through Jewish and Christian primary and secondary historical sources.[296] Using historical methods, Modena interprets the conditions of the Second Temple period to understand Jesus, and he is interested in the psychology of the parties involved: the character development of Jesus in his overreaction to the Pharisees' fear of

[286] Adelman, 'Success and Failure', 499, 621.
[287] Modena, *Autobiography*, 131; Facchini, 'The City, the Ghetto and Two Books', 19–20.
[288] Facchini, 'Jesus the Pharisee', 85–86.
[289] Podet, 'Christianity in the View of Rabbi Leon Modena', 22. In his autobiography, Modena writes about an occasion when he attended a sermon in the church of San Geremia, to whose parish the ghetto belonged, and it does not appear from his language that he was forced to do so or that it was a one-off occasion (Modena, *Autobiography*, 109; Adelman and David, 'Historical Notes', 217.). Although Venice had had a ghetto for about a hundred years in Modena's time, lively interreligious encounters occurred in the city, in keeping with the tendencies of the time: "starting from the end of sixteenth century, Christian travellers and scholars would seek Jewish ritual in every city they visited" and Jewish sermons were "a sort of religious performance which attracted Christians from different creeds. Christian princes and nobility enjoyed attending the sermons in the synagogues of Western Europe". (Facchini, 'The City, the Ghetto and Two Books', 20.) It appears that Italian Jews also encouraged this type of interreligious encounter by showing a "willingness to be observed" (Fishman, 'Changing Early Modern Jewish Discourse about Christianity', 192.) On Christian Hebraism, see Dunkelgrün, 'The Christian Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe'.
[290] Adelman, 'Success and Failure', 327. Marc Saperstein notes that Modena "owned at least one volume of Savonarola's sermons and an Italian treatise on 'The Way to Compose a Sermon'" and he speaks about a Jewish "openness to what was happening in the pulpits of nearby churches" (Saperstein, *Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn*, 94–95.)
[291] Facchini, 'Jesus the Pharisee', 82.
[292] Guetta, 'Leone Modena's Magen We-Ḥerev', 134.
[293] Facchini, 'Jesus the Pharisee', 87. Modena planned "three more sections, on the death and resurrection of Jesus, the eternity of the Torah, and miracles" (Guetta, 'Leone Modena's Magen We-Ḥerev', 134.)
[294] Facchini, 'Jesus the Pharisee', 89.
[295] Berger, 'On the Uses of History', 35.
[296] *De republica hebraeorum libri VII* by Carlo Sigonio and *Sefer Yosippon* (Guetta, 'Leone Modena's Magen We-Ḥerev', 310.)

Jewish sectarianism, which gave rise to a new form of faith Jesus never dreamed of. Berger notes that Modena "speculates in sober, informed fashion about the possible motivations, concerns, even the personal development of the major protagonists" of the New Testament.[297]

Modena takes a historical approach to Jesus, imagining himself in the time and place "as though I were of his generation and had been close to him",[298] whereby examining Jesus in his own context rather than through the lens of Christian tradition. The context he finds, as Facchini points out, is not a uniform but a sectarian Judaism of the Second Temple period, in which Jesus chose the "true sect", i.e. Pharisaic Judaism, which, according to the "Jewish master narrative", adhered to the Oral Torah and was the forerunner of Rabbinic Judaism. Modena argues that by speaking of the Pharisees as sitting on Moses' seat in Matthew 23:2, Jesus also acknowledged the validity of the Oral Torah. He also fully adhered to Judaism, otherwise no one would have ever listened to him. However, Jesus differed from the Pharisees in finer points that were not explicitly mentioned in the Torah but were derived from it, e.g. the washing of the hands, which the Pharisees disapproved of for fear of the emergence of another Jewish sect. Modena's Jesus "overreacted" to the Pharisees' attack and wanted to prove his greatness by declaring himself the Son of God, but he never said he was equal to God because he knew no one would have accepted that.[299]

It is also on historical grounds that Modena denies Jesus' messiahship: he could not even have considered that he could have been the Messiah because in the first century, there was no need for a messianic saviour and accordingly, the Jews were not expecting one. The Messiah appears upon a prophetic promise and what the first-century Jews were expecting was a powerful king, who could free them from Roman rule, something a poor and suffering man like Jesus could never achieve. Thus, as Facchini notes, Modena presents "a very human Jewish Jesus" in the context of late Second Temple Judaism.[300] Homolka points out that Modena portrayed Jesus as a liberal Pharisee who saw himself as chosen by God to teach the Torah, someone greater than the prophets but not divine.[301]

Although the subtitle of *Magen vaḥerev* is "an essay against Christianity" (*ḥibur neged hanotsrut*), Modena's portrayal of Jesus is more than just polemics and more than against Christianity. It appears that he was the first Jewish thinker to project the problems of his own age

[297] Berger, 'On the Uses of History', 35–36.
[298] Podet, 'Christianity in the View of Rabbi Leon Modena', 23; Facchini, 'Jesus the Pharisee', 90.
[299] Facchini, 'Jesus the Pharisee', 91–93. This story of Jesus going astray because of his inappropriate response, of hardened positions, and of the birth of a new form of worship, for which the Sages are also at least partially responsible, is strikingly similar to the Talmudic story of Yehoshua ben Perahya's wayward disciple in b*Sanhedrin* 107b and b*Sotah* 47a (Cf. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 33–40., especially page 39. See also page 73 below.
[300] Facchini, 'Jesus the Pharisee', 96.
[301] Homolka, *Jesus Reclaimed*, 30.

back to the time of Jesus when he discussed the motives of the Pharisees. Modena also feared that Jewish sectarianism might reemerge with the spread of Kabbalah[302] and used Jesus to simultaneously justify his position to his Jewish *and* Christian opponents at the same time,[303] thus reclaiming Jesus for his own purposes. This is similar to what the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* did more than three hundred years later.

3.3.5. Baruch Spinoza

After his excommunication from the Amsterdam Sephardic Jewish community, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) ceased to consider himself a Jew, and led the life of a secular philosopher, with which he "moved into the previously impossible space that was neither Jewish nor Christian".[304] For this reason, it is questionable whether he can be counted among the premodern Jewish thinkers. However, his roots in the Jewish intellectual tradition, his legacy in Jewish thought, recent attempts to "reclaim" or "reappropriate" him to the Jewish intellectual tradition, and most importantly for our topic, his method of using Jesus to justify his own philosophical and political agenda fits him into the lineage of both premodern and modern Jewish thinkers on Jesus, and can perhaps even be seen as a link between them, at least as far as views on Jesus are concerned.

Spinoza expresses his idiosyncratic views on Jesus mainly in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, hereinafter: TTP), in which he always refers to Jesus as "Christ", and contrasts him favourably with Moses, emphasizing that while Moses, who talked to God from face to face, was a particularist lawgiver, Jesus was a universalist philosopher, "God's Wisdom assumed human nature",[305] with whom God communicated "from mind to

[302] Facchini, 'Jesus the Pharisee', 93. On Modena's criticism of the Lurianic Kabbalah, see Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah*.

[303] Adelman notes that *Magen vaḥerev* is actually an attack on Christian Kabbalah (Adelman, 'Modena, Leon', 14:410 in: EJ.) Adelman also points out that Modena polemicized "against the use of Kabbalah by Christian missionaries" and "attempted to undermine the specific connections which Christians had established between their religion and Kabbalah" (Adelman, 'Success and Failure', 841–42.)

[304] Balint, 'Spinning Spinoza'. Although one might think that Spinoza left Judaism for the rest of his life because his excommunication prevented him from returning to the community, it was apparently his own decision. Rebecca Goldstein points out that in his community, excommunication was not a particularly harsh and final punishment as many excommunicated Jews sought to return, which was apparently encouraged. Steven Nadler points out that Spinoza was repeatedly contacted by the rabbis, who "reportedly even tried to bribe him into attending synagogue and conforming outwardly with their behavioral norms", implying that it was important for the community to keep him in its folds, and even his radical views would have been tolerated if Spinoza had continued to behave like a devout Jew (Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza*, 4; Nadler, *Spinoza*, 180–81, 338.) On the issue of whether Spinoza can be considered as a "Jewish philosopher", see Nadler, 'The Jewish Spinoza'. and Nadler and Rudavsky, 'Introduction'. On Spinoza's rootedness in in medieval anti-Christian Jewish polemic, see Lasker, 'Reflections of the Medieval Jewish–Christian Debate'.

[305] TTP I:23. in: Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, II:84.

mind",[306] and who taught universal and eternal laws that were aimed at improving moral character. Thus, Spinoza's Christ is the incarnated Sophia, whose ethical teachings are universal. This is mere Christian language as the personified Wisdom (LXX: *sofia*) in Proverbs 8 has been understood since the Church Fathers as the pre-existent Christ who incarnated as Jesus.[307]

Frank and Waller note that by claiming that Jesus had a universal moral message, Spinoza attacks the then thousand-year-old "Christendom Model" of society, in which the Church functions as an aid to the State in maintaining cohesion between incongruent social groups that otherwise would tear society apart, and which did not change after the Protestant Reformation, but even strengthened, with the political implications that the laws of the state must be constructed on the basis of the Torah of Moses and the teachings of Jesus, especially those in the Sermon on the Mount.[308] Spinoza's primary purpose was to argue that neither the Mosaic law nor Jesus' teachings are suitable to be used as the laws of a government. The laws of Moses applied to the ancient Jewish community and the "laws" of Jesus were moral in nature, and their codification would be detrimental to the peace and the preservation of the Republic, whose interests are above those of the religions.[309]

By claiming that Christianity misappropriated Jesus, by detaching him from Christianity and by defining him as a philosopher with a universal ethical teaching, Spinoza uses the same tactic of polemicizing with Christianity, appropriating Jesus as earlier premodern and later modern Jewish thinkers by providing a powerful counternarrative that undermines Christian claims to and (perceived) misappropriation of Jesus. Like Modena, Spinoza also uses Jesus to polemicize against Jews and Christians at the same time. Although he does not claim Jesus for the Jewish tradition, which he renounced, he does claim Jesus for himself or his philosophical-ethical tradition, in the manner many other Jewish thinkers did 300 years later. Given Spinoza's enormous influence on later Jewish thought, from our perspective, he seems to fit into the range of Jewish thinkers from Yehiel of Paris to Joseph Klausner and even beyond.[310] Furthermore,

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[306] TTP I:24, in: Ibid., II:85.

[307] Wright, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 59–67.

[308] Frank and Waller, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Spinoza: On Politics*, 1–12. In fact, the idea appears to be much older, dating back to the pre-Christian Roman policy of achieving religious uniformity through syncretism and emperor worship in order to preserve the cohesion and integrity of the vast and diverse Roman Empire by securing a universal religion as much as possible. One of its manifestations was the worship of *Sol Invictus,* the Invincible Sun (González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2010, 1:20.).

[309] TTP XIX:232, in: Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, II:336–37.

[310] Interestingly, Spinoza's fate in later Jewish thought is very similar to that of Jesus. Daniel Schwartz talks about the "Jewish reclamation of Spinoza" and notes that the heretic is made into a hero, and the image of Spinoza became a deliberately anachronistic construction that would probably have no meaning for Spinoza himself but which is used "by a range of modern Jewish thinkers in order to validate— and in some cases critically interrogate— their own identities and ideologies". (Schwartz, *The First Modern Jew*, 3–5.). A parallel

due to his deep roots in medieval Jewish thought, he appears to be a link between the premodern and the modern periods as the first representative of secular Jewish experience.

3.3.6. Jacob Emden

In the 18th century, Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697–1776)[311] went even further and adopted an "astonishingly liberal attitude"[312] towards Christianity and the person of Jesus. Moshe Miller notes that Emden was uncomfortable with the Talmudic passages that spoke negatively about Jesus, did not believe that the derogatory passages about Yeshu referred to Jesus of Nazareth, and developed the "theory of two Yeshus"[313] similarly to the arguments of Yehiel of Paris.[314] Emden took the then unimaginable position that Jesus was the "most faithful upholder" of Judaism,[315] confirming the validity of the Torah for the Jews, even more than the Sages, and being the first Jew to actually actively fulfil the mission of the Jewish people in the world, which was to be achieved not through proselytism but the spread of faith in God and basic Jewish ethical principles among the nations of the world,[316] which are "much more stringent [...] than the Torah of Moses".[317]

Emden expressed his views on Jesus and the origins of Christianity in a letter sent to the Council of the Four Lands, the central institution of Jewish self-government in Poland, in response to their request whether the Christian authorities should be informed about the nature of the messianic Jewish Frankist heretics, an offshoot of the Sabbatean movement. This group, led by one Jacob Frank, had previously been excommunicated by the rabbinate, but they turned to Catholic bishops for protection, claiming that they were being persecuted by the Jews because they believed in the Trinity, which caused no small amount of controversy. Emden recommended that the Council ask the Christian authorities to help them in their struggle against the Frankists.[318] He advocates for mutual respect and understanding between Jews and Christians and even acknowledges in his argument that there are "foolish" and "true" scholars in both Judaism and Christianity. In his letter, Emden attempts to correct misconceptions about the intentions behind the teachings of Jesus (referred to as "the Nazarene") and his apostles,

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between Spinoza and Jesus was explicitly stated by Heinrich Heine in 1835: "It has been established that Spinoza's life was free of all blemishes, as pure and immaculate as the life of his divine cousin, Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, he suffered for his teachings and wore the crown of thorns. Everywhere a great spirit expresses its thoughts in Golgotha". (Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 51.)

[311] Shraga Samet, 'Emden, Jacob'. in: EJ vol. 6.

[312] Miller, 'Rabbi Jacob Emden's Attitude Toward Christianity', 105.

[313] Ibid., 115.

[314] Berger, 'On the Uses of History', 33.

[315] Miller, 'Rabbi Jacob Emden's Attitude Toward Christianity', 125.

[316] Ibid., 128, 131.

[317] Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee*, 21. Emden seems to be talking about the "You have heard that it was said – But I say to you" ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21–48).

[318] Ibid., 14.

particularly regarding Torah observance. Emden points out that "the Nazarene brought about a double kindness in the world" in that he confirmed the validity of the Torah for the Jews much more than any of the Sages, and "did much good to the Gentiles" by forbidding them idolatry.[319]

Emden 's Jesus "came to establish a religion for the Gentiles", which was by no means new "but actually ancient they being the Seven Commandments of the Sons of Noah, which were forgotten".[320] Since both Jews and Gentiles are subject to their respective *mitzvot* originating in the same Torah given by the same God, the only difference is that Jews are parties to the Sinaitic Covenant since "God delivered them from the iron furnace (Egypt) to be the people of his possession".[321] Miller notes that Emden did not consider Jews and Gentiles to be metaphysically different when he wrote "In the name of heaven, we are your brothers!" [322] It is notable that Emden takes the idea of spreading the Torah among the Gentiles from Maimonides but he does not share his view that Christianity would be the preparation for the eschatological victory of Judaism in the form of the conversion of Christians to it. Probably for the first time in history, Emden views the Jewish and Christian faiths as equals, neither being "truer" than the other.

Emden appears to have consciously and somewhat sincerely wanted to foster good relations with Christians, but his intentions are clouded by the fact that he did it under the disguise of his fight against the Frankist movement, whom he saw as a shared foe of both Christians and Jews. Miller suggests that Emden may have had the goal of forming an elite alliance between learned Jews and Christians against the Frankist movement as the reason for his liberal views on Jesus. If it is so, Jesus is once more utilized to further the thinker's own religious and political goals. However, there is evidence for his sincerity as well: Emden formulated his views in "purely religious writings, written in Hebrew and intended for a religious Jewish audience".[323] Even though his true goal was to facilitate the acceptance of Christians as allies against the Frankists rather than curry favour with the Christians, he nevertheless adopted a daring stance that went "far beyond his predecessors and contemporaries" and "remains unparalleled among traditional Talmudists to this day".[324] Jacob Schacter notes that Emden had such a positive attitude toward Jesus that Yehuda Liebes even suggested that Emden may have considered Jesus to be the messiah of his time, consistent with Emden's belief that each generation could potentially produce such a figure.[325]

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[319] Barker and Gregg, *Jesus Beyond Christianity*, 30.
[320] Ibid., 29.
[321] Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee*, 20.
[322] Miller, 'Rabbi Jacob Emden's Attitude Toward Christianity', 132; Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee*, 22.
[323] Miller, 'Rabbi Jacob Emden's Attitude Toward Christianity', 135.
[324] Ibid., 113, 125.
[325] Schacter, 'Rabbi Jacob Emden, Sabbatianism, and Frankism', 383.

3.3.7. Moses Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn (1729–1786) also claims Jesus back for the Jewish people to defend the right to be Jewish and to participate in majority society as such but in doing so, he falls into polemicizing powerfully against Christianity. Susannah Heschel points out that although emancipation and enlightenment promised Jews entry into a secular but still Christian society, this came at a price, and the positive Jewish interest in Jesus was not an endorsement of Christianity but a tool to legitimate Judaism by reminding Christians of Jesus' Jewishness.[326] Jonathan Hess notes that Mendelssohn separates Jesus from Christianity and presents him "as an exemplary Jewish reformer, a polemicist for Jewish emancipation and a critic of the religious and political power of Christianity".[327]

Although Mendelssohn had Christian friends like Lessing, whom he truly respected, and admired the morals of Jesus, he was critical of Christianity and flatly refused to convert when he was openly called to do so by Johann Caspar Lavater, a Swiss theologian.[328] In his reply to Lavater, he describes the idea of calling him to convert as ridiculous as if someone would want to convert a contemporary Confucius or Solon simply out of admiration for them. In his analysis of the book that Lavater sent him, Mendelssohn states that "the more I come to know this religion so highly recommended to me, the more frightful it is to my reason".[329] Lavater apparently made the mistake of confusing friendship with Christians and interest in Jesus with the acceptance of Christianity itself, putting Mendelssohn on the defensive against his will and leading him into theorizing about the tolerance of Judaism and the intolerance of Christianity. As Gottlieb notes in her Introduction to Mendelsohn's *Writings on Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible,* the shock of Lavater's attitude even gave Mendelssohn a nervous disorder for the rest of his life.[330]

Mendelssohn expressed his views on Jesus in *Jerusalem or on Religious Power and Judaism*, published in 1783 arguing for the emancipation of Jews as Jews, without them having to convert into Christianity. In Jerusalem, Mendelssohn takes up on one of the teachings of Jesus, saying "what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6), although with a different interpretation. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of divorce, while in *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn argues against the separation of the Jewish people from the Torah and compares their relationship with a marriage.[331] Mendelssohn begins his argument for Judaism and against Christianity by noting,

[326] Heschel, 'Jewish Views of Jesus', 152.
[327] Hess, 'Mendelssohn's Jesus', 111.
[328] For more on the "Lavater Affair", see Michal Gottlieb's Introduction to Mendelssohn, *Writings*, xv and 3–4.
[329] Ibid., 10, 17.
[330] Ibid., xv.
[331] The comparison of the setting is also interesting: in the Gospel, Jesus answers the Pharisees, who approach him to get a grip on him, while in *Jerusalem,*

similarly to Duran and Modena, that Jesus and his disciples followed not only the written Torah but also the oral tradition. Furthermore, since Jesus was a rabbinic Jew for Mendelssohn, he presents him as a religious authority not only for Christians but also for Jews. As early as 1770, he had argued in an unpublished statement that Judaism needs no justification because "Jesus of Nazareth and the apostles themselves *did not liberate us* from the law".[332] Later, he develops this idea in *Jerusalem:*

> Jesus of Nazareth was never heard to say that he had come to release the House of Jacob from the law. Indeed, he said, in express words, rather the opposite; and, what is still more, he himself did the opposite. Jesus of Nazareth himself observed not only the law of Moses but also the ordinances of the rabbis; and […] the rabbinic principle evidently shines forth from his entire conduct as well as the conduct of his disciples in the early period. […] And you, dear brothers and fellow men, who follow the teachings of Jesus, should you find fault with us for doing what the founder of your religion did himself, and confirmed by *his authority?* Should you believe that you cannot love us in return as brothers and unite with us as citizens as long as we are outwardly distinguished from you by the ceremonial law, do not eat with you, do not marry you, which, as far as we can see, the founder of your religion would neither have done himself nor *permitted us* to do?[333]

Mendelssohn speaks here as if Jesus had religious authority over the Jews, as if his *permission* meant something for Judaism. Thus, his Jesus appears as a halakhic authority whose words at best were misunderstood or at worst intentionally distorted by the Christians.

3.4. Conclusions

As we have seen, there were intellectuals who opposed the hostile, popular pre-modern Jewish view of Jesus, who engaged seriously with his figure and increasingly openly expressed an increasingly positive opinion, describing him as a pioneer of the messianic age (Maimonides), a Torah-observant Jew betrayed by his followers (Duran and Troki), a Pharisee (Modena), the incarnation of the divine Wisdom (Spinoza), the most faithful defender and propagator of Judaism (Emden), or even a halakhic authority (Mendelssohn). These assessments fit the paradigm discussed in chapter 2 and appear to have paved the way for reclamation in the 19th

Mendelssohn is arguing against the Christian society, which expects something the Jews do not want to do, as if Mendelssohn had identified himself with Jesus and Christianity with the Pharisees acting hypocritically in the Gospel story.

[332] Cited in Hess, 'Mendelssohn's Jesus', 101. (italics mine).

[333] Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 134–35. (italics mine).

century. Before I move on to that, I would like to present examples of what I call the covert premodern Jewish reclamation of Jesus.

4. Covert premodern Jewish reclamations of Jesus

In addition to the overt premodern Jewish reclamation of Jesus, there also seems to be a covert one between the lines, discernibly mostly in language. As Van Voorst notes, for example, "rabbinic tradition everywhere knows that Jesus was Jewish"[334] and portrays him as a villain, but a *Jewish* villain, over whom the Sanhedrin had jurisdiction, completely neglecting any Roman responsibility for Jesus' death. Schäfer interprets this stance as "a deliberate misreading of the New Testament, (re)claiming Jesus, as it were, for the Jewish people, and proudly acknowledging that he was rightly and legally executed because he was a Jewish heretic".[335] In this chapter, I consider ways in which Jesus is reclaimed for Judaism in unlikely sources such as the Talmud, the *Toledot Yeshu,* the Midrash, the Crusade Chronicles, and as the figure of the tzaddik in Hasidism. As a case study, I also discuss the premodern Jewish reclamation of Jesus through the hidden Christological interpretation of the figure of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, understood to prefigure Jesus Christ in Christian tradition, as representative of the people of Israel.

4.1. Talmud

As we saw on page 54, the Talmud sharply attacks the Christian teaching that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah by emphasizing that Mary had a secret lover and that Jesus was an illegitimate child.[336] Over time, the opinion arose that, Jesus' father was a non-Jew according to the Talmud, although this does not seem to be confirmed upon closer inspection. Allusions to Jesus' father survive only in the uncensored manuscripts and printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud in *Shabbat* 104b,[337] which attempts to resolve the question of whether Jesus was the son of a particular Stada or Pandera. The text attests that the Babylonian rabbinical academies of Sura and Pumbeditha differ regarding the identity of Mary's husband, but they agree that she had a lover called Pandera. Consequently, the Talmud classifies Jesus as a *mamzer* (illegitimate child) regardless of whether his father was Mary's husband or lover because the very fact that Mary had a lover makes Jesus' legal status doubtful. However, the Talmud tends to accept that Jesus' biological father was Mary's lover, Pandera.[338] Schäfer concludes that having "a certain soldier named Panthera" as a father is identical to saying that Jesus is "the son of a non-Jew" and of "a member of the hated Roman Empire".[339]

[334] Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 115.
[335] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 12.
[336] Ibid., 22.
[337] Ibid., 16.
[338] Ibid., 18.
[339] Ibid., 19, 21.

The idea that Jesus' father was a Roman soldier comes from Origen's *Contra Celsum* I:32, quoting the pagan philosopher Celsus, who quotes a Jew who said that "the mother of Jesus […] had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera".[340] However, as Schäfer himself admits, the Talmud nowhere says that Pandera was a non-Jew, let alone a soldier,[341] and in discussing the birth narrative of the *Toledot Yeshu,* Schäfer notes that the earliest versions of the *Toledot Yeshu* made no use of the story told by Celsus: "they completely ignore the question of Yeshu's origin except for the single feet that he is "ben/bar Pandera", which alone does not imply much". Furthermore, Schäfer finds it striking that the explicit idea that Jesus is the descendant of a Jew and a gentile appears relatively late in *Toledot Yeshu,* the earliest evidence being from "not later than the 15th century".[342] The Talmudic dispute is only about whether Jesus was born out of wedlock, and therefore illegitimate, and the Jewish ancestry of Jesus' father is not questioned.

Another form of covert reclamation of Jesus is that, strikingly, the Talmud appears to use the figure of Jesus to internally criticize the strict observance of Judaism and to portray Jesus as a Jewish identity figure in the story of the frivolous (or wayward) disciple in b*Sanhedrin* 107b, analysed in detail by Stephen Gero[343] and from the perspective of Jesus, by Peter Schäfer in *Jesus in the Talmud*.[344] In short, the story goes as follows: Yehoshua ben Perahya and his disciple, Jesus of Nazareth (here mentioned explicitly by this name), flee to Alexandria from the persecution of the sages by Alexander Jannaeus. When the danger has passed, they return to Jerusalem together. One night they enter an inn, which delights Perahya and exclaims: "How beautiful is this inn". Jesus understands that his master is speaking of the hostess (the Aramaic *akhsanya*

[340] Ibid., 18–19. *Contra Celsum* I:32 (Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 31.) Although the name comes from Greek through Latin (Greek *panthēr* meaning 'leopard'), and *Pantera* was a common name among Roman soldiers, especially the standard bearers of Roman military units, who wore the fur of a predatory cat, often leopard, on their head and back, it does not reveal much about ethnicity. In addition, being a Roman soldier does not mean that someone was "ethnically Roman" (whatever that means), or any other Gentile for that matter. Zeichmann points out that we also have names of Jewish soldiers who served in the Roman army (Zeichmann, 'Jesus "Ben Pantera"', 151.). Being a Roman soldier, therefore, does not preclude being a Jew and the Talmud does not come to this conclusion either. The idea that Jesus' father is a Gentile first appears in Jewish tradition in the post-15th century St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274 manuscript of *Toledot Yeshu* (Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, II:71.), which contains a story where Jesus is interrogated by the rabbis, and he confesses that he is a Jew but a bastard (**בן יהודים אני אלא ממזר**) and his father is Pandera, who is a Gentile (**פנדירא וארמאי הוא** , Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:160; Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, II:74.). Based on the understanding of the word *arma'i* as Gentile (literally 'Syrian' but also 'Roman' in Talmudic Aramaic, but not specifically 'Aryan' in the modern sense of the word), there may have been a tradition that the father of Jesus was a Gentile but there were other *Toledot Yeshu* traditions that held that his father was Jewish, but his name happened to be Pandera. In the Wagenseil version, Joseph Pandera comes from the tribe of Judah (Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:286–87.).

[341] Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:7.

[342] Ibid., I:47–48.

[343] See Gero, 'The Stern Master and His Wayward Disciple'.

[344] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 34–40.

means both), and replies: "But her eyes are too narrow". Perahya becomes angry with Jesus for having such frivolous thoughts (and probably also because Jesus apparently assumes that his master has them) and excommunicates him. Jesus approaches his master several times and asks him to take him back, but Perahya refuses. One day Jesus comes when his master, who has already changed his mind, is praying and only raises his hand to indicate that Jesus can stay but must wait until he is finished. Jesus misunderstands the gesture and thinks that Perahya is sending him away again, so he goes out, makes himself an idol, and starts worshipping it. Perahya goes after Jesus to call him back but Jesus refuses (misunderstanding his master for the third time) and becomes destructive: he begins to practice magic, incites people to idolatry, and leads Israel astray. The story suggests that the path Jesus took was his own choice because of his disappointment.

On the surface, this Talmudic story also illustrates, as usual, how trivial misunderstandings can have far-reaching consequences. More interestingly, however, the Talmud uses the figure of Jesus for an internal criticism of the strict adherence of rabbinic Judaism, which resonates with Eli Yassif's analysis of the origins of the *Toledot Yeshu*. In the Talmudic story, Jesus becomes a covert identity model for inexperienced young students, who have been judged too harshly by their older masters too harshly. It even has erotic undertones, alluding to how young people have erotic thoughts that can confuse their thinking, and that their masters are too hard on them for it. Understood this way, the story warns of the strict and intolerant religiosity of the older leaders and depicts an extreme scenario in which a generally benevolent but expelled and disappointed young student turns away from rabbinic Judaism and becomes a villain. Schäfer points out that actually the story is criticizing not Jesus, but rather Perahya, who is portrayed as a bad teacher *par excellence* who does not understand young people. In this way, Jesus becomes a character with whom young rabbinical students can identify with, meaning that the story utilizes the figure of Jesus for internal Jewish polemical purposes to articulate a generational gap.

4.2. Toledot Yeshu

One of the unlikely sources where Jesus can be viewed as a premodern Jewish individual identity model is *Toledot Yeshu.* Eli Yassif interprets it as a medieval novella, "the long-short story which relates unusual events in a person's life and is generally of an erotic nature".[345] Among other things, he analyses the text from the perspective of two crucial elements of the novella: character development and turning point, and makes draw attention to a tendency in the *TY* tradition in which Jesus undergoes a character development, moving from victim to

[345] Yassif, 'Toledot Yeshu', 116.

villain when he realizes that he has no chance in Jewish society and decides to become a heretic. For Yassif, it is about who is responsible for Jesus' fate, and what its implications are.

In the story, Jesus' problem is that he was conceived out of wedlock, which makes him a *mamzer,* a child "born of an illicit union", who "shall not come into the assembly of the Lord" according to the Torah (Deuteronomy 23:2). Thus, Jesus carries a stigma from his birth. To make his misfortune even worse, Jesus is a talented Torah student, as all versions of the *TY* agree.[346] Although he has all the intellectual abilities to become a great Torah scholar, his family background prevents him from even being a full member of Jewish society, let alone developing his talents. And, according to the Torah, his potential children also carry the same stigma, so Jesus has no future among the Jewish people.

According to most *TY* manuscripts, Jesus of Nazareth "was arrogant since the time he knew how to speak"[347] and was born with a defect that justified his discrimination as a *mamzer*. In this tradition, the rabbis investigate the child Jesus' disrespectful behaviour towards the sages, learn the circumstances of his conception, which Jesus is aware of all along. However, there is another (according to Meerson and Schäfer: 'Slavic') tradition that Yassif draws attention to, which involves a character development and a turning point. Here (in the manuscript 'Princeton Firestone Lib. Heb. 28', hereinafter Princ28) Jesus, unaware of his status and opportunities within the community, is repeatedly victimized since his childhood but he does not know why. His fate is sealed when, as a young adult, he learns his true identity and realizes why the community is against him. In this tradition, the story of Jesus' conception is treated as a rumour that he only learns to be true at a young age. This is a point of awakening for Jesus, and he decides to turn against normative Jewish society. When he is finally officially excommunicated, he exclaims "If I am a bastard, I will act like one!", goes to Galilee and founds a heretic sect.[348]

In another tradition (Byzantine, manuscript 'St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274,' hereinafter Petr274), the rabbis' investigation of Jesus' parentage is triggered by his resistance to the corrupt local Jewish leadership, and his excommunication is the rabbis' revenge because Jesus exposed that they silence the dissenting voice. Jesus, apparently a member of the local *bet din,* witnesses that the judges pervert justice by accepting bribes and practicing favouritism. On one occasion, he rebukes them concerning a righteous person and defeats them in the argument. This appears

[346] Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:57.
[347] Ibid., I:206.
[348] Ibid., I:340. Note that Jesus' discrimination based on being a *mamzer* is against the halacha as according to the Mishna (*Horayot* 3:8), the life of a scholar mamzer is more important than that of an ignorant high priest in the case of an emergency, so *mamzerim* may have more rights than *kohanim* in certain circumstances. Since the rabbis do not excommunicate Jesus explicitly but leaves the Jewish community on his own accord, the story might suggest that put under pressure, Jesus misunderstands the rabbis' attitude behind and purpose with their harsh questioning.

to be the final straw for the rabbis, who "had enough of him and were searching for a pretext for distancing him from his position amongst them". Hearing Miriam in Jesus' absence, the judges learn that he is a *mamzer,* and Jesus is excommunicated. He first argues with them, then tries to appease them, but finally gives in and, like the rebel Jeroboam,[349] goes north (to Galilee) to gather disciples.[350]

In these two stories, Jesus emerges as a smart and well-intentioned young man, who is victimized by his community because of something he cannot do anything about, and which prevents him from achieving the social status he deserves. Samuel Krauss claims that the texts of *TY* "reveal the author's mentality, his culture, his knowledge and the ways in which he believed he could be of service to his oppressed co-religionists. For this reason, each text in *TY* is a mirror of the times, reflecting the feelings, aspirations and opinions of at least a certain part of Judaism or certain Jewish circles".[351] Based on this understanding, we can view these versions of the *TY* as striking criticisms of Jewish society under the guise of external polemics. In Yassif's reading, the text blames the "fanaticism and corruption" of the "unscrupulous judges and rabbis" for "the fact that [Jesus] left the fold".[352] However, Jesus' heresy led to Christianity, which caused great suffering to the Jews. In this sense, the text is a warning about the dangers of the rigid religiosity of Jewish society.[353]

Yassif claims that these traditions in which Jesus is portrayed as "a positive, complex, and even tragic figure", who cannot escape his past, undergoes character development, and experiences a turning point are *earlier* than those in which Jesus is a villain by birth as his illicit conception "manifests itself in his personality". In contrast, later versions depict a "flat" Jesus figure, whose fate is irrevocably determined by the circumstances of his conception, and the Jewish community is in no way responsible for him becoming a heretic because "it was only *after* his villainy became apparent [...] that the rabbis discovered what there was to discover".[354] Yassif's contention is that *TY* was probably originally written by poorer lower-class students of the Babylonian *yeshivot* who, despite their intellectual abilities, were treated as inferior by their teachers and peers coming from the respected families of the religious elite.[355] In this reading, *Toledot Yeshu* criticizes the Jewish leadership as exclusivist and corrupt, and, further threatens it by

[349] Ibid., I:157. Jeroboam, the first king of the northern Kingdom of Israel is the only person in the Bible who bears the epithet "who caused Israel to sin" (1Kings 14–16 and 2Kings 13–15), not only politically but also cultically. Thus, he became a suitable archetype for any Jewish rebel who sirs up dissent, including Jesus according to the rabbis' view.

[350] Ibid., I:157–58.

[351] Krauss, 'Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toldot Yêšû', 67.

[352] Yassif, 'Toledot Yeshu', 115.

[353] Note that it is not foreign to rabbinic literature to strike a self-critical or self-ironical tone, which is exemplified well by the Talmudic stories that attribute the destruction of the Second Temple and the Diaspora to the Sages' incompetence, cowardice, and narrow-mindedness (b*Gittin* 55b–56a, b*Bava Metzia* 30b).

[354] Yassif, 'Toledot Yeshu', 113–16.

[355] Ibid., 130–31.

saying: "if you treat us as worthless outsiders, we will act like them and you will watch the results". Yassif's theory implies that these lower-class students found their identity model in the figure of Jesus, who was only rejected because of prejudice about his origins.

Yassif bases his theory on two factors. One is a version of the *TY* that he claims being earlier than the rest, and the other is the situation in the Babylonian *yeshivot* based on Salo Baron's and Ben-Sasson's description. As for the *TY* text itself, the two stories from which Yassif draws his conclusions (childhood bullying and criticism of corrupt leadership) come from two different manuscripts from two different eras and places. Petr274 (the rabbis take revenge for criticism) was first published in 2000 by Yaacov Deutsch in a Hebrew-language paper,[356] and Yassif claims it as "one of the earliest known to us".[357] However, Deutsch states in the article that the manuscript was copied in Byzantium in 1536, which Meerson and Schäfer accept.[358] It does not contain the a childhood bullying story, which Yassif quotes from another text published in 1938 by Samuel Krauss in a French-language essay (evident only from Yassif's footnote),[359] which Meerson and Schäfer cannot identify but assume to be their 'Slavic A1' version (Princ28),[360] the manuscript of which they date to the mid-19th century in Bratislava,[361] and mention that it is actually one of the latest versions,[362] and a scribal note suggests that this version also circulated in Yiddish.[363] Krauss points out that his manuscript "must have been written two centuries ago", i.e. in the middle of the 17th century, and draws attention to "involuntary Germanisms" in the Hebrew text, the likely reason for which is that the native language of the author or scribe was German (or Yiddish). Krauss also notes that the notebook in which he found the text also contains a "Judeo-German" version.[364] Since it is impossible to date the time of the composition of the text on which Yassif bases his theory, there is no conclusive evidence that the "tragic Jesus" tradition dates from Geonic times.

Yassif's other argument is that according to Ben-Sasson, the world of Babylonian *yeshivot* in the Geonic period was highly hierarchical and the community was led by a hereditary, exclusivist, anti-meritocratic "intellectual-sacral aristocracy" that "combine[d] sacral, hereditary and intellectual components within a single structure", where "aristocratic families devote[d] meticulous care to assure 'purity of lineage'",[365] and ranks and positions were determined by the

[356] Deutsch, 'New Evidence of Early Versions of "Toledot Yeshu"'; Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:27.
[357] Yassif, 'Toledot Yeshu', 113–14.
[358] Deutsch, 'New Evidence of Early Versions of "Toledot Yeshu"', 178; Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:29; Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, II:71.
[359] Yassif, 'Toledot Yeshu', 114; Krauss, 'Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toldot Yêšû'.
[360] Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:24.
[361] Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, II:253.
[362] Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:26.
[363] Ibid., I:37.
[364] Krauss, 'Une nouvelle recension hébraïque du Toldot Yêšû', 66.
[365] Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 426.

family tree, leading to fierce battles for leadership.[366] Furthermore, according to Salo Baron, "[s]ome judges abused their power, conniving the rich and oppressing the poor under their jurisdiction"[367] This type of strictly exclusivist and elitist milieu in Geonic Babylonia could obviously lead to a distortion of justice and generate the kind of criticism and threat, which can be discovered in the quoted versions of the *TY*.

Ben-Sasson notes that although "[d]uring the Middle Ages the leadership of Jewish society was almost always in the hands of clearly defined and cohesive groups",[368] and "[t]he type of yeshiva that existed in Babylonia and Ereẓ Yisrael, based on an aristocratic hierarchy of intellectual families whose profession was the study of Torah and whose leadership derived from the sanctity of their study, was no longer to be found and apparently had never taken root anywhere in Europe. It is true that every country had its aristocratic scholarly families; but their status never approached that enjoyed by such families in Babylonia and Ereẓ Yisrael".[369] However, it appears that a similar situation, albeit on a smaller scale, occurred almost 1000 years later in Eastern Europe between the second half of the 16th and the second half of the 18th centuries. Ben-Sasson notes that this Jewish social milieu was characterized by "divisive quarrels", "factiousness", "individual aspirations for power", power struggles between the learned rabbis and the wealthy lay leaders who elected them to positions, and a general denigration of and paternalism towards the lower classes, who demanded justice for themselves.

Such a situation can also produce the kind of disillusionment and threat exhibited by the cited *TY* manuscripts. Young boys from uninfluential families could easily have sympathized with the tragic character of Jesus, who although being "educated and became skilled in Scripture, and emerged sharp and intelligent",[370] ended up on the fringes of society and became a heretic. The risk of dissent was also similar. Just as the unity of the Babylonian Diaspora was threatened from the late 8th century onward by Karaism and various messianic movements that attracted large crowds,[371] early modern Eastern European Jewry had to face the challenges of Sabbateanism, Frankism, and Hasidism.[372] Even if the *TY* texts discussed refer to a social

[366] Yassif, 'Toledot Yeshu', 133; Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 424–27.

[367] Yassif, 'Toledot Yeshu', 130; Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 5:178. This attitude was apparently not without antecedents because concerning the Talmudic period, Richard Kalmin speaks about a "Babylonian rabbinic obsession with genealogy" as opposed to the rabbis of Roman Palestine, who were more relaxed in this respect. (Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*, 51–60.) See also page 44 above.

[368] Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 511.

[369] Ibid., 494.

[370] Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:156.

[371] Yassif, 'Toledot Yeshu', 133; Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 169; Astren, 'Non-Rabbinic and Non-Karaite Religious Movements', 5:610 in: CHJ.

[372] Goldish, 'Sabbatai Zevi and the Sabbatean Movement', 7:491-521 in: CHJ; Dynner, 'Jewish Piety and Devotion in Early Modern Eastern Europe', 7:607-624 in: CHJ; Rosman, 'The Rise of Hasidism', 625–51 in: CHJ.

situation in the pre-Enlightenment Ashkenaz, what we see in them can be perceived as a striking example of a Jewish source using the figure of Jesus for intra-polemical purposes, a premodern Jewish use of Jesus as an identity model hidden in external polemics – someone with whom young Jews might identify with and a potential model to follow if they were treated not on their merits but on their lineage. Therefore, at least some versions of the *TY* seem to find itself in the interesting position of an open polemics against Christianity and covert intra-Jewish polemics, both using the figure of Jesus.

4.3. Pesikta Rabbati

A striking example of the premodern covert Jewish reclamation of Jesus, or rather Christ (meaning: the Messiah), is a collection of Jewish *midrashim* entitled *Pesikta Rabbati,* recorded in the seventh century but probably dating back to earlier times, probably as far back as the 4th century.[373] The title *Pesikta Rabbati* means "Greater Sections" in Aramaic and is a collection of rabbinic homilies for the festivals and special Sabbaths of the entire year, missing only Sukkot, which has probably been lost.[374] Four of its texts, Sections 34 to 37, which may be the earliest chapters, probably even date to the 2nd century,[375] contain apocalyptic visions featuring a certain Messiah Ephraim son of Joseph, whose description contains a surprising number of Christological features, as if they were copied from the New Testament. Almost all of the attributes of Messiah Ephraim have parallels in the Gospels, the Acts of Apostles, the letters of Paul, the epistle to the Hebrews, and the book of Revelation, and the homilies quote texts from Psalm 22 and the prophets which Christians refer to Jesus.

If we compile the bits of information into a coherent story, sections 34, 36 and 37 say about the Messiah that he is light, God's first creation; his name is Ephraim, son of Joseph, and at the same time, he is also God's pre-existent son, in whom He takes delight, and whose works God had already planned before the creation of the world. Back then, God tells him that there are unborn souls under His throne whose future sins will bend and choke him like a yoke of iron in his neck. The Messiah willingly accepts this suffering in exchange of the salvation of everyone in Israel who has been born alive or dead since the days of Adam and even those who would be born after his death. When Ephraim accepts this mission, he is given a throne of glory carried by four creatures, and upon seeing this, Satan is shaken, falls upon his face, and acknowledges

[373] Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 26; Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 300; Ulmer, *A Bilingual Edition of Pesiqta Rabbati. Volume 1: Chapters 1–22*, 28.

[374] Sperber, 'Pesikta Rabbati', 16:12-13 in: EJ.

[375] Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 300; Mitchell, *Messiah Ben Joseph*, 145; Ulmer, *A Bilingual Edition of Pesiqta Rabbati. Volume 1: Chapters 1–22*, 5.

Ephraim to be the Messiah, who will send him and his angelic servants to the Gehenna. He is born to the earth from a blessed womb, but first he is brought charges against and imprisoned upon the inspiration of his demonic enemies. His sufferings start in the month of Nisan, and he complains and is mocked for being abandoned by God using the words of Psalm 22. He is distressed that he will be unable to endure his sufferings, but God and the Patriarchs comfort him. After coming out of prison, he rides into Jerusalem on an ass, stands on the roof of the Temple to proclaim Israel's redemption from there. When he thus reveals himself, "all the kings of the nations of the earth will be at strife with one another", and "all the nations of the world will be agitated and frightened, they will fall upon their faces, and they will be seized with pangs like the pangs of a woman in labour". Although Ephraim has power over the waters and "no nation or people will be able to withstand him", the earth's kingdoms attack him, but he destroys them with the breath of his lips and scores a victory in the war against Gog and Magog. Then he brings about a second redemption, which, unlike the first one, will be followed by no anguish and enslavement of his people, which is likened to his bride. Ultimately death will be swallowed up forever, and God "will wipe away tears from off all faces".[376]

The figure of Messiah Ephraim is most likely based upon inherently Jewish ancient traditions that appear to be widespread in Second Temple Judaism and in later non-rabbinic forms of Judaism, and perhaps even in some rabbinic circles. One of these inherently Jewish concepts is the idea of two messiahs, which states that alongside the messiah son of David there is a messiah Son of Joseph. According to Ginsberg et al., he is "a secondary messianic figure, whose coming precedes that of the Messiah, son of David, and who will die in combat with the enemies of God and Israel".[377] The Talmud mentions Messiah son of Joseph, the forerunner of Messiah son of David in b*Succah* 52a, where he is spoken of as slain, and Messiah Son of David is victorious.[378] Exodus 40:11 in the interpretative "para-rabbinic"[379] The Aramaic translation *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,* probably compiled not earlier than the 7th century CE,[380] also speaks of Messiah son of Ephraim, who is a descendant of Joshua, "by whom the land of Israel is to be divided", and "through whom the house of Israel is to be victorious over Gog and his associates at the end of days".[381] His figure appears to be based on the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, whose identification with the Messiah was probably not foreign to the Judaism(s) at the time of Jesus.[382]

[376] Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 662–668; 677–690.
[377] Ginsberg et al., 'Messiah', 14:112. in: EJ. Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 236–37. For more on his figure, see Torrey, 'The Messiah Son of Ephraim', 253–77.
[378] Slotki, 'Sukkah', 246–47.
[379] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 104.
[380] Grossfeld and Sperling, 'Bible: Translations: Ancient Versions', 3:591. in: EJ.
[381] McNamara, Cathcart, and Maher, 'Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus', 273.
[382] Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 132. See also page 96 below.

The other religious concept with which Messiah Ephraim is associated is the idea of "two powers in heaven", which seems to come from in the enigmatic statement about the antediluvian patriarch Enoch, who did not die but "he was no more because God took him" (Genesis 5:24) to which *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* adds that "he ascended to the firmament at the command of the Lord, and he was called Metatron, the Great Scribe".[383] It appears that in Jewish mystical tradition, Metatron was identified with the "Son of Man" in the throne vision of Daniel 7, the angel of Exodus, and the personified Wisdom of Proverbs 8, and was granted the title "the Lesser Lord" (*Yhwh hakatan*).[384] The concept may have originated before the first century,[385] and there is evidence that at the time of Jesus there were Jews who worshipped a second God under the names Logos, Memra, Sophia, Metatron, or Yahoel, who was considered a mediator or interface of sorts between the Godhead and the material world, which is transcendent and immanent at the same time.[386] Daniel Boyarin, maybe a bit preconceptionally, even considers it an evidence that "in the first century many—perhaps most—Jews held a binitarian doctrine of God in the form of a Father-person and a Son-person".[387]

Although according to Boyarin, these traditions "may be among some of the most ancient ideas about God and the world that the Israelite people ever held",[388] the Midrash brings them together in a remarkable way to shape the character of Messiah Ephraim. In doing so, the Midrash does the same as the New Testament, where, as Schalom Ben-Chorin emphasises, both roles are integrated into Jesus: he is the Son of David and the Son of Man at the same time: when he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he is greeted by the crowd as "son of David" (Matthew 21:9) and at the last supper, he identifies himself as the son of Joseph, the "Son of Man" (Matthew 26:24).[389] Thus, the description of Messiah Ephraim in *Pesikta Rabbati* combines the single Messiah with the second divine power of the "Two Powers" tradition. However, this fusion could still have been traditional within ancient Judaism, because according to Alan Segal, there could have been non-Christian Jews at the time of Jesus who had identified the second divine person with the Messiah.[390] Boyarin notes that some targumic texts also identify the Son of Man of Daniel with the Messiah.[391]

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[383] McNamara, Cathcart, and Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 1B:36–37.
[384] Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 41; Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 65–67; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 90; 97; 134; 141; Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 143–44.
[385] Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 43.
[386] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 92; 112.
[387] Ibid., 131; 135. However, Peter Schäfer strongly disagrees with this statement and calls it an "insinuation". (Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 65–67.)
[388] Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 158.
[389] Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus*, 128.
[390] Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 47–48.
[391] Boyarin, 'Two Powers in Heaven', 344; Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 357; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 136.

However. the homilies of *Pesikta Rabbati* go far beyond the boundaries of rabbinic messianism and come dangerously close to the message of the New Testament,[392] where Jesus is identified as "the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power[393] and coming on the clouds of heaven". (Matthew 26:64 and Mark 14:62, cf. Daniel 7:13–14). Schäfer emphasizes that the description of Messiah Ephraim in *Pesikta Rabbati* only "pretends to be traditional" but is in fact "radically new within the context of rabbinic Judaism",[394] and lists characteristics of the suffering Messiah Ephraim that are absolutely unheard of in any known Jewish tradition:[395] (1) as a preexistent being, he is with God when he creates the world, (2) he is indispensable because (3) redemption is brought about not by God but by him (4) by accepting suffering for the sins of humankind, (5) which even makes the creation of humankind possible. Then, (6) God exalts the Messiah and (7) gives him his own throne of glory; (8) the Messiah is incarnated as a human from a blessed womb, (9) tortured under a heavy object put in his neck, (10) prays in agony, (11) doesn't die in the battle against God's enemies but (12) returns and (13) brings about a second redemption, (14) throwing Satan into the Gehenna and (15) puts an end to death.[396]

The polemical nature of the midrashim is reinforced by the fact that the biblical texts on which they are based are close to that Jesus is read in the synagogue of Nazareth on a Sabbath in the beginning of his activity according to Luke 4:16–30. Sections 36 and 37 are homilies for Sabbath and they are based on haftarahs, portions from the Prophets that are read after the Torah reading on Sabbaths, festivals, and fast days. The homilies are based on Isaiah 60:1–22 and Isaiah 61:10, the haftarahs for the weekly Torah portions *Ki tavo* (Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8) and *Nitzavim* (Deuteronomy 29:9–30:20), respectively.[397] These haftarahs surround Isaiah 61:1–2, which, according to the Gospel, Jesus read in the synagogue and developed into a messianic midrash referring to himself (Luke 4:14–27).[398] Furthermore, in section 34 of *Pesikta*

[392] Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 19; 254–255.

[393] In first and second century Judaism, Power *(Dynamis)* was often used as a synonym for God (Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 67.).

[394] Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 35.

[395] The *Jewish Encyclopedia* summarizes what can be known about Messiah Ephraim from the classical Jewish tradition: "Messiah b. Joseph will appear prior to the coming of Messiah b. David; he will gather the children of Israel around him, march to Jerusalem, and there, after overcoming the hostile powers, reestablish the Temple-worship and set up his own dominion. Thereupon Armilus, according to one group of sources, or Gog and Magog, according to the other, will appear with their hosts before Jerusalem, wage war against Messiah b. Joseph, and slay him. His corpse, according to one group, will lie unburied in the streets of Jerusalem; according to the other, it will be hidden by the angels with the bodies of the Patriarchs, until Messiah b. David comes and resurrects him" (Jacobs and Buttenweiser, 'Messiah', 8:511-512 in: JE.)

[396] Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 264–268.

[397] Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot*, 217; 220. Braude claims that the homilies belong to Torah portions *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech* (Deuteronomy 31:1-30), see Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 677; 684.)

[398] The Isaiah section Jesus read according to the Gospel account is not read today in the synagogue as a haftarah. Hananael Mack is of the opinion that it is deliberate because of its appearance in the New Testament (Mack, 'What Happened to Jesus' Haftarah?'). However, according to Jared S. Klein and Max Reinhart, the translators and editors of Schalom Ben-

Rabbati the Messiah's followers are referred to as "Mourners of Zion" from Isaiah 61:3, This verse is not reported to have been read by Jesus but the designation appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. What *Pesikta Rabbati* seems to be doing is that it meticulously shoots around the "Jesus Haftarah" like a knife-thrower. Additionally, Ulmer points out that sections 34 to 37 of *Pesikta Rabbati* are referred to as "Holy Spirit" (*ruaḥ hakodesh*) homilies, which can be interpreted as a reflection on the third person of the Holy Trinity. All of this supports rabbinic familiarity with Christian tradition and its inversion for their own polemical purposes.

Given these unique features, it seems certain that the Messiah Ephraim of *Pesikta Rabbati* is closely related to the Messiah Jesus of the *New Testament,* so we are dealing with a case in which rabbinic Judaism engages with the Christian narrative. Ulmer concludes that the Midrash is "interrelated with the book of Revelation" by combining elements of Christian and Jewish messianism,[399] and considers the homilies of *Pesikta Rabbati* as a "replication of some aspects of Christian theology", and the figure of Messiah Ephraim a "blatant evidence" of "Jewish response to Christianity".[400] She claims that this engagement is realized through a "process in which an element of another culture is incorporated, but changed".[401] Therefore, this midrash is an example of a "cultural transformation and inversion of Christian themes […] by affirming that Judaism had a related version of salvation".[402] She calls Messiah Ephraim "an ideological inversion of Jesus" responding to the "Christian view that Jesus was the only messianic figure who suffered and died in pain while bringing salvation to the righteous. This rabbinic text demonstrates that there will be a Jewish Messiah who fulfils the same paradigm".[403]

4.4. Medieval Ashkenazic rabbis as Christ figures

One of the strongest premodern Jewish polemical claims against Christianity was that it failed to live up to its own standards of universal love and peace-making, particularly during the Crusades. The lack of peace in the world, let alone within Christianity itself, was enough for premodern Jews to argue that contrary to church doctrine, they were certainly not living in the messianic age in which peace reigns among all creatures (cf. Isaiah 11:1–9).[404] Based on Saint Augustine's doctrine of "cursed but protected Cain",[405] Christianity considered the destruction

Chorin's *Brother Jesus,* it is also conceivable that Jesus deliberately changed the standard haftarah to make point about his own mission, which might also explain why "all in the synagogue were filled with rage" (Luke 4:28) (Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus*, 195.).

[399] Ulmer, 'The Culture of Apocalypticism', 69.

[400] Ulmer, 'The Contours of the Messiah in Pesiqta Rabbati', 124.

[401] Ibid., 139.

[402] Ulmer, 'The Culture of Apocalypticism', 69.

[403] Ulmer, 'Psalm 22 in Pesiqta Rabbati', 106.

[404] Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 9.

[405] Augustine of Hippo, *Writings in Connection with the Manichean Heresy*, 209–14. An earlier reference to Cain representing the Jews is in *The Demonstrations* of St Aphrahat the Persian (c. 280 – c. 345). In Demonstration 16:8, Aphrahat quotes Jesus saying to

of the Jerusalem Temple, the Diaspora, and, according to the Cluny abbot Peter the Venerable, "a life worse than death of the Jews"[406] a living witness to divine punishment for their original and ongoing rejection of Christ, although, as Daniel Lasker sarcastically notes, the Christian authorities were careful to maintain the reality that proved the theory. In response, Jews argued that the current moral conditions of Christianity belied that it could be a true religion pleasing to God.[407] To back up their words, they also polemicized in deeds, thereby defying the Augustinian claim about "the ungodly race of carnal Jews":[408] they tried to hold up a polemical behavioural mirror to the rival faith, as if they were saying: "we please God better than you" and considering themselves a "model Christianity". Robert Chazan cites *Sefer haberit* (The Book of the Covenant) by Joseph Kimhi and *Milḥemet mitzvah* (Compulsory War) by Rabbi Meir bar Simon of Narbonne, which forcefully argue that the Jews far more surpassed their Christian neighbours in appropriate behaviour.[409]

One of the manifestations of this kind of polemics seems to be the portrayal of Ashkenazic rabbis as Christ figures. Ivan Marcus is discussing another striking premodern reclamation of Jesus[410] through the stories of two famous Ashkenazic rabbis: Jacob ben Meir (Rabbenu Tam), a prominent French Talmudist in the 12th century, and the fictional Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, the alleged composer of the Rosh Hashanah piyyut *Unetaneh tokef*. The story of Jacob ben Meir appears in the *Sefer zekhirah* (Book of Remembrance) by Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn, a relative of Eliezer ben Nathan, the author of the 1096 pogrom chronicles. Marcus cites the following quotation:

> "On the second festival day of Shavuot, French Crusaders gathered at Ramerupt and came to the house of Rabbenu Jacob, may he live, and took all that was in his house. They ripped up a Torah scroll before his face and took him out to a field. There they argued with him about his religion and started to assault him viciously. They inflicted five wounds on his

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the Jews "You are the children of Cain, not the children of Abraham" (Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat*, 383.), paraphrasing John 8:44 ("you are from your father the devil"). Note the Jews Jesus addresses are the ones *"who had believed in him"* (v. 31) and not those who rejected him. The full-fledged interpretation of Cain killing Abel as the Jews killing Jesus is presented by the 8th-century Venerable Bede in his Homily 1:14 on the Gospels: "if anyone understands the murderer Cain as the Jews' lack of faith, the killing of Abel as the passion of the Lord and Savior […] have a more sacred understanding" (Bede the Venerable, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 1:139-140.). It was Robert Grosseteste, the 13th-century English scholastic philosopher and bishop of Lincoln, who first argued on the basis of Augustine that Jews must be held captive alive by the Christian princes. (Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs*, 576; Grosseteste, *Letters*, 67–68.)

[406] Peter the Venerable, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 1:328.

[407] Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 8–9.

[408] Augustine of Hippo, *Writings in Connection with the Manichean Heresy*, 393.

[409] See Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity*, 298–313.

[410] Marcus, 'A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis', 493–97.

head, saying: You are the leader of the Jews. So we shall take vengeance upon you for the crucified one and wound you the way you inflicted the five wounds on our god".[411]

In Marcus's analysis, three elements support the view that a Jewish author portrays a rabbi as a Christ figure and the crusaders as the Jews and the Romans as described in the Gospels. First, the crusaders argued with Rabbenu Jacob about his religion and assaulted him the same way as the "scribes and the Pharisees" argued with Jesus (cf. Mark 8:11). Second, five wounds are inflicted on the rabbi in exchange for Jesus' five wounds, and the wounds on the rabbi's head may be an allusion to Jesus' crown of thorns. In this respect, the Crusaders behave like the Romans. Third, the Crusaders identify Jacob as "the leader of the Jews", which, according to Marcus, is "an echo of Jesus' mock title: King of the Jews".[412] Beyond these elements in the story, Marcus also highlights that Rabbi Jacob ben Meir is known as Rabbenu Tam instead of the customarily expected acronym "Rybam" (רי"ם), *tam* being a characteristic of the patriarch Jacob in Genesis 25:27, where it means 'simple' or 'plain'. However, the same word can also be understood as "innocent", such as in Job 1:1, suggesting that Rabbi Jacob suffered innocently at the hands of the crusaders, similarly to Jesus, who is also portrayed as an innocent martyr in the Gospels.

Marcus' other example is Amnon of Mainz, an imaginary Jewish leader in contrast to Rabbenu Tam, who was a real one. According to his story, found in *Sefer or zarua* (The Book of Disseminated Light) by Isaac ben Moses,[413] the local bishop makes considerable efforts to convert Amnon, who almost gives in but eventually volunteers to be a martyr rather than become a Christian. He offers his tongue to be cut out because he sinned by expressing interest in converting, but the bishop insists on dismembering him on the grounds that it is not his tongue that sinned by expressing interest in converting but rather his body by not coming to the Church. Later, when Rosh Hashanah arrives, the dismembered rabbi is brought to the synagogue and composes the piyyut *Unetaneh tokef*. At the end of the story, Amnon dies and three days after his death, he appears before his disciples and instructs them to spread the prayer he composed, just as Jesus, resurrected on the third day, instructs his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

According to Marcus, these stories represent clear references to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' martyrdom and appearances after his death. He concludes that medieval Jewish authors transformed overt Christian symbols into anti-Christian polemics to bolster morale in the face of an aggressive culture.[414] If we accept Marcus' arguments, we see in these two stories a reversal

[411] Ibid., 494; Eidelberg, *The Jews and the Crusaders*, 130; Haberman, *Sefer gezerot ashkenaz vetsarfat*, 121.
[412] Marcus, 'A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis', 493.
[413] Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, *Sefer or zarua*, vol. 2, fol. 63a.
[414] Marcus, 'A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis', 493–95.

of the Gospel story and a premodern use of Jesus as a personal identity model with which a Jew can identify, or even follow in martyrdom. The steadfast adherence to the Torah even in the face of death seems to be based on Jesus but is represented through the figures of prominent rabbis.

4.5. The tzaddik as a Christ figure

The rabbi as a Christ figure also appeared in Hasidism in the concept of the tzaddik or *rebbe*, the charismatic holy leader, who, unlike the scholarly rabbis, derives his authority from divine power. Jewish historians and Hasidic authors describe the tzaddik in terms strikingly resembling Christology.[415] For Ben-Sasson, the tzaddik is "the foundation of the world" as the whole world was created for him, the world is under his control, and he can even influence God; he is an intermediary between people and God.[416] Efron, Lehman and Weitzmann emphasize that "[a]ccording to Hasidic teachings, the tzaddikim are variously described as "emissaries of God", capable of "sustaining the entire world", existing on a level that is "higher than the angels", possessing the "power to transform Divine judgment into Divine mercy". His power is so great that Hasidic teaching declares: "Whatever God does, it is also within the capacity of the tzaddik to do".[417] These formulations are very similar to the way the apostle Paul describes the metaphysical role of Christ in Colossians 1:15–17: "[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together".

Regarding the self-definition of Hasidic authors, Moshe Idel quotes R. Dov Baer of Medziretch, who in his work *Or torah* (The Light of Torah) summarized his master's, Baal Shem Tov's view of the tzaddik as follows: the Tzaddik "is the foundation of the world", the "pipeline who allows the abundance [of the divine bounty] to flow down for his entire generation", "a pathway through which all can pass", which connects the transcendent and the immanent words and raises his entire generation to God.[418] Although Idel criticizes Martin Buber for saying that his "propensity toward the figure of Jesus was not helpful in advancing a more adequate picture of the righteous",[419] he repeatedly draws parallels between Jesus and the tzaddik. Referring to the passage above, he points out that in John 1:51, Jesus identifies himself with this

[415] Caution must be exercised, however, concerning the scholars mentioned here as they are Americans and Israelis, who interpret premodern texts on the basis of contemporary Enlightenment-based western scholarly culture. For this reason, using Sagi's discovery vs. creation model (see page 20), we can never know whether they discover the hidden meanings of these texts or create them based on their contemporary concerns, which taint their understanding.

[416] Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 769.

[417] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 296.

[418] Idel, *Ben*, 536.

[419] Ibid., 540. Idel does not cite a source for Buber's alleged mistake.

mystical ladder by saying: "you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man", and notes that "[t]he righteous, like the supernal Jesus, is an important pontific figure". He also draws parallels between the Righteous and Jesus citing his son-in-law, Rabbi Moses Hayim Ephraim of Sudylkow's unique summary of the teachings of Baal Shem Tov in *Degel maḥaneh efrayim*:[420]

> Sometimes he [the tzaddik] falls from his rank in order to reach a higher, more sublime rank, either for himself or for others, as it is known in the name of my master, the grandfather, blessed be his memory, and quoted in the books of the great priest, our teacher and Rabbi Jacob Joseph, blessed be his memory. And when he is in the lower ranks he does not know what this means neither what is the reason for it, and he is sorry in his soul and asks from Him – blessed be He – because of it and he checks his deeds and says: 'My God My God, why did you abandon me?' Until the Lord, blessed be He, helps him to arrive to a sublime rank.[421]

Idel specifically highlights the parallel between the Biblical outcry of the tzaddik in Psalm 22 and that of Jesus shortly before he died on the cross[422] and argues that scholarly analyses before him neglected the connection between the above passage and the Christian identification of Jesus with the Suffering Son of God,[423] whose "initial suffering and subsequent glory is […] reminiscent of the manner in which Jesus's ascent has been envisaged, for example, in Lk. 24.26 or Rom. 8.17, where suffering is described as coming before his entrance to glory".[424]

In introducing the figure of the tzaddik, Gellman, Rossman and Sagiv argue that the Hasidic type of tzaddik comes from two sources: the charismatic biblical prophet and the Hellenistic "demigod".[425] The latter could be an explanation for why he bears similarities to the figure of Jesus in Christianity. In Kabbalah, the term tzaddik was associated with the ninth *sefirah*, *yesod* (foundation), which serves as a channel between the upper and lower worlds. The earthly tzaddik is seen as an incarnation of this *sefirah* and plays a role in mediating between God and the material world, which he sustains. However, Hasidism brought about a significant change by giving the human tzaddik a social role as leader of a community. An important task of the tzaddik is to descend to the people, similarly to how Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness" (Philippians 2:7) in order to be a "friend of sinners" (Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34) and raise them to *devekut*, the state of "a complete mystical union

[420] Hallamish, 'Moses Ḥayyim Ephraim of Sudylkow', 14:557-558. in: EJ.
[421] Idel, *Ben*, 544.
[422] Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34
[423] Idel, *Ben*, 545.
[424] Ibid., 551.
[425] Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History*, 166.

between the human intellect and the Agent Intellect or God",[426] which appears to parallel the *unio mystica* of Christian tradition, "the relationship between a person and God in the highest degrees".[427]

Biale et al. note that the relationship between the tzaddik and his Hasidim "was depicted as the relationship between the limbs and organs of the spiritual organism called the people of Israel, which, in turn, corresponded to the limbs of the divine *anthropos*".[428] This is very much like the way the New Testament represents the community of believers as "the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1Corinthians 12:27) headed by "Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:16). Biale et al. note another important aspect of the tzaddik: that "even when he and his Hasid were separated by vast distances, their souls were related through a divine source so that the Hasid might connect to the tzaddik through his thought and through his prayers".[429] This is similar to the way Jesus comforted his disciples before he left them on earth: "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:16–28) and more specifically, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Shaul Magid argues that Hasidism is a resistance to the centrality of the book (Torah) in favour of the person (tzaddik) through an incarnational thinking similar to that of Christianity. He emphasizes that this incarnational thinking may not have been absorbed from Christianity but may have common origins with the Christian one in Hellenistic mystery cults or pre-rabbinic Judaism.[430] Whatever the case may be, it appears that "Hasidism has resurfaced theological tropes that since the institutionalization of Christianity have been deemed "Christian" and thus "not Jewish".[431] Magid bases his claim on the self-understanding of Rabbi Nahman, the founder of Breslov Hasidism, as expressed in his homilies titled *Likutei moharan,*[432] in which, according to Magid, he anonymously portraits himself as the epitome of the tzaddik,[433] emphasizing his redemptive role by way of his divine speech, *leshon hakodesh,* the Holy Tongue. According to Magid, Nahman's self-image as the "flesh who becomes word" is simultaneously a charismatic critique of Rabbinic Judaism and an inversion of Johannine Christology, in which "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

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[426] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 296; Dan and Idel, 'Devekut', 5:628-629. in: EJ.
[427] Lohkamp, 'Mystical Union', 10:109-110. In: New Catholic Encyclopedia.
[428] Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History*, 169.
[429] Ibid.
[430] Magid, *Hasidism Incarnate*, 33.
[431] Ibid., 34.
[432] Nahman of Breslov, 'Likutei Moharan'.
[433] Magid, *Hasidism Incarnate*, 40.

Magid points out that Nahman's "very self-fashioning suggests that he serves as a unique, even incarnate, nexus of the human and the divine", just as Jesus did in Christianity. Magid calls Nahman "almost a Jewish counterpart to Jesus" as seen in Johannine incarnational theology.[434] He does not say that Nahman's "tzaddikism" is a conscious Jewish adaptation of Jesus as an identity model, but he repeatedly draws parallels to Christian ideas and literature, e.g. the Gospel of John and Augustine's *Confessions*. He also says that "[t]he implications of a comparison of Nahman's self-fashioning with Christianity's fashioning of Jesus should not be underestimated" as both represent strong criticism of the Rabbinic concept that "the words the rabbis speak in the House of Study that are from heaven" because only *the* tzaddik (i.e. Nahman himself) can speak *leshon hakodesh,* the language of God, "not instructing them like their *Torah*-teachers but as one who had authority himself" (Mark 1:22, CJB).

Overall, the concept of tzaddik in Hasidism is a synthesis of mystical and communal leadership that connects the spiritual and material realms while guiding and uplifting the community, much in the same way that the New Testament and Christian tradition understand the role of Jesus Christ. Although there is no definitive proof that the descriptions of the tzaddik and Jesus come from a common source, there are too many similarities for them to be mere coincidence. Thus, through the concept of the tzaddik, Jesus of Nazareth can easily be viewed as a personal identity model for the Hasidic leader and sometimes for the individual Hasidim.

4.6. The premodern Jewish reclamation of the Suffering Servant

The premodern and modern Jewish interpretation of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah is my other case study to support my thesis that the covert Judaization of the symbols of the majority society in general and the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus in particular serve polemical and identity-building purposes, and that it has a long premodern tradition in Judaism. Here I would like to set out what we can know with certainty about this figure from the Biblical texts themselves (both Masoretic and Septuagint) as we have them, briefly discuss the Christian understandings of the Suffering Servant as a background against which premodern and modern Jewish authors interpreted this figure as a symbol for the Jewish people suffering in the Diaspora, and argue that although the modern Jewish collective interpretation originates in Rashi's revolutionary understanding of the figure, Rashi is not without antecedents either. It appears that the understanding of the Servant as a symbol of Israel originates from the Second Temple period, and the other elements of his interpretation, the messianic understanding of the Servant, the sacrificial understanding of suffering, and the concept of vicarious suffering also seem to be

[434] Ibid., 31–50.

traditions originating in the same period. Rashi's innovation is that he combined all these traditions into a coherent interpretation of the Servant, which was taken for granted by his successors from Isaac Troki to Joseph Klausner.

4.6.1. The Biblical text

In the Bible, God's enigmatic Servant is described in four short passages called "Servant Songs" in Isaiah 42 to 53.[435] Before examining its Christian and premodern Jewish interpretations, let us summarize what can be known from the Biblical text itself as we have it. Marc Zvi Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine, in their article *Isaiah's Suffering Servant: Before and After Christianity,* point out that the concept of the "Suffering Servant" is a modern construct introduced in 1892 by the German Lutheran theologian Bernhard Duhm in his work *Das Buch Jesaia*, claiming that they were written by the same postexilic author called "Deutero-Isaiah" or Second Isaiah.[436] Yet, as Brettler and Levine make clear, nothing in the Bible suggests that these four passages are about the same character, but even when they are, he is not assigned any sacrificial role and he is never called messiah, let alone considered divine. In the context of the Servant Songs, only Cyrus the Great is referred to as "his [i.e. God's] anointed" (Hebrew: *meshiḥo*) in Isaiah 45:1. When we combine the Servant Songs into a coherent narrative, we get that the Servant unjustly suffers from severe physical disabilities and shunning due to an undisclosed sin. However, he does not die but is exalted at the end and has a long life. His sufferings make forgiveness possible, and upon seeing his fate, the nations are silenced, and many people are made righteous.[437]

The primary identity of the Servant, which the Biblical author might have originally intended is unknown. Brettler and Levine conclude that the Songs "most likely originally referred to one of the prophet's exilic contemporaries, whom he viewed as vicariously atoning for the guilt-ridden exilic (or early post-exilic) community. We know neither this individual's name nor anything about him beyond what this passage says".[438] The Masoretic Text identifies him with Israel/Jacob in Isaiah 44:1 and 49:3, and in the Septuagint also in 42:1,[439] which also seems symbolic. Blenkinsopp and North point out that this identification is an editorial insertion, and

[435] 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12.

[436] There appears to be some misunderstanding on the part of Brettler and Levine here because Duhm's book does not contain the expression "suffering servant" (*leidende Knecht*), and Duhm suggests that the Servant Songs were written by a postexilic author who is neither "Deutero-Isaiah" nor "Trito-Isaiah" (Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia*, XIII.).

[437] Brettler and Levine, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant', 159–63.

[438] Ibid., 164.

[439] "Iakob is my servant; I will lay hold of him; Israel is my chosen; my soul has accepted him" (Pietersma and Wright, *NETS*, 856.). The Masoretic text reads: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights".

North adds that the author probably considered the servant to be a single individual.[440] Blenkinsopp notes that the identification with Israel is seamless in the text, and the redaction history of the Biblical passages is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct. Therefore, as Rembaum notes, their language "is sufficiently obscure so as to lend itself to a variety of interpretations".[441]

4.6.2. Christian interpretations

While the detailed treatment of the Suffering Servant in the Christian tradition is beyond the scope of this dissertation, a brief overview might be insightful as the background for Jewish interpretation and also reveals how the exchange of religious ideas went back and forth between Jews and Christians.[442] The Christian Church has since the earliest times interpreted the Servant in a messianistic way as a prophetic symbol of Jesus Christ, although North emphasizes that this is not as clear in the New Testament as it seems from the perspective of later Christian tradition.[443] The New Testament does not build a unified "midrash" on the Servant Songs but only alludes to them or quotes them in passing. The most important examples are:

- Luke 2:25-32—the prayer of the righteous Simeon while holding the baby Jesus in his arms at Jesus' circumcision at the Temple (*Nunc dimittis* in Christian liturgy);
- John 1:29—the exclamation of John the Baptist when Jesus shows up for baptism, not mentioned by the Synoptics (*Agnus Dei* in Christian liturgy);
- Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22—the heavenly voice after Jesus' baptism;[444]
- Acts 8:32–35—the story when Philip uses Isaiah 53:7–8 argue to the Ethiopian courtier that Jesus is the Messiah;[445] and
- 1Peter 2:19–25—the encouragement of Christian slaves to follow the example of the Suffering Servant Jesus in enduring unjust abuse while doing good.

Based on the New Testament, the Church Fathers advocated the Christological understanding,[446] which practically left no room for alternative Christian interpretations from the Antiquity to the Enlightenment, even in Protestantism. However, on its wake, minority opinions started to appear that interpreted the Servant to be a historical individual. North mentions Michael Servetus, who was burned as a heretic upon Calvin's initiative, who understood the

[440] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 6; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 81.
[441] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 297.
[442] For a historical overview of the Christian interpretations of Isaiah 40–55 in general and the figure of the Suffering Servant in particular, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 81–92. and North, *The Suffering Servant*.
[443] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 23–26.
[444] The heavenly voice is a blending of Psalms 2:7 ("**You are My son,** I have fathered you this day".) and Isaiah 53:1 ("This is My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one, **in whom I delight".**). Both translations are form the NJPS. The Greek wording of the Gospels is not identical with that of the Septuagint.
[445] Here the New Testament text is identical with the Septuagint.
[446] For details see Elliott, *Isaiah 40-66*, 31–35, 109–11, 130–33, 154–73.

Servant to be Cyrus. A handful of other "heretics" and Deists also denied the Christological interpretation and understood the Servant to be the prophet Jeremiah.[447] Beginning in the late 18th century, Christian scholars began to interpret the Servant differently than in Church tradition, sometimes influenced by premodern Jewish interpretations. North classifies them as follows:

- *Collective:* the physical or ideal Israel or part of it;[448]
- *Historical Individual:* an ancient king, prophet, or another leader, including Cyrus;
- *Messianic:* Jesus Christ;
- *Mythological:* a mythological character belonging to the dying and rising gods;
- *Autobiographical:* Deutero-Isaiah himself;
- *Historico-Messianic:* an anonymous historical but messianic figure.

What is relevant to our study is the collective interpretation, according to which the Servant represents a group of Jewish people, which may be the entire physical or ideal Israel, its "pious remnant" (the counterpart of the Jewish "righteous remnant"), the prophets, or the priests. North names Wilhelm Gesenius, Julius Wellhausen, Andrew B. Davidson, and Samuel R. Driver among those who advocated a collective interpretation.[449] Although North does not mention him, the list also includes David Friedrich Strauss, who claims that Isaiah 53 speaks of "the calamities of the prophetic order, or more probably of the Israelitish people" and sarcastically notes that "the application of this passage to Christ is now only maintained by those with whom it would be lost labour to contend".[450] We must remember that their arguments had little effect on the popular Christological understanding of the Servant and that their arguments were mainly theoretical in nature and not deeply engaged with the meaning of the Servant's sufferings.[451]

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[447] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 26–27.

[448] Interestingly, no Christian exegete has ever interpreted the Suffering Servant as a collective symbol for the Universal Church, although it would follow logically from the self-understanding of the Church as the continuation of the Biblical Israel, and from the New Testament's definition of the community of Christian believers as "the body of Christ" (1Corinthians 12:27). Joseph Fitzmyer notes, however, that the instruction of the resurrected Jesus given in Acts 1:8 to his disciples to be his witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (*heōs eskhatēs tēs gēs*) might be an allusion, albeit uncertain, to the LXX text of Isaiah 49:6, where God promises that the Servant will be "a light to the nations" so that God's "salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (*heōs eskhatou tēs gēs*) (Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 206.).

[449] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 28–39; 57–62.

[450] Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 565.

[451] The struggle to reconcile Christian theology and faith with the vicarious suffering of the non-Christological Servant is well illustrated by Davidson, who identifies the Servant as the ideal Israel as opposed to the physical one and calls the Servant's vicarious suffering "the most difficult question". Davidson basically concludes that the Servant is "Israel within Israel" meaning the "divine forces within Israel" incarnated in "prophets, confessors, and martyrs for the truth", which suffers for the sins of the empirical Israel, the Jewish people (Davidson, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 452–67.).

4.6.3. Premodern Jewish interpretations

The church historian Justo Luis González notes that there was a theological paradigm shift in Christianity in the 12th century, arguing that with the emergence of cities and the middle class, theological activity shifted from monasteries to urban cathedral schools, which became the nuclei of universities. This included an increased focus on the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ, initiated by St. Anselm of Canterbury in *Cur Deus homo* (Why God Became Man). Anselm's innovative argument was that sin does not bring man into Satan's captivity, as in earlier theology, but makes them indebted to God as he defines 'sin' as "nothing else than not to render to God His due", for which reparations must be made.[452] The problem is that it is man's duty to repay the debt they owe for their sins but only God can do this, so restitution can only be made by a "God-Man", who must be perfect God and perfect human being at the same time.[453] After Anselm, the human Jesus became an increasingly important role model for the emerging bourgeoisie.[454]

This paradigm shift, which González calls "the Renaissance of the twelfth century"[455] appears to be a theological background for a novel Jewish interpretation of the Servant introduced by Rashi, who, according to the scholarly consensus, wrote his Isaiah commentary following the Rhineland massacres of 1096 at the time of the First Crusade.[456] He identifies the Suffering Servant of Isaiah with the people of Israel who are presented collectively "as a single person" (כאיש אחד), suffering innocently as compensation or reparation (*kofer*, Old French *amende,* transliterated by Rashi as אמינד"א) paid by Israel instead of the Gentiles. Similarly to Anselm's "God-Man", Rashi claims that the Jewish people "was chastised with pains so that all the nations be atoned for with Israel's suffering" "so that there be peace for the entire world".[457] Thus, Rashi

[452] Cur Deus Homo, I:11 (Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, 84–85.). Lewis and Demarest point out that for around a thousand years, the prevalent view within the church was the "ransom theory", emphasizing Christ's role in delivering humanity collectively from the bondage of Satanic forces, rather than bearing the individual sinner's penalty or appeasing God's wrath. One of its alternatives was the "satisfaction or juridical theory" of atonement, introduced by Anselm and apparently Judaized by Rashi. This theory focuses on restoring God's wounded honour through Jesus' death, drawing on the idea of a feudal lord whose dignity is harmed by his subjects' failure to provide complete submission or obedience. On the different Christian theological theories of atonement, see Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 2:372-382.

[453] Anselm, II:7. (Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, 125–26.)

[454] See: Georgi, 'The Interest in Life of Jesus Theology'.

[455] González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 2:156–92.

[456] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 294, 298. David Berger asserts that there is no definitive evidence that Rashi reflects to the Rhineland massacres, even that he wrote his commentary after 1096. He points out that "[t]he Jews of France and Germany had experienced serious attacks between 1007 and 1012, as well as in sporadic episodes during the course of the eleventh century, leading – according to some reports – to classic instances of martyrdom, and Ashkenazic authors gave expression to these experiences before the Crusade". (Berger, 'Rashi on Isaiah 53', 306.). Berger's argument is weakened by the fact that he does not identify the reports and the authors he is referring to.

[457] Rashi, 'On Isaiah'.

viewed the innocent Jewish people, who accepted God's judgment instead of the nations as a human sacrifice essential to the redemption of the world.[458] Amos Funkenstein emphasizes that by questioning the association of Christ with the Suffering Servant in Christian theology, Rashi was adopting a fundamental principle of it, namely the doctrine of vicarious suffering as the pathway to the salvation of the nations, with Israel assuming the role traditionally assigned to Christ in this context.[459]

Although Rashi's interpretation is groundbreaking, it is not lacking in preliminaries.[460] He appears to combine at least four distinct premodern Jewish traditions regarding the Servant and the nature of suffering: his collective and messianic interpretations, which seem to have lived

[458] Berger argues that it is not Rashi's consistent understanding. He cites a *seliḥah,* a liturgical penitential poem composed by Rashi, in which he apparently endorses the messianic interpretation of the servant (Berger, 'Rashi on Isaiah 53', 305.). However, he bases his theory on a single phrase in the poem, *meḥolal meḥovim* ("wounded because of wrongdoings"), which resonates with *meḥolal mipesha'enu* in Isaiah 53:5 (NRSVue: "wounded for our transgressions", NJPS: "wounded because of our sins"). However, it is doubtful whether this phrase is such a "transparent reference" to "the rabbinic identification of the servant" as Berger claims.

[459] Funkenstein, 'The Dialectics of Assimilation', 9. It is debated whether Rashi polemicizes with Christianity. For example, Shaye Cohen argues that Rashi's Torah commentary is not polemical because it contains no explicit rebuttal of Christian claims, and since Rashi did not make his commentary relevant to his own time, it cannot be considered a response to contemporary Christian theology (Cohen, 'Does Rashi's Torah Commentary Respond to Christianity?', 453–54.). In addition, the later polemical use of Rashi's arguments does not prove Rashi's original intent either (Ibid., 468.). Furthermore, Cohen argues that there is no implicit polemic without explicit one (Ibid., 469.). This last argument seems unsound because, by definition, the existence of something implicit cannot depend on the existence of its explicit version. Therefore, the absence of explicit polemic does not prove the lack of implicit one but only makes its detection difficult or impossible (as Cohen himself suggests on pages 451 and 458). Thus, implicit polemic does exist without explicit one, and it is historically plausible that Jewry as a religious minority polemicized covertly with its theologically hostile Christian environment without detectable overt polemic (see also Yuval's argument presented on page 16). As Avraham Grossmann notes, this is exactly the case with the early scholars of France, including Rashi, who did not mention Christian arguments overtly, but an analysis of their texts clearly reveals their polemical thrust (Grossmann, *Rashi*, 19.). This logical reasoning aside, Cohen himself also acknowledges that Rashi is explicitly polemical in his commentaries on Isaiah and Psalms, which were used by Christians to support their faith much more than the Torah, and which were underrepresented in Jewish exegesis (Cohen, 'Does Rashi's Torah Commentary Respond to Christianity?', 470.). This means that it is perfectly reasonable to understand Rashi's interpretation of the Suffering Servant as polemical even by Cohen's strict standards. Unfortunately, Cohen does not specify which texts of Isaiah he has in mind, which Rashi uses as explicit polemic. Note that Yuval perceives hidden polemic even in Rashi's Torah commentary pointing out that it was Rashi who started to popularize the midrashic interpretation of Esau's kiss, with which he greeted Jacob in Genesis 33:4, as a kiss of hatred, and establishes a polemical parallel with the kiss of Jesus' betrayal by Judas Iscariot (Yuval, 'Christianity in Talmud and Midrash', 65.) . Yuval's argument, however, is weakened by the fact that in his commentary to the word *vayishakehu* ('and he kissed him'), Rashi cites the *Sifre Bamidbar* 69 verbatim, where two opposing opinions are recorded: one is of the *Sifre* itself, according to which Esau did not kiss Jacob sincerely and the other one is that of R. Shimeon ben Yoḥai, according to whom upon meeting Jacob, Esau's "deepest feelings changed, and he kissed him with all his heart". Moreover, in his commentary on the word *vayḥabekehu* ('and he embraced him') Rashi seems to endorse R. Shimeon ben Yoḥai's interpretation: "his better feelings took over when he saw Jacob" (Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible: Genesis*, 300; Neusner, *Sifré to Numbers*, 2:32.).

[460] Berger, 'Rashi on Isaiah 53', 303–4. A detailed collection of pre-Rashi interpretations of the Suffering Servant is found in Sigal, *Isaiah 53*, 15–75.

side by side, the sacrificial understanding of suffering and the concept of vicarious suffering. It seems that this understanding is not only a polemic but also a means of self-identification and self-justification, as Funkenstein put it, to make sense of "the discrepancy between the certainty of being God's chosen people and the present humiliation in dispersion".[461]

Blenkinsopp notes that the probable editorial identification of the Servant with Israel attests that the **collective interpretation** arose very early within Judaism, including identification with the "community of the righteous" within Israel.[462] Consequently, individual understanding did not become widespread although there are some examples. Driver and Neubauer mention y*Shekalim* 5:1:3, where the fourth-century amora Rabbi Yonah identifies the Servant with Rabbi Akiva.[463] However, in the very next sentence, which Driver and Neubauer ignored, there is an alternative collective interpretation of the Servant as the men of the Great Assembly.[464] Another early individual understanding that Driver and Neubauer mention is b*Sotah* 14a, where Rabbi Shimlai, expounding on Isaiah 53:12, identifies the Servant to be Moses, who "was numbered with the transgressors" as he could not enter the Promised Land even though he "made intercession for the transgressors" by requesting mercy for those who made and worshipped the Golden Calf, thus "bore the sins of many" meaning that he atoned for Israel.[465] A pre-Rashi medieval example mentioned by North is Saadia Gaon, who understood the Servant to be Jeremiah, and this view was shared by Ibn Ezra and Judah ben Balaam in late 11th century and later by authors such as Abarbanel in the 15th century and Samuel David Luzzatto in the 19th century.[466] As we have seen, this view was also shared by the handful of Christian heretics that North mentions.

Regarding the collective interpretation, North concludes that "there is a fair amount of evidence that before the rise to prominence of the Messianic interpretation the Servant was identified with the community of the righteous"[467]. He suggests that the reference to "those who are wise" (NJPS: "the knowledgeable") in Daniel 12:3 is based on are allusions to the figure of the Servant on the basis of similar wording. He also cites the apocryphal book of Wisdom of Solomon, in which the Servant appears to be understood as "the (community of the) righteous" in 3:1–9. Although the parallel is not entirely clear, the description appears to be a paraphrase of the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 52:15–53:6.[468] The collective understanding is supported by the fact that Wisdom 3:9 refers to the righteous "faithful", "his holy ones", and "his elect". In

[461] Funkenstein, 'Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics', 376.
[462] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 81.
[463] Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1877, II:7.
[464] See 'Yerushalmi, Shekalim 5:1:3'.
[465] Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1877, II:7–9.
[466] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 20–21.
[467] Ibid., 7.
[468] Ibid., 8.

addition, Driver and Neubauer refer to the Midrash (Numbers Rabbah 13:2), which applies "he poured out his soul to die" in Isaiah 53:12[469] to the Jews, who exposed themselves to death in the exile (הֶעֱרו יִשְׂרָאֵל נַפְשָׁם לְמִיתָה בַּגָּלוּת).[470] Since the post-70 Diaspora is also called *galut*, this explanation points to the later collective understandings of suffering in the Diaspora existence. According to North, "the righteous remnant of Israel theory has a lineage as old as the collective theory itself" but the first example he mentions is Rashi (commentary to Isaiah 53:13), followed by Moses Hakohen of Tordesillas, Yom Tov Lippmann Mühlhausen, and Eliezer of Beaugency, who identifies the Servant not with a specific group of contemporaries but with the metaphysical group of all prophets throughout the centuries, despised not only by the Gentiles but also by their own people.[471]

Indirect evidence of collective interpretation in late Antiquity also survives in Christian patristic literature. In the second century, Origen, in *Contra Celsum* I:55, quotes an unnamed Jew describing the Servant with the entire people of Israel "as though of a single individual" (echoing Rashi's wording) and the purpose of its suffering in the Diaspora is to convert many people into Judaism.[472] Another example is what Saint Jerome, who lived as a monk in Byzantine Palestine, noted concerning the first Servant Song in his Epistle 121, which he wrote in response to a certain Gallian lady called Algasia in 406. In the letter, Jerome asks: "How is it possible that we understand as fulfilled in Jesus what was written about Jacob and Israel?"[473] Jerome's remark could be further indirect evidence of the existence of a collective interpretation among the Jews in late antiquity. Horowitz lists pre-Rashi Jewish authors from the ninth to tenth centuries who equate the Suffering Servant with Israel, and wonders whether they relied on the oral tradition cited by Origen in the third century.[474]

North concludes from the intra-biblical allusions to the Suffering Servant that the collective interpretation as "the community of the righteous" precedes the **messianic interpretation** that later gained importance.[475] North posits that the description of the Messianic King in Zechariah

[469] NRSVue: "he poured out himself to death"; NJPS: "he exposed himself to death", Hebrew: הֶעֱרָה לַמָּוֶת נַפְשׁוֹ

[470] Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1877, II:9; Freedman and Simon, *Numbers Rabbah*, II:501. Driver and Neubauer erroneously refer to Deuteronomy Rabbah 23 as the source.

[471] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 19–10; Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1877, II:66.

[472] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 17; Horowitz, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant and the Jews', 432. See also in Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 50.

[473] Jerome of Stridon, 'Epistle 121', loc. 121:2. Although Elliott translates it as "how can we understand the text fulfilled in Jesus, since it was obviously written about Jacob and Israel" (Elliott, *Isaiah 40-66*, 34.). Note that the Latin equivalents of *can* and *obviously* are missing from the original text: *quomodo in Jesu intelligimus esse completum, quod de Jacob, et de Israel scriptum est?* (Jerome of Stridon, 'Epistola CXXI'.)

[474] Horowitz, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant and the Jews', 427–36. The authors Horowitz mentions are the liturgical poets Amitai ben Shefatia of Oria and Solomon ha-Bavli, as well as the Karaite exegete Salmon ben Jeroham.

[475] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 7.

9:9 is an allusion to the Servant, although he considers it uncertain because this royal character does not suffer. As in the case of Daniel 12:3, North bases this theory on a similar wording, but the conclusion may also have been inspired by the Christian tradition, which identifies the Messianic King with Jesus Christ. For North, "it sems clear" that the first book of Enoch identifies the Servant with the messianic Son of Man, although the Messiah's sufferings are not mentioned therein.[476] Driver and Neubauer cites the Midrash Rabbah of Ruth, which, concerning Ruth 2:14,[477] elaborates on six alternative exegeses of the verse. Only the fifth holds that the verse refers to the King Messiah, who is called to approach, take the bread of kingship, and dip it into the vinegar of suffering. The Midrash then cites Isaiah 53:5 which describes the Servant's wounds as a result of the people's transgressions,[478] so it appears to be an early reference to the vicarious suffering of the Servant.

Rembaum claims that rabbinic sources treat the Servant strikingly sparingly, and that their predominant theme is messianic understanding.[479] Despite the meagre sources, Daniel Boyarin makes a strong case for the continuity of the Jewish concept of the suffering Messiah, which he argues "is present in ancient, medieval, and early modern Judaism" as "part and parcel of Jewish tradition from antiquity to modernity".[480] According to him, the collective "metaphorical" or "allegorical" reading was always in the minority. Boyarin cites two examples, the Talmudic parable of the Messiah sitting at the gates of Rome and suffering along with the lepers in Sanhedrin 98b[481] and an allegedly lost rabbinic passage in *Pugio Fidei* (Dagger of Faith) written by the 13th-century Dominican friar Raymond Martini. Martini cites a rabbinic-like saying that he attributes to the Galilean rabbi Yose Hagelili and identifies it as coming from the midrash Sifre. Here we read that "the King Messiah fasts and suffers for the sinners, as it says, 'and he is made sick for our sins etc.' ever more so and more will he be triumphant for all of the generations, as it says, 'And the Lord visited upon him the sin of all'".[482] From these examples, Boyarin concludes that "we have clear evidence that by the third century, rabbinic readers understood the suffering servant to be the Messiah who suffers to vicariously atone for the sins of humans".[483] However, the evidence that Boyarin cites for vicarious suffering is anything but definitive since in the Talmudic story the Messiah only suffers *alongside* the poor, so his suffering is not vicarious, and the authenticity of Martini's passage is disputed. Boyarin himself is also suspicious, admitting

[476] Ibid., 7–8.

[477] NJPS: "At mealtime, Boaz said to her, 'Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar.' So she sat down beside the reapers. He handed her roasted grain, and she ate her fill and had some left over".

[478] Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1877, II:9; Freedman and Simon, *Ruth Rabbah*, 64.

[479] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 290–91.

[480] Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 150.

[481] Ibid., 153.

[482] Martini, *Pugio Fidei*, fols 674–675. In Hebrew: ומלך המשיח המתענה והמצטער בעד הפושעים שנ' והוא מחולל מפשעינו וגו' על אחת כמה וכמה שיזכה לכל הדורות כלן הה"ד ויהוה הפגיע בו את עון כלנו

[483] Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 154.

that its authenticity as a genuine rabbinic text is questionable.[484] Against this background, it is difficult to understand Boyarin's argument as anything other than an attempt to incorporate the messianic reading by presenting it as the mainstream Jewish understanding, thus a polemical covert reclamation of Jesus on his part. However, considering the above, it seems to be sure that the Messianic interpretation also has a long tradition and apparently lived side by side with the collective interpretation in Second Temple Judaism.

Early evidence of the fusion of the collective *and* messianic understanding is the Isaiah Targum, traditionally attributed to Jonathan ben Uzziel, a contemporary of Jesus. This tradition cannot be ascertained, but Grossfeld and Sperling cite proof from the Talmud that as early as in the 4th century, this Targum was already considered ancient.[485] Chilton argues that the Isaiah Targum is definitely not a work of a single translator because the Aramaic interpretations of Isaiah apparently started to take shape in the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods and the coherent text as we know it emerged gradually during successive generations,[486] i.e. sometime between Jesus and the Islam conquest. The Targum identifies the Servant in two ways. First, in Isaiah 43:10a the Servant is the community of God's witnesses and the Messiah at the same time: "You are witnesses *before me,* says the LORD, and my servant *the Messiah with* whom I *am pleased",* whereby the Messiah is described as an eternal figure that apparently represents God's righteous witnesses at all times.[487] On the other hand, in 52:13, the Targum identifies the Servant with the eschatological messianic king for whom "the house of Israel hoped for many days". Strikingly, North mentions only this second interpretation and does not cite 43:10.[488]

Since Rabbinic exegesis tends to avoid exclusive interpretations and regularly presents contradictory alternatives, we might assume that the collective and messianic interpretations coexisted, and some premodern authors either switched back and forth in their interpretations, or, similarly to Targum Isaiah, claimed that that the Servant was simultaneously the Messiah and the people of Israel, like two sides of the same coin. A late example is Solomon Astruc of Barcelona in the late 14th-century, who concluded that "when he [Isaiah] speaks of the people, the King Messiah is included in it; and when he speaks of the King Messiah, the people is

[484] Ibid., 190.
[485] Grossfeld and Sperling, 'The Targum', 3:592.
[486] Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, xiv–xxv.
[487] Ibid., xviii, 84. Italics indicate differences from the Masoretic text, which reads: "You are my witnesses (NJPS: my witnesses are *you*), says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen". In Aramaic of the Targum: אַתּוּן סָהֲדִין קֳדָמַי אֲמַר יְיָ וְעַבְדִי מְשִׁיחָא דְּאִתְרְעֵיתִי בֵיהּ
[488] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 11; Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, 103. Italics his, denoting Targumic additions to the text we know as Masoretic. In Aramaic: הָא יַצְלַח עַבְדִי מְשִׁיחָא

comprehended with him".[489] However, the traditional premodern Jewish messianic understanding lacked the sacrificial concept of atonement and the idea of vicarious suffering.[490]

The third idea that emerges in Rashi's understanding of the Servant is **the sacrificial value of suffering,** the willing acceptance of which leads to the removal of guilt and the sinner can start over with a clean slate. One of its earliest traces is the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 3:1–6, which argues that suffering is only apparent and harms the sufferer only in the eyes of the tormentors. In reality, the persecuted "righteous" do not suffer but rather they are "disciplined a little" and "will receive great good" because God accepts them "like a sacrificial burnt offering". Another example is *Berakhot* 5a of the Babylonian Talmud, where there is a saying attributed to Rav Huna, a 3rd-century amora, explains concerning Isaiah 53:10 that "anyone in whom the Holy One, Blessed be He, delights, He oppresses him with suffering, as it is stated: "Yet in whom the Lord delights, He oppresses him with disease", which is an alternative understanding of וַיהוָה חָפֵץ דַּכְּאוֹ הֶחֱלִי, translated by the NJPS Tanakh as "the LORD chose to crush him by disease". North cites this passage as a rabbinic source for the interpretation of the Servant as the righteous[491] but the text apparently does not even come close to this statement; rather, it is about the sacrificial understanding of suffering. Rav Huna concludes that there is a correspondence between suffering and guilt offering: "Just as a guilt-offering is brought knowingly, so too suffering: knowingly". It also means that suffering has sacrificial value when it is accepted knowingly. Therefore, the sufferer must understand the reason for their suffering in order for it to have sacrificial or penitential value.

A variant of sacrificial suffering is **vicarious suffering,** in which someone suffers the place of another person so that they can be freed from the consequences of their wrongdoing. This idea appears in several Jewish sources before Rashi. In the Targum, there appears the idea that the Gentiles suffer instead of the Jews. Targum Isaiah says in 53:6–10 that God will forgive the sins of Israel by casting them on the Gentiles, who will be handed over to the Gehenna, whereby refining, cleansing, and making sinless the remnant of God's people.[492] With this thought, the Targum treats the Gentiles as the scapegoat sent to Azazel with Israel's sins in Leviticus 16. As we have seen on page 83, one of the characteristics of Messiah Ephraim ben Joseph in *Pesikta Rabbati* is vicarious suffering, which he willingly accepts for the sins of everyone in Israel "who died from the days of Adam up to the time of redemption", including aborted foetuses and also those who will die after his sacrificial death, and the Messiah's willingness to do so leads to his

[489] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 12–13; Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1877, II:129. In Hebrew: וכשמדבר מהעם נכלל עמו מלך המשיח וכשמדבר במלך המשיח נכלל עמו העם (Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1876, I:122.)

[490] North, *The Suffering Servant*, 15.

[491] Ibid., 9.

[492] Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, 104.

exultation.[493] Vicarious suffering also appears in the Hebrew chronicle on the 1096 Rhineland massacres by Rabbi Shlomo ben R. Shimeon, where there is a story of a certain Isaac the Pious, who kills his two children in the synagogue and spills their blood on the pillars of the holy ark saying "May this blood serve me as atonement for all my sins".[494]

Citing Moore, Rembaum notes that although rabbinic sources express the concept of the righteous Jews (a "remnant") suffering vicariously on behalf of other Israelites,[495] the concept of *universal* vicarious sacrifice introduced by Rashi is an innovation with no predecessor in the Jewish tradition.[496] Horowitz sees it as a kind of Jewish reclamation of the Christian understanding of the Suffering Servant. He cites Funkenstein, who speaks of the "interesting dialectic" in which Rashi negates the Christian interpretation while at the same time being heavily influenced by it.[497]

After Rashi, there is a long tradition of understanding the Suffering Servant as Israel and his sufferings as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the nations. Based on the 1877 seminal work entitled *The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah According to Jewish Interpreters* by Samuel R. Driver and Adolf Neubauer, Joel Rembaum compiles and extensive list of Jewish thinkers from Rashi to Heinrich Graetz and Joseph Klausner.[498] Rembaum states that the interpretation of the Suffering Servant as a collective representation of Israel's permanent experience throughout history "represents a traditional Jewish understanding of Jewish existence".[499]

Rembaum explains the reason for the shift (or return) from the messianic understanding of the Servant in rabbinic literature to the earlier collective understanding in response to Christian anti-Jewish doctrine emerging from the theology of Saint Augustine. Accordingly, the Diaspora is evidence that the Jews were punished and abandoned by God because they rejected Jesus, but they should be kept alive in a miserable state as living witnesses to the truth of Christianity.[500] To refute this strong claim, seemingly supported by indisputable empirical facts, Jews had to justify their existence and affirm that they were still the chosen people even though Christianity was politically successful, and Jews lived in poor social conditions.

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[493] Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 679. Note the strong allusion to the doctrine of the original sin.

[494] Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, 264. In Hebrew: הדם הזה יהי לי כפרה על כל עוונותי (Haberman, *Sefer gezerot ashkenaz vetsarfat*, 37.)

[495] For examples, see Moore, *Judaism*, 1:547–52.

[496] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 297.

[497] Horowitz, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant and the Jews', 427.

[498] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 301–10. The list includes the following authors: Joseph Kara, Abraham ibn Ezra, Joseph the Official (Yosef Hamekane), Yom Tov Lippmann Mühlhausen, Solomon ben Melekh, Abraham Farissol, Isaac Troki, Abraham ben Judah Hazzan, Moses of Salerno, Joseph Albo, the anonymous 'Fuente Claro', Gershom ben Nathan, Heinrich Graetz and Joseph Klausner (Ibid., 301.).

[499] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 310.

[500] Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, 163–65 (XVIII:46). See also: Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 19–32; Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs*, 555–81, especially from page 573; Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom*, 44–51; Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 129–34, 183–211.

Rembaum cites Funkenstein, according to whom medieval Jews gave three kinds of meanings to their sufferings in the Diaspora. The oldest was the 'cathartic' explanation, which attributed Diaspora and persecution, particularly the Rhineland massacres of 1096, to the "original sin" of Israel, the "sin of the golden calf" in Exodus 32. This view already polemicizes with Christianity, according to which the Diaspora is a punishment of the Jews for rejecting Jesus, by accepting the punishment theory but rejecting its cause. The second was the 'missionary' justification, according to which the Jewish Diaspora was God's means of bringing the theological truth of monotheism to the nations, which is the one Origen cites. This statement reflects the Christian mission and affirms a Jewish fulfilment of Matthew 28:19 where the risen Jesus Christ instructs the apostles to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations".

The third 'soteriological' explanation is a combination of the first two and the only one developed under Christianity, displaying the dialectic of the absorption of Christian theology into Jewish thought and its simultaneous rejection. It is manifested in the interpretation of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52 and 53 as a representative of the entire people of Israel, who their sufferings, redeems the world from its sins and pays a ransom for those persecuting them.[501] In it, Israel is assigned the same redemptive function as Jesus has in Christian theology. All three explanations appear to be covert polemics against Christian theology, internalizing Christian concepts for the purpose of building of Jewish communal identity. Rembaum adds a fourth justification of Jewish suffering, which he calls "retaliatory", meaning that the nations' mistreatment of the Jews justifies their divine punishment. This idea was apparently introduced by Abraham Ibn Ezra, who mentions that God will visit the nations because of the sufferings they

[501] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 299–300; Funkenstein, 'Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics', 376–77. Berger notes that apart from commentaries on Isaiah 53, he did not find "a single instance, either in Rashi or elsewhere, where the proposed explanation was that the Jewish people suffers in order to atone for the sins of its oppressors" (Berger, 'Rashi on Isaiah 53', 313.). Against the scholarly consensus that Rashi' soteriological interpretation was a response to the massacres during the First Crusade, Berger raises the possibility that Rashi's view may have been based on longstanding exegetical tradition rather than a theological reflection on the pogroms of the 11th century. Berger points out that it would be illogical for Rashi to explain the massacres this way, as it would constitute saying that "Jews were murdered during the Crusade to atone for the sins of their murderers", implying that the more Gentiles persecute Jews, the more they benefit spiritually from the Jews' suffering. Berger claims that Rashi would not have reached such a troubling conclusion on theological grounds because it "may have made him at least somewhat uneasy" (Ibid.). However, Berger's reasoning seems to be based on what he, in the 21st-century United States, imagines Rashi would have found theologically acceptable 900 years earlier in medieval Ashkenaz, so it runs the risk of anachronism, especially because we do not know of a single Jewish criticism of Rashi's understanding as being repulsive. Instead, Rashi's idea has been carried on to the extreme well into the 21st century (see page 178), which means that there is still a theological interest in it. Even Berger himself does not criticize Rashi but only his scholarly interpretation and exonerates Rashi by suggesting that he reached his conclusions against his better judgement, under the imperative of an exegetical tradition.

inflicted on Israel,[502] and reverses the Christian idea that Jewish suffering is God's revenge for rejecting Jesus.[503] Identifying Israel as a "Christ-people" allows Jews to turn the tables on the Christians by proclaiming that God will punish the Gentiles for causing suffering to Israel, just as Jews are punished for rejecting and killing Jesus according to the Christian doctrine.

Rembaum also quotes the late 14th-century Solomon Astruc, who "explicitly states that Israel, living among the nations, serves as a vehicle for enabling God to punish the nations for their sins as He had punished the Egyptians"[504] as if Jews were bait on God's fishing line. However, Astruc's reference to the fate of the Egyptians in the Exodus story is far from an "explicit statement" of God's vengeance for the suffering of the Jews, but merely a plausible alternative explanation for why sufferings "had befallen Israel *accidentally*" because they were "*merely the consequence* of the punishment inflicted on the Gentiles". Astruc, prone to presenting alternative interpretations, seems to claim that God is punishing the Gentiles anyway and that Israel's suffering is either collateral damage because Jews happened to be among them, or an excuse for God "to punish the Gentiles as the Egyptians were punished".[505] Vengeful redemption does appear, but only as an alternative explanation to attributing the sufferings to the Jews' interaction with the Gentiles, which also suggests that Israel is responsible for its own sufferings.

The collective interpretation of the Suffering Servant is not limited to rabbinic Jews. In Chapter 22 of *Faith Strengthened,* the late 16th-century Karaite Isaac of Troki analyses Isaiah 53 verse by verse to refute the Christological understanding of the Suffering Servant and argue for a collective interpretation.[506] However, as Schreiner notes, Troki understands that the Servant does not represent the entire Israel but only the part of it that suffers in exile,[507] and he claims that Isaiah 53 is about the divine promise of Israel's future prosperity as opposed to its current miserable condition in the Diaspora. Troki asserts that the gift of the Torah and the sufferings are not an end in themselves but serve a divine purpose that goes beyond Israel and serves the highest good of instruction and redemption of the nations of the world. Israel is assigned a priestly mission to the nations among which it is scattered, wherein Israel's righteousness will remove the wickedness of the Gentiles and contribute to the future peace and happiness of humankind. Israel will also be compensated for its suffering in the end, but the Jews will also

[502] It is a reminiscent of the vengeful redemption Israel Jacob Yuval identifies as characteristic of Ashkenazi Jews as opposed to the proselytizing one of the Sephardim, see Yuval, *Two Nations*, 93–115.

[503] Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1877, II:44–45. In Hebrew: **השם יפקד על הגוים בעבור שצערו ישראל** (Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1876, I:45.)

[504] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 300.

[505] Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1877, II:133. Hebrew: **מה שפגע המקרה לישראל היה בסבת ענש האומות ודרך פגע ומקרה היה בא לישראל אם למה שהיו מחוברים עמהם אם להעניש האומות כמו שנענשו אנשי מצרים** (Driver and Neubauer, *The 53rd Chapter of Isaiah*, 1876, I:125.)

[506] Troki, *Faith Strengthened*, 109–27.

[507] Schreiner, 'Isaiah 53 in the Sefer Hizzuk Emunah', 431.

benefit from their suffering in their current Diaspora existence because they will be strengthened for the time of their restoration.

Troki seems to combine the proselytizing and the vengeful redemption, identified by Yuval as two distinct concepts in medieval Jewish messianism,[508] and introduces new interpretations of both. On the one hand, he argues that after the eschatological restoration of Israel, the Christian nations will marvel at Israel's exalted state and regard it as a miracle that will make them not only realize the error of their religion and the truth of Judaism, but also that they misunderstood the sufferings of Israel as punishment for killing Jesus, but in reality Israel suffered on behalf of the nations to atone for their sins; that they should have been punished with the sufferings which the Jews endured, because the price for their present and future bliss was actually paid by Israel; that were been morally corrupt idolaters responsible for the futile mistreatment of the Jews; and finally, that Jews are in fact martyrs for their monotheistic faith.

Troki's innovation is the idea of legitimizing Israel as a source of not only the future redemption of the Gentiles but also their current historical success. Based on the observation that without struggle and suffering there is no peace and happiness, Troki claims that the prosperity and power of the Christian civilization could not be achieved without a proportionate amount of suffering. Since the Christian nations apparently did not suffer enough for their success, someone else did—and it was the Jews. This is a strong polemic because Troki says that the undeniable prosperity of the Christian civilization is not the evidence of divine blessing for the acceptance of the truth of Christianity, but rather the merit of the Jews and a proof of the truth of Judaism. Troki supports his point by stating that Jews also contributed to the success of the Gentiles with their prayers for the prosperity, happiness, and well-being of the nations that mistreated them.

Troki's other novelty is that he exonerates the Gentiles from their "basic" hostility toward the Jews on the grounds that God's will has not been revealed to them,[509] and argues that God will exterminate the Gentiles only if their mistreatment of the Jews becomes outrageous even by human standards and will threaten Israel's very existence. Troki speaks of such divine vengeance through an eschatological war only theoretically, which suggests that he does not consider it a necessity. Should an eschatological war occur, Israel will be the divine army that righteous Gentiles can join to survive the extermination of unrepentant Gentiles. No Gentile would need to fight against a Gentile because in the divine army, Jews fight in the front row to protect the

[508] See footnote 502 on page 102.

[509] This thought echoes Jesus' words on the cross saying "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

righteous Gentiles in the rear, with whom they will share the spoils. Troki therefore theorizes about a selective revenge on the nations.[510]

Although Troki does not explicitly say that the Jews were a collective Messiah or Christ, he nevertheless presents the fate of Israel in the same way that the New Testament presents vicarious suffering of the human Jesus for humankind and the return of the glorified Christ to wage war against the forces of the evil. Through this understanding, Troki claims that Israel exists for the benefit of other nations, and that all its blessings and sufferings serve the purpose of redeeming humankind, similar to Jesus. Thus, Troki's interpretation of the Suffering Servant is overtly collective and covertly messianic. Furthermore, Troki's Christological account of the Jewish mission appears to be a forerunner of the ideas expressed by modern Jewish thinkers together with the unintended dangerous consequences of understanding the Suffering Servant as representing the people of Israel.[511] By making Jewish suffering an indispensable tool for the salvation of the nations, Judaism's *raison d'être* is not only made dependent on the nations, but God is indirectly made a culprit of the suffering of innocent people in exchange for the hopes of a bright future.

4.7. Conclusions

These were just a few examples of the hidden reclamation of Jesus in premodern Jewish thought by interpreting the Suffering Servant to represent Israel in different ways, contrary to Christian understanding. Rashi made a breakthrough by combining various elements of Jewish tradition to create a Christological picture of the Jewish people parallel to the changes in Christian Jesus-theology at the turn of the 12th century. What we see here is that premodern Jewish thinkers not only openly reclaimed the figure of the human Jesus as we have observed in section 3.3 by separating him from Christianity, but they also did so in a latent manner. On the one hand, they covertly used the figure of Jesus as a model for individual identity; on the other hand, there also seems to be a latent reclaiming of Christianity's figure of Christ. This is done by attributing to Judaism the qualities that Christians ascribe to Jesus, thereby placing Israel in the position that Christians assign to Jesus and presenting Israel as a Christ-nation or nation of

[510] Earlier, Abarbanel expressed a similar thought in his commentary to Isaiah 56:6: "at the time of the ingathering of exiles, Israel will take vengeance on the nations and devour all the peoples who opposed them, it is stated that these mentioned foreigners, having joined Israel, will also partake in consuming and destroying the nations, though they were initially part of those very nations." (בזמן קבוץ גלויות יקחו ישראל נקמתם מהאומות ויאכלו את כלל העמים הצובאים עליהם לכן אמר שבני הנכר אשר זכר בהיותם נקבצים עם ישראל עם היותם ראשונים מכלל האומות יבאו לאכול ולהחריב את האומות שהם היו ראשונים מכללם, Isaiah 56:6 with Commentary (sefaria.org))

[511] The idea that the Jewish diaspora is actually a mission toward the Gentiles is already expressed in the Talmud, where Rabbi Elazar says that God "exiled Israel among the nations only so that converts would join them" (b*Pesachim* 87b).

Christs. This is most evident in the interpretation of the suffering servant, which appears to be a direct precursor to how modern Jewish thinkers interpreted the suffering servant. As we will see in the next chapter, Rashi's collective messianic understanding of the Suffering Servant as a symbol of Israel, whose vicarious suffering in the Diaspora is a sacrificial atonement for the sins of the Gentiles, survived into the modern age as different thinkers used it to reach different conclusions about continued Jewish existence among the nations after the emancipation in an age of nationalism, permeated by the Hegelian concept of *Volksgeist* and the historical mission of the nations.[512]

[512] See footnote 190 on page 47.

5. The Christian quest for the historical Jesus as background and paradigm

ANOTHER thesis of this dissertation is that, similarly to the 19th-century Jewish argument saying that Jesus cannot be understood separately from his 1st-century Jewish context, the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus cannot be understood independent from the Christian study of the historical Jesus. Rather, it can (or should) be viewed as part of a wider European movement, the utilization of Jesus by nineteenth-century Western European middle-class Christian male thinkers. During my research into the topic, I found that the comparison of and the connections between the Christian "quest for the historical Jesus"[513] and the "Jewish reclamation of Jesus" have not yet been adequately explored as so far, so the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus was largely treated independently from the Christian quest for the historical Jesus. Although Susannah Heschel, Matthew Hoffman and Walter Homolka discuss how the Jewish quest was influenced by the Christian one, they do not reach the conclusion that the Jewish reclamation was in essence the same as the Christian Quest, like two faces of a coin. My proposition is that the phenomenon called "the Jewish reclamation of Jesus" itself is the appropriation of the Christian appropriation of Jesus, an "inward acculturation" in itself, the internalization of the values of the majority society for hidden polemical purposes in the Yuvalian sense of expropriating not

[513] In 1999, W. Barnes Tatum proposed five distinct periods of the Christian quest for the historical Jesus: the "Pre-Quest" from the beginnings until 1778, the "Old (or First) Quest" from 1778 to 1906, the "No Quest" from 1906 to 1953, the "New (or Second) Quest" from 1953 to 1985, and the "Renewed (or Third) Quest" since 1985 (Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, 91–109.). This periodization became standard in scholarly literature but upon closer scrutiny, its validity is highly debatable. For example, the Spanish historian Fernando Bermejo Rubio passionately argues that Tatum's chronological division is scientifically flawed, logically and empirically unfounded, contradicts evidence, and the apparent (albeit unconscious) "crypto-theological bias" behind perpetuating it aims at invalidating or discrediting the non-Christian quest(s), including the Jewish reclamation of Jesus (Bermejo Rubio, 'The Fiction of the "Three Quests"', 250.). He asserts that the beneficiary of the four-stage chronological division is the traditional Christian view unable to get in terms with Reimarus' and Strauss' insights on Jesus' unoriginality, humanness and Jewishness during the "Old Quest" (Bermejo Rubio highlights that "old" implies "outdated"), with Jesus put in service of Nazism and Zionism simultaneously during the "No Quest" period (the term suggesting the complete denial of a period when countless studies on the historical Jesus were published, including Klausner's *Jesus of Nazareth,* which was soon translated into several languages and enjoyed a wide critical reception; Bermejo Rubio, 'The Fiction of the "Three Quests"', 224–26.), and with the Jewish authors of the "New Quest," such as Vermès and Flusser. Bermejo Rubio also contends that the other agenda behind Tatum's chronological division is to suggest a *progress* in the study of the historical Jesus towards today's theology-free, purely academic venture, the "Third Quest". Instead, he proposes a categorization of parallel trends and approaches that have been present since Reimarus until today, which would allow the inclusion of Jewish scholars, because Walter Homolka, while not questioning Tatum's periodization, notes concerning Joseph Salvador (See section 6.1) that as early as in 1838, i.e., in the First Quest period, he "is more or less arguing from the perspective of the Third Quest" (Homolka, *Jewish Jesus Research*, 51.).

only the opponent's symbols but their discourse as well. Thus, Christian and Jewish thinkers were competing for the rhetoric of authority and domination by struggling over the question as to who is entitled to give meaning to the figure of Jesus.

5.1. The history of the Christian view of Jesus

Just as the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus is not without antecedents (see chapter 3), the 19th century Christian quest for Jesus as a historical person and the use of his constructed image had antecedents in Christianity. In his 1992 article titled "The Interest in Life of Jesus Theology as a Paradigm for the Social History of Biblical Criticism", Dieter Georgi analyses how the changing societal and economic conditions brought about changes in how Christians viewed Jesus over time, and how the emergence of the bourgeoisie brought about the view of Jesus as a tangible human being who was alive in a specific place and time and with whom and whose circumstances one can identify with.[514] Apparently, this evolution of the Christian view of Jesus and its development into the quest for the Historical Jesus also made the Jewish reclamation of Jesus possible.

Per Georgi's analysis, the Jesus of the early church was a divinely gifted man, who gradually turned into an all-powerful king untouchable by everyday people in the 3rd century, when Christianity became increasingly powerful and ended up as the official cult of the Roman Empire. Later, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, argues Georgi, Jesus started to be considered as a superhuman individual who could influence and shape the shared vision of the emerging bourgeoisie. This shift was influenced by thinkers like Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, and Thomas Aquinas, and popularized by mendicant orders such as Franciscans and Dominicans. Jesus became portrayed as a model for individual behaviour, and his accomplishments, knowledge and experience were considered attainable by everyday people, especially members of the free bourgeoisie.[515] Meditation on Jesus as a real person who lived in a specific time and place as the incarnation of God became a significant element of Christianity, leading to the emergence of the *devotio moderna* movement, which consisted of disciplined contemplating on the life of Jesus with the aim of imitating it. The most renowned work of this

[514] Georgi, 'The Interest in Life of Jesus Theology'.

[515] This change was reflected in iconography as well. *The Cambridge History of Christianity* notes that the 12th century marked a time of transition in how the crucified Jesus was portrayed. While some crucifixes still depicted Christ in a triumphant and lively manner as seen in Carolingian and earlier art, there were others that emerged during this period, like the oaken crucifix from the church of St. Denis in Brussels (circa 1160), portraying the drooping head and protruding ribs of the dying Jesus in a moving manner, which reflects a new emphasis on his humanity and a new emotionalism that surrounded it (Lipton, 'Images and Their Uses', 260.).

movement is *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas à Kempis, widely read as a devotional guide for centuries.[516]

During the 17th and 18th centuries, as the market became dominant, the bourgeoisie in Western Europe sought more control. Pietism and the Enlightenment were two movements that emerged from this class, both emphasizing the importance of the self and its liberation.[517] Pietism focused on experiencing Jesus through reading and group narratives, with self-examination and scrutiny of the conscience as important preparations. Rationalism and Pietism sought practical piety and the internalizing and ethicizing of religion for positive change, and supported public education and European imperialism. They worked to reconstruct authentic history where the individual was the acting subject and used it as an instrument for the freedom of the bourgeois *citoyen*. Jesus was seen as a symbol of mature individual consciousness, enabling others to discover their true selves and identity, prefiguring the concept of talents as God-given rights. This understanding of Jesus helped shape the idea of *égalité* and *fraternité*, with disciplined *liberté*, whereby the demythologized Jesus became the source of the values of the Enlightenment. In parallel with the changes in the Christian view, the interpretation of Jesus started to change among Jewish intellectuals as well (see section **3**.3).

5.2. The Hegelian reclamation of Jesus

In *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship,* Kelley examines the way modern biblical scholarship is rooted in Hegel's philosophy of history, which also influenced the study of religion and antiquity.[518] Kelley begins by discussing how the ideas

[516] González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2010, 1:427.

[517] Pietism and the Enlightenment seem to be flipsides of the same coin, i.e. the intellectual-spiritual consequence of the shock of the Thirty Years War, which by the Peace of Westphalia, as Justo L. González puts it, "degenerated into skirmishes, banditry, and protracted negotiations […] the religious motivations of which were by then nearly forgotten, and which had become little more than an excuse for a power struggle" (González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2010, 2:182.). González also notes that the result of the war that tore Europe apart on religious grounds was "a growing indifference to religion accompanied by the feeling, even among those of deep religious commitments, that such commitments should remain private, and not be carried into civil and political life." Thus, the intellectual outgrowths of this abhorrence from "attempting to settle religious matters by force" are Pietism (with God) and the Enlightenment (without (an immanent) God) (Ibid., 2:177–84.).

[518] Hegel summarizes his conception of history in Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 103–10. Kelley's main argument is that despite the authors' best intentions, the post-Enlightenment Christian study of the historical Jesus is inherently "racialized" because it stems from Hegel's philosophy of history, which he calls "racialized discourse" meaning "infused with the category of race" and the source of modern racism. Per Kelley, this discourse found its way into modern Biblical scholarship in the form of anti-Jewish tendencies, apparent in putting Jesus into stark contrast with his contemporary Judaism (Kelley, *Racializing Jesus*, 18.). Although Hegel does make statements that could be considered racist or racialized according to our contemporary categories, for example in §394 of *Philosophy of Mind,* where Hegel argues that the world's geographical diversity "descends into specialities, that may be termed local minds—shown in […] the inner tendency and

of the *Geist* (the Spirit that reveals itself in history, driving its progression through a dialectical method, where contradictions lead to higher levels of consciousness and freedom), the *Volk* (the nation or people possessing a unique spirit, culture, and historical mission) and their combination, *Volksgeist* (national spirit) became central to Hegel's system, resulting in the concept of cultural purity. Kelley argues that ultimately, Hegel's philosophy of history not only influenced the study of history and culture but also left a lasting impact on the field of modern biblical scholarship, especially within the Tübingen school, which played a pivotal role in transforming Biblical studies into a modern academic discipline by systematically applying secular and modern categories to the New Testament.[519] It resulted in a dichotomic model where which Judaism was depicted as an "Oriental religion", spiritually limited and largely reduced to empty rituals and worldly ambitions, while Greek culture was celebrated for its spirit of freedom and intellectual vigour, positioning Greece as the cultural and racial forefather of Western civilization.[520]

Ferdinand Christian Baur, the founder of the Tübingen School, sought to place early Christianity within the broader context of world history, interpreting the New Testament as a reflection of the Hegelian spiritual struggle between East and West. This approach framed Christianity as emerging from the conflict between the spiritual forces of Judaism and Greek paganism, with Jesus seen as a figure who synthesized and transcended these traditions. However, Baur's approach also had significant ideological implications as his work reinforced anti-Jewish stereotypes by portraying Jesus as fundamentally opposed to the religiosity of his Jewish

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capacity of the intellectual and moral character of the several peoples" (Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 14.), calling someone accountable on the basis of the categories of another age is anachronism and it amounts to saying that only white Westerners are capable of racism. Furthermore, Kelley can be criticized for conflating contrast with racialization and corruption. One of the reviews of his book points out that "no reconstruction of Jesus' lifestyle and message can make him agree with all his Jewish contemporaries" (Downing, 'Book Review: Racializing Jesus', 195.), thus the very highlighting of Jesus' conflicts with the Judaism of his age cannot be termed racialization. Also, Kelley claims that words like "freedom" and "authenticity" are racially loaded and corrupt as they "contain unsettling echoes of 'Jewification'" (Kelley, *Racializing Jesus*, 141.). According to the book review, this argument is rather forced as "Kelley seems to end up feeling all such readings are rendered inescapably corrupt by association" whereas the coexistence of multiple "freedoms" and "authenticities" is conceivable so the terms themselves do not necessarily imply mutual exclusion. (Downing, 'Book Review: Racializing Jesus', 196.). Another book review criticizes Kelley for stigmatizing the entire modern Christian biblical scholarship and advising to disavow its roots in a cancel culture of sorts, which would be throwing out the baby with the bathwater (Kee, 'Book Review: Racializing Jesus', 211.). However, Kelley's analysis of the survival of the Hegelian philosophy of history in modern Biblical scholarship in general and Jesus studies in particular seems to stand and sheds lights on the way modern Jewish thinkers treated the figure of Jesus.

[519] Although the Tübingen school was highly influential in the middle of the 19th century, it soon lost prestige and was finally abandoned because its forced Hegelianism contradicted historical facts. For example, the school conceived late 2nd century "Catholicism" as the synthesis of Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity (Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1645. See also: Baur, *The Church History*, 1:112–13.).

[520] Kelley, *Racializing Jesus*, 63–66.

contemporaries, thus emphasizing the necessity for Christianity to distance itself from its Jewish and Oriental roots. This portrayal of Judaism as spiritually deficient allowed scholars to maintain the theological view of Jesus as a unique and transcendent figure, distinct from his Jewish background. This negative depiction of Judaism became a critical strategy in elevating the Westernized interpretation of Jesus and Christianity.[521] Kelley argues that Baur's framework became institutionalized within biblical scholarship, viewing Christianity as a Western religion that required purification from its Jewish and Oriental origins to fulfil its universal mission. This perspective continued to shape theological and historical studies well into the 20th century, Kelley argues, reinforcing the myth of the West as the pinnacle of spiritual and cultural development through the person of Jesus.[522] In this narrative, Jesus is portrayed as a transformative figure who plays a crucial role in the evolution of religious thought by bridging and purifying the spiritual traditions of both Judaism and Hellenism.

Baur describes Jesus as a central figure whose teachings are essentially moral, thus Christianity is ultimately of a moral character, to which it perpetually returns from "exaggerated dogmatism, whose logical conclusions were found to undermine the very foundations of moral and religious life", understood to be Judaizing legalistic tendencies. However, Jesus' significance goes beyond his moral teachings as Baur sees his person as essential to the historical development of Christianity: Jesus is a "firm centre" around which his disciples could rally, allowing Christianity to grow into a movement that would conquer the entire world. Baur highlights that the messianic idea, deeply rooted in Jewish national hopes, was also crucial to Jesus' impact on history. Jesus was regarded by himself and his disciples as the Messiah who fulfilled the promise to the Jewish forefathers, and this belief gave Christianity its historical significance. Baur emphasizes that without spiritualizing and universalizing the material and particularistic Jewish messianic idea, the belief in Jesus would not have had the power to influence world history as profoundly as it did. Furthermore, Baur argues that Jesus' death created a complete and irreparable breach between him and Judaism because it forced his followers to reimagine the concept of the Messiah in a way incompatible with Jewish messianism. Irrespective of its historical veracity, Jesus' resurrection became the foundation of Christian faith, allowing Christianity to move beyond a purely Jewish sect and develop into a universal religion.[523]

The Norwegian theologian Halvor Moxnes, in his book *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth-Century Historical Jesus,* analyses the ways Jesus was used as an identity model for the different types of emerging nationalism in Germany, France, and Britain, demonstrating it through the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, David Friedrich Strauss,

[521] Ibid., 67–72.
[522] Ibid., 81–82.
[523] Baur, *The Church History*, 1:37–43.

Ernest Renan, and George Adam Smith. In his work, Moxnes compares the authors' views on Jesus with their contemporary political issues expressed in their other writings.

Schleiermacher's lectures on the historical Jesus at the University of Berlin in 1819 were not merely historical undertakings but actively engaged with the nationalistic discourse of the time, reimagining Judaism as a 'nation' and the Holy Land as a 'country' in their modern sense, mirroring the fragmented political state of his time with no unified German nation. He uniquely does not place Jesus in Galilee but relies on John instead, who depicts Jesus as traveling throughout the "country". This aligns with Schleiermacher's national concerns, presenting Jesus' mission as for all the people and all the land, reflecting the idea of a monarch closely connected with his people and a teacher central to German nationalism. Reflecting his own hopes for German unification, Schleiermacher presented Jesus as someone whose mission was to unite the Jewish people, thus serving as a symbol of national unity. Additionally, Schleiermacher highlighted Jesus' role as a teacher to the nation, aligning this with the emerging self-consciousness of German educators as national leaders. He portrayed Jesus as embodying the ideal of public teaching, which resonated with contemporary discussions on education's role in nation-building. Through these arguments, Schleiermacher sought to reinterpret Jesus in a way that resonated with the nationalistic and democratic movements of his time, making Jesus a central figure in the shaping of German national identity.[524]

Strauss's various depictions of Jesus from 1835–1872 reflect the evolution of German nationalism, from early democratic aspirations to the establishment of the Prussian German Empire. In *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (*The Life of Jesus Critically Examined,* 1835), Strauss challenged the historical accuracy of the Gospels, presenting them as myths rather than history and sought to present Jesus in terms relevant to contemporary society through a democratic critique of the state. In response to criticism for his democratized view of Jesus, Strauss retreated from his radical position in his later works, including *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet* (Life of Jesus for the German People, 1864, published in English as *A New Life of Jesus*), where he portrays Jesus as embodying the moral and spiritual ideals necessary for the unification of Germany, particularly within a Protestant, Prussian-led framework, in accordance with the Reformation's legacy and the cultural identity of the German people. However, in his later work titled *Der neue und der alte Glaube* (1872, published in English as *The Old Faith and the New* in 1873), Strauss ultimately rejected Jesus as a model for modern society, viewing him as an "enthusiast" whose teachings were incompatible with the rational, progressive values

[524] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 14–15, 61–93. See also: Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*.

of the modern world. This represented a complete break from earlier attempts to reconcile Jesus with contemporary German ideals.[525]

Renan wrote his book *Vie de Jésus* (*The Life of Jesus,* 1863) during an expedition to Syria under the French Empire's military campaigns, in which he claimed that his portrayal of the land as central to understanding Jesus. His book is a mixture of a biography and a travel journal and fits into the larger framework of Orientalism, portraying the Orient as simultaneously fascinating and repulsive. Renan depicted the Orient in ambivalent terms, as both an ideal primitive world (Galilee) and a degenerate, fanatical one (Jerusalem), reflecting a broader European tendency to romanticize and denigrate non-Western peoples at the same time. Renan represents Jesus, who emerged from the idyllic setting of Galilee, as a critique of modern European urban society. Renan contrasts Galilee to Jerusalem, which he describes as a corrupt, harsh, and fanatical place. Based on his own disdain for the Muslims and Jews he encountered during his travels, Renan used stereotypical and derogatory terms to depict them as inferiors. He held them responsible for the region's decline, which could be civilized only through European dominance, reflecting European superiority.[526]

Moxnes points out that unlike the forms of nationalism found in Germany and France, masculinity played a significant role in the development of British national identity. British nationalism was intertwined with Protestantism and shaped by responsibilities toward the Empire, in which the development of "male character" was crucial rather than focusing on national unification or race. It manifested in the Victorian values of self-discipline, respectability, and moral responsibility, which were seen as essential for maintaining social order and national strength. In this context, Smith's *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1894), deemed by Moxnes a "moral geography", portrays Jesus as an ideal for developing national character not in a formal biography but a reflection on how Galilee's physical, moral and spiritual landscape influenced him to become an example of manliness and moral strength. Through Jesus, Smith presents Victorian values as ideals for British youth, particularly young men, in their preparation for adulthood and national service. Smith promotes altruism as a central value in this national character, interpreting Jesus' self-sacrifice as an expression of true manhood and altruism, embodying the Victorian ideal of "muscular Christianity", which combined physical strength with moral and spiritual vigour. Thus, Jesus serves as a model for British readers, encouraging them to emulate his resistance to temptation, self-sacrifice, and leadership, supporting the

[525] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 15, 95–120. See also: Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*; Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*; Strauss, *The Old Faith and the New*.

[526] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 15, 121–47. See also: Renan, *The Life of Jesus*.

Empire's civilizing mission in alignment with Britain's imperial self-image as a force for good in the world, spreading "Western" values and civilization. Through this portrayal of Jesus, Smith suggests that Britain's imperial mission is a continuation of the biblical narrative and uses Jesus' teachings and life to justify Britain's role in leading and uplifting other nations.[527]

Concerning 20th-century interpretations, Paula Fredriksen, a contemporary feminist Jewish scholar of early Christianity and the historical Jesus, argues that contemporary Christian scholarly interpretations of Jesus are still tainted by 19th-century Christian theology as their authors are unable to get over the "ethical constructs of liberal Protestants" (relevant for today but pointless in 1st-century Judaism) as opposed to Jewish apocalypticism (irrelevant for today but meaningful in 1st-century Judaism). Fredriksen notes that "Jesus the apocalyptic Jew—the Jesus of Weiss and Schweitzer—remains for many New Testament scholars an awkward and unwelcomed stranger" to be replaced by "some form or other of the ethical Jesus, conceived no longer as a nineteenth-century liberal but as his twentieth-century avatar: radically egalitarian, anti-elitist, anti-nationalist, anti-racialist, anti-patriarchal".[528] She calls this phenomenon "Rorschach Jesus", implying that scholarly portrayals of the historical Jesus over the last two centuries tend to reflect the religious views and concerns of the scholars themselves, as if those concerns were central to Jesus' own. For example, while the Jesus of 19th-century Germany was often depicted as a liberal Protestant of that era, the Jesus of the 1960s was characterized as a freedom-fighter. In current American research, Jesus is often portrayed as fighting contemporary issues like sexism, nationalism, or social inequality. Fredriksen argues that these portrayals are essentially modernized versions of Jesus, dressed in ancient clothing but shaped to fit contemporary agendas, rather than truly reflecting the historical figure—actually "thinly disguised versions of ourselves in antique garb".[529]

Fredriksen also emphasizes the inherent anti-Judaism present in many Christian studies of the historical Jesus over the past two hundred years. She observes that in many of them, Jesus' original Jewish context is often overshadowed and represented as morally inferior for the sake of making the point. For example, if Jesus is presented as striving for equality, Jewish leadership is assumed to be highly hierarchical; if Jesus cared for the sick, "the Jews" must have ignored or shunned them; and if Jesus prioritized ethics like loving one's neighbour, Jewish practices were nothing more than empty and cruel purity laws.[530] The typical Christian descriptions of first-century Judaism claim that it was "economically and politically oppressive, exclusive,

[527] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 16, 149–78. See also: Smith, *Historical Geography*.
[528] Fredriksen, 'What You See Is What You Get', 75–76.
[529] Fredriksen, 'My Quest for the Historical Jesus', 89.
[530] Ibid.

hierarchical, patriarchal, and money oriented[, focusing] excessively on ritual purity, racial purity, and nationalism, and it encouraged meanness to sick people". Thus, first-century Judaism is often portrayed as a negative contrast rather than the vibrant cultural and religious context in which Jesus and the early church existed, as if something had gone wrong with Judaism after the exile, having deteriorated completely by Jesus' time. Fredriksen concludes that all this is nothing more than the survival of traditional Christian anti-Judaism in New Testament scholarship.[531]

Concerning Moxnes' and Fredriksen's otherwise revelational and insightful analyses, we must note that, unlike Kelley, they do not seem to differentiate between purposeful agenda and sincere interest and make the impression that the 19th-century thinkers they discuss could have been thinking otherwise, outside the "boxes" of Hegelianism, nationalism, and imperial colonialism. Even terming their motivations "misguided" is biased, suggesting the possibility of an alternative "right guide" which they did not recognize at best or rejected at worst. It would be a mistake to make 19-century thinkers, be they Christian or Jewish, accountable based on our contemporary values and attribute to them motives they in all probability did not cultivate consciously. It would lead to a cancel culture seeking the elimination of otherwise extremely interesting authors who also shaped our current world, thus hindering our understanding of the present. Ultimately, Moxnes' and Fredriksen's (in all probability) subconscious attitude illustrate that they themselves are also the children of their own age, unable to fully transcend their own categories.

5.3. Case study: the Christian and Jewish reclamations of the Holy Land

This case study serves to support my thesis that the 19th-century Christian reconstruction of the 1st-century Jewish society as a cultural setting for the interpretation of the historical Jesus served as a background and paradigm for the Jewish reconstruction and interpretation. It

[531] Fredriksen, 'What You See Is What You Get', 95. A striking example of it is what happened to Fredriksen a conference of the Society of Biblical Literature in the early 1990s. In her scholarship, Fredriksen questions the historicity of the synoptic gospels' account that Jesus' cleansing of the Temple infuriated Jewish religious leaders, which led to his crucifixion. Instead, she prefers John's chronology, which shows Jesus visiting Jerusalem multiple times, based on which she believes that both Pilate and the Jewish leaders were familiar with Jesus and considered him a harmless apocalyptic preacher. According to Fredriksen, Pilate crucified Jesus to only set an example for the Passover crowds in the hopes of preventing a potential riot. She points out the anomaly that while crucifixion was typically reserved for political insurgents, Jesus' followers were not targeted, and the early Christian community thrived in Jerusalem without Roman interference for decades. When Fredriksen presented her arguments at the conference, emphasizing that there was no intrinsic antagonism between Jesus and the priests, the first question she received from the scholars was: "Are you saying then that the Jews did *not* kill Jesus?" (Fredriksen, 'What Does Jesus Have to Do with Christ?', 4, 12., italics hers).

showcases how the arguments of 19th and early 20th century Jewish thinkers were grounded in the same conceptual premises as their Christian colleagues, and how they reached conclusions different from their shared reconstruction of the Holy Land based on a shared philosophical background differently — in the 19th century mainly antagonistically to the Christian view but in the 20th century sometimes strikingly in agreement with it.

The shared theoretical background is pointed out by the scholars like Simon Schama, Paul Readman, and Tom Ingold, who view landscape not as a natural and untouched space but as a cultural construct shaped by historical and national narratives, influencing how nations perceive their past and form their identities. Schama points out that landscape, which we assume to be untouched by culture, upon closer inspection, turns out to be a cultural construct created by our interpretive perception.[532] Readman emphasizes that nations, closely tied to their geographical territories, maintain a connection to their historical past through the landscape, through which past makes its presence felt in the physical environment. [533] Ingold describes landscape as "history congealed" embodying the creative powers of the ancestors in materialized form, creating identity for its inhabitants, who incorporate the essence of a locality into their own being, right down to identifying themselves with the locality.[534]

Apparently, this is the way 19th-century Western culture treated the Biblical Land of Israel as *homeland*. Halvor Moxnes mentions that when he was a schoolboy in the 1950s, there was a map of Palestine at Jesus' time hanging on the wall of his classroom next to the map of Norway. The two maps were the same size as if the Holy Land was as big as Norway, leading schoolchildren to perceive the Holy Land as their second or parallel homeland.[535] Concerning Britain, the Israeli historian Eitan Bar-Yosef emphasizes that the special significance of the Holy Land in popular imagination and in the creation of national identity is inextricably linked to Sunday-school culture, nostalgically associating the Holy Land with familiarity, domesticity, tradition, communal identity, and family.[536] However, instead of representing the actual *Eretz Yisrael* of the age, this biblically imbued religious educational culture also contributed to suppressing the contemporary reality of the place and led to a romantic alienation from its physicality. Bar-Yosef quotes the English novelist D. H. Lawrence, who wrote in 1928 that he did not want to know

[532] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 9.
[533] Readman, 'Landscape, National Identity', 1174–78.
[534] Ingold, 'Ancestry, Generation, Substance, Memory, Land', 141, 150.
[535] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 39. Even if the possible reason was to print the two maps on sheets of the same size, apparently nothing indicated that Norway is more than four times bigger than today's State of Israel.
[536] Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*, 158.

where Galilee was and never wanted to visit the Holy Land but only to leave these places untouched in "the golden haze of a child's half-formed imagination".[537]

Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, an Israeli geographer specializing in the historical and cultural geography in the Middle East, notes that the most striking features of the 19th-century Western descriptions of the Holy Land are (1) their biblical orientation centred upon Jerusalem, which renders the land holy (in various degrees inversely proportional to the regions' distance from it),[538] (2) the lack of the clear definition of the boundaries of the territory referred to as the "Holy Land", ignoring the Ottoman administrative divisions of the age and overlooking that it was not a separate political entity at the time, and (3) the almost complete neglect of the contemporary native population and their sociocultural setting, using them only for illustrating the past. He also points out that these historical geographies use Biblical names rather than contemporary ones because their aim was to identify Biblical places and sites for their European middle-class Bible-reading Christian audiences.[539] Ben-Arieh also highlights that the 19th-century study of the Holy Land arose from the widespread romantic belief he calls "physical determinism",[540] according to which landscape determines the character of the people that inhabit a geographical area and its history. Since the Biblical history and its people are unique, they assumed that there must be something unique in the geography of the Land of Israel, which produced the unique theological phenomena of monotheism and ultimately Christianity.[541]

One of the most striking features of the 19th-century interpretations of the first-century Holy Land is a construction of a dichotomous antagonism between Galilee and Judah, sometimes with Samaria in between. Scholars projected their contemporary social or ideological problems into this bipartite/tripartite model of the Holy Land, using it as a mirror image of contemporary European cultural, societal, and political situations.[542] Interestingly, the Galilee vs. Jerusalem dichotomy is shared by Christian and Jewish scholars, who used the attitudes of the two "places" toward Jesus as a common paradigm or lens through which contemporary

[537] Ibid., 180; Lawrence, 'Hymns in a Man's Life', 597.
[538] See the map on Ben-Arieh, '19th-Century Historical Geographies', 72.
[539] Ibid., 70–71, 76–77. Ben-Arieh specifically mentions George Adam Smith as "ignoring contemporary geographical subjects" in *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* but this remark is not entirely fair. Smith regularly uses contemporary Arabic geographical names although only for those places that have no Biblical ones. Concerning the boundaries of the Holy Land, Smith notes that its "well-defined boundaries—the sea on the west, Mount Taurus on the north, and the desert to east and south—give it a certain unity" but it is for the larger territory he calls Syria and Palestine and not the "Holy Land" itself, the boundaries of which he does not define (Smith, *Historical Geography*, 3.).
[540] Ben-Arieh, '19th-Century Historical Geographies', 79. See also: Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 72–74. The phenomenon is also called "geographical determinism" (Thrower, 'Geography', 918–23. in: *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*). Amy Kaufman and Paul Sturtevant views it as one of the foundations of modern racism (Kaufman and Sturtevant, *The Devil's Historians*, 99–100.)
[541] Ben-Arieh, '19th-Century Historical Geographies', 75–76.
[542] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 13.

religious and political conflicts were interpreted not only between Judaism and Christianity but also *within* the respective communities.[543]

5.3.1.Christian thinkers

For Christian historians, the perceived attitudes of Galilee and Jerusalem toward Jesus apparently symbolized the attitudes of the geographical regions or social groups of their homeland (or Europe) toward progress and Enlightenment. In this model, Galilee was represented as progressive and liberal, and Judah as reactionary and conservative. "Galilee as reconstructed"[544] was particularly important for the Christian Jesus quest because it was perceived as more Hellenized than Judah, thus the image of the Galilean Jesus enabled Christian thinkers to detach Jesus from Judaism—first at least partially, then completely in the "Aryan Jesus" hypothesis.[545] By constructing an East-West dichotomy *within* the Holy Land, Jesus could be reconstructed as influenced by the free, open, progressive, and universalistic Greek thought, allowing the origins of the Western European Christian civilization to be represented as antagonistic to the Orient, which is symbolized by the perceived rigidity, isolation, and particularism of the Judaism of Judah. This view was supported by the traditional Christian interpretation that contemporary Jews, particularly the Pharisees, had a contempt for Galilee.[546] Following Moxnes, below I am summarizing the views of three key Christian thinkers who claimed the Holy Land as a homeland for Germans, French, and Britons.

5.3.1.1. David Friedrich Strauss

Strauss appears to be the first one to construct this contrast. Due to its distance and separation from Jerusalem by Samaria, the influence of "the hierarchical party", i.e. the Pharisees was weak, and "faith-proud Judea" (*glaubensstolzen Judäa*) despised Galileans as not fully legitimate Jews. As a result, the region was exposed to Greek thought,[547] which encouraged freethinking and religious renewal in "the Galilee of the Gentiles".[548] Strauss attributes Jesus' originality,

[543] Moxnes, 'The Construction of Galilee, Part 1', 32.
[544] Arnal, 'The Galilean Jewish Jesus', 61.
[545] See footnote 1026 on page 196.
[546] The Christian image of Galilee is positive even if sometimes they admit that "all Galileans were despised for their want of culture, their rude dialect, and contact with Gentiles. They were to the Jews what Bœotians were to the Athenians". (Plummer, *The Cambridge Bible for Schools: John*, 81. Note the comparison with ancient Greece).
[547] Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, I:342.
[548] Ibid., I:263. Moxnes notes that the English translation "entitled to the full privileges of Jews" does not adequately render the German expression *vollwichtige Juden,* meaning 'Jews of full importance' (Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 222, note 75.). The expression *Galilaia tōn ethnōn* is from Matthew 4:15 that cites the Septuagint version of Isaiah 8:23 (Hebrew: *gelil hagoyim*). The English translation of Strauss misquotes it as from Mark but the German original correctly refers to Matthew (Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet*, 1:247.).

freshness, and his lack of pedantry to his Galilean upbringing and education,[549] and the Gentiles of Galilee are praised for showing "more susceptibility as hearers of [Jesus'] preaching, met him with more open confidence, were more readily persuaded of the necessity of beginning a new life, than the prejudiced and pretentious sons of Abraham".[550] At the same time, Strauss calls Jerusalem "the lions' den", "the stronghold of everything that Jesus wished to combat", where Jesus had to contend with "the obstinacy of the hierarchical party, the immorality and stupidity of the masses, and the unsteadiness of the momentary enthusiasm of even sympathetic circles".[551]

Moxnes observes that Strauss projected the contrast between the Protestant northern and the Catholic southern Germany into the opposition of a liberal Galilee and a fanatical and formalistic Jerusalem. He notes that in Strauss' text, "Jerusalem is portrayed in negative terms, with statements about its religion similar to stereotypes about the Catholic South":[552] fanaticism, formalism, empty rituals, priests, impressive churches, and solemn services.[553] Another clue, highlighted by Moxnes, for projecting contemporary issues back to Jesus' time may be the possible *double entendre* about Roman Catholicism in his claim that as opposed to Galilee, where Roman influence was weaker, Judea and Jerusalem is represented as "the territory that was immediately subject to the dominion of the Romans".[554]

5.3.1.2. Ernest Renan

Renan portrays the region around Jerusalem as the most melancholic land on earth, a parched and harsh terrain that deprives its inhabitants of any connection to nature, while instilling in them a sense of solemnity, albeit one marked by sadness, dryness, and unattractiveness. In this region arose an obstinate and dishonest form of Judaism, founded by the Pharisees, maintained by its uninspiring legal scholars and hypocritical and melancholic followers, later codified by the Talmud, and transmitted to contemporary times.[555] Renan portrays Jerusalem as a city characterized by pedantry, bitterness, conflicts, hostilities, and a narrow-minded attitude, just like the Jerusalem of his time, which was dominated by the Islamic jurists,[556] who conducted empty and time-consuming discussions around mosques without any real contribution to the improvement of mental discipline. Renan draws a further analogy with contemporary Islam, noting that the Jewish scribes harboured a contempt for Greek culture, similar to the disdain of

[549] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 110; Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, I:262–63.
[550] Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, I:299.
[551] Ibid., I:343–46.
[552] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 109–11.
[553] Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, I:345.
[554] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 110; Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, I:334.
[555] Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 113–14.
[556] Ibid., 214. In the English edition, *faqīh,* the expert of Islamic law (*fiqh*), is mistranslated as *fakir,* the Sufi Muslim ascetic (compare Renan, *Jésus*, 128.)

contemporary Muslims for European civilization or the historical contempt of Catholic theologians for secular knowledge.[557]

In contrast, Renan represents Galilee as the ideal Orient that invokes the Garden of Eden:[558] "a very green, shady, smiling district" with a pleasant climate that allowing its working-class inhabitants a delightful life characterized by simplicity, sweetness, and "extreme liberty", "much less confined in the bonds of Pharisaic pedantry".[559] This atmosphere was "like perfume from another world, like the "dew of Hermon" (Psalm 133:3) which has prevented drought and barrenness from entirely invading the field of God", also in a symbolic way.[560] The landscape and lifestyle of Galilee differed from those surrounding Jerusalem, so too did its inhabitants display contrasting characteristics. Renan characterizes them as an "energetic, brave, and laborious […] agricultural people, no way gifted in art, caring little for luxury, indifferent to the beauties, of form and exclusively idealistic".[561] In summary, Renan portrays Galilee as bucolic countryside full of freedom, simplicity, and natural beauty, superior to Jerusalem, which is portrayed as a city marked by religious legalism, strife, and fanaticism, where Jesus lost his Jewish faith to find his own revolutionary mission in Galilee.[562] The idyllic Galilee is a fitting birthplace of Christianity, whereas Jerusalem's attitude only led to the destruction in 70 CE.[563] Renan concludes that the true essence of religion is found in the peaceful countryside, not in the noisy and tumultuous city[564] whereby he applies the Jerusalem-Galilee dichotomy to that of the city and the countryside.

5.3.1.3. George Adam Smith

In *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land,* the Scottish theologian Smith frequently highlights the similarities of the geography of the Land of Israel to Britain and he even points out their common Roman history.[565] Smith asserts that the geography of the Holy Land shaped Jesus into an identity model embodying the values of the 19th-century British Empire, claiming that these values also originated in the geography of the Holy Land and have a continuity with Biblical Israel. Thus, Smith interpreted Jesus through the social lens of 19th-century Britain and used him to promote Victorian ideals, which are represented as identical with Christian ones. This is striking because Smith explicitly warned against the danger of the widespread anachronistic interpretation of Jesus as if he was a son of the contemporary times.[566]

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[557] Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 214.
[558] Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 136.
[559] Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 184, 187, 295, 112.
[560] Ibid., 193.
[561] Ibid., 115.
[562] Ibid., 112, 235.
[563] Ibid., 327.
[564] Ibid., 306.
[565] Smith, *Historical Geography*, 68, 203, 232, 419, 445.
[566] Ibid., 114.

Smith was deeply interested in how landscape influenced character development, and based on the description of the Holy Land in Deuteronomy 11, he claimed that the climate in the Holy Land breeds good morals by teaching people to obey God and trust in divine providence.[567] Also, since Jesus' personality was also shaped by this landscape, he stressed the importance of studying the geography of the Land of Israel to understand Jesus and to develop a strong national character.[568] However, he claims that the different geographical features of Galilee and Judea produce opposite character types, resulting in a moral conflict between the two regions, into which he explicitly reads the contemporary conflict between Scotland and England. Smith plainly states that "do we desire to look for a modern analogy for the difference between Judæa and Galilee in the time of our Lord, we shall find one in the differences between England and Scotland soon after the Union. But then Galilee had as much reason to resent the scorn of Judæa as Scotland the haughty tolerance of England".[569]

Smith also draws anti-Jewish conclusions from the geography of Judea, the most important feature of which for him is its isolated and unattractive nature, which predisposes a slow and stubborn functioning. and is the cause of the moral defects of its inhabitants: "selfishness, provincialism and bigotry" from the very beginning after the Israelite conquest of the Holy Land.[570] To illustrate that the situation remained the same in Jesus' time as well, he mentions that Judas Iscariot was also a Judean.[571] Smith argues that Judea's isolation was not strong enough to produce "the necessary elements of a nation's character" among its inhabitants,[572] who lack "spiritual initiative or expansion" but abounds in "concentration, indifference to the world, loyalty to the past, and passionate patriotism", which accounts for the "insane struggles" that led to its ultimate destruction.[573] Thus, Smith seems to claim that the Jews' national zeal *without* proper character traits is responsible for the destruction of the Temple, just as it happened at the first time.[574]

In contrast to Judea, Galilee's main characteristic is its (geographical, intellectual and moral) exposure to the Gentile world, which makes it immensely superior to both Judea and Samaria. Smith characterizes the population of Galilee as embodying Victorian British values being "men of courage [and] fidelity", and notes that Jesus chose his disciples from among the Galileans exactly for this reason. While Judeans were zealous for the law, Galileans were passionate about hope, thus the only thing he had to correct in them was their misguided messianic

[567] Ibid., 73–74.
[568] Ibid., 114, 302.
[569] Ibid., 427.
[570] Ibid., 259, 297.
[571] Ibid., 422. Smith says that "it was *not* a Galilean who betrayed Him" (italics his).
[572] Ibid., 299–300.
[573] Ibid., 259–60.
[574] See footnote 579 on page 121.

patriotism.[575] Smith even resorts to biological claims to assert that the "austere and fanatic temper of the Jew" (note the singular) also originates in the Judeans' interbreeding with desert Arabs, while the "chivalrous and a gallant race" of Galileans mixed with Canaanites and other Gentiles,[576] citing as proof for the latter the etymology of the name and the postexilic history of the region.[577] Against this backdrop, Smith sees it an irony of history that after the destruction of the Temple and the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt, Judean scribes found refuge in Galilee, "the province, which through so many centuries Judæa had contemned as profane and heretical", and it was Galilee that replaced Judea as the spiritual centre of Judaism. Smith sees this as the fulfilment of Jesus' prophetic words in Matthew 19:30 saying that "many who are first will be last, and the last will be first", which, he argues, occurs throughout Israel's history.[578]

Smith attempts to resolve the contradiction that the geography of Judah produce good and bad morals at the same time by explaining the difference diachronically. He presents a "dispensationalist geography" of sorts,[579] in which God's dealings with Judea are revealed in its historical geography, divided into three periods. The first is what we read in Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49:11–12, which suggests a fertile and overabundant region. The second period is the portrait in Isaiah 7:20–23, which says that a result of God's punishment in the form of the Assyrian invasion, Judah will be shaved as with a razor, which has been the case ever since. A third period described is the promise of restoration in Jeremiah 33:10–13, which states that the desolate wasteland of Judah will once again be filled with abundant pastoral life in the eschatological future.[580]

In all these Christian depictions, Galilee is characterized as good and familiar, representing freedom, and Judah/Jerusalem as bad and foreign, representing bondage and retrograde forces, consistent with the Christian interpretation of the role of the two traditions. In this respect, landscape is not only congealed history but also "congealed theology".

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[575] Smith, *Historical Geography*, 413–28.

[576] Ibid., 316.

[577] Smith understands the expression *gelil hagoyim* in Isaiah 8:23/9:1, traditionally translated as "Galilee of the nations" ("Nations" in NJPS, "Gentiles" in NKJV and NASB2020), as a common name meaning 'the region of the Gentiles', which later became a proper name: *Hagalil,* 'The Region'. For Smith, even the names of the two regions reflect the morality of their landscapes: "the one [Galilee] liquid and musical like her running waters, the other [Judea] dry and dead like the fall of your horse's hoof on her blistered and muffled rock". (Ibid., 422.).

[578] Ibid., 424–25.

[579] The influence of dispensationalism can also be seen in how Smith explains the Islamic conquest of the Levant as God's punishment for the "idolatry and materialism" of early Christianity and finds it ironic and theologically and morally significant that it took place exactly where monotheism was born. He compares the Islamic conquest to "the victory of Babylonia over Israel upon the same stage", which events prove the validity of the moral principles of the Bible, based on which false followers of the true faith deserve to be defeated by God's enemies because of the "folly of making a political kingdom the ambition of our faith". Smith seems to claim that the separation of church and state is under divine approval. (Ibid., 115–16.).

[580] Ibid., 308–9.

5.3.2. Premodern Jewish views

Martin Goodman emphasizes that there is no evidence to suggest that in the late Second Temple period, Galileans identified themselves as anything other than just Jews, and that many Gentiles lived among them. He refers to Josephus, who provides a detailed narrative set in Galilee but does not highlight any particularity in the Judaism practiced there. Nevertheless, later rabbinic texts preserve traditions that suggest differences in religious life compared to Judea, including family law, burial customs, observance of festivals, and taking vows. Also, Goodman points out the geographical distance between Galilee and Jerusalem could obviously lead to different views on the Temple and the priesthood, and there was also the linguistic difference as the vernacular of Galilee was an Aramaic dialect as opposed to Judea, where it was Rabbinic Hebrew.[581]

Concerning a possible antagonism Galilee and Judea, what we have is John 7:52, where "the chief priests and Pharisees" say that "no prophet is to arise from Galilee" and the Babylonian Talmud, which mentions in *Eruvin* 53b that Judeans are precise in their pronunciation in contrast to Galileans, who are not, and ridicules the misunderstandings and meaningless utterances that arise from it, and calls the Galileans stupid, compared to whom even the maidservant of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi is more intelligent. However, the Jerusalem Talmud is ambivalent: in *Shabbat* 16:8 it refers to a view that Galilee will serve its oppressors because it hates the Torah, while in *Ketubot* 4:14, it quotes the opinion of the people of Jerusalem, who say that "the people of Galilee care for their honour more than for their money; the people of Judea cared for their money more than for their honour".[582]

Two additional differences that are controversially discussed the Christian and Jewish historiography of the 19th century is the extent of the influence of Greek culture in Galilee and the characterization of its inhabitants as revolutionaries. Concerning the first, Goodman mentions that the evidence for or against this view is only circumstantial at best with dubious conclusions as to theological differences, since a possible increased contact with the Gentiles could lead to either protectiveness or openness.[583] As for the motif of Galilee being the hotbed of messianic revolutionism, Goodman notes that, among other things, it stems from Josephus' possibly

[581] Goodman, 'Galilean Judaism and Judean Judaism', 3:596-600 in: CHJ; Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, 3; Breuer, 'Amoraic Hebrew', 1:102. in: Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics. The dialectal difference between Judea and Galilee is also reflected in the Gospels in the scene of Peter's denial of Jesus, when bystanders in the courtyard of the High Priest, the venue of Jesus' trial, conclude from Peter's Galilean accent that he is one of Jesus' entourages (Matthew 26:73 and Mark 14:70).

[582] It was also used by Smith as a proof for the gentlemanliness of Galileans (Smith, *Historical Geography*, 782.).

[583] Goodman, 'Galilean Judaism and Judean Judaism', 3:610-613. in: CHJ.

tendentious description, particularly that of the revolt of a certain Judas the Galilean against the Census of Quirinius in 6 CE.[584] Goodman argues that the rebellion probably centred in Judea rather than Galilee, since the census this Judas opposed was not enforced in the northern region at that time. Goodman suspects that the idea that the Galileans were particularly prone to revolt may simply be "a Judaean stereotype" and asserts that there is no evidence that the Galileans embraced messianic ideas with more enthusiasm than other Jews.[585]

5.3.3. Modern Jewish thinkers

In this case study, the following modern Jewish thinkers are included: the assimilated Frenchman Joseph Salvador (1796–1873, see also section 6.1 on page 137), who gave the Galilee-Jerusalem antagonism a French social dimension; the *Wissenschaft* scholars Abraham Geiger and Heinrich Graetz, who expressed identical views of Galilee and Judah although interpreted Jesus antagonistically (see page 135); the Zionist Klausner continues the evaluation of Geiger and Graetz but A. A. Kabak, a Zionist novelist inspired by Klausner to write a novel on Jesus' life (see section 6.10 on page 187), romanticizes the rural Galilee as opposed to the harsh and dehumanizing Jerusalem; finally, the Lithuanian-born American Reform rabbi Hyman Enelow uses his positive image of Galilee to raise his voice for Eastern European Jewish immigrants and to popularize the dispersion of Jews into the American countryside from urban centres.

5.3.3.1. Joseph Salvador

In contrary to the Christian view, Joseph Salvador reverses the positive image of Galilee and the negative one of Jerusalem among Christian scholars. For Salvador, Galilee is a place of darkness and ignorance, subject to internal unrest, a land of messianic fervour and credulity, outside the moral influence of Jerusalem, where "the doctors and the most distinguished men of the nation" are found. Salvador uses the Gospel to support his claim by putting the words of Matthew 4:15–16 into Jesus' mouth, as if he was calling "Galilee of the Gentiles" "a region of shadow of death" where "people sit in darkness".[586] Salvador also emphasizes that in the synoptic gospels, the Jewish religious leaders go (or send emissaries) to Galilee to question him, but in

[584] Judas the Galilean is also mentioned in Acts 5:37, where he is identified, along with a one Theudas, by Rabban Gamaliel I, head of the Great Sanhedrin, as an example of failed messianic movements.

[585] Goodman, 'Galilean Judaism and Judean Judaism', 613–16.

[586] Matthew's quote, which is actually part of the narrative and not a saying of Jesus, as Salvador claims, is a midrash on Isaiah 8:23–9:1, interpreted by Salvador as a description of the spiritual atmosphere in Galilee.

John, the same questioning place in Jerusalem.[587] According to Salvador, the reason behind this contradiction is that the more educated John, who wrote his gospel outside the Holy Land, was embarrassed that Jesus' miracles impressed only the lower-class Galileans.[588]

Michael Graetz notes that for Salvador, "'Jerusalem' meant Paris; Moses' laws were equated with those of the French Republic; and the nation of the revolution of 1789 was called 'our Land of Israel'."[589] However, it seems that for Salvador, Jerusalem and Galilee symbolize not geographical but social dimensions, and the antagonism between Jerusalem and Galilee is transferred to the opposition of the contemporary enlightened intellectual elite with "the doctors" and the "National Council", who work to maintain the rule of law, and the uneducated lower classes, who are "dangerous for the social order",[590] which Salvador was greatly preoccupied with.

5.3.3.2. Geiger and Graetz

According to Geiger and Graetz, Galilee was far from Judea, the intellectual centre of Judaism, separated from it by Samaria, which led to poor Torah knowledge, rigid morality, fanatical dogmatism, superstition, little reflection, strong emotions, savageness and revolutionism, and Galilee became a hotbed of intense messianism.[591] These attributes sound very much like the religious conditions of Hassidic Eastern Europe, separated by Poland from Germany and Berlin, the centre of Jewish learning. Furthermore, Geiger and Graetz agree that the Galileans spoke a corrupted Hebrew, mixed with foreign elements, which revealed not only a Galilean the moment they opened their mouth, but also provoked the ridicule and rejection of educated Judeans.[592] This is analogous with the opinion of *Hochdeutsch*-speaking educated Jews on Yiddish, since until the beginning of the 20th century, Yiddish was regarded as "broken German, more of a linguistic mishmash than a true language".[593]

Given the bad reputation of Galilee, Geiger and Graetz argue that educated, intelligent, middle-class Judeans had good reasons not to be interested in the teachings of Jesus. Both authors emphasize that the saying "those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick" (Matthew 9:12) should be understood to mean that Jesus saw the Judean middle class as spiritually healthy; therefore, he had no interest in their spiritual improvement but limited

[587] Salvador provides examples of such incidents from Matthew and Mark but does not cite which Johannine passage he is referring to. Since to my knowledge, the Synoptic examples have no counterpart in John, Salvador's argument appears unfounded.

[588] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:264–65, 278–79.

[589] Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*, 9.

[590] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:111.

[591] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1893, II:129, 143, 148; Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, 130.

[592] Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, 129; Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1893, II:148–49.

[593] Johnson, 'Scholars Debate Roots of Yiddish, Migration of Jews'.

his activity to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24), i.e. to social outcasts for whom "the teachers of the Law […] failed to make the Law and the prophets intelligible" and who were "shunned from all sides".[594] Only "a small band who stood low and were despised by the bulk of the population"[595] and "belonging to the lowest classes attached themselves to Jesus and followed him".[596]

Although Geiger and Graetz do not say it openly, the message seems to be that the "uncultured masses"[597] of Eastern European Jews, especially Hasidim, are in danger of losing – or have probably even lost – their true Jewish identity because their distance from the centre of Jewish scholarship (Jerusalem in Antiquity and Berlin in the 19th century) resulted in a degraded intellectual life, the extent of which they are not even aware of.[598] Their situation is similar to that Galilean and Judean *amei-ha'arets,* in the first century, "who had no knowledge of the great healing truths of Judaism, […] were ignorant of its laws, and indifferent as to the glorious history of its past or its possible future", whom this ignorance made fanatical, superstitious and savage, and who ended up venerating a simple, uneducated moralist and preacher, a *Rebbe* of the time, as a supernatural being.[599] The polemics could be directed against both Hasidism and Christianity at the same time in favour of the "true spirit of Judaism", the goal of which according to Geiger is "the elevation of man to free and independent religiousness".[600] Both authors seem to argue that enlightened middle-class Jewish scholarship is able to offer uneducated masses a Jewish identity that is neither a Hasidic seclusion from the world nor the headlong embracing of Christianity, which latter has very little, if any, in common with the original teachings of Jesus anyway.

5.3.3.3. Joseph Klausner

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, the Zionist Klausner (see section 6.8 on page 173) presents the first-century Land of Israel, particularly Galilee but also Judea and Samaria, as a region superabundant in agricultural produce that was sufficient not only to feed the native population but even for the export, representing the region as the breadbasket of the Levant.[601] In Klausner's description, Galilee is a pleasant and gentle landscape in contrast to the majesty of Judean mountains, far away from Jerusalem and separated from Judea by Samaria, and mentions the negative premodern attitude of Judeans to Galileans.[602] In representing the intellectual conditions in Galilee

[594] Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, 134; Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1893, II:152.
[595] Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, 134.
[596] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1893, II:153.
[597] Ibid., II:157.
[598] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 61.
[599] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1893, II:152, 157.
[600] Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, 123.
[601] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 174–76.
[602] Ibid., 231.

as being far worse than its natural ones,[603] Klausner continues the attitude of Salvador, Geiger and Graetz by saying that compared to "the more sophisticated society of Jerusalem", Galilee was a faraway provincial and underdeveloped region "with primitive conditions", where "ignorance, disorder and injustice were there most frequent".[604] For Klausner, Galilee had never been a centre of the Law or a place for the higher classes, who could mitigate the harsh realities of Roman rule. The uneducated and simple Galilean people lived in villages, and the stark contrast between their political reality and prophetic ideals provoked them to political and religious extremism, especially among the youth, which manifested itself in the violent messianism of the Zealots and the mystics and visionaries, who turned into themselves and dreamed of a better future.[605]

Klausner concludes that due to the entire first-century Land of Israel was filled with dissatisfied revolutionaries,[606] "the whole of Galilee was a boiling cauldron of rebels, malcontents and ardent 'seekers after God'",[607] as a result of which there were a large number of Galilean brigands and bandits hastening the coming of the Messiah by the sword.[608] Klausner claims that Galilee was also more suitable than Judea to be the cradle of zealotism[609] for psychological reasons as well. The protracted wars in the region and the oppression of Herod and the Romans led to large-scale poverty and unemployment, which is why "Palestine, especially Galilee, was filled with the sick and suffering and with those pathological types which we now label neurasthenics and psychasthenics [...] especially hysterical women and all manner of 'nerve cases'—dumb, epileptics, and the semi-insane", which conditions were viewed as possessions of the devil or unclean spirits, and belief in cures performed by miracle-makers was widespread.[610] For Klausner, messianic extremism, which arises from ignorance, hopelessness, and psychological conditions, explains why Jesus emerged and became popular in Galilee.[611]

Klausner polemicizes not only internally but also externally against the prevailing Christian view of Judea and Galilee. Although he accepts the 19th-century view that the Jewish inhabitants of Galilee were outnumbered by Gentiles,[612] but in order to promote the Jewishness of Jesus over the already developed hypothesis of the Aryan Jesus,[613] he emphasizes that Nazareth was exclusively Jewish until the fourth century.[614] And although the intellectual conditions of Judea and Galilee are contrasted in favour of the former, Klausner stresses national unity when he argues for the courageous, self-sacrificing heroism of the Jews (Judeans and Galileans united)

[603] Ibid., 174–92.
[604] Ibid., 171, 105, 142.
[605] Ibid., 171–73.
[606] Ibid., 153.
[607] Ibid., 237.
[608] Ibid., 141–42, 251.
[609] Ibid., 142, 153.
[610] Ibid., 266.
[611] Ibid., 142.
[612] Ibid., 135.
[613] See footnote 1026 on page 196.
[614] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 231.

against the attempted desecration of the Temple by the Caius Caligula at the time of Jesus. By mentioning that such heroism produced religious and moral heroes like Hillel the Elder, for whom Judaism was the democratic "Law of life" rather than the elitist "Law of death", Klausner argues against the Christian view that by Jesus' time, Judaism became "petrified and Pharisaic hypocrisy prevailed, when the Jewish religion was nothing but the observance of the ceremonial laws in hope of future reward".[615]

In his reconstruction, Klausner apparently also projects contemporary intra-Jewish antagonisms back into the late Second Temple period, Jerusalem representing the secular Jewish elite and Galilee the ignorant diaspora Jewry, particularly that of the Pale of Settlement.[616]. His use of the Jerusalem versus Galilee opposition to describe contemporary conditions within Judaism sounds very similar to that of Geiger and Graetz. Furthermore, by characterizing Jesus as nothing more and nothing less than a Jewish "messiah of the usual type",[617] who is a dime a dozen, Klausner manages to reclaim Jesus for the Jewish people as part and parcel of the conditions prevailing at the time and to downplay his significance at the same time.

5.3.3.4. Aaron Kabak

In his description of Galilee, Klausner echoes the city versus village dichotomy, introduced by Renan, by saying that Galilee "had no cities approaching the scale of Jerusalem nor, till the time of Antipas, even towns of the scale of Jericho".[618] This theme was continued by the Zionist writer Aaron Abraham Kabak in his novel on Jesus' life titled *The Narrow Path* (see section 6.10 on page 187).

Interestingly, Kabak presents the conditions in Jerusalem and Galilee in a similar way as other Jewish thinkers before him, but strikingly, his evaluation is the opposite and closely resembles the Christian ones. In the novel, although poverty is rampant in Gailee, Jesus, unimpressed by the glory and splendour of the Temple, feels more at home in Galilee than in Jerusalem. He shares this feeling with many in Judea and Galilee who are dissatisfied with the bustling atmosphere of Jerusalem and disapprove of the haughty Sadducees and strict Pharisees. They find the Temple practices objectionable, as they witness priests aggressively competing during sacrifices and arguing over the distribution of palm branches on the Sabbath of Tabernacles. Honest pilgrims, motivated by love for God to participate in Israel's celebrations, follow religious commandments, and engage in the festival of the first fruits, often leave Jerusalem

[615] Ibid., 222–23.
[616] Klausner mentions that unlike Judea, the uneducated Galileans did not speak Hebrew, which sounds as a Zionist argument for the importance of Hebrew language (Ibid., 263.).
[617] Ibid., 142.
[618] Ibid., 173.

discouraged.[619] After having visited Jerusalem twice in his childhood, Jesus never returned there as an adult but felt more connected to God in the hills of Galilee, where God was seen as a kind and approachable Father, putting aside his throne and royal garb to interact kindly with his creation.[620] When Jesus and his disciples finally appear in Jerusalem before his arrest at Passover, they wander the streets in shabby clothes, as mendicant monks of sorts, confused by the tumult of the city, until they grow tired of the townspeople, who show arrogance, insolence, and haughtiness, in contrast to the humbler behaviour of the Galileans. Jerusalem's atmosphere overwhelms the spirit of the fishermen of Capernaum, weighing on them as heavily as the city's towering structures and magnificent mansions, only to find peace in the nearby village of Bethany.[621]

In the novel, Jesus' dislike of Jerusalem is also reflected in the Judeans' prejudices against and contempt for the Galileans, which appears in two instances. The first one is the event, also reported in the Gospel, when the child Jesus, overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of the Jerusalem, drifts away from his parents, gets lost, and ends up in the hall of the Sanhedrin, where the sages, although happy that he is well-versed in the Torah, are amused by his Galilean accent.[622] The second one is in his adulthood, when the religious leaders discuss what to do with him after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday before Passover, which made him and his followers familiar and popular figures there, the High Priest's son-in-law calls Jesus a "Galilean lunatic"[623] and begins "discussing the half-wits and lunatics whose number had increased of late, and explained to the gathering why there were so many rebels against authority among the Galileans".[624]

The Jerusalem vs. Galilee antagonism also appears in the untranslated Chapter 13 of Part 1[625] in connection with Thomas' impressions with these two places. After living the life of an assimilated Jew in the house of his rich Alexandrian uncle Dorotheus (who eventually becomes his father-in-law) under the Greek name Didymus,[626] Thomas is bored with the superficiality of rich life and social inequalities and decides to make an *"aliyah"* because he thinks he will find divine righteousness in the Land of Israel. However, soon he becomes disappointed by

[619] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 147–48.
[620] Ibid., 149.
[621] Ibid., 371–73.
[622] Ibid., 148–49. Note that the Gospel story (Luke 2:41–52) suggests that Jesus does not simply drift away from his parents in the city, but *intentionally* stays behind in Jerusalem when the others leave. Kabak uses a subtle irony here by depicting the sages as being happy that the Torah has a bright future with this smart little boy, unsuspecting of what will happen when Jesus grows up, and especially after his death.
[623] Echoing *b*Eruvin 63b, see page 122.
[624] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 371.
[625] See footnote 978 on page 186.
[626] According to the novel, the name Didymus is made up ad-hoc by one of his uncle's servants and Thomas does not know its meaning. It seems Kabak was unaware that both the Aramaic *te'oma* and the Greek *didymos* means "twin", which is the meaning of his name according to John 11:16.

Jerusalem and the same social inequalities he saw in Alexandria, to find tranquillity and God's service only in the Galilean countryside, where "Jews were simpler, working the land, engaging in crafts, and serving the Creator with love".[627]

Kabak's description of the antagonism between the Jerusalemites and the Galileans can be understood as another projection of a contemporary historical setting back into Jesus' time as if its problems had been relevant then. Kabak actually seems to describe his own situation, when modern secular Jews got disappointed in the rigorous religious life of Judaism but valued its traditions while perceiving the formality of traditional Judaism as an obstacle to the honest search for God. Seen this way, Jerusalem represents traditional rabbinic Judaism, while Galilee and the Jesus movement represents progressive Zionism.

5.3.3.5. Hyman Gerson Enelow

Enelow also sees the environment alongside cultural heritage as a character-forming element, and emphasizes that Jesus can only be understood in relation to his environment.[628] However, unlike his predecessors, he argues that the character of Jesus was shaped by *both* Galilee and Jerusalem.[629] In his 1920 book titled *A Jewish View of Jesus,* he portrays the antagonism in a very Christian way, describing Galilee positively and Jerusalem negatively. In order to reclaim Jesus the Galilean for Judaism, he emphasizes the purity of Galilee in contrast to the corruption of Jerusalem, similarly to Kabak's novel. Enelow is basically saying that while Galilee formed Jesus through its natural environment, Jerusalem did it through its socioreligious and cultural setting.

Enelow's Galilee is one of the most populous areas of the Land of Israel, also with the most mixed population, which includes, in addition to Jews, Phoenicians, Arabs, Syrians, and Greeks. However, he emphasizes that the way of life there was thoroughly Jewish, although different from that in Judea, but he does not consider it as a problem in itself asserting that the people of Israel have never been uniform. He characterizes the Galileans as a temperamental and tolerant people due to their increased contact with the Gentiles and "more informal than the Judeans, less bound by rules and regulations, more spontaneous, less learned and more poetic, less legalistic and more lyrical". Enelow points to the Judeans' contempt for the Galileans, attributing the Galileans' impure language "to lack of good teachers and to indifference".[630] Contrasting the

[627] ראשית דרכו היתה לירושלים. בבית־המקדש עמד מרעיד ונרעש עד עמקי לבו. אך מראה העניים, וביחוד החנוָנים, בחצרות הר־הבית הכאיבו מאד. תושבי ירושלים אף הם לא הניחו את דעתו. ביניהם היו עשירים יותר מדי, כמו חותנו, והיו עניים יותר מדי, כמו אותם שבחצרו. שוב אותה התהום בין בני־אדם. עמד והלך אל הגליל. שם היהודים פשוטים יותר, עובדים את האדמה, עוסקים באומנויות ועובדים את הבורא באהבה. (Kabak, 'Bamishol hatsar'.)

[628] Enelow, *A Jewish View of Jesus*, 43.

[629] Ibid., 31.

[630] Ibid., 34–35.

negative image of Galilee in Judaism, Enelow emphasizes that Galilee was the home of famous rabbis, including the aforementioned Yose Hagelili (Y. the Galilean), "the learned and magnanimous rabbi of the first century", who was held in high regard by Rabbi Akiva.[631] Enelow praises the Galileans as "brave, courageous and industrious [who] knew no cowardice [but] gave heroes and martyrs to the cause of Jewish emancipation from the yoke of Rome".[632] Thus, Enelow states that first-century Galilee was a perfect home for Jesus, "a dreamer and […] a poet of Nature and human life".[633]

According to Enelow, Jerusalem, in contrast to Galilee, made an ambivalent impression on Jesus, who was devoted to and loved the city, whose splendour must have made a deep impression on his "quick and poetic mind" in his childhood. At first, he admired Jerusalem but then looked behind the scenes and "realized the meaning of the intrigues, and ambitions, and rivalries, and hypocrisies that centered about the Temple", which made Jesus disappointed because he saw his dream violated by the corrupt religious leadership. Enelow emphasizes that Jesus' revolt against "the pompous and hypocritical Temple piety" was not an attack against Judaism itself but rather the indignation of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible against the real destroyers of the otherwise beloved establishment.[634] With this thought, Enelow places Jesus into Israel's prophetic tradition to support his reclamation for the Jewish people. In summary, Enelow's Jesus was an idiosyncratic holy man, who very much resembles Francesco, the future St. Francis of Assisi as portrayed in Franco Zeffirelli's *Brother Sun and Sister Moon,* as a sensitive and temperamental young person disappointed by the corrupt and superficial high society of his age and "taught by the mountains and the sea of Galilee, as well as by the lily and the sparrow".[635]

A parallel can be observed between the way Enelow presents the Galilee vs. Jerusalem dichotomy and his contemporary social concerns, particularly the antagonism of the elite and the egalitarian strata of contemporary American Jewish society. Ben-Sasson points out that by Enelow's time, the United States had become the largest Jewish centre in the world, its population almost quintupling in the first 30 years of the 20th century to reach 4.5 million in early 30s.[636] Since such growth was primarily due to the immigration of Eastern European Jews, social and philanthropic organizations played an important role in Jewish communal life. In this regard, Efron, Lehmann and Weizman note that in New York in the early 1920s, a sharp opposition developed between settled aristocratic German "uptown" Jews and newly immigrated Yiddish-speaking "downtown" Jews from Eastern Europe. Wealthy American Jews were ashamed of their

[631] Ta-Shma, 'Yose Ha-Gelili', 21:399-400. in: EJ.
[632] Enelow, *A Jewish View of Jesus*, 35.
[633] Ibid., 32.
[634] Ibid., 41–42.
[635] Ibid., 38–39. We must not forget that like Enelow's Jesus, Zeffirelli's Francesco is also an anachronistic construct "presented as the original hippie" (Reed, 'Brother Sun, Sister Moon'.).
[636] Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 984.

poor brethren and feared that anti-Semites would bracket them with Eastern European immigrants.[637] To handle the situation, they created institutions to "civilize" them. Concerning the immigrants' feelings, Efron, Lehmann and Weizman cite a contemporary observation that in the buildings of the philanthropic institutions run by aristocratic German Jews, poor Eastern European Jews felt overwhelmed by the "beautiful offices, desks, all decorated, but strict and angry faces" and felt more at home in the ones run by Eastern Europeans, regardless of their shabby appearance.[638] It sounds is similar to the way Jesus might have felt in the Temple as opposed to Galilee according to Enelow. This intra-Jewish social antagonism closely resembles what one can observe in among the case of Wissenschaft thinkers, but the answer Enelow gives is exactly the opposite, as if he had seen the problem from the other side, through the eyes of an Eastern European immigrants, himself one of them.

Enelow also constructs an antagonism within the Jewish leadership of Jesus' time between the elitist aristocracy of the Sadducees and the more democratic Pharisees, "the true friends of the people".[639] This seems to parallel the situation mentioned by Ben-Sasson that the two main social and philanthropic organizations that played an important role in Jewish communal life were the elitist American Jewish Committee and more egalitarian American Jewish Congress, the latter representing "all the trends and opinions of American Jewish life".[640] Moreover, his characterization of Galilee as a multiethnic and multicultural environment may reflect his view of America as a similar multiethnic and multicultural society. Additionally, Hasia Diner notes that America viewed cities as unnatural and urban life as antithetical to national values,[641] so Enelow's praise of rural Galilee as the perfect home for the Jews in contrast to "the capital" of Jerusalem can be interpreted as an incitement or desire for urban American Jewish masses to disperse in rural America, maybe to create an American Pale of Settlement so to speak. Strikingly, he uses the figure of Jesus and his imagined social and geographical setting for this purpose.

5.3.4. Conclusions

The Holy Land was reclaimed by both Christian and Jewish thinkers, who exploited its geography in a variety of ways, based on the common premises of the binary construct of 1st-century Holy Land and of the romantic idea that landscape influences character. Furthermore, both parties projected the problems of their time into the constructed and geographically based antagonisms of Second Temple Judaism. When it came to Jesus, however, the Christian

[637] Diner, 'The United States', 8:175. in: CHJ.
[638] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 375.
[639] Enelow, *A Jewish View of Jesus*, 40.
[640] Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 985.
[641] Diner, 'The United States', 8:175. in: CHJ.

interpretations were overwhelmingly in favour of Galilee, while Jewish intellectuals reached ambivalent conclusions, mostly opposing the Christian view (Salvador, Geiger, Graetz, and Klausner) but sometimes agreeing with it (Enelow and Kabak).

6. The modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus through the Suffering Servant

This chapter is primarily about how modern Jewish thinkers reclaimed Jesus for the Jewish people through their collective interpretation of the Suffering Servant. The hidden Jewish reclamation of Jesus through this Biblical character is based on (1) the Christian interpretation of the Servant and (2) Rashi's revolutionary understanding of the Suffering Servant, and (3) the Hegelian concept of *Volksgeist,* meaning that a nation can be represented as a single person, who has a distinct spirit and a defined historical mission.[642] The main difference between the premodern and the modern reclamation of Jesus is that the premodern version is covert in its topic and language as well, while the modern one is overt on the surface as it speaks openly about Jesus, but its language is covertly Christological in many cases. Besides emphasizing the Jewishness of the historical human being Jesus of Nazareth, in their speaking about the Jewish people using Christological language, Jewish thinkers tended to put the Jewish people in the position Jesus Christ fulfils in Christian theology, representing Israel not as the Messiah in the traditional Jewish sense of the word as a glorious human king but as Christ in the Christian senses: the redeemer of the world, who saves people through his sufferings. Thus, what they do is apparently the adoption of Christian messianism or Christology and can be termed the "Jewish reclamation of Christ".

In *Defending the Faith: Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Writings on Christianity and Jesus,* George Berlin notes that Reform Jews not only sought to deprive Christianity of Jesus by emphasizing his Jewishness, but also adopted his Passion narrative, arguing that it better reflected the Jewish religious experience.[643] He calls it "a new application of the Isaian suffering servant motif".[644] However, aside from the fact that Berlin focuses on American authors, this method is not unique to them only, and as we have seen, the understanding that the Suffering Servant symbolizes Israel and its suffering is a sacrifice for the sins of the nations is by no means new, as it goes back to ancient times through Rashi. Matthew Hoffman speaks of a dialectical "blend of assimilationist acquiescence and polemical self-assertion" on the part of modern Jewish thinkers, whose aim is to secure a place for Jews in Western society by redefining of 'Jew', 'Christian', and 'West' and also by reinterpreting Jesus to form a counternarrative to the Christian one.[645] It is also important to note that the treatment of historical and contemporary Jewish suffering by modern Jewish thinkers seems to fit the futuristic trend of 19th-century

[642] See footnote 190 on page 47.
[643] Berlin, *Defending the Faith*, 53.
[644] Ibid.
[645] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 51–52.

historiography. As François Hartog puts it, futurism is characterized by a belief in "perfectibility and progress that not only the past—considered outmoded—but also the present were devalorized in the name of the future. The present, as nothing but the eve of a better if not a radiant morrow, could, and indeed should, be sacrificed".[646]

Hoffman surveys Jewish authors who conceptualized Israel as a "nation of Christs" and understood Jewish suffering in Christological terms. However, similarly to Berlin, he limits the application of the Suffering Servant to the Jewish people to American authors only,[647] which again, gives the impression that this type of interpretation was characteristic of American Jewish thinkers and was their innovation. Joel Rembaum, in his article entitled *The Development of a Jewish Exegetical Tradition regarding Isaiah 53,* discusses Graetz and Klausner as modern European Jews who interpreted the Suffering Servant as a symbol of the Jewish people, but ignores other influential figures such as Samuel Hirsch, Abraham Geiger, David Einhorn, Kaufmann Kohler, Hermann Cohen, and also unusual ones such as Eliyahu Soloveitchik and Eliyahu Benamozegh.

In my survey, I included as diverse Jewish thinkers as possible, preferably the aforementioned ones underrepresented in scholarship, to show how they used the figure of the Suffering Servant to construct a collective Jewish identity similarly, interpreting Israel's historical mission using the same Christological language and latently adopting the Christian concept of Christ in their discourse, doing so irrespective of their not infrequently contradictory conclusions regarding the meaning and solution of the Jewish Diaspora existence. In my view, their arguments tend to have three distinct layers. On the surface, their position is usually one of tolerance and respect for Jesus and Christianity, but the reclamation of Jesus for Judaism constitutes a second layer of powerful polemics, reinforced by the third, their use of Christological language, through which they internalize not only the subject of the discourse but also its vehicle for Judaism. In this chapter, I am concentrating on the third layer.

Joseph Salvador used the Suffering Servant to argue for a communal Jewish existence in opposition to the assimilationist policies of the French government. The two *Wissenschaft* scholars, Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) and Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) categorized Jesus into two different branches of Second Temple Judaism. Both viewed Pharisaism as a forerunner of their own movement, but the conservative Graetz took a negative stance by classifying Jesus as a rebellious Essene, while Geiger took up his figure as a precursor of Reform Judaism by describing Jesus as a Pharisee. However, both used Christological language to assert the Suffering Servant as a collective symbol for the entire Jewish people (Graetz) or its righteous remnant understood

[646] Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 13.

[647] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 55–60.

as Reform Judaism (Geiger). The Reform rabbi Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889) was not interested in the historical Jesus but rather presented Israel as a collective Christ whose function is the redemption of humanity by holding a mirror up to the nations until they themselves recognize their own errors. Reform rabbi Kaufmann Kohler (1843–1926), took a markedly anti-Zionist position, and argued using the Servant that Diaspora existence was a sacrifice in itself, which Jews have undertaken willingly to atone for the sins of humankind. Lithuanian Talmudist Eliyahu Soloveitchik (c.1805–1881) viewed Jesus as a Talmudist Essene and the Evangelists as Talmudists,[648] embracing Jesus and the entire early Christian movement as belonging to his own stream of Judaism. The Italian Kabbalist Eliyahu Benamozegh (1823–1900) understood Jesus to be a Kabbalist and is somewhat off the mark here because he identified Israel with Jesus in a uniquely obscure way without ever referring to the Suffering Servant. However, I still included him on the list precisely because of this deafening silence. Joseph Klausner (1874–1958) used the figure of Jesus to construct an identity model for the Zionist concept of the "New Hebrew Man"[649] and used the Suffering Servant as a vehicle to argue for the Zionist project, the participants of which he understood as the "remnant" of Israel, the Messiah of the world. The neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) was uninterested in the historical Jesus because he approached the topic on ethical grounds. Although he viewed the Isaian Servant Songs as a literary prototype of the Gospel's passion narrative, he reclaimed Jesus through the Servant and considered suffering in the Diaspora as a privilege for Jews and righteous Gentiles. Since I treat the writings of these thinkers as historical documents, in my survey, I am not concerned with the scientific validity of their statements. Rather, I am focusing on what they say and what the implications of their messages are. Although the Zionist novelist A. A. Kabak does not mention the Suffering Servant, let alone identifying him with the Jewish people, his novel about Jesus' life covertly internalizes Christian values and ideals and puts them at the service of his Zionism in a remarkable manner.

What these authors did is more than the classical reclamation of Jesus for the Jewish people by emphasizing his Jewishness; rather, it represents the incorporation of the theological concept of Christ into Jewish thought. It is as though there were a theological role—the Christ—where Christian theology places Jesus. In the Christian quest, Jesus was removed from this role and replaced, if at all, only implicitly with the ideals of the enlightened bourgeois nation. Inspired by this shift, Jewish thinkers also separated Jesus from the concept of Christ, reclaiming the historical figure for Judaism and filling the theological role with Israel, drawing on the image of the Suffering Servant. This substitution established a theological category that is generally

[648] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament,* 82, 95, 292, 362.

[649] Stahl, 'Jesus as the New Jew'.

foreign or peripheral to Judaism, as the Jewish Messiah traditionally lacks the role of a saviour who removes sin through suffering and death; yet Jewish scholars interpreted Israel in this way.

6.1. Joseph Salvador

Although Salvador's Sephardic father allegedly descended from the Maccabees (hence the family name meaning 'Saviour'), his mother was Roman Catholic, so halakhically he was not Jewish; in addition, he was buried in a Protestant cemetery at his own request.[650] Nevertheless, he identified himself as a Jew,[651] and was considered as such by is French critics and biographers, including his nephew, Gabriel Salvador,[652] and Zionist historians considered him a forerunner of Zionism.[653] More recent Jewish authors also regard him as a modern Jewish thinker.[654] Although Michael Graetz notes that "strictly speaking, Salvador has no place in the history of French Jewry in the 19th century" because his "conduct and mode of life seem nothing less than a protest against organized Jewish society and the practices of its members", he also acknowledges that "he praises the "Hebrew people", to whom he attributes an enormous role in the history of humankind. His research foregrounded the perennial nature of Israel and its mission and inspired pride among the intellectual elite of French Jews. It contributed as well to the elaboration of a new Jewish mentality. How, then, could we ignore Salvador and consider his work irrelevant?"[655]

The background to Salvador's interpretation of Jesus is the challenges of the French Revolution for Jewry summarized in 1789 by a representative to the National Assembly, who said

[650] Singer, 'Salvador, Joseph', 10:662. The funeral, however, was officiated by the rabbi of Nîmes.

[651] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 25.

[652] Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 1; Salvador, *J. Salvador*, 23–26.

[653] Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 2; Skolnik and Berenbaum, 'Salvador, Joseph', 17:712. It is apparently due to a single passage in *Loi de Moïse* on the possible return of Jews to the Holy Land and the rebirth of Jerusalem as the successor of Rome as a fulfilment of Deuteronomy 30:4–5, which promises that even if Israel is scattered to the farthest parts of the earth, God will gather them and bring them back to the land of their ancestors, where they will prosper and multiply (Salvador, *Loi de Moïse*, 455.). However, Paula Hyman observes that it has little to do with Zionism because according to Salvador's passage, the restoration of Jerusalem and the Jewish settlement would not take place because of a Jewish effort and not even an act of God, but upon the initiative of the Gentile nations. (Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 6.). In the part of the passage not translated by Hyman, Salvador claims that such a restoration will take place when the nations, having attained an elevated level of reason and liberty, would offer the Holy Land to the Jews out of sheer warm-hearted generosity and a moral obligation because its soil "has become infertile under the feet of the sons of the Crescent", thus they have less right to live there than the Jews, who are worthy to possess it by way of cultivating it. Salvador basically says that in the enlightened messianic age of reason, liberty, and justice, European nations will have right to give a piece of land belonging to the Ottoman Empire to any nation that deserves it.

[654] Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, 56, 57; Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 1; Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 134; Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 25; Homolka, *Jesus Reclaimed*, 31; Homolka, *Jewish Jesus Research*, 50.

[655] Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*, 6–7.

that "the Jews should be denied everything as a nation but granted everything as individuals."[656] This attitude led to Judaism being perceived as a "religion" in the sense of a private faith without the possibility of forming a nationality, and the people of Israel being referred to as "Frenchmen of the Mosaic persuasion".[657] This position undermined the communal nature of Judaism and the authority of rabbinical courts and was perceived as a threat to traditional Jewish identity. However, Jews were not alone in this situation: Pierre Birnbaum notes that the revolutionary government aimed to assimilate other particularist groups such as Bretons and Occitans, making them give up their distinctive "national" identities and collective rights to become individual citizens of France instead.[658]

Obviously, traditionalist Jews resisted their individualistic emancipation by the revolutionary nation state. They feared from antisemitic attacks, from which they thought only the kings could protect them and took pride in being directly subordinated to the king. Ben-Sasson talks about "an aristocratic attitude towards the outer world"[659] among medieval Jewry, and according to Yerushalmi, they considered themselves a kind of aristocracy, "servants of kings and not servants of servants".[660] In the *Ancien Régime,* Jews and others saw their servitude to the king not as a mark of humiliation but as a mark of their elevated status, something that needed to be nurtured. No wonder, Jewish communities were hesitant to become ruled by the former subjects of the kings, who demanded the dissolution of the *kahal*.

Salvador celebrated the emancipation as a gracious act on the part of "noble France", a "fatherland of generous sentiments", which "opened her bosom" to the Jews.[661] Contrary to Salvador's praise, however, the motives of Jewish emancipation had an anti-Jewish trait as well. Efron, Lehmann and Weitzman note that it was not a purely philanthropic act in the supposed spirit of the Enlightenment but a test case for "the revolution's ability to transform the degraded and corrupt [Jews] into model revolutionary citizens".[662] Moreover, as Ben-Sasson highlights, the majority population still considered Jews as aliens and treated them as such, and regular outbursts against the Alsatian Jews ultimately led to the establishment of the Grand Sanhedrin

[656] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 275.
[657] Ibid., 278.
[658] Birnbaum, 'Jews and the Modern State', 296.
[659] Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 389.
[660] Yerushalmi, 'Serviteurs des rois et non serviteurs des serviteurs', 34. The expression comes from the 15th century Spanish rabbi and philosopher Isaac Arama, who, in his highly influential commentary to the Torah titled *Akedat Yitzhak,* compares the Diaspora situation to Israel's slavery in Egypt with this expression. Apparently, Arama took the idea from the halakhic midrashim *Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael* and *Sifra*, which cite Deuteronomy 7:8 that juxtaposes "the house of slavery" and "the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" as proof that the Israelites "were servants of kings and not servants of servants" (**עבדים למלכים היו ולא עבדים לעבדים**) (Lauterbach, *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, 2:318; Weiss, *Sifra debe rav*, 111 (**קיא**).
[661] Salvador, *Loi de Moïse*, 249–50.
[662] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 275–78.

by Napoleon in 1806.[663] All this demonstrated that there is much to be done in the "battle to save the dignity of Judaism."[664]

In this climate, Salvador's goal was to demonstrate that Jews are honourable *as a collective* and not only as individual citizens. To achieve this, he goes at great length to prove the historical contribution of Jews to the emergence of Western civilization that ultimately attained the era of reason and enlightenment through the French Revolution. In doing so, he practically reclaims the entire history of European civilization, which he saw culminating in the Enlightenment: from Greek philosophy to the concept of the modern nation state. Salvador's representation of Jesus and early Christianity is subordinated to this overarching narrative, in which Abraham is the founder of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité,*[665] transformed by Moses into a political reality with a real people and a nation state,[666] and Jesus is the means through whom Judaism reached the Gentiles with these ideas. His argument is that Judaism is not to be rejected as obsolete because it was able to provide everything that was necessary for Christianity, and Judaism was the channel through which Eastern and Greek ideas got their way into Christianity.[667] Salvador contributed to this with his interpretation of Jesus.

In Salvador's work, Jesus first appears in a footnote in *Loi de Moïse*, where he vindicates the fairness of Jesus' trial before and death sentence by the Sanhedrin as represented in the Gospels on two grounds: he committed blasphemy according to the Torah by speaking of himself as God, and he threatened social stability by agitating the lower classes. At the same time, Salvador acquits the Jews of the ill-treatment Jesus received during his trial as being contrary to the spirit of the Torah,[668] and of the brutality of his execution as well, blaming the Romans for "the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus Christ […] for the law did not order these two kinds of punishment against the Israelites".[669] For this view Salvador received harsh criticism, according to which his argument was an apology of deicide purposefully attacking the foundations of Christianity.[670] These criticisms motivated him to elaborated his views on Jesus of Nazareth and Early Christianity in *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine* (Jesus Christ and his doctrine), and his vision in *Paris, Rome, Jérusalem*. The former is considered to be the first modern history of Jesus written by a Jew until Joseph Klausner.[671] In the latter, Salvador outlined a universal creed based on either reformed

[663] Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, 800.
[664] Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*, 181.
[665] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:72.
[666] Ibid., 1:73–74.
[667] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1:106.
[668] Salvador, *Loi de Moïse*, 201–6.
[669] Ibid., 200.
[670] Salvador, *J. Salvador*, 32–46.
[671] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 27; Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 134.

Judaism or a combination of Judaism and Christianity, which he saw as the direct descendant of the original form of Judaism, with Jerusalem as its centre.[672]

Salvador used the canonical and extracanonical gospels[673] to draw a coherent picture of Jesus, interpreting him within what he believed to be first-century historical Jewish context, representing him as someone through whom a Jewish hope and a Jewish destiny is fulfilled.[674] In doing so, Salvador's novelty lies in his consideration of first-century Judaism not only a monolithic entity but in the recognition of its diversity and his attempt to place Jesus and the early Christian movement within this diverse Judaism.[675] For him, the early Christian movement was not something new but thoroughly embedded in contemporary Judaism. Salvador argues that through Jesus, Christianity took all its basic tenets from all first-century Jewish "sects",[676] so Christianity is indebted to the entire Jewish nation for its existence because each "school" of Judaism provided nascent Christianity "with all the elements necessary for its first creation:[677] not only the "the great inner schools of Judea", i.e. the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes, but also "the outside schools" or Oriental Jews, whom Salvador considers to be the Egyptian Therapeutae, the Babylonian Kabbalists, and the Alexandrian Hellenists.[678]

The Pharisees gave Christianity mission as referred to by Jesus in his remark that they "cross sea and land to make a single convert" (Matthew 23:15), which for Salvador, indicates their openness to Gentiles.[679] The Sadducees promulgated the linear view of history and progress of the Enlightenment, leading to a universal happiness. They also rejected blind fate and proclaimed the total autonomy of humans, making us, "the essential reason for our successes or misfortunes". The Essenes gave Christianity the practice of celibacy and monasticism, as well as the elevated morality of the Gospels and the belief of reward and punishment after death.[680] The Therapeutae provided Christianity with the healing of the soul and ascetism, and the Kabbalists contributed with the concept of *Adam Kadmon,* which became the high Christology of Logos

[672] This focus on Jerusalem was another reason that caused Jewish historians to consider Salvador as an early advocate of Zionism, but he actually dreamed of a "heavenly Jerusalem" (cf. Ezekiel 40–48 and Revelation 21:9–27), serving as the spiritual capital of a universal society and not of a restored Jewish people. Both books were put on index by the Catholic Church (Skolnik and Berenbaum, 'Salvador, Joseph', 712.).

[673] The Gospels of James and Nicodemus (Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1:158, 166.)

[674] Ibid., 1:191–92.

[675] Homolka, *Jewish Jesus Research*, 51.

[676] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1:115.

[677] Ibid., 1:107–8.

[678] Ibid., 1:65–57. Later, we will examine one of Salvador's.

[679] Salvador also contests the popular negative Christian view of the different parties of Judaism represented in the Gospels, especially the Pharisees by adopting the language and outlook of the French Revolution. Salvador claims that they were in majority in the "national council of the country," (Ibid., 1:113.) suggesting that their leadership was based on social contract. Thus, according to Salvador's view that Mosaism is the source of Enlightenment, he imagines first-century Judaism to be an entity similar to revolutionary France.

[680] Ibid., 1:111–20.

theology as expressed in John 1 and the Paulinian concept of Jesus being the spiritual or heavenly Adam of 1Corinthians 15. Hellenistic Judaism gave the Septuagint and the wisdom of Ben Sira, which made the Church capable of expressing its message in Greek language and form. Also, the philosophy of Philo made it possible for the Church to reach the educated and not to remain the cult of the lower classes.[681] Thus, the novelty of Christianity, lies not in the transcendence of Judaism in any way but in the amalgamation of the best of all its varieties.

Salvador reminds that Christianity also openly admits its Jewish origins by the "axiom" that Jesus' life and doctrine were the perfect fulfilment and ultimate realization not only of the hopes and morals of the entire Hebrew Bible and Jewish "national theories".[682] For example with the scene of the transfiguration, the Gospels themselves declare that Moses and Elijah, the two most important Jewish heroes of faith support Jesus and hand their power over him, approved by a divine voice.[683] However, for Salvador, not only is Jesus the "final realization" of the messianic hopes "contained in the sacred books of the Jews, or propagated by the popular voice",[684] but he considers the Gospels Jewish writings, citing the New Testament as proof. Salvador points out that even the word *euangelion* is from the LXX version of Isaiah,[685] and emphasizes the Jewishness of the authors and the audience of the Gospels as representing the various phases of nascent Christianity.[686]

In making his point, Salvador occasionally makes unique claims about first-century Judaism and the origins of Christianity, the historical and philological truthfulness of which are highly questionable and sometimes their implications are exactly the opposite of what he intended to prove. One of these is that Judaism influenced even Christian liturgy, such as the Catholic Holy Thursday liturgy of maundy (washing of the feet), which he also represents as originating in Judaism.[687] When Salvador says that Jesus' washing of the feet of his disciples before the Last Supper[688] is "borrowed from local customs",[689] he does not specify what "local customs" he is referring to as origins of the practice, but most plausibly he is alluding to a Jewish

[681] Ibid., 1:125–36.
[682] Ibid., 1:153.
[683] Ibid., 1:272–73. See Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, and Luke 9:28–36.
[684] Ibid., 1:171.
[685] Ibid., 1:162. For example, Luke 4:18 quotes Isaiah 61:1 and Romans 10:15 quotes Isaiah 52:7 from the LXX, where the verb *basar* is translated as *euaggelizō*. The noun form occurs only in 2Samuel 18 concerning the "good news" of the death of Absalom, King David's rebellious son.
[686] Ibid., 1:165–67. Matthew is the Gospel of "the indigenous Jews to whom Jesus had exclusively spoken", Mark and Luke "belong to the Hellenist Jews and to the Christians of the second phase or of the school of Paul", and John is "the representative of the third and final phase of the origin of Christianity".
[687] Ibid., 1:283.
[688] John 13:3–11. The scene is unique to John and, as Raymond Brown points out, replaces Jesus' blessing the bread and the wine and declaring them his body and blood in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:19–20), upon which the Eucharist is based. (Brown, *Anchor Bible: John (xiii-xxi)*, 559.)
[689] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:338.

act of hospitality as recorded in the Bible several times.[690] It might have been a conventional idea in the period as in a paper published in 1908, Walter Fleming connects Jesus' washing of the feet to the aforementioned biblical stories, especially Abraham's hospitality towards the "angels" announcing the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, and helping Lot and his family escape.[691]

The Catholic Encyclopedia argues that the use of sandals in Ancient East made foot washing a customary act of courtesy toward guests from very early times[692] and Andrew Arterbury notes that "in the Jewish culture, the story of Abraham functioned as the ideal picture of hospitality".[693] Abraham's hospitality is recorded in Genesis 18 when God's messengers or angels announcing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah enter into Abraham's tent by the oaks of Mamre. Interestingly, there is a slight but important difference between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint (LXX) version of Genesis 18:4. In the Masoretic Text (MT), Abraham asks his guests to wash their own feet by saying, "let a little water be brought, and wash your feet" (*veraḥatsu ragleikhem*), whereas in the Septuagint, he is talking about others (presumably his servants) doing the job: "do let water be taken, and let them wash your feet" (*nipsastōsan tous podas hymōn*).[694] Arterbury considers it a contextualization of the story on the part of the LXX for Hellenized readers, as in "in more Hellenistic contexts the servants wash the guest's feet".[695] Arterbury also cites the pseudepigraphic *Testament of Abraham* (TA), where it is already Abraham himself who washes the guests' feet, highlighting that there is an observable evolution in the washing of the feet of Abraham's guests, which is performed by the guests themselves in the MT, then a servant in the LXX, and finally Abraham himself in the TA.[696]

Arterbury notes that "[o]ver time, however, more and more examples of Jewish hosts washing their guests' feet can be seen".[697] He cites *Joseph and Aseneth,* a Hellenistic Jewish narrative elaborating on the relationship of Joseph and his wife given to him by her father, "Potiphera,

[690] Genesis 18:4, 19:2, 24:32, 43:24; Judges 19:21.
[691] Fleming, 'Religious and Hospitable Feet Washing', 2.
[692] Thurston, 'Washing of Feet and Hands', 557.
[693] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 58.
[694] The English translation is from Pietersma and Wright, *NETS*, 16. Interestingly, when the same guests arrive at Lot's house in Sodom (Genesis 19:2), they wash their own feet in both versions. The MT reads, "turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet" (*veraḥatsu ragleikhem*) and in the LXX says, "turn aside to your servant's house, and find lodging, and wash your feet" (*nipsasthe tous podas hymōn*). Since the oldest surviving manuscripts of the LXX are from the 4th century and those of the MT are from the 10th, it is important to note that the phrase in both verses is translated according to the MT both in the early 2nd-century Targum Onkelos (*veasḥu ragleikhon*) and in the early 5th-century Vulgate (*lavate pedes vestros*), which suggests that the alteration took place in the LXX and not in the MT. I found nothing about why the LXX is identical with the MT in Lot's case. A speculative solution could be that it is a vehicle to depict Lot, probably influenced by the wicked Sodomites, as less courteous to his guests than Abraham from a Hellenistic perspective.
[695] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 61.
[696] Ibid., 68; Box, *The Testament of Abraham*, 41, 45. Since this evolution of the ritual washing of the guests' feet starts in the Hellenistic period, we might risk positing that it is an instance of a Jewish inward acculturation to Hellenism by adopting a Greek custom and Judaizing it as discussed in Chapter 2.
[697] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 57.

priest of On" in Genesis 41:45 and who became the mother of Manasseh and Ephraim (41:50–52). In the story, there are two instances of foot washing as an act of hospitality. On one occasion, Pentephres (Potiphera) washes Joseph's feet when Joseph visits his house (7:1), and at another visit, Asenath does the same out of hospitality, humility, and devotion to his future husband (20:2–3). However, in a similar story in the Hebrew Bible featuring Joseph and hospitality, Joseph's brothers are given water to wash their own feet when they are invited for dinner to Joseph's house (Genesis 43:24). Arterbury concludes that in *Joseph and Aseneth* as well, we can observe an increasing trend in Jewish hospitality where hosts wash their guests' feet themselves instead of just offering water for them to wash their own feet.[698]

The evolution of foot washing in the stories about Abraham and Joseph also hints that the washing of the guest's feet *by the host* was probably not even a Jewish custom but it was known and practiced by other peoples, such as the Greeks. Andrew Arterbury highlights a fundamental difference between Hellenistic and Jewish hospitality customs by saying, "whereas Greek and Roman hosts bathed their guests, Hebrew hosts generally provided their guests with water so they could wash their own feet".[699] For example, in Book 19 of the *Odyssey,* Eurycleia, Odysseus' wet nurse, washes the feet of Odysseus disguised as a beggar and recognizes him by a scar on his foot he received when he went hunting boar with his grandfather. Since it is an important turning point in in the story, it is hard to believe that Salvador did not know about it. We are left to educated guesses about what might have been known to Salvador as finding traces of it is far outside the limits of this dissertation and can be a study of its own, if feasible at all. The closest reference I found mentioning the Greek practice and the Last Supper scene on the same page is a 1908 paper by the American historian Walter Lynwood Fleming.[700] Thus, apparently there is no support for the claim that he maundy ritual originates in the Hebrew Bible or even a Jewish custom for that matter, and is probably not even an act of hospitality on Jesus' part as the Last Supper takes place in a home borrowed for the occasion and the host is absent from the meal.[701]

Also, Raymond Brown points out that the foot washing scene is apparently more than just an example of humility, and scholars have conjectured several possibilities of symbolism since antiquity to modernity, as such a *double entendre* is characteristic of John.[702] Whatever the intended meaning of this scene is, it has theological implications related to the ultimate fate of the disciples, which they will understand only after Jesus' death.[703]Salvador also understands this

[698] Ibid., 90.
[699] Ibid., 57.
[700] Fleming, 'Religious and Hospitable Feet Washing', 1.
[701] See Matthew 26:17–19; Mark 14:12–16; Luke 22:7–13. John is not concerned about the venue.
[702] Brown, *Anchor Bible: John (xiii-xxi)*, 558–59.
[703] Ibid., 565.

act on Jesus' part as symbolic and, interpreting the Gospel text creatively, uses it to polemicize against Christianity by claiming that Jesus' innovation concerning a Jewish act of humility is also the origin of the negative side of the church. He calls Jesus' foot washing "the mixture of authority and humility which, in the later history of the Church, produced two kinds of opposite effects: on the positive side, true self-denial, very high and very active virtues, and on the negative side, all the saddest disguises of an ambition reduced to lying to itself, and all the hypocrisy of pride".[704] Again, Salvador does not disclose the basis of this view of his but it might be what Jesus answers to Peter, who is apparently embarrassed by his master's gesture[705] and says, "you will never wash my feet".[706] Jesus answers, "unless I wash you, you have no share with me" (John 13:8), which implies that to remain in communion with Jesus, Peter has no choice but let his feet be washed. Strikingly, Salvador attributes aggressive coercion to Jesus and represents it as the source of the subsequent arrogance, hypocrisy and pride of the Church.[707]

In summary, it seems that even the scarce and circumstantial historical or literary evidence we have does not substantiate Salvador's claims concerning the washing of feet. In fact, under closer scrutiny, they apparently support just the opposite, the Hellenistic origins of Christianity. On Salvador's part, such "over-reclamations" of Jesus and Christian practices are intended to be attempts to deny the Greek origins of Christianity and the Enlightenment in particular, and of the entire Western civilization in general, and to stress their indebtedness to Judaism in polemicizing against the Church. Salvador represents Jesus as a pivotal point in the development of Western civilization, through whom the light of Judaism reached the nations and produced Christianity. His goal with this was to prove that Jews are a civilization of their own, therefore they are acceptable of being admitted to the French society collectively and not only individually. However, his aims are seriously compromised by the implications of his passing remarks such as the one about the washing of the feet.

For Salvador, Jesus was the main channel through which Jewish ideas found their way into Christianity, which, however, adopted Jewish spiritual and moral values only imperfectly.[708] With this claim, Salvador continues the tradition of premodern Jewish intellectuals, for example Profiat Duran, who distinguished between the "errants" (**טועים**), the harmless early Christian

[704] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:338. In French: *"le mélange d'autorité et d'humilité, qui, dans l'histoire ultérieure de l'Église, a produit deux genres d'effets opposés: en bonne part, la vraie abnégation de soi-même, des vertus très-hautes et très-actives, et en mauvaise part, tous les déguisements les plus tristes d'une ambition réduite à se mentir à elle-même, et toute l'hypocrisie de l'orgueil".*

[705] Brown, *Anchor Bible: John (xiii-xxi)*, 565.

[706] Peter's protest also indicates that Jesus is not performing an act of hospitality, and the structure and wording of Peter's outburst (*ou mē nipsēs mou tous podas eis ton aiōna*) implies an emotionally strong refusal, something like "You are absolutely not going to wash my feet ever!"

[707] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1:84.

[708] Ibid., 1:131.

community and the "misleaders" (מטעים), the threatening Christian church it became later,[709] the creation of Paul, who "transformed the Nazarene synagogue into a church."[710] Thus, Salvador distinguishes between "idealized" and "existing" Christianity.[711] The former ("the Christian institution") is deemed as one of the most important achievements of humankind,[712] created by Jews and only developed (per Salvador, deteriorated) by the Greeks and Romans, who created the "existing" Christianity, the church. He also asserts that it is actually Christianity that got rid of Jesus by turning against the morality he represented and became "the propagators of the new yoke", ending up like the Pharisees against whom Jesus fought.[713] Salvador asserts that Protestantism's "pure and simple return to the doctrines of the Gospel" is in fact a return to the Jewish origins of Christianity,[714] whereby he considers any Christian attempt to return to Jesus' original teachings as a return to Judaism. Thus, Salvador represents the Reformers as Judaizers and thus claims the entire Protestantism for Judaism. On the surface, he reclaims Jesus to Judaism and promotes the rapprochement of the two traditions but on the second layer, he actually polemicizes with Christianity, denying its originality and questioning it *raison d'être*.

As to the third layer of his reclamation of Jesus, Salvador combines the traditional Christian understanding of Jesus Christ as representative of the community of believers with the Hegelian view that nations can be reduced to individual spirits with unique missions in the world.[715] He argues that a people or even all of humankind can be symbolically represented as a single person and that in this way the unity of God is reflected in humankind and such a "nation-being" (*être-peuple*) represents national unity. In his earlier works (*Loi de Moïse* (Law of Moses) published in 1822, and *Histoire des institutions de Moïse et du peuple hébreu* (History of the Institutions of Moses and the Hebrew People) published in 1828, he sets out his understanding of the Paulinian concept that Jesus Christ is a symbolic corporate identity,[716] "which suffers from the injustices and misfortunes the theatre of which is the surface of the earth, in the same way that a human being would suffer if his limbs were torn and his heart were pierced by blows. This is the natural meaning of the figure of Jesus Christ, seen as a symbolic image".[717] In *Law of Moses,* he repeats this idea and adds: "this is the great philosophical extension of the metaphysical principle of the Law of Moses" and presents "this thought" as "emanating from the Hebrew books,

[709] Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 241, n.7.
[710] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 2:293.
[711] This is similar to Kant's dichotomy of "pure" and "applied" religion, as well as the Christian theological concept of denominationalism, see page 176.
[712] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:26.
[713] Ibid., 1:341.
[714] Ibid., 1:xx.
[715] See footnote 190 on page 47.
[716] "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1Corinthians 12:12 and 27) and "we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12:5).
[717] Salvador, *Histoire des institutions*, 3:13–14.

and conceived by Hebrews",[718] with which he presents the idea of the Hegelian *Volksgeist* as originating in Judaism.

For Salvador, the portrayal of the Jewish people as "Israel" in Isaiah and the Christian believers as "Christ" in the New Testament is "the positive link that connects Christian morality to Mosaism".[719] At this point, Salvador seems to be talking about two different symbolic entities but sees the manner of representation to be identical. However, there appears to be an evolution of Salvador's interpretation of the "nation-being". In *Jésus-Christ et sa Doctrine,* published in 1838, Salvador limits the Servant to representing the Jewish people only based on the Biblical analogy that a single person, "Jacob or Israel represented the general community of the Hebrew people".[720] Later, in *Paris, Rome, Jerusalem,* published in 1860, Salvador claims that Israel symbolizes the universal future "church", the emergence of which will be impossible without the physical Israel, "this Messiah people", which exhibits all the necessary characteristics to lead the creation of the metaphysical True Israel, "this collective unity, this fruitful personification, the man-people, the man-nation".[721] Salvador compares the Diaspora existence of the Jews with the fate of the personified *être-peuple,* who is "torn apart […] and his limbs scattered everywhere".[722] He argues that this fragmented and scattered nature of the Jewish people has a beneficial purpose for the nations of the world in because their relentless suffering throughout history confirmed to the world that there was reason to wait for a messianic age, which Paula Hyman calls "a primitive mission theory for the Jews".[723]

Salvador reclaims Jesus through the Suffering Servant as a vehicle of constructing Jewish identity by Judaizing the Passion of Christ. Salvador argues that we are seriously mistaken if we believe that the passion narratives are merely historical accounts. In fact, they are *midrashim* on Jewish experience, elevating the sufferings of Jesus to a higher level and allegorically describing "another passion which is obvious to everyone: the long, cautionary, and terrible passion of the personified Hebrew people".[724] However, contrary to Rashi's interpretation, Israel's suffering is redemptive but not atoning or vicarious. In Salvador's understanding, Jews suffer not *instead of* but *for the sake* of the Gentiles in order for God to reach them through the teaching and example of the Jews. Israel is to bring "peace, wealth, and glory" to the nations and lead them out of bondage to God so that they can confidently walk under the beneficent Torah and "finally […] transform their instruments of war into instruments of utility".[725]

[718] Salvador, *Loi de Moïse*, 359.
[719] Salvador, *Histoire des institutions*, 3:14.
[720] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 2:69.
[721] Salvador, *Paris, Rome, Jérusalem*, 363.
[722] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:82.
[723] Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 9.
[724] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 2:98–99.
[725] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:80–81.

Salvador reclaims Jesus not only in his passion but also in his resurrection. In Christian theology, God's rejection of Jesus on the cross and his death was not a failure but a triumph. In a similar manner, although the Jewish people fell into an "undead" state in the Middle Ages, they have been rejuvenated[726] and will survive until their historical destiny, their "ultimate goal" is realized in the messianic age, namely "to govern, glorify and enjoy this world"[727] meaning that not Christ but the Jewish people will be the ruler of the world.[728] With this idea, Salvador internalizes and reverses the Augustinian doctrine that the sufferings of the Jews testify their rejection by God[729] and presents "the passion of the Jews" as something that refutes the apparent triumph of Christianity and gives meaning to Jewish history. For Salvador, Israel symbolizes suffering humankind and Jesus symbolizes the Jews, with the personified Hebrew people ultimately being "a Christ truer, greater and more powerful than the master of Nazareth".[730] Jesus merely fulfilled a Jewish hope and purpose and through him Israel is honoured.[731]

Salvador detaches not only Jesus, but also the Gospels as well from Christianity, which he represents as thoroughly Jewish writings,[732] and in doing so also reclaims the early Christian community and its scripture as well from Christianity for Judaism. Salvador adopts not only the passion of the Christ but also the Gospels and early Christian tradition through an act of what Hoffman calls a "likely […] anachronistic […] reading the history of Jewish suffering in medieval Europe back the time of the writing of the Gospels".[733] He argues that the term "Christ" or "Messiah" can be applied to the entire Israel on the basis of Psalm 105 (LXX: 104):14-15, where God's people is called "my anointed ones" (Hebrew *meshiḥay*, Greek *hoi christoi mou*).[734] Thus, as Hyman notes, Jews became a collective Christ figure[735] in their teaching, mission, suffering, quasi-death, "resurrection", and future glory.[736] For Salvador, this narrative serves as a justification or legitimation of Jewish existence and the reclamation of the entire European culture and civilization as something that owes its existence to the Jews.

6.2. Heinrich Graetz

In his essay titled *The Rejuvenation of the Jewish Race,* Graetz gives universal meaning to Jewish suffering. He restates Rashi's thought that Israel's suffering is a path not only to its own salvation but to the reconciliation of the Gentiles with God, and views martyrdom as a sacrifice

[726] Ibid., 1:82–85.
[727] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 2:99.
[728] Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 9. This thought is very much like what Paul writes in Romans 8:34: "Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."
[729] See footnote 500 on page 100.
[730] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 2:99.
[731] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:171–73.
[732] Ibid., 1:151–52.
[733] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 28.
[734] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:198–99.
[735] Hyman, 'Joseph Salvador', 9.
[736] Salvador, *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838, 1:82–83.

to God for the sake of the "salvation […] of the sinful world of paganism".[737] In the essay, Graetz also argues that Israel's suffering is proof that it is "summoned for great things",[738] polemicizing against the Augustinian understanding of Jewish existence, which is interpreted as a historical failure indicating divine disapproval. For Graetz, Israel's apparent historical failure is actually a success, thus a justification for continued Jewish existence.

In his argument, Graetz often uses words and concepts borrowed from Christianity to describe Israel's mission in world history in Christological terms. In Rembaum's words, he describes Israel as a "Messiah-nation, […] the redeemer of the world" who wears a crown of thorns and is resurrected, emphasizing that the interpretation the Servant as a single person represents a caricature of the real thing.[739] In his fictional *Correspondence of an English Lady on Judaism and Semitism,* which was first published anonymously in 1883,[740] Graetz expands the meaning of the Isaian prophecy to his contemporary times: "2400 years have roared by and the description still fits today to the last detail"[741]. Therefore, Graetz views not only the Jews in the Babylonian exile but also contemporary Jewry to be God's Suffering Servant who brings redemption to the non-Jewish world.[742]

Rembaum notes that in his collective-national interpretation of the Suffering Servant, Graetz uses Christological elements not only to explain the Jewish experience but also to covertly apologize with Christians' identification of the Servant with Jesus. Rembaum emphasizes that Graetz's use of these Christological elements and their association with Israel is characteristic of his polemical and apologetic methods, in which he adapts the opponent's symbols, Judaizes them, and uses them for apologetic purposes.[743] Heschel points out that understanding Jesus as an Essene was also a convenient way for Christians to maintain Jesus' undeniable Jewishness while keeping him away from Pharisaism.[744] We can add that the same also applies to Graetz. However, while in the Christian interpretation Jesus was a "good Jew" who distanced himself from the "bad Jews", for Graetz, Jesus is a "bad Jew" in contrast to the "good Jews", the Pharisees. Here too we can see another case in which the figure of Jesus of Nazareth is reclaimed for Judaism to construct Jewish identity and to legitimize collective Jewish existence against all odds, and he adopts Christian language in the process.

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[737] Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, 148.
[738] Ibid., 149.
[739] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 308.
[740] Brenner, *Prophets of the Past*, 76.
[741] Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, 210.
[742] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 309. Rembaum contends that Graetz gives a "new meaning" to the traditional identification of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 with the exiled Jewish people, who suffer not for their own sake but "for the well-being of the world, with its sacrificial and expiational overtones" (Ibid., 308.). This is striking considering that ten pages earlier he writes that it is Rashi who "presents the Jewish people as a human sacrifice necessary for the maintenance of the world" (Ibid., 208.).
[743] Rembaum, 'Jewish Exegetical Tradition', 308.
[744] Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 141.

Graetz uses Jesus not only to assert the superiority of Judaism over Christianity, but also to polemicize against other types of contemporary Judaism, especially Hasidism and the Reform movement. He constructs a historical situation that allows him to assert Jewish supersessionism by claiming that Jesus was under the profound influence of the mystical Essenes through John the Baptist[745] and Christianity as "an offshoot of the sect of the Essenes"[746]. Graetz stresses Jesus' low level of education, who, being a Galilean, "could not have stood high in the knowledge of the Law", had "a small stock of learning" and spoke a "corrupt half-Aramaic language". However, his "deficiency in knowledge" was counterbalanced by his "intensely sympathetic character[, …] high-minded earnestness and spotless moral purity", who modelled himself on Hillel in his kindness and humility.[747] As opposed to the half-learned Jesus and his disciples characterized as basically Essenes, Graetz identifies himself with the Pharisees, who are portrayed as a traditionalist "moral, chaste, temperate and benevolent"[748] middle-class "learned body of the nation" seeking to preserve Judaism "in the exact form in which it had been handed down".[749]

With this, Graetz distances himself from other currents of Judaism, especially Hasidism, which in his opinion is rooted in the same mystical current of Judaism as Christianity, and also from the Reform movement, which he considered as "Christianization of Judaism".[750] Jonathan Elukin highlights that according to Graetz, mystical Judaism is rooted in Essenism the same way as Christianity does[751] by saying that "messianic fancies" (*messianische Schwärmereien,* literally 'messianic delusions' or 'raptures')[752] are in the centre of mystical Judaism such as Kabbalah, Sabbatianism, Franksim, and Hasidism, the same way as Christianity. Although the English translation of *History of the Jews* makes the impression that Graetz considers Essenism and Judeo-Christianity "prototypes" of contemporary Hasidism, he only draws a very strong parallel by asserting their resemblance[753]. On the other hand, he considers Hasidism a "new Essenism"[754] and fights against the mystical trends of Judaism using anti-Christian arguments while internalizing Christian categories.

[745] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1893, II:150.
[746] Ibid., II:171.
[747] Ibid., II:149.
[748] Ibid., II:20.
[749] Ibid., II:17–18.
[750] Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, 31. In the "Editor's Introduction" to the book, Schorsch cites a letter by Graetz, in which he says, "I will fight against the christianization of Judaism, which is entailed in the reform of Judaism, to my last breath and with all the weapons at my command" (Ibid.).
[751] Elukin, 'A New Essenism', 143.
[752] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1895, IV:7; Graetz, *Geschichte Der Juden*, 1891, 7–8:212.
[753] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1895, V:383., Graetz's original wording is *"die ihnen ähnlichen Essäer und Judenchristen",* meaning 'the similar Essenes and Judeo-Christians' (Graetz, *Geschichte Der Juden*, 1891, 11:102.), which indicates resemblance but does not justify a prototype relationship.
[754] Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 1895, V:374.

Graetz basically claims that Christianity is ultimately Jewish mysticism and Hasidism is ultimately Christianity.[755]

6.3. Abraham Geiger

Geiger claims Jesus for Reform Judaism in a more covert way. Although he is not mentioned by North, Rembaum or Hoffman, Susannah Heschel notes that Geiger uses "the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 as a metaphor for the Pharisees",[756] placing him in the "Righteous Remnant" subcategory of the collective interpretation. Geiger also adopts the Christological understanding of the Servant to explain Jewish history, make sense of the historical mission of the People of Israel, and legitimize Judaism externally and the Reform movement internally. He does all this in a language borrowed from Christianity and the secular Enlightenment, and even similar to that of the labour movement. Geiger's understanding of the Suffering Servant is not easily summarized because its elements are fragmented within and across his writings, but taken together, they seem to form a coherent picture, similarly to the Talmud's fragmented image of Jesus.

In *Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel in Ihrer Abhängigkeit von der innern Entwicklung des Judentums* (The Original Text and Translations of the Bible as Dependent on the Internal Development of Judaism), Geiger speaks about the Suffering Servant without explicitly identifying him: "[t]he oppressed servant of God, who is despised and persecuted by the proud rulers and the people who blindly follow them, is particularly celebrated in the famous passage 52:13 to the end of 53. They condemn him as a sinner, lay all the blame on him, the silent one, but the grace of God will reward him".[757] We only learn that the Servant is persecuted "from above" by the rulers and "from below' by the masses, who fell victim of character assassination and been declared to be a public enemy, but it is unclear whether he is an individual or a group. What is clear here is that the Servant does not represent the nation collectively because the rulers and the masses are excluded.

Geiger further clarifies the identity of the Servant in *Judaism and Its History* by interpreting him as representing the "middle class" of the Jews, "the only faithful one, the Middle Estate that clung to its ancient and sacred custom, but was not of the ruling party, but yet constituted the centre of the political and religious life of Judah".[758] Thus, Geiger identifies both the Pharisees

[756] Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, 212.

[757] Geiger, *Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel*, 57.

[758] Geiger, *Judaism (1866)*, 1:138. Interestingly, the 1911 translation by Charles Newburgh makes the impression that the Servant is an individual or an indefinite person: "the Servant of God […] was […] the man of the middle class" (Geiger, *Judaism (1911)*, 88.). However, the German original seems to support the collective meaning: *"der Gottesknecht, der aber*

and the Suffering Servant with the "middle class", claiming that the Servant is the Pharisees.[759] Geiger formulates the historic mission of the Jews by calling the Isaian Servant as a "light to the gentiles" so that "humankind [...] be encircled by the *one* truth".[760] From the context, however, it is unclear what he means by this one truth but the context suggests that he is talking about the Gentiles joining (Reform) Judaism in one way or the other. Right before the sentence cited, he writes that "Israel never forgot to hold all mankind in his embrace" and "their Religion[761] came into existence for the whole world, the whole earth must be comprised within its fold". On the one hand, for Geiger the truth of Judaism means an infallible view of the essence of things by not losing from sight the Unchangeable and the Eternal[762], thus he seems to be talking about the Gentiles accepting an abstract, universal, and absolute (e.g. ethical and monotheistic) truth of Reform Judaism. On the other hand, Geiger is not saying that Christians (and Muslims) would already be on the right track towards this, and he cites Isaiah 56:3–8, a biblical text traditionally interpreted as saying that non-Jews will convert to Judaism *en masse,* keeping the Sabbath and holding fast to the covenant.[763]

It seems that according to Geiger's somewhat inconsistent vision, the parted ways will unite again under the leadership of Reform Judaism, which will bring salvation to the world and unite

doch der einzig treue ist, jenen Mittelstand, der sich eng anschloß an das Alte und Heilige, aber nicht zu den Herrschenden gehörte, verhöhnten, obwohl er doch Mittelpunkt war des staatlichen und religiösen Lebens" (Geiger, *Das Judentum*, 77.).

[759] Interestingly though, the Pharisees do not seem to be suffering very much in their description by Geiger—on the contrary, they were rather successful and "won the victory" of their struggle with the Sadducees (Geiger, *Judaism (1911)*, 265.). In the Second Temple period, says Geiger, they managed to gain control over all institutions that had significant influence on the lives of people, including the calendar and the judicial system. (Geiger, *Judaism (1866)*, 1:167.). It was only under "another religion" (to wit Christianity) under which the Pharisees, or more appropriately, their successors suffered the most (Ibid., 1:172.).

[760] Geiger, *Judaism (1866)*, 1:71. (italics Mayer's). Newburgh translates it as "All humankind is to be united in the one true service of God" (Geiger, *Judaism (1911)*, 52.). Geiger's original is *"Die Ganze Menschheit soll von der einen Wahrheit umfaßt warden"* (Geiger, *Das Judentum*, 41.).

[761] Here, Geiger uses the word *Glaube*, which literally means 'faith'. (Geiger, *Das Judentum*, 41.) However, Geiger uses the word *Religion* as well for Judaism. For him, religion is "not a system of truths" but the pursuit of perfection, the striving for the transcendent by overcoming and perfecting the immanent while acknowledging our inherent limitations and finite nature and believing in ultimate truth and unity even if we cannot fully comprehend it. In this sense, Judaism as a religion is "the noblest animating power among mankind" (Geiger, *Judaism (1866)*, 1:16–19.) and its uniqueness lies neither in revelation nor in tradition but in the fact that Judaism was the first to clearly communicate "those sublime truths that have become the inheritance of mankind" (Ibid., 1:4.). On the other hand, he defines Israel as being distinguished by Revelation (Ibid., 1:47–64.) and tradition, which he regards "the life-giving soul in Judaism", which he defines not as something permanent and immutable but "continuing in Judaism as an invisibly creative agent, as a certain something which will never obtain its full expression, but which will ever work and create" (Ibid., 1:135.).

[762] Geiger, *Judaism (1866)*, 1:64.

[763] Ibid., 1:70–71. *The Jewish Study Bible* notes that "rabbinic commentators understand the passage as referring to converts" (Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 896.) According to Abarbanel and Ibn Ezra, they are "the righteous converts" (גרי הצדק), see https://mg.alhatorah.org/Full/Yeshayahu/56.3#e0n6.

all peoples in a single worship, just like the Christians imagine what Jesus will achieve in the end of the days.[764] Geiger also integrates his view of the historical mission of the Jews into his description of the fate of Judah. According to his narrative, instead of a separate national existence, Jews must remain in the Diaspora to do their "allotted work", namely the "development of the Divine Idea" of which they are the custodians[765]. There is a lack of vicarious suffering in Geiger's interpretation of the Servant, which may indicate that in his opinion, the goal of Jewish suffering appears to be self-preservation until the nations realize that Judaism is the true religion.

6.4. Samuel Hirsch

Hirsch does not categorize Jesus within 1st century Judaism because he is not interested in the historical circumstances of the time, but rather his understanding of the figure of Jesus is anchored in his Hegelian view of history. He imagines history as progressively developing stages in the types of religiosity. The paradigm shifts are motivated by an imbalance in the thesis of Spirit as source and end, and the antithesis of Nature as means, each shift being initiated by a Jewish hero.[766] The first stage is the passive religiosity of paganism, including all Oriental religions *and* Greco-Roman polytheism, followed by active religiosity, which is that of the Patriarchs, beginning with Abraham. The third period is the intensive religiosity of Biblical Judaism, initiated by Moses at the Sinaitic revelation. The fourth is the extensive religiosity of Christianity initiated by Jesus and developed by Paul, eventually to be replaced by the absolute religiosity of the Messianic age, initiated by the Jewish Messiah.[767] In this model, Jesus fits into the line of Jewish religious heroes from Abraham to the Messiah, and he is portrayed as a figure who confirms Israel's leading role in world history and its everlasting nature.[768] Hirsch claims that all other religions will die out (as they have in the past), but Israel will survive *in aeternum* (as it always has) into the messianic age as an "eternal example" for humankind.[769] Hirsch forcefully

[764] Geiger's polemic is apparently against not only Christianity but also other contemporary trends of Judaism and forms of Jewish existence, including assimilation.

[765] Geiger, *Judaism (1866)*, 1:124–25, 133.

[766] This is similar to the Christian idea of dispensationalism, which says that through its history from creation to salvation, God relates to the world differently in different periods called "dispensations" (meaning 'stewardship' or 'management'), which are essentially historical stages from the Edenic innocence to Christ's eschatological rule (See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 23–59.). The difference between Hirsch's "dispensationalism" and the Christian concept is that in the latter, epochs are characterized by God's different dealings with humankind, whereas in Hirsch's model, the stages are characterized by humankind's different attitudes to God.

[767] Chapters 2 to 6 (Hirsch, *Religionsphilosophie*, 105–884.) summarized in: Greenberg, 'Religion and History', 120–22.

[768] Unlike other 19th century Jewish thinkers who stressed Jesus' "normative" Jewishness thus unoriginality, Hirsch attributes originality to Jesus as a Jewish religious innovator, thus keeping Jesus' originality strictly within the bounds of Judaism.

[769] Greenberg, 'Religion and History', 116, 122.

argues against Christian triumphalism by saying that it is a transitional phase in history, subordinated in its existence to Judaism. The Christianity initiated by Jesus is not an accidental outgrowth of Judaism but a Jewish tool to reach the world with the universal message of monotheism.

Although Hirsch, who is not mentioned by North, Rembaum, or Hoffman, assumes a position of disinterest in the historical Jesus, he still presents historical arguments for why Israel must be the Suffering Servant and not Jesus. He recalls that, according to the Gospels, Jesus could travel freely in the Land of Israel with a group of his disciples at will, teach and preach publicly to crowds, undisturbed by his enemies, and could even enter Jerusalem in a triumphant procession on Palm Sunday. In addition, his mental and physical sufferings did not last even for a day, for which he received a moral exaltation. On the other hand, Jews have been suffering continuously for two thousand years, and they are not burned at the stakes *en masse* only because the method has proven ineffective, but they are still blamed on every single occasion even if they are completely innocent.[770] For Hirsch, facts show that Israel is a better candidate for the Suffering Servant than Jesus, thereby indirectly reclaiming the figure of Jesus by portraying Israel as a collective Christ.

Although the treatment of this suffering Christ-nation seems to be morally repugnant to Hirsch, he maintains that Israel's suffering has a historical function in bringing about humankind's redemption. For him, Israel's historical mission is to annihilate evil by taking upon itself all the disgrace and suffering of the world until the situation becomes so shameful that people finally realize that their treatment of the Jews is pointless and ineffective, whereby sin transforms into nothing by itself. The goal of Israel's suffering is to shock the nations to such an extent that they will finally realize the magnitude of the debt they owe to the tortured but patiently suffering Israel,[771] which will trigger a remorse on their part until, as Hirsch understands Isaiah 2:2-4 idiosyncratically, *the nations* will enthrone the Messiah in Jerusalem and voluntarily submit to his authority.[772] What is striking about this interpretation is that the "he" of the passage is not God but the human Messiah, made king by the nations over themselves as an act of repentance, rather than by God as an intervention in human history. With this, Hirsch claims that the advent

[770] Hirsch, *Religionsphilosophie*, 631–32.

[771] Hirsch's argument reminds of Christianity's "moral influence" theory of atonement introduced by Peter Abelard. Unlike the classical ransom view and Anselm's satisfaction theory embraced by Rashi (see page 93 here), this individualistic concept of atonement posits that the barrier to salvation lies not in the individual's being kept hostage by Satan or having an unpayable debt but in their rebellious attitudes that alienate them from God. Jesus' crucifixion, therefore, is seen not as atonement but as a powerful display of God's love, meant to break the rebellion by shocking the sinner by its brutality and persuading them to repent. The idea survived into contemporary Protestantism through Pietism (Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 2:373.). Apparently, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is based on Abelard's theology, taking Jesus' suffering to the extreme.

[772] Hirsch, *Religionsphilosophie*, 630–31.

of the messianic age depends on the Gentile nations and not on God's decision. Israel only contributes to this through its "active suffering" and waiting.[773]

As for the cause of Jewish suffering Hirsch argues in *The Messianic Teaching of the Jews* that Israel is in the world but has never been part of its conflicts because it is a sacrificial lamb, which cannot be destroyed for profane reasons but only for God.[774] Claiming that Israel is the real "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) and also the genuine people of the Messiah, about whom Jesus says that they are hated because they "do not belong to the world" but "chosen out of it" (John 15:19), Hirsch simultaneously identifies the Jewish people with Jesus and his Ecclesia.[775]

Thus, by denying the Christian identification of the Servant with Jesus, let alone the Messiah, and by applying New Testament metaphors to Israel, Hirsch uses the figure of Christ as a collective identity model for the Jewish people and denies originality to Jesus and the early church. According to Hirsch, as Gershon Greenberg notes, Jesus was the perfect Jew as he "did what each member of Israel should do" by taking all the evil in the world upon himself and transforming it into nothing.[776] Furthermore, in *Judaism, the Christian State and the Modern Criticism,* Hirsch turns this identification into a political program: "We should become Christians, otherwise we cannot participate in the Christian state. What is being a Christian? Does it mean acting and living as Jesus Christ did? Then we are Christians and strive to be so with all our efforts".[777]

Taking up on Hirsch's remark that "the house of Israel should be in this world, but it should not enter into worldly relationships", Greenberg develops a theory that Israel's separation from the world means that it cannot proselytize directly but needs Christianity to mediate between Israel and the pagan world, Christianity being is the extension of Judaism to the non-Jewish world.[778] However, Greenberg seems to be wrong, at least about the passage he quotes, because the two halves of the above phrase are in two different sentences, and Hirsch continues the second one with "as an earthly state", so his real argument is against a separate Jewish state (italics mine):

> Israel is not to build a house for itself in another social order which is removed from earthly conditions; even if Israel is not to leave its house until the morning, *yet the house of Israel is to stand in this world. It is true that Israel is not to intervene in these worldly conditions as an earthly state;* it is true that it is pointless to speak of an Israelite state life, for Israel has

[773] Greenberg, 'Religion and History', 118.
[774] Hirsch, *Messiaslehre*, 219–20.
[775] The Septuagint translates *kahal* as *ekklēsia* in e.g. Deuteronomy 31:30.
[776] Greenberg, 'Religion and History', 115.
[777] Hirsch, *Judenthum*, 101.
[778] Greenberg, 'Religion and History', 115.

> never had significance as a state and can never have significance as such; but nevertheless, Israel gives itself a visible form in this world. Even if Israel does not and cannot have a special state; even if its state was only necessary to strengthen the Israelite thought in Israel's heart, but disappeared from the earth, never to rise again.[779]

It is unclear whether Hirsch's position is a reaction to some proto-Zionist movement, a loyalty statement to the Gentile state or the justification of why the Jews do not need a separate state despite they are a nation.[780] In any case, Hirsch's phrase seems to be consistent with the way Jesus spoke of his followers not belonging to the world in John 15:19. If this understanding is correct, it would further underscore that Hirsch considered the Jews the real "Christians", thereby reclaiming Jesus as a spiritual authority and role model for *contemporary* Jews.

6.5. Kaufmann Kohler

Although he is not mentioned by Rembaum, the German-American Reform rabbi Kaufmann Koehler also dealt extensively with the figure of the Suffering Servant in his *Jewish Theology* (1918). George L. Berlin describes Kohler as one of the most prominent representatives of the reinterpretation of the Suffering Servant as symbol for Israel, a messiah people who suffer as atonement for the sins of the world, portraying the Jews as a people of Christs.[781] As Kohler writes in a book review of *The Spirit of Judaism* (1895) by the American Zionist author Josephine Lazarus[782]: "Not an individual, but the Jewish race is to lead humankind to God. […] What Christ is to the Church, Israel is to Judaism—the world's suffering Messiah to be crowned as the triumphant victor at the end of his wondrous career. The Jews are a people of Christs. Not A Jew but THE Jew is the God-chosen mediator between the nations and the creeds and classes of men whose life-blood has so often to atone for the sins of the world".[783]

In his *Jewish Theology,* apparently a "counter-theology" that follows the structure of Christian systematic theologies, Kohler attempts to reclaim every tenet of Christianity as Jewish. As for the figure of the Suffering Servant, Kohler also disputes the identification of the with Jesus

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[779] Hirsch, *Messiaslehre*, 220. The italicized section in German: *"so soll doch das Haus Jisrael in dieser Welt stehen. Zwar soll Jisrael nicht als irdischer Staat in diese Weltverhältnisse eingreifen; zwar ist es sinnlos, von einem jisraelitischen Staatsleben zu sprechen".*

[780] Greenberg points out that in articles published 26 years later (in 1869), Hirsch formulated the following principle of Reform Judaism concerning the Diaspora: "Judaism was part of modern times and was especially fitting to America. A Jewish state would not be established. Indeed, Jews could not recite prayers for Zion without being traitors to their own flag" (Greenberg, 'Samuel Hirsch's American Judaism', 368.).

[781] Berlin, *Defending the Faith*, 53.

[782] She was the sister of the poet, essayist, and activist Emma Lazarus, who advocated for a Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel about a decade before Herzl's *Judenstaat,* and whose poem entitled "New Colossus" is engraved on a plaque affixed to the base of the Statue of Liberty in New York. See Elwell, 'Josephine Lazarus'; Lichtenstein and Schor, 'Emma Lazarus'. in: EJ.

[783] Kohler, 'The Spirit of Judaism', 746.

on the grounds that the Suffering Servant cannot represent someone who brought persecution to his own people through his followers, and thus became the primary reason for the suffering of the Jews.[784] In support, Kohler mentions Origen's anonymous Jew, Rashi, as well as the modern Christian thinkers discussed here, who unambiguously understand the Servant as a representative of Israel, chosen to preserve the noblest religious truths among humankind by praising God among the peoples, bringing light to them and promote their fundamental unity every time and everywhere.[785]

Kohler identifies God's Suffering Servant with "the nucleus of Israel, [...] who would become conscious of his great historic mission in the world", which is "making of proselytes among the heathen",[786] and actually fulfilled the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 where Jesus instructs his disciples "to make disciples of all nations". In this role as God's collective light bearer and witness, Israel is called God's anointed (Messiah or Christ) and his prophet, a "wandering missionary people", thus bringing them "blessing and salvation following his doctrine and example" until "all the nations would in the end recognize only Israel's One God as King of the world".[787]

Using highly creative interpretations of the Talmud, Kohler explains why the Jewish people is suited to this purpose and the consequences of its election. Kohler claims that Jews are superior to other nations because they, collectively and individually, possess the qualities necessary to fulfil their historical mission as a holy priest-people for the nations, a "mediator between God and man", another image adopted from Christianity with a polemical thrust.[788] Alluding to Exodus 34:9 and citing b*Beitza* 25b, Kohler claims that this "stiff-necked people" was entrusted with the Torah because its boldness and obstinacy ensured its defence and dissemination under all circumstances.[789] The Servant suffers because it is through his wounds that the nations are healed. On the question of why the Servant must suffer, Kohler cites b*Menaḥot* 53b, which discusses why Jeremiah 11:16 calls Israel "a green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit". Kohler quotes a Rabbi Yohanan, who says that Israel must be crushed like olive to yield its oil, which Kohler interprets as meaning that Israel can only be a source of salvation for the nations when it is persecuted.[790] This is the only way the Kingdom of God can be established, which is the ultimate

[784] Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 374.
[785] Ibid., 323–25.
[786] Ibid., 333–34.
[787] Ibid., 336–38.
[788] Cf. 1Timothy 2:5–6, where Paul writes that Jesus is the only "one mediator between God and humankind".
[789] Although this interpretation does not violate the letter of the text, it reverses the traditional understanding according to which the Torah was given to Israel as a means of discipline for their insolence. The text says "For what reason was the Torah given to Israel? Because they are impudent (*azin*)", but (*az*) also means 'strong, firm, vehement, energetic' (Jastrow, *Dictionary of Targumim, Talmudim and Midrash*, 1060.)
[790] Kohler, 'The Spirit of Judaism', 325–27. Kohler seems to ignore the second part of Yohanan's

goal of "the divine plan of salvation",[791] which includes Israel's unpredictable and turbulent history.

Historically speaking, Israel did not become the Servant of the Lord, a priest-people for the nations under the Temple priesthood in the Land of Israel but under the synagogue of the rabbis in the Diaspora:[792] "as soon as the Torah passed from the care of the priests into that of the whole nation, the people of the book became the priest-nation, and set forth to conquer the world by its religious truth".[793] The abolition of the priesthood enabled the entire Israel to be a nation of priests and the former priestly particularism gave way to rabbinic universalism, which "endowed humanity with an educational ideal, destined to regenerate its moral life far more deeply than Greek culture could ever do".[794] For Kohler, this change is also represented by the rabbinic replacement of God's personal name, *Yhwh*, with *Adonai,* 'the Lord', stressing the universal nature of the God of Israel.[795] Under the guise of the "priests vs. rabbis" antagonism, Kohler actually seems to be talking about the struggle of the Reform movement against Orthodoxy. The rabbis are ultimately portrayed as reformers, whereby Kohler legitimizes the Reform Movement as the only branch of Judaism that allows Israel to fulfil its historical mission in contrast to Orthodoxy and Zionism.

Kohler recognizes that the fulfilment of Israel's historical mission in the Middle Ages was not without obstacles. First, the rabbis themselves also became legalistic in the same way as the priests, which Kohler attributes to priestly influence, but rabbinic casuistry also "served the Jew as an iron wall of defense against temptations, aberrations, and enticements of the centuries" thus it ultimately contributed to Israel's mission[796]. Second, Christianity's usurpation of the Jewish mission led Judaism to abandon its proselytizing efforts, which were recognized and sustained only by "individual thinkers such as Jehuda ha Levi (sic!) and Maimonides" but in general, Judaism's mission was reduced to passivity; as Kohler puts it, conviction instead of conversion, deed instead of creed, and conduct instead of confession. On the other hand, Judaism became tolerant towards believers of other religions: it does not deny them salvation, refrains from "undermining the foundations of their spiritual life", does not want "to become the Church Universal in the usual sense of the term" but rather helps believers of other faiths get closer to God in their own ways.[797]

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sentence, which states that "similarly, the Jewish people returns to good only by means of suffering", apparently meaning that crushing is a way of discipline when Israel goes astray, and not a lasting experience as Kohler interprets.

[791] Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 332. The expression is apparently taken from Dispensationalism (see footnote 766 on page 151).

[792] Ibid., 345.

[793] Ibid., 354.

[794] Ibid., 355.

[795] Ibid., 359.

[796] Ibid., 351–52.

[797] Ibid., 339–40.

Kohler cites Jewish scholars as examples who breathed new life into the petrified Christian church of the Middle Ages, otherwise "she might have starved in her mental poverty". Thus, "Jews of Spain became the teachers of Christian Europe" to such an extent that "the forerunners of the Protestant Reformation sat at the feet of Jewish masters". Jews were the true transmitters of culture and mediators between East and West, while "the New Testament point of view" "created monasteries and the celibate ideal, and thus discouraged industry, commerce, and scientific inquiry".[798] For Kohler, Judaism not only gave birth to the church, but also nurtured and educated her in her childhood.[799]

However, Kohler's stated view that Judaism is religiously tolerant is at odds with his view that Judaism is the beginning and end of Christianity because he does not treat Christianity as an equal but puts it in a subordinate position to Judaism. He claims that Christianity and Islam owes their existence to Judaism[800] and hopes that in the messianic age, "all the nations would in the end recognize only Israel's One God as King of the world"[801] reigning in "Zion, the city of God, elevated to be the religious metropolis of the world".[802] Although Kohler notes that "Judaism does not deny salvation to those professing other religions, which would tend to undermine the foundation of their spiritual life",[803] his overt arguments against Christianity and the covert adoption of the Suffering Servant for Israel can hardly be seen as anything but Jewish supersessionism, albeit unintentional.

Kohler uses the figure of Jesus covertly reclaimed in the Suffering Servant to legitimize Diaspora existence and to polemicize against Orthodoxy and Zionism simultaneously by denying that the Diaspora is a divine punishment for Israel's sins, and that Jews must either return to the Land of Israel or assimilate into their host nations.[804] Considering the Babylonian exile as a symbol of the Jewish Diaspora, Kohler argues against Ezekiel's understanding of exile as a punishment and the restoration of Israel in the Holy Land as divine mercy,[805] adopting what he believes to be the concept of Deutero-Isaiah: exile itself is a propitiatory sacrifice, which wipes out sins, and which took over the role of animal sacrifices in the Temple. Rejecting that anyone should be punished for the actions of their fathers, Kohler sees suffering in exile as serving a higher purpose.[806] Israel, the corporate Servant of the Lord, does not suffer for its own guilt, but

[798] Ibid., 363.
[799] Ibid., 326. Kohler claims that Jewish thinkers kept the Church alive by carrying "the torch of science and free investigation, directly or indirectly, into the cell of many a Christian monk" and "the forerunners of the Protestant Reformation sat at the feet of Jewish masters", and "Lutheran and English translations of the Bible were due to [the] effort" of "Jewish students of the Hebrew language" (Ibid.).
[800] Ibid., 326–27, 334.
[801] Ibid., 338.
[802] Ibid., 336.
[803] Ibid., 340.
[804] Ibid., 330.
[805] Ezekiel 39:23–26.
[806] Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 368–69.

it is an atoning sacrifice for the sins of humankind.[807] For Kohler, the Diaspora is actually a divine providence for the Jews to fulfil their historic mission, in which the only acceptable "action" is "patient endurance and perseverance, confidently awaiting the fulfillment in God's own time of the glorious prophecy that all the nations shall be led up to the mountain of the Lord by the priest-people".[808] Israel must suffer in the Diaspora to fulfil its historic messianic mission of bringing salvation to humankind.

Kohler represents Israel's sacrifice as *willing,* as if every Jew had agreed to the sacrificial role assigned to them. However, he does not explain why he considers Israel's sacrifice willing once they were predestined to be martyrs by God, and why God would make Jews suffer for the sins of complete strangers rather than bearing the consequences of their ancestors' actions. Furthermore, Kohler makes the bold statement that the more unbearable the nations make the lives of the Jews, the closer are "humanity's triumph over barbarism" and the "victory of right and love". In this scenario, the Gentiles have no other choice but to persecute the Jews, and the Jews to resignedly accept their persecution.[809] Apart from the fact that this narrative does not correspond to historical reality, Kohler's model makes the fate of Jews entirely dependent on the extent to which nations realize the magnitude of their sins and stop mistreating the Jews on their own initiative, while Jews are reduced to passive objects of history, whose only "action" is to radiate light and patiently endure sufferings. Thus, the model denies free choice because Jews, let alone informed Gentiles, are incapable of refusing this "divine plan of salvation".

Also contrary to the element of willingness, Kohler imagines the relationship between Israel and the nations as prey animals and their predators. Following the Midrashic observation based on Ecclesiastes 3:15 that sacrificial animals in the Torah "belong to the pursued, not the pursuers"[810], Kohler argues that Jews were "singled out by God to atone for the sins of the nations"[811] as a sacrifice because they were already persecuted by their enemies.[812] The problem with this statement is that it makes the selection as a sacrifice dependent on the sacrifice itself: the sacrificial lamb is the one the wolves devour. However, in this case it is not God who makes the choice but the nations, so God's decision is subordinated to theirs. Furthermore, Kohler's circular logic is that nations can only be saved from their sins through the sufferings of the Jews that they inflict upon Israel, so the more they sin, the more they are saved. Thus, the pogroms are God's will for the sake of the Gentiles, as if God would be the greatest anti-Semite. It appears that by portraying the Jewish people as Christs, Kohler faces the same dilemma as Christians

[807] Kohler does not specify humankind's sins.
[808] Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 365.
[809] Ibid., 375–76.
[810] Leviticus Rabbah 27:5 (Freedman and Simon, *Leviticus Rabbah*, 347–49.); Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:15 (Freedman and Simon, *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, 99–100.); Pesikta of Rav Kahana 9:4 (Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, 236–38.)
[811] Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, 378.
[812] Ibid., 375–76.

regarding the simultaneous necessity and sinfulness of killing Jesus. Apparently Koler also feels this because he tempers Israel's willingness to sacrifice itself by admitting that it was "no easy matter for men reared in the old view to reach the lofty conception of a suffering hero" and to understand "the essence of His plan for the world", which explains why the majority of the exiled Jews "were eager to return to Palestine, to rebuild State and Temple under the leadership of the heir to the throne of David". instead of wanting to be "the martyr-priest of the centuries, the Job of the nations".[813] With this remark, Kohler appears to suggest that Zionism is the betrayal of the Jewish historic mission and is against God's will.

Kohler argues that although the medieval Jewish masses had no idea of their mission, they did not suffer in vain because the nations are becoming increasingly friendly toward the Jews, so his contemporary historical reality confirms to him that the suffering of the medieval Jews was worth the price. On the other hand, says Kohler, modern Judaism sees the big picture and strongly affirms the true identity and mission of the Servant of the Lord.[814] This makes Reform Judaism the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, the spiritual heir of the pious remnant, who educates Jews and Gentiles about the meaning of Jewish suffering and who is "willing to offer his very life for its cause".[815] Using the symbols of the Suffering Servant and the Messiah, Kohler reclaims Jesus as a role model of Reform Judaism, i.e. as a collective identity model for his own movement, and as the Jew *par excellence,* representing him as a personal identity model for each Jew.

6.6. Eliyahu Soloveitchik

Despite his distinguished pedigree as the grandson of Chayim ben Isaac of Volozhin, a disciple of Vilna Gaon and founder of the prestigious Volozhin yeshiva, the predecessor of contemporary yeshivas,[816] Eliyahu Soloveitchik is unfairly forgotten by Jewish and Christian sources,[817] although he deals with the figure of Jesus and the Suffering Servant in a most unique

[813] Ibid., 372.
[814] Ibid., 376.
[815] Ibid., 333.
[816] Abramsky, 'Soloveichik Family', in: The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe.
[817] The *Jewish Encyclopedia* mentions his name only in the entry on Rabbi Lazare Eliezer Wogue, his French translator (Kahn, 'Wogue, Lazare Eliezer', 12:546.) In the *Encyclopedia Judaica,* his name appears only on the Soloveitchik family tree (Hacohen, 'Soloveitchik', 18:774.). His name is not mentioned at all in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. In a family history book, his name is mentioned only once in connection with his birth (Soloveitchik Meiselman, *The Soloveitchik Heritage*, 43.) In 1985, a Hebrew-language book about him was published by Dov Hyman (Hyman, *Masa al eliyahu tsvi halevi soloveytsik: ha'ish vekhitvav.*). The book was privately published, printed in only 50 copies, and not sold commercially (Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 8.). Pinchas Lapide devotes less than a page to him (Lapide, *Israelis, Jews, and Jesus*, 112–13.), Marc Shapiro wrote about him in a blog entry (Shapiro, 'Thoughts on Confrontation & Sundry Matters Part I'.), Alan Brill has three pages about him (Brill, *Judaism and Other Religions*, 90–92.), and Jacob Schacter mentions him in a footnote (Schacter, 'Rabbi Jacob

way. He agrees with "most of our commentators" that the Suffering Servant is the embodiment of the "people of Israel as a whole", whose suffering is "its entire history before its dispersion".[818] Soloveitchik ends here and does not address how Israel ceased to be the Suffering Servant after the destruction of the Temple or at any point when the "dispersion" began. However, it is a highly idiosyncratic argument because it denies the view that the Diaspora experience has any beneficial effect on and salvific value for the Gentiles or the Jews themselves. Soloveitchik presents a unique rationale for maintaining his position that the Christian tradition is equally valid. Although he flatly denies that Isaiah's prophecy was intentionally meant for Jesus, he also defends the Gospel writers for the apparent misapplication of the Suffering Servant to Jesus by saying that even Talmudic masters use creative exegesis, often against contextual meaning, to make a point without any intention to say that it is the only correct meaning of a verse.[819] Given that for Soloveitchik, the authors of the Gospels are Talmudists using rabbinic methods of exegesis, Soloveitchik does not rule out the understanding that the Suffering Servant symbolizes Jesus "no matter what the correct explanation may be".[820]

Soloveitchik also denies the vicarious suffering of the Suffering Servant but presents a characteristically creative refutation of the Christian doctrine of Jesus' atonement for sins when he discusses Matthew 1:21, where we read that God told Joseph in a dream that "he [Jesus] will save his people from their sins", when he planned to send her away privately upon learning that Mary was pregnant. In Soloveitchik's interpretation, the Gospel states that Jesus' job is to teach Israel "how to serve YHWH so that they may not sin" and "how to return [to God] in such a way that they may be saved from their sins".[821] Considering that, as Magid notes, it is "Soloveitchik's basic promise that Jesus was preaching exclusively to Israel", Jesus not only brought "the lost sheep of Israel" back to God, but also taught them how to do the same to other Jews. In his commentary on Matthew 5:13-15, he interprets Jesus' words that his Jewish listeners are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, meaning that they have a greater responsibility because of their example and their words, and they must teach others (apparently Jews) "the good and

Emden, Sabbatianism, and Frankism', 383.). Among Christians, only Donald Hagner mentions his name in a footnote (Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*, 28.), and (the Jewish-born) Michael L. Brown devotes a few sentences to him in his book, in which he argues against *Kosher Jesus* by Shmuley Boteach (Brown, *The Real Kosher Jesus*, 17–18.). There is only a short English-language article about him on Wikipedia, created in 2012 by a PhD student researching on Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliyahu_Soloveitchik).

[818] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 386.

[819] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 138.

[820] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 387. Magid notes that Soloveitchik is actually polemicizing with Christians and Jews at the same time, both of whom misunderstand the Gospel: the Christians because they are ignorant of the Talmudic method of exegesis, and the Jews because they do not apply it to the Gospel.

[821] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 69.

correct path, and […] to forbid them from transgressing".[822] Thus, Soloveitchik excludes the world from the Jews' salvific mission, makes not only Jesus a source of religious authority for the Jews, but also the Gospels as well, and apparently treats them on the same level of authority as the Talmud. In doing so, he not only reclaims Jesus for Judaism but also the New Testament as well. For this reason, the third layer of using Christological language to reclaim the theological concept of Christ does not appear in his work, only the first (sympathetic acceptance) and the second (hidden polemics). However, denying the availability of the "salvation" Jesus offers for Gentiles is an extremely powerful polemic against the Christian view. Thus, Soloveitchik's interpretation seems to be against his intent of Jewish-Christian friendship because like Geiger, he also undermines the way Christianity perceives its legitimacy.

Soloveitchik's declared purpose with writing his Gospel commentaries was to reconcile Judaism and Christianity by showing that both exist on their own right, and that the two traditions are able to cohabit without negating the validity of the other. He apparently perceived his own role as a mediator between Judaism and Christianity.[823] In the 1868 English edition of *Kol Kore,* he even strikes a Christian tone when writing about Christian misunderstandings concerning Judaism.[824] He even attempts to defend Christianity from Jewish intellectual attacks,[825] and claims that both Judaism and Christianity misunderstand who Jesus really was and what he stood for: "Yeshua [not Yeshu!] proclaimed and demonstrated everywhere his devotion to the Torah of Moses […]. And whosoever claims that Yeshua violated, or permitted the violation of, a single command of Moses utters vicious slander against him."[826]

Apart from praising Jesus' personality and ethics, the only positive theological assessment is found in his commentary to Matthew 1:1, where Soloveitchik draws a parallel between Jesus and Abraham as represented in Chapter 1, section 3 of *Hilkhot avodah zarah veḥukot hagoyim* (Foreign Worship and Customs of the Nations) of Mishneh Torah[827] by saying that both were "the first to instill monotheism […] in the hearts of those who participated in idolatry",[828] which, as it turns out at Matthew 24:14, he understand to be the "good news of the kingdom".[829] Otherwise Soloveitchik strongly denies the uniqueness of Jesus and the veracity of the Christian

[822] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 103. "וכן כוונת ישוע: "אתם אור העולם" להאיר לכל העולם וללמדם הדרך הטובה והישרה, ועליהם מוטל הדבר למחות בידם" (Soloveitshik, *Kol kore*, 88.)

[823] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 49.

[824] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 8.. Magid notes that Soloveitchik was apparently writing for a Christian audience and this language was either rhetorical on his part, or a Christian wrote it to summarize Soloveitchik's viewpoints (Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 40.).

[825] Brill, *Judaism and Other Religions*, 90.

[826] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 319.

[827] Maimonides, 'Foreign Worship: Chapter 1'.

[828] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 64. Soloveitchik does not elaborate on how he understands that both are first.

[829] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 241.

tradition. In doing so, Soloveitchik uses the title "Son of Man" for supporting Jesus' humanness all along his commentary and strongly denies his messiahship by interpreting the Gospel passages sometimes in a highly creative manner.

For example, at Matthew 3:17, he asserts that even the testimony of a heavenly voice does not prove that Jesus would be anything more than a very pious man[830] as anyone can be a son of God, who believes in God's oneness and omnipotence, and gives up bodily desires, as Jesus did.[831] In his commentary to Matthew 24:44, Soloveitchik claims that Jesus calls the Messiah (not himself!) Son of Man because he is afraid that false prophets will make the Messiah a divine being and thus, he wants to remind his disciples that the real Messiah is a son of man, *ben adam,* a human being and not a divine person.[832] Soloveitchik interprets Jesus' words in Matthew 24:5 as Jesus referring to himself ("many will come in my name saying that I am the Messiah and they will lead many astray") and warning about potential deceivers who claim that Jesus is the Messiah and not themselves.[833] However, this is actually what Christians do, thus Soloveitchik indirectly labels Christians "false prophets" for making Jesus divine and represents the Christian tradition as erroneous. Commenting on Matthew 16:16, where Peter explicitly identifies Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God", Soloveitchik cites a Talmudic passage in b*Sanhedrin* 94a, where it is written that God wanted to make King Hezekiah the Messiah but in the end he did not. Soloveitchik interprets the intent of the Talmud to emphasize that Hezekiah was so righteous that he was worthy to be the Messiah. Likewise, he continues, Peter meant, that Jesus was a *tzaddik,* a righteous person, in the truest sense of the word, who *was worthy to be identified as the Messiah* and to be called the Son of God.[834]

Concerning Jesus' resurrection, Soloveitchik make a striking remark in his commentary to Mark 8:31–33 where Jesus speaks about his own death and resurrection, and rebukes Peter for setting his mind on human and not divine things. Soloveitchik claims that Jesus is talking about his *reappearance* to the disciples to prove the Maimonidean concept of the immortality of soul and not his flesh and bone resurrection.[835] Consequently, Jesus rebukes Peter because he understood Jesus to be talking about a literal resurrection and can only think of human (i.e. physical) things instead of considering divine (i.e. spiritual) things.[836] In his commentary to the

[830] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 88.
[831] The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament, 90.
[832] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 246.
[833] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 239–40; Soloveitshik, *Kol kore*, 184–85. Soloveitchik's reasoning is that there is no point for someone in claiming that they come in Jesus' name and they themselves are the Messiah at the same time.
[834] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 198–99.
[835] See Maimonides' introduction to *Perek Ḥelek,* the 10th chapter of tractate *Sanhedrin* of the Mishna (https://www.sefaria.org/Rambam_on_Mishnah_Sanhedrin.10.1.15).
[836] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 333–34.

parallel passage, Matthew 28:16–17, Soloveitchik cites a story from the Talmud (b*Mo'ed Katan* 28a), where a sage summons one of his fellows in a dream and talked to him, therefore, he writes, it was nothing extraordinary in that Jesus' disciples saw him.[837] However, this understanding of Jesus' "virtual resurrection" explicitly denies the Christian tradition of Jesus' bodily resurrection and its importance in Christian tradition as expressed in 1Corinthians 15:14–17: "if Christ has not been raised, *then our proclamation is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God* […]. If Christ has not been raised, *your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins*" (italics mine).

Thus, Soloveitchik's view of Jesus is incompatible with both the traditional Jewish and Christian ones, and he offers a third profile that neither Jews nor Christians are able to accept. By seeking the highest common factor of Judaism and Christianity, being an abstract belief in the unity of God and a philanthropic ethics, he denies Jesus' uniqueness and makes him unfit to be the hero of Christianity. As Levenson put it "the Jesus Soloveitchik loved, and wanted Christians to confess, was largely a figure of his own creation and in his own image: a talmudically learned sage whose teaching and practice adhered faithfully to rabbinic law and theology," which he considers "a blow at the heart of Christianity".[838]

Soloveitchiks's expectations from the adherents of the two traditions is also imbalanced. Although he was probably the first to claim that the Church and the Synagogue are "sister religions" before its first explicit "post-polemical" articulation by Yehuda Liebes,[839] and he claimed that "Israel separated into two opposing camps, the Jews and the Christians",[840] Levenson highlights that Jews only need to accept that Jesus is not against Judaism, and Christianity is not inherently anti-Semitic, while Christians would need to "transform themselves into something like philo-Semitic Unitarians".[841]

6.7. Eliyahu Benamozegh

The Italian Kabbalist rabbi and professor of theology Eliyahu (Elia, Élie, Elijah) Benamozegh (1823–1900)[842] expresses is views on Jesus in a highly idiosyncratic, ambivalent and contradictory manner in his books titled *Morale juive et morale chrétienne* (1867, translated into English as *Jewish and Christian Ethics,* 1873) and *Israël et l'humanité,* edited and published

[837] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 268.
[838] Levenson, 'A Tale of Two Soloveitchiks'.
[839] Magid, *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament*, 49; Liebes, 'Christian Influences on the Zohar', 139. This thought was also articulated at about the same time by Eliyahu Benamozegh in *Israel and Humanity,* published in 1863 (Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, 51.)
[840] Soloweyczyk, *Kôl Kôré*, 6.
[841] Levenson, 'A Tale of Two Soloveitchiks'.
[842] Broydé, 'Benamozegh, Elijah', 684 in: JE; Guetta, 'Benamozegh, Elijah Ben Abraham', 3:317-318 in: EJ.

posthumously in 1914 by his Christian disciple and admirer Aimé Pallière,[843] the 1961 abridged French edition of which is translated into English as *Israel and Humanity* and published in 1995. Since neither is a monograph, Jesus is subordinated to the respective overarching topics of the books.

The "Translator's Preface" to the English version of *Jewish and Christian Ethics* anticipates the critical attitude of the book by saying that Benamozegh's work highlights two key points about the founder of Christianity: first, that he was a fanatic, meaning a "one-sided philosopher" and second, that he was a false prophet, possibly unknowingly, by predicting the imminent end of the world, which latter claim is represented as a major reason for the recklessness and vice in the early Christian communities.[844] However, instead of rejecting Jesus altogether on these grounds, Benamozegh represents him as someone deeply embedded in the Jewish esoteric tradition, who abused Jewish mysticism and thus threatened the concept of the unity of God through the idea of the divine persons.[845] Consequently, his ethics also cannot even come close that of Judaism, and what is more, even he himself was unable to observe it, not to speak about his followers.

Benamozegh analyses Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and concludes that the ethics Jesus taught was already present in Pharisaic Judaism, which Benamozegh considers as esoteric and having produced the Kabbalah. Benamozegh claims that Jesus learned everything from, and thus Christianity owes everything to, the Kabbalistic school of R. Shimeon bar Yoḥai,[846] a 2nd century *tanna*, concerning whom Kabbalistic tradition holds that he is the author of the *Zohar*.[847] Jesus' error, however, was that he claimed that the high ethical standards of Pharisaic mystics are common property and can be made a standard for the masses, especially Gentiles, thus suffocating the world by imprisoning it "in an Essenic cloister".[848] Benamozegh also maintains that Jesus drew his ethics of not judging others from R. Jehoshuah ben Peraḥya and Hillel.[849]

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[843] Boulouque, *Another Modernity*, 2.

[844] Benamozegh, *Jewish and Christian Ethics*, v.

[845] Benamozegh, *Doctrines and Ethics of Islamism*, 4. The English version says "*his* theory of persons", attributing it to Jesus himself, which would be a serious anachronism on Benamozegh's part, unimaginable based on how well-versed he was in Christian theology, but the French original says, *la théorie des personnes,* ("*the* theory of persons", Benamozegh, *Les dogmes et la morale de l'islamisme*, 332.), which suggests a translation error.

[846] Benamozegh, *Jewish and Christian Ethics*, 99, 105.

[847] Burgansky and Wald, 'Simeon Bar Yoḥai', 594; Hellner-Eshed, 'Zohar', 648–50. The Jewish Virtual Library and the Chabad movement present it as historical fact (see 'Shimon Bar Yochai'. and Mindel, 'Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai'.).

[848] Benamozegh, *Jewish and Christian Ethics*, 60. Note the Christian wording.

[849] Ibid., 100. With this, Benamozegh renders the Talmudic view in b*Sanhedrin* 107b that Jesus of Nazareth was a student of R. Jehoshuah, who lived about 100 years before Jesus, conceivable for modern minds by asserting that Jesus only continues his tradition and not that he was his personal student, as the Talmud unambiguously presents it.

As we have seen, a characteristic argument of the Jewish apologists-polemicists is that Jesus taught nothing more and nothing less than what was conceivable in the normative Judaism using Matthew 5:17, where Jesus says that he did not "come to destroy the Law or the prophets […] but to fulfill them". Benamozegh, however, argues that Jesus actually claims superiority to his own ethics over that of the Pharisees under the disguise of moral progress. With the "you have heard that it was said […] but I say to you" antitheses, Jesus deliberately established a "perpetual opposition […] between the requirements of the Old Law and those of the new Covenant".[850] What is more, concerning the antithesis about loving the enemy (Matthew 5:43–44), Benamozegh notes that since the alleged commandment of hating the enemy is nowhere in the Jewish tradition as we know it, and seeing that the preceding antitheses are almost direct quotes from the Pentateuch, Benamozegh, accuses Jesus with forging an oral tradition "to give the new law pre-eminence" and with maliciously making up false accusations against the Torah itself against which he was prejudiced.[851] In a passage missing from the English translation, he uses legal language to conclude that when criticizing the Torah, Jesus did not limit his critique to well-known and clearly established doctrines but relied on his own memories, judgments, and personal assessments, even if they were not fully accurate.[852] Benamozegh is basically saying that apart from not adding anything to Jewish ethics, Jesus even shows disregard for the spirit of justice and accuses the Torah whimsically.[853]

In addition, Benamozegh claims that Jesus does not measure up to his own professed standards concerning loving the enemy, and he is actually extremely particularist because he has no love and prayer for anyone outside his "church". For example, he threatens the cities that do not accept his apostles with the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt 10:14–15), and his "habitual meekness", tenderness, mildness, and "patience and indulgence lavished upon thieves and adulterers" who accept him vanish into nowhere when he confronts the Pharisees he detests, for example in Matthew 23, which is incidentally against the hypocrisy of the pseudo-Pharisees.[854] Benamozegh also criticizes the apostle Paul as well for the same intolerance and failing to put

[850] Ibid., 62.
[851] Ibid., 71.
[852] Benamozegh, *Morale juive et morale chrétienne*, 199. French original: *"Impossible donc de nier que Jésus, en dressant cet acte d'accusation contre la loi de Moïse, loin de ne prendre à partie que des doctrines clairement et hautement avouées, loin d'exiger dans les pièces du procès cette exactitude et cette évidence qui seules pouvaient leur donner une valeur probante, a fait bon accueil à tout ce que ses souvenirs, ses jugements, ses appréciations personnelles lui ont suggéré sur les limites à imposer à la charité hébraïque."* ("It is therefore impossible to deny that Jesus, in drafting this indictment against the Law of Moses, far from challenging only doctrines that were clearly and highly acknowledged, far from requiring of the trial documents that accuracy and clarity which alone could give them probative value, welcomed everything that his memories, his judgments, and his personal assessments suggested to him concerning the limits to be imposed on Hebrew charity.")
[853] Benamozegh, *Jewish and Christian Ethics*, 111–12.
[854] Ibid., 59; Benamozegh, *Morale juive et morale chrétienne*, 163.

the love of the enemy in practice, probably as an aftereffect of the persecution he performed before his conversion. Benamozegh draws attention that while Paul instructs Christians to "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (Romans 12:14), he says concerning a certain coppersmith called Alexander, who did him great harm: "the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message" (2Timothy 4:14–15).[855] Benamozegh concludes that Jesus' doctrine is exclusive and his faith intolerant, leaving no middle ground between Christians and the damned. Once someone accepts his teachings, they should view others as religious enemies, focusing only on the potential for their souls' future conversion, and not being overly concerned about the methods used to achieve this.[856] With this statement, Benamozegh is basically saying that religious intolerance is inherent in Christianity, and it originates from Jesus himself and perpetuated by Paul.

In *Doctrines and Ethics of Islamism,* published as an appendix to *Jewish and Christian Ethics,* Benamozegh uses a language strikingly resembling what appears in various versions of *Toledot Yeshu,* according to which Jesus got his magic powers by "stealing" God's Ineffable Name from the Sanctuary.[857] Benamozegh claims that Jesus "went into the depths of the sanctuary" to bring out "the most elevated doctrines, the most learned metaphysics" of Judaism, and turned it into "a religion of the multitudes", which can be considered a miracle. Benamozegh considers it an "abuse of esoteric theology" because Jesus was unprepared for such a knowledge, not to speak about his audience, thus he lost sight of monotheism, and the resulting concept of the Holy Trinity endangers the unity of God.[858]

Benamozegh seems to perpetuate the ambivalent tradition that Jesus is a villain, but he is still a Jewish one. His mitigating circumstances are his ignorance and fanaticism. Thinking that the era of the Messiah is identical with that of the resurrection or universal regeneration, Jesus sincerely believed that he was on the eve of legitimately abrogating the Law, when the dead, just before rising from their graves, should assume immortal bodies. Benamozegh concludes that "the abolition of the Law was early proclaimed by Christianity. [It] left Christianity, from its very origin, at the mercy of the waves of opinion, and even exposed to destruction", which is evaluated as a "fatal precedent that Christianity established against morality".[859] Strikingly, Benamozegh's reclamation of Jesus is an overt and a covert polemic at the same time. In *Jewish*

[855] Benamozegh, *Jewish and Christian Ethics*, 91–92; Benamozegh, *Morale juive et morale chrétienne*, 263–65.

[856] Benamozegh, *Jewish and Christian Ethics*, 84; Benamozegh, *Morale juive et morale chrétienne*, 241.

[857] Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 2014, I:64–69.

[858] Benamozegh, *Doctrines and Ethics of Islamism*, 4; Benamozegh, *Les dogmes et la morale de l'islamisme*, 332.

[859] Benamozegh, *Jewish and Christian Ethics*, 12–13.

and Christian Ethics, there is no trace of surface acceptance covering a hidden polemics, yet Jesus is reclaimed for the Kabbalah. He is a villain but Benamozegh's one.

In *Israel and Humanity,* Benamozegh articulates a much more nuanced and accepting, less openly polemical view of Jesus in the context of Jewish religious progress or development. He begins with stating that Judaism is unlike other religions, which consider ancient times better. Instead, the Pharisees believed in "progressive perfectibility", "religious evolution" as a central feature of Judaism.[860] Per Benamozegh, it is also reflected in the Talmud, where Rabbi Akiva is represented as superior to Moses in b*Menaḥot* 29b,[861] and also cites the *Zohar* and the *Midrash Rabbah* that place Rabbi Shimeon ben Yoḥai above him, as well as the Hebrew Bible, where a moral development of the patriarchs is observable: "Abraham is superior to Noah, and Moses is greater than Abraham", and this moral development goes hand in hand with progressive revelation, as attested in Exodus 6:3, where God appeared to Abraham and Isaac as *El Shaddai* but to Moses as *Yhwh*.[862] Concerning this progressive moral and revelational evolution, Benamozegh cites the Kabbalists, according to whom the explanation of life's mysteries is revealed

[860] Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, 168–70.

[861] In the Talmudic story, Moses ascends to Heaven and finds God tying crowns to the letters of the Torah. When Moses asks why these additions are necessary, God explains that a man named Akiva ben Yosef, to be born in the future, will derive countless laws from these crowns, making them essential. Moses asks to see Rabbi Akiva and is shown a vision of Akiva teaching, though Moses cannot understand the lesson and feels inadequate. However, when Rabbi Akiva explains that the teachings originated from Moses at Sinai, Moses feels reassured, realizing that his Torah is indeed complete.

[862] Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, 169–71. Concerning the *Midrash Rabbah,* Benamozegh refers to its commentary on Genesis 1:3, which allegedly says that "let there be light" refers to Moses, "and there was light" refers to Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai." (Ibid., 171.) However, the *Midrash Rabbah* nowhere says this, only identifying "let there be light" with Abraham and "God called the light day" with Isaac and quotes R. Shimon who says that the five mentions of light in Gen 1:3-5 correspond to the five books of the Torah (Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, I:16, 21.). Benamozegh cites the commentary of Jacob Raccah of Tripoli to Psalm 83 as source, (Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, 347, n6.) to which Pallière adds a footnote (only available in the French edition), where he acknowledges that he was unable to find a specific quotation in the *Shoftim* section of the *Midrash Rabba*, but he finds this idea so profound and truthful that, even if the passage didn't exist, it would be worth inventing (Benamozegh, *Israël et l'humanité*, 322.). It is unclear why Pallière looked for it in *Parashat Shoftim* (Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9) as there is nothing like that in Raccah's commentary (Rakaḥ, *Ma'atah tehilah*, 70.). Concerning Benamozegh's interpretation of "let there be light", Clémence Boulouque notes that Benamozegh's eclectic approach in his Biblical commentary, which drew from various controversial, unverified and non-Jewish sources, including Spinoza, the hoax author Berossus, Plinius, the Church Fathers Eusebius and Isidore, Azariah de Rossi, Descartes, and Newton, alienated him from conservative scholars and leaders. In 1865, the rabbinates of Aleppo, Damascus and Jerusalem banned and ordered the burning of his Torah commentary titled *Em lamikra* ('Matrix of Scripture'), declaring it *ḥerem* (forbidden) and labelling Benamozegh a heretic. This move was especially harsh because Benamozegh's commentary included the Torah itself, so burning it meant the burning of a sacred text, which, according to Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah,* Foundations of the Torah 6:8) is possible and mandatory if "a Jewish heretic write[s] a Torah scroll, […] since he does not believe in the sanctity of [God's] name and did not compose it for this purpose" (Boulouque, *Another Modernity*, 38–39. See also: Em LaMikra, Genesis 1:3:3 at sefaria.org).

progressively, and complete knowledge is reserved until the messianic age.[863] Benamozegh articulates a trend: "esoterism disappears, and what was once hidden may now be seen, whether by special design or by natural inevitability, as the flower brings forth the fruit".[864]

In the examples Benamozegh cites, preparation and execution, promise and fulfilment, beginning and end, the potentiality and the actuality are intertwined, just like in the case of Jesus. In *Israel and Humanity,* Jesus is represented as just another step in religious evolution, reflected in his saying in Matthew 5:17, which, in *Jewish and Christian Ethics,* Benamozegh evaluates as an insincere attempt on Jesus' part to sell his antinomianism as moral progress. Here, it is cited as a "more than merely conjectural" proof that Jesus talks about the "fulfillment of the kind we have just considered", and this is "the only explanation which allows us to reconcile the role of reformer, which he had assumed, with his role of revealer of doctrines until then kept secret". Benamozegh refers to Luke 12:2–3, where Jesus says that whatever is covered up, hidden, said in the dark, and whispered behind closed doors will be uncovered, become known, heard in the light, and proclaimed from the roofs. From this verse, Benamozegh concludes that Jesus, who considered himself the Messiah, and his disciples, who believed that the messianic age had begun, thought that they do not have to be cautious about publicizing the esoteric teachings of the Pharisees to the uneducated masses.[865] With this, Benamozegh is suggesting that there is no problem with revealing esoteric Pharisaic teachings in the messianic age, so Kabbalah has a future and will be dominant. In this respect, Jesus was perfectly in line with Pharisaism but made a mistake of initiating progress prematurely. However, irrespective of his mistake, Jesus confirms the Jewish "doctrine of progress" towards the messianic age when he talks about the future Paraclete (advocate or comforter) in John 15:26.[866]

Thus, Jesus is described as a Jewish reformer and a revealer of secrets at the same time, which is a considerably milder evaluation of Jesus than in *Jewish and Christian Ethics* where he is represented not as a fanatic false prophet but as a mistaken Jewish esoteric, a Kabbalist, fitting into Jewish religious development and a predecessor of Benamozegh's strain of Judaism. As

[863] Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, 171. Besides Jesus' antitheses, the same idea of gradual progress until perfection also appears in Paul's letters as well. 1Corinthians 13:10–12 says that "when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away with [...] now we see in a mirror dimly [literally: *en ainigmati,* 'in an obscure (image)'], but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully" (NASB2020), an allusion to Numbers 12:8 ("with [Moses] I speak face to face – clearly, not in riddles"), where the Hebrew *beḥidot* 'in riddles' is translated in the Septuagint as *di' ainigmatōn*, 'through riddles'. Another example is, using the same metaphor, is 2Corinthians 3:18, where Paul speaks about the Christians "seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another".

[864] Ibid., 169.

[865] Ibid. This is a strikingly creative interpretation of Jesus' words because in the previous sentence, Jesus speaks not about the secret teachings but the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, which will be exposed as a result of his activity.

[866] Ibid., 177.

Benamozegh summarizes, He was "a good Jew, who did not dream of founding a rival church",[867] whereby Jesus is represented as deeper embedded in the Jewish tradition than in *Jewish and Christian Ethics*. However, this more accepting stance is at the same time, results in more powerful anti-Christian polemics and, simultaneously, against other types of Judaism. Thus, the evolution of Benamozegh's assessment of Jesus illustrates that the first two layers seem to be inversely proportional: the more Jesus is accepted on the surface, the more Christianity is rejected behind the lines. Apparently, if Jewish and Christian traditions are considered mutually exclusive, one cannot emphasize Jesus' Jewishness without polemicizing with Christianity at the same time.

As to the third layer of polemics, Benamozegh does not specifically mention the Isaian Servant and does not find meaning in Jewish suffering, let alone any atoning value in it. Yet he seems to reclaim the figure of Jesus implicitly as an identity model for the Jewish people in an idiosyncratically Kabbalistic manner, using a plethora of veiled allusions to Israel being a nation of Christs, reclaiming the position Jesus fulfils in Christian theology to Judaism using Christian language to describe Jesus and the universal church. In doing so, he is a striking representative of the third layer of the Jewish reclamation of Jesus (and Christianity, which he deems premature Kabbalism). At the same time, he is internalizing the Hegelian *Volksgeist*.

In *Israel and Humanity,* Benamozegh consistently affirms that the Jewish people have a mission as priests for humankind, set apart as such by the Torah.[868] He uses terms like "priestly people", "priest-people", "priests of humankind", and "firstborn" in the family of peoples[869] and claims Israel functions as a mediator between heaven and earth and uses its priestly functions to serve all.[870] The idea that Israel acts as a priest for humankind is based on Exodus 19:5-6, where God tells Israel that if they obey God and abide by the Torah, they "shall be for me a priestly kingdom [MT: *mamlekhet kohanim*, NJPS: kingdom of priests, LXX: *basileion hierateuma,* 'royal priesthood', inverting the Hebrew grammatical structure] and a holy nation [MT: *goy kadosh,* LXX: *ethnos hagion*]". However, this Biblical text does not explicitly state that the entire Israel will function as priests, let alone for the Gentiles.[871] Furthermore, the earliest

[867] Ibid., 329–30.

[868] Ibid., 239.

[869] Apart from the quotations cited here, these expressions appear in Ibid., 43, 53, 54, 103, 133, 142, 212, 238, 244, 303.

[870] Ibid., 327.

[871] In *Exodus 19–40* of the Yale Anchor Bible series, William Propp by points out that the meaning of this "unique and unparalleled" phrase is highly ambiguous. According to the elitist interpretation, "kingdom of priests" is not identical with "holy nation", and it means "monarchy of priests", i.e. theocracy, where priests assume the function of the monarch, and in this sense, it legitimizes the Hasmonean Kingdom ruled by priests. In the egalitarian interpretation, "kingdom of priests" is the same as "holy nation", which emphasizes the holiness and priestly quality of the entire Israel, however not unambiguously implying that the holy Israel makes God's blessings available to humanity. Propp notes that this "democratization of Israel's holiness [with the interpretation of

attested written source of its interpretation as "priests of the humankind" appears to be in *the New Testament,* where we read in 1Peter 2:9 that the purpose of the electing the community of Christian believers as "royal priesthood" (*basileion hierateuma*) is to "proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light". Thus, there is strong evidence that the Jewish theory that Israel's mission is to be priests for the nations originates (or, if it was present in Second Temple Judaism, survived) in the New Testament. Thus, Benamozegh appears to be polemically Judaizing of a Christian concept based on the interpretation of the Septuagint instead of the plain meaning of the Masoretic Text.

Instead of the Isaian Servant Songs, Benamozegh builds his mission theory for Israel on Psalms 110:4, where God says to the anonymous lord of the psalmist that "you are a priest forever according to the order of [Luria's translation of "*selon la parole de"* is 'after the manner of'] Melchizedek [NJPS: 'a rightful king by My decree', *malki-tsedek* being understood as a common name]". Christian tradition understands this text to refer to Jesus based on the Epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament,[872] which portrays the glorified Christ as the eternal High Priest of humankind. Benamozegh, however, applies it to Israel, calling King Melchizedek "the representative of the priesthood of humankind", who, according to rabbinic tradition, passed on his priestly functions, once "the possession of the Gentiles before the election of Israel", to Abraham, from whom his descendants inherited it and became a universal priesthood.[873] Thus, Benamozegh reclaims the priestly functions that the Christian tradition attributes to Jesus for the Jewish people, essentially saying that Israel is a people of Christs.

Another way Benamozegh covertly identifies Israel with Jesus is by using the concept of the *Shekhinah,* "the divine immanence, which Christianity has transformed into the conception of a man-god",[874] i.e. Jesus Christ, and mixes it with the German philosophical ideas of *Volksgeist* and the historical mission of each *Volk* by claiming that every people has a separate historical task or mission in "transforming the universe".[875] Benamozegh seems to identify the *Volksgeist* with the notion of *sarim,* "princes", protecting "angels or spirits appointed by the supreme God

priests for the Gentiles] is sometimes viewed as a postexilic development that reached fruition, after the Temple's demise, in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity", in which latter case Propp explicitly refers to 1Peter 2:9. (Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 157–59.) Propp does not tell where this interpretation appears in rabbinic tradition and *The Jewish Study Bible* only mentions that "later Jewish tradition converted this from a promise to a responsibility (noblesse oblige) requiring the entire Jewish people, not just the priests, to live by a code of holiness—God's commandments—and to serve as priests, bringing knowledge of Him to the world" (Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 146.). Rashi, Rashbam and Bekhor Shor understand "priests" as "princes" (*sarim*), and Ibn Ezra says that "kingdom of priests" means that God's Kingdom becomes manifest through Israel (Shemot 19 – שמות יט – Mikraot Gedolot – AlHaTorah.org).

[872] See Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:5–10 and chapter 7.

[873] Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, 108, 231.

[874] Ibid., 194.

[875] Ibid., 247.

for the governance of each people",[876] which he understands to be a Kabbalistic concept based on the Bible.[877] In a passage, present only in the French original and absent from the English translation of *Israel and Humanity,* Benamozegh claims that the *sar* of Israel is the *Shekhinah*, the physical representation of which is that only Israel worships God in his totality, whereas all other nations only worship partial aspects of God.[878] Benamozegh is apparently aware of the Christological implications of his claims, for he states that "the Christian Incarnation is but an imitation of the Hebraic *Shekhinah*"[879]. Thus, Israel is collectively represented by what Benamozegh considers to be Jesus Christ in Christianity. Furthermore, elsewhere he identifies the *Shekhinah* with the Temple of God, and elaborates on how the Temple allegorically representing man, claiming that "the perfect temple is the holy nation itself"[880]. With this, Benamozegh seems to be Judaizing the Temple image of the New Testament, representing Jesus and the Christian community (See John 2:19–21 and 1Peter 2:5).

Thus, Benamozegh seems to carefully avoid associating Israel's priestly mission with suffering, persecution, and martyrdom. This topic is only mentioned in passing, for example saying without any further elaboration that Israel has become a "people of martyrs".[881] Another example is when he compares Israel's priestly function to freemasonry, an object of similar false accusations.[882] Thirdly, Benamozegh claims asserts that being a priest for the nations is a dangerous privilege because it has resulted in much "tears, blood, suffering, contention, and scorn" among those to whom it has been entrusted.[883] By not ascribing any inherent meaning to Jewish martyrdom, Benamozegh seems to suggest that Jewish suffering is the by-product of the priestly commission and not an integral part of it. Instead, he sees the goal of Israel's priestly function as "the salvation of the entire human race",[884] with Jewish particularism serving universal purposes.[885] Benamozegh echoes Rashi when he claims that the destiny of Judaism is to redeem humankind and that Jesus, as well as Muhammad, are means to achieve this.[886] For him, Israel's mission is to preserve and spread the "true religion", the Law of Noah, until all peoples embrace

[876] Ibid., 97.
[877] Boulouque, *Another Modernity*, 97, 230.
[878] Benamozegh, *Israël et l'humanité*, 252.: *"Quoi qu'il en soit, on comprend maintenant comment, sans contradiction réelle, on a pu dire qu' Israël a un* sar*, ange protecteur, et d'autre part, qu'il est l'héritage de Dieu seul, car l'ange d' Israël c'est la* schechina*, le divin dans le monde, c'est-à-dire la plénitude de la Divinité dans ses relations avec le créé, tandis que les autres nations, dans leurs diverses conceptions religieuses, n'adorent de Dieu que des aspects partiels."* ("In any case, we now understand how, it could be said without any real contradiction that Israel has a *sar*, a protective angel, and on the other hand, that it is the inheritance of God alone, because the angel of Israel is the *Shekhinah,* the divine presence in the world, that is to say the fullness of Divinity in its relations with creation, while the other nations, in their various religious conceptions, worship only partial aspects of God.")
[879] Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, 202.
[880] Ibid., 155.
[881] Ibid., 46.
[882] Ibid., 78.
[883] Ibid., 328.
[884] Ibid., 134.
[885] Ibid., 103.
[886] Ibid., 324–30.

it in the messianic age. Using Christian language, Benamozegh calls it "a kind of monastic law, an ecclesiastical constitution", which the first Christians failed to fulfil.[887]

6.8. Hermann Cohen

The neo-Kantian Cohen was not interested in the historical Jesus and apparently had an ambivalent attitude toward the study of him, viewing this venture by Protestant and Jewish thinkers as a missing of the mark, even amounting to a serious mistake.[888] The only historical argument Cohen makes against the uniqueness of Jesus is a reminder that there were many similar itinerant teachers in Judea at the time.[889] As Robert Erlewine notes, Cohen was not interested even in the teachings of Jesus, but rather focused on his passion,[890] with which he argued against the Christological interpretation of the Suffering Servant and associated it with the metaphysical meaning of Jewish suffering.

In *Der Begriff der Religion* (The Concept of Religion, 1915), he criticizes the Jesus quest for placing the human being at the centre of religious experience. Cohen argues that Jesus as a historical figure cannot serve as an identity model that can be directly imitated through the simple replication of his specific actions.[891] For Cohen, this is far from treating Jesus as a fully human being but rather as an infallible superhuman, essentially an immutable God, which amounts to the deification of a human being. Rather, individuals should strive to embody the virtues, values, and qualities that he represents and view Jesus as a representative of humankind's potential for redemption, moral growth, and spiritual enlightenment. Therefore, for Cohen, Christ should become the model of one's own self in a limited way in his religious self-awareness, struggles, and endeavours, a paradigm for individuals to aspire towards their own spiritual and ethical development.[892]

Nine years before, in his essay entitled *"Gedanken über Jugendlektüre"* (Thoughts on reading for the youth, 1906), Cohen had objected to allowing Jewish youth to sympathize with Jesus and view him as a role model because it "would undermine the foundations of our religious thinking, feeling and behaviour", and calls for "the greatest restraint and caution" because on the one hand, Jesus lived his life "in hostility to the foundations of our teaching", and, on the other hand, his alleged special relationship with the divine Father is "a blasphemy of our religion".[893] Thus, Cohen categorically rejects Jesus as a Jewish identity model, but at the same time covertly uses him as such through ascribing to Israel the role that the Christian tradition

[887] Ibid., 54.
[888] Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes*, 86.
[889] Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion*, 93.
[890] Erlewine, 'Hermann Cohen and the Jewish Jesus', 211.
[891] In Christianity, it is common in the Pietist tradition by pondering over what Jesus would do in one's place.
[892] Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion*, 67.
[893] Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, 127–28.

attributes to Jesus, namely that Israel is the Messiah who will redeem humankind through his suffering and lead the peoples of the world to true monotheism, which is Judaism.[894]

In his essay *"Der Jude in der Christlichen Kultur"* (The Jew in Christian Culture, 1916), Cohen argues that when Jesus is honoured as an idea rather than a historical figure, the best spirit of Antiquity and the Middle Ages lives on, whereby "Protestant dogmatics becomes much deeper and more genuine than through the insistence on the factuality of a historical person".[895] On the other hand, however, in *Der Begriff der Religion,* Cohen evaluates the Protestant quest for the historical Jesus positively as a renunciation of his divinity and a move towards the pure monotheism Judaism represents. However, he judges the Christian project to be lacking, claiming that Christians have stopped at halfway, which sends the entire project astray since treating Jesus as a historical human being and viewing him as a timeless moral exemplar leads to mysticism.[896] Since the two writings were published one year apart, it is unclear whether what kind of Protestantism Cohen wishes to see: a one that allows mysticism or a one that is purely rational. One thing is for sure: he evaluates Protestantism based on his Jewish values perceived as rational. Walter Jacob notes that he seeks to influence Protestantism, in the rationality of which he sees potential, understanding this act as a Jewish mission.[897] As Robert Erlewine observes, "Cohen ascribes to Judaism a role from which to dictate or guide Christianity in regard to revising and reforming itself along the lines of pure monotheism and rationality".[898]

As to the Servant Songs, Cohen saw them as literary precursors to the Gospels, describing the history of Israel and its historical mission as a messianic people, and he considers the Gospel's passion narrative to be "an imitation of the messianic imagination of Deutero-Isaiah" while the prophetic text is actually about the history of the righteous "remnant of Israel", which Cohen apparently understands as Diaspora Judaism. Cohen understands that the Gospel account of Jesus' life and passion is based on the Isaian text as a "literary prototype",[899] thus the Servant Songs actually about the historical experience of the Jewish people, which Cohen sees as "a continuous chain of human, of national, suffering".[900] Cohen asserts that Isaiah "draws, in the

[894] See footnote 919 on page 176.

[895] Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, 208; Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes*, 86; Mittelman, '"The Jew in Christian Culture" by Hermann Cohen', 71. Cohen's original wording is *"vertieft sich die protestantische Dogmatik viel kräftiger und echter als in dem Pochen auf die Faktizität einer geschichtlichen Person"*. Note that the expression *Pochen auf die Faktizität* ('insistence on the factuality') is translated as "boasts about the reality" by Jacob and "snares of the facticity" by Mittelman, through which both attribute an unsubstantiated strong value judgment to Cohen.

[896] Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion*, 67.

[897] Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes*, 91.

[898] Erlewine, 'Hermann Cohen and the Jewish Jesus', 222.

[899] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 440; Mittelman, '"The Jew in Christian Culture" by Hermann Cohen', 64–65.

[900] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 267. Jacob notes that Cohen admits that while Jews must object to the portrayal of Jesus as God's Suffering Servant, it could be beneficial in engendering motivation for social justice (Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes*, 87.).

servant of God, the destiny of Israel", with the righteous diasporic "remnant of Israel" being a collective Messiah, "to which Israel will unite all the nations",[901] whereby, as Erlewine notes, "he makes Judaism the spiritual center of Christianity".[902] According to Cohen, the goal of history is that not only the entire Jewish people but all of humankind should become servants of God, that is the Messiah, under the leadership of Judaism.[903]

For Cohen, Israel's suffering is vicarious in the sense that what the Jews have endured should indeed be the punishment of the Gentiles. However, since Israel was chosen to recognize the unique God, it recognizes the guilt and the sins of other peoples and, plagued by the anguish of all humankind,[904] voluntarily takes on their suffering. Therefore, Israel was chosen to be the "servant" of many peoples, to "suffer in their place". In Cohen's view, this is necessary because, although polytheism is a grave sin, it also has a historical function, and monotheism must redeem it because suffering from its own sins would deprive polytheism of its vital energy to such an extent that it would not be able to fulfil its historical function. Israel's historic mission is to be a messiah nation that suffers for the nations that reject not only the unique God but also Israel, as the world does not appreciate its sacrificial suffering and interprets it as a sign of Israel's contemptibility.[905] The peoples of the world are unaware that Israel's suffering is the "suffering of love" for their redemption, and that Israel is actually suffering "the martyrdom of monotheism".[906] Thus Cohen describes Israel in the same way as the New Testament and Christian tradition portray Jesus, which is why Erlewine states that martyrdom represents the connection between Jesus and Diaspora Jewry.[907] Cohen even considers it ironic that "the story of Jesus Christ's life, sealed by his death, should have become the source of the main difference between Christianity and Judaism" whereas "the history of Christ is actually the history of Israel".[908]

However, Jacob appears to have misunderstood something in *The Jew in Christian Culture,* because Cohen does not unambiguously establish a causal connection between the Christological interpretation of the Suffering Servant and the charitable work of Christianity but simply states that the two go side by side: *"die Symbolik des Christentums ist daher ebenso genau das Leiden des Messias, wie das praktische Christentum in der sozialen Fürsorge zurückgeht auf die Sozialgesetzgebung des Mosaismus"* translated by Mittelman as "just as the symbolism of Christianity is precisely the suffering of the messiah, so too the practical Christianity of social welfare work returns to the social legislation of Mosaic religion" (Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, 199; Mittelman, '"The Jew in Christian Culture" by Hermann Cohen', 65.). Cohen is apparently saying that Christianity imitates Judaism in its symbolism and social ethics.

[901] Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, 200; Mittelman, '"The Jew in Christian Culture" by Hermann Cohen', 65.

[902] Erlewine, 'Hermann Cohen and the Jewish Jesus', 222. Erlewine also notes that Cohen focuses on Christianity and is "not genuinely interested in contemporary non-Western religions", which he evaluates as an adoption of "German Orientalism's attempt to find non-Semitic foundations" (Ibid., 212, 227 n10.)

[903] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 261.

[904] Ibid., 266.

[905] Ibid., 229.

[906] Ibid., 434.

[907] Erlewine, 'Hermann Cohen and the Jewish Jesus', 211.

[908] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 439–40.

Cohen presents a novel approach to reconciling the vicarious suffering of the innocent with the justice of God by separating vicarious suffering from vicarious punishment. Contrary to prevailing views that conflate suffering and punishment, Cohen distinguishes between the two, asserting that the Suffering Servant suffers innocently but without bearing the guilt of others.[909] Based on this distinction, Cohen criticizes the Christological interpretation of the Servant because he considers the Christian concept of original sin and redemption from it through the suffering and death of Jesus as vicarious punishment mythological.[910] The human Jesus cannot be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"[911] anyway because, on the one hand, only God can take guilt upon himself, and, on the other hand, humans cannot be relieved of their guilt. Moreover, if Jesus had taken the guilt of other people upon himself, he would have become "the representative of guilt" and as such, he could not be "the ideal of man".[912]

However, Israel's vicarious suffering is different from vicarious punishment because it does not involve the transfer of the guilt of humankind's sins as in the case of Jesus.[913] Cohen argues that while the sufferer, although unable to absolve others from their guilt, bears the burden of their consciousness of guilt[914] and becomes a guilt offering that reconciles humankind with God. It is in this sense that Israel serves as a sacrificial victim for the good of humankind.[915] Apparently, Cohen has to separate suffering and punishment to portray Israel as blameless, in contrast to Jesus, whom he sees as tainted by the Christian idea of taking upon himself the sins of others. While Cohen's interpretation aims at countering Christian theology, which also emphasizes Jesus' innocent death for the guilty,[916] in his argument, he uses Christian language and adopts the concept of innocent vicarious suffering from Christianity to challenge traditional Jewish interpretations of the Suffering Servant as well, which means that he uses Jesus and Christological language not only for anti-Christian polemics but for an intra-Jewish one as well.

Cohen grapples with the challenge of reconciling Israel's historical suffering with God's justice and develops a unique understanding of why messianic suffering is necessary, just, and beneficial for the Jewish people. He views vicarious suffering as a catalyst for historical progress, much as social progress arises from the suffering of the poor due to economic injustices.[917] Cohen views Jewish suffering as a sign of religious progress and demonstrates Judaism's resilience

[909] Ibid., 283.
[910] Ibid., 433.
[911] John 1:29.
[912] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 264. Cohen apparently refers to the Pauline understanding of Jesus' death according to which Jesus became sin (2Corinthians 5:21) and a curse (Galatians 3:13).
[913] Ibid., 264, 433.
[914] Ibid., 265–66.
[915] Ibid., 286.
[916] See 1Peter 3:18, which says that Jesus suffered innocently. Lewis and Demarest point out that Peter was apparently "guided by the suffering-Servant imagery of Isaiah 53", evident in 1Peter 2:24 which says that Jesus "bore our sins in his body" (Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, II:395.).
[917] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 265, 316; Cohen, *Writings on Neo-Kantianism and Jewish Philosophy*, 165–66.

to persecution and manipulation. This suffering is balanced by the joy arising from divine favour and the belief that God's justice will be fulfilled thereby, reaffirming Israel's commitment to its historic mission.[918] Thus, the preservation of the Jewish people is closely linked to or even dependent on their suffering. For Cohen, Israel's suffering is intimately linked to its identity and imbued with dignity and a sense of tragic purpose that are crucial to its role in educating humankind. He argues that this suffering is not just a fate but a noble calling, manifesting in a genuine desire to convert others to monotheism. By willingly embracing suffering, Israel enhances its historical dignity and ethical autonomy, prioritizing the pursuit of ultimate good over fleeting prosperity. Cohen posits that true justice and an end to suffering will occur once Israel fulfils its mission to unite humankind in the worship of the one God.[919] He points out that messianic suffering is a privilege granted to Jews by birthright but is also available to righteous non-Jews. He claims that the "pious of the peoples of the world", whom Israel "has already received in its bosom" according to the Talmud,[920] have their "[fully] entitled share" (*vollberechtigen Anteil*) in the messianic suffering together with Israel.[921]

Another example of the covert adoption of Jesus through Christological terms is the idealization of Israel and viewing it as a symbol.[922] Seeskin points out that Kant provided an idealized version of Christianity 125 years before the publication of *Religion of Reason,* and Cohen's goal was to do the same with Judaism: to find the ideal faith behind the fragmented and confused reality.[923] Kant distinguished between pure or universal religious faith, represented by the canon of the religion versus ecclesiastical faith, which is the actual manifestation in the various denominations.[924] It appears to be a philosophical application of the theological concept of denominationalism, one of the main features of pietistic Christianity, which emerged from the experience of the religious wars after the Reformation. According to this concept, Christianity consists of the universal Church, "an invisible reality consisting of all true believers" called "the body of Christ" according to 1Corinthians 12:27, and the visible churches or denominations, "voluntary organizations that believers create and join according to their convictions and preferences".[925] The ideal universal Church seems to correspond to Kant's *pure religion* and the real denominations to his *applied religion*. Cohen adopts this distinction for Judaism, further illustrating his absorption of Christian theological concepts.

[918] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 434, 438.
[919] Ibid., 283–84.
[920] Cohen does not specify the Talmudic locus and the expression חסידי אומות העולם is not in the Talmud.
[921] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 268; Cohen, *Die Religion der Vernunft*, 315.
[922] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 420.
[923] Seeskin, 'How to Read Religion of Reason', 29.
[924] Kant, 'The Conflict of the Faculties', 262, 272.
[925] González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2:322–23.

In addition, for Cohen, Israel also functions as "the solicitor who intercedes for the sin of the peoples".[926] This idea is reminiscent of 1John 2:1, which says that Jesus is not only an atoning sacrifice for the world's sins but also an advocate pleading for the innocence of the redeemed but relapsed sinners. Furthermore, it also sounds strikingly similar to the Advocate promised by the resurrected Jesus in John 16:7-11, whom he would send after his ascension to heaven to comfort the disciples and condemn the world, understood as the Holy Spirit in Christian theology. Thus, Cohen apparently adopts not only the figure of Jesus, but also the third person of the Holy Trinity for Judaism as a representative of Israel. Just as the Advocate "will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8), "the misery of the Jews has been at all times a great rebuke against the other peoples", whose "faults and wrongs which still hinder the realization of monotheism".[927]

We have seen Cohen's ambiguous evaluation of Protestantism and his representation of Israel as chosen to be a voluntary servant on pages 174 and 175. In addition to these, Cohen runs into other serious contradictions when it comes to reclaiming Jesus through the interpretation of the Suffering Servant and describing Israel in Christological concepts. First, despite all his professed respect for Christianity, he actually polemicizes against it, thereby covertly delegitimizing it. Cohen's understanding of Jesus Christ and identifying him with Diaspora Judaism through the Suffering Servant of Isaiah represents a powerful covert polemics against Christianity that reverses Christian triumphalism and, in reclaiming the Suffering Servant, Cohen also reclaims the Gospel in general and the passion narrative in particular for Judaism by interpreting it as a *midrash* on Isaiah 53, but apparently does even more. With the universal messianic interpretation of the Servant, Cohen apparently makes not only Christianity but the entire humankind subordinate to and dependent on Judaism. Erlewine understands Cohen's efforts as a reversal of the Protestant de-Judaization and Hellenization of Jesus, whereby Judaizing of the entire Western culture.[928] In doing so, Cohen reverses the traditional power relations and subordinates Christianity and all humankind to Judaism, using the figure of Jesus in his own idiosyncratic way to legitimize Judaism through the combination of anti-Christian polemics and the tradition of "proselytizing" messianism.[929] Second, this subordination of Christianity to Judaism is, however, only seeming. Behind the lines, Cohen is doing the opposite by making the *raison d'être* of Judaism dependent on the nations of the world because without suffering for, instead of, and at the hands of the Gentiles, Israel makes no sense. Cohen also subordinates Israel to Christianity on another level by making sense of the Jewish historical experience using

[926] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 267.
[927] Ibid., 268.
[928] Erlewine, 'Hermann Cohen and the Jewish Jesus', 226.
[929] See footnote 502 on page 102.

Christological language and finds himself struggling with the same problem as Christians, who have hard time reconciling the sin of killing Jesus with the soteriological benefits deriving from his death.[930]

Third, although Cohen claims to be rational, he enters the realms of what he considers mythology. On the one hand, he considers the idea that a single person can represent the entire humankind a myth, and on the other, he claims that is rational to say that a literary person represents Israel, and through it the entire humankind. In effect, in his efforts to reverse Christian triumphalism by identifying Israel with the Messiah, who redeems the world through its sufferings, Cohen replaces one mythology with another, where Israel has the same role in world history as Jesus has according to Christian theology. In this respect, he runs into a fourth contradiction: although he argues against using Jesus as a Jewish identity model, he does exactly that by indirectly reclaiming his figure through the Suffering Servant.

A fifth contradiction, the most serious of all, arises from Cohen's attempt to reconcile his Kantian ethical approach with Israel's messianic role in world history as a people chosen by God to be voluntary martyrs. His concept of Jewish "martyrdom of monotheism" implies that polytheism is a greater sin than abusing and killing innocent people. Ironically, it was precisely Cohen's moral interpretation of Jewish suffering and martyrdom and Israel's role as God's Suffering Servant on a Kantian ethical basis which suddenly became untenable after the Holocaust. For this reason, Seeskin notes that "Cohen has little to say to people living in the last half of the twentieth century"[931] and it seems that after 7 October 2023, he has even less to say in the 21st.[932]

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[930] This dilemma also appears in the Christological interpretation of Judaism by Kohler (see page 158) and Klausner (see page 185).

[931] Seeskin, 'How to Read Religion of Reason', 40. Seeskin quotes Emil Fackenheim, according to whom the entire Kantian idea of categorical imperative was destroyed by the Third Reich, which usurped it to destroy human dignity, in stark contrast to Kant's purposes with formulating the categorical imperative (Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 272–73.).

[932] Strikingly, the Jewish apologist Gerald Sigal, in his 2007 book titled *Isaiah 53: Who is the Servant?,* still advocates the view that Jewish martyrdom is "the ultimate consequence of being God's witness", about which Jews cannot do anything but patiently endure, because "election carries responsibilities—some of which are not pleasant, but in the end, faithful Israel will be rewarded". Sigal claims that one of the ways God's mercy is manifest in the Diaspora existence is that Judaism has been untouched by the negative consequences of being an imperial religion like Christianity and Islam. Moreover, he asserts, the Jewish people will survive forever to witness the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel and their suffering will make the final redemption of Israel and the world possible (Sigal, *Isaiah 53*, 225–29. The quotations are from pages 226 and 227). It seems that Sigal is co much carried away by his intent to refute the Christological interpretation of the Servant that he forgets the ethical consequences of his own and depreciates the historical and contemporary suffering of millions of innocent Jews by terming it simply "not pleasant". The absurdity of his position is spectacularly manifest also in the photo on the cover of his book, showing a Jewish man in *tallit* and *tefillin* apparently praying the *Kaddish* over the bodies of dead Jews under the watch of laughing Nazi soldiers, depicting the inevitable consequences of being chosen by the God of redemption as His witness and servant. Paraphrasing the question on page 225 intended to highlight the still prevalent cruel anti-Semitism of the Gentile nations, one can ask, "What is it to you if a few more Jews die for the sake of redemption?" And

Erlewine points out that "a central element of Cohen's philosophy of Judaism is the usurpation of Christianity's theological foundations".[933] We have seen it manifest in Cohen's understanding of the image of the Suffering Servant as a symbol of Israel similar to the Christological interpretation, which represents a primary indirect reclamation of Jesus on Cohen's part in contrast to his objections to using Jesus as an identity model. Thus, Cohen also displays all three layers: the positive evaluation of Christianity on the surface, which is actually polemics on the second layer, and the covert adoption for Christological language and Christian symbolism for describing Israel's historical mission through the interpretation of the Suffering Servant.

6.9. Joseph Klausner

Klausner expresses his views on Jesus from a Zionist viewpoint in his Jesus monograph titled *Yeshu hanotsri: zmano ḥayav vetorato* (Jesus of Nazareth: his Time, Life, and Teaching) published in 1922 (with an English translation in 1925).[934] In the book, Klausner provides a comprehensive examination of Jesus' life and teaching from a Zionist perspective, highlighting both the Jewish roots and the departures of Jesus' teachings from traditional Judaism. He seeks answer to the question as to "why his teaching has not proved acceptable to the nation from which he sprang".[935]

Klausner stresses that Jesus' personality was purely a product the culture and landscape of the Land of Israel, especially Galilee, the "stronghold of the most enthusiastic Jewish patriotism", thus he was free from Gentile influences, and his teaching was deeply rooted in Jewish sources.[936] Klausner describes Jesus as an ardent nationalist with a national pride, even calling

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it seems that not only "the nations take comfort in the continuity of Israel's suffering" but Sigal himself as well, who is willing to pay this ethical price to refute Christianity.

[933] Erlewine, 'Hermann Cohen and the Jewish Jesus', 211.

[934] The book originally appeared in parts in the Zionist periodical *He'atid* (The Future) between 1907 and 1913, mostly during a press debate termed "the Brenner Affair". This fierce debate lasted from 1910 to 1913 among secular Zionist intellectuals ranking behind Yosef Hayim Brenner, a prominent Socialist Zionist writer of the *Yishuv* and Ahad Ha'am (Asher Zvi Ginsberg), a leading figure of cultural Zionism in the Diaspora. It revolved around questions as to what constitutes secular Jewish identity if not Jewish religious tradition, what role Judaism has in Jewish nationalism, and where the boundaries of free expression of opinion, free press and free speech lie. The contradictory answers given to these questions caused considerable ideological, political, geographical, and generational rifts, where conflicting views were often expressed through attitudes to Christianity and Jesus. The debate escalated into acts of vandalism and even a suicide of one of the participants, a certain Ben Israel, who idealized Christianity and criticized Judaism in an article, which was followed by a round of rude responses. More on the Brenner Affair: Govrin, *Me'ora brener*; Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 90–116. More on Brenner: Shapira, *Y. H. Brenner*. More on Ahad Ha'am and Cultural Zionism: Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 162–71; Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism*.

[935] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 361.

[936] Ibid., 363.

him "chauvinistic", who never wanted to be a prophet or a messiah to the Gentiles.[937] Concerning Jesus' ethical teaching, Klausner observes that it was in line with the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, or Talmudic and Midrashic writings to such an extent that it appears as if the Gospels were entirely derived from the teachings found in the Talmud and Midrash.[938] Klausner argues the same way concerning Jesus' view of God as the heavenly Father[939] and his eschatological beliefs,[940] concluding that his messianic teaching was "truly Jewish in everything".[941] This assertion of Jesus' Jewishness does not differ much from what other Jewish thinkers did before him: on the surface, Jesus is reclaimed for Judaism but beneath, on the second layer, his representation amounts to powerful hidden polemics against Christianity, coupled with not so hidden one like saying that Christianity testifies that Judaism is right in ethical matters[942] because Christians never kept Jesus' ethical standards as opposed to the Jews who did,[943] and declaring that "Judaism possesses everything that is to be found in Christianity",[944] which is represented as a medium for Israel to become "a light to the Gentiles",[945] combined with the criticism that Christianity severed Jesus from Judaism and persecuted the Jews.[946]

Apart from asserting its Jewishness, Klausner praises Jesus' "high ethical ideals" in lofty words, asserting that Jesus' ethics appear more prominent and focused compared to those found in texts like *Pirke Avot* or Talmudic Aggadah and Midrashim, where they are scattered among a vast body of legal rules and secular information.[947] Klausner even claims that Jesus surpassed Hillel in his ethical ideals[948] and his main strength lies in his ethical teaching, making the

[937] Ibid., 363–64. Hoffman claims that chauvinist "was a favorable category in Klausner's view" (Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 113.) but does not tell why he thinks so. Klausner uses the word *shovinisti* (Klausner, *Yeshu hanotsri*, 398.), the French original of which, according to Klein's *Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language,* "was formed from the name of Nicolas *Chauvin,* one of Napoleon's veterans, ridiculed for his excessive patriotism" (Klein, *Etymological Dictionary*, 643.). Also, according to English dictionaries from the period, the word explicitly means exaggerated nationalism and is used in a negative sense. See for example Porter, *Webster's International Dictionary*, 243.). Aḥad Ha'am also uses the word *shovinismus* negatively in his 1902 essay titled "The national education" (Ha'am, 'Haḥinukh hale'umi'.). Therefore, it is hard to conceive that it could have meant something positive for Klausner.

[938] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 384–89.

[939] Ibid., 377–78. See *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:1 (Freedman and Simon, *Leviticus Rabbah*, 408.). Based on modern Hebrew usage, Klausner anachronistically claims that the expression *abba shebashamayim* is a "diminutive of affection" as if it meant "Daddy in Heaven". However, at that time, the Aramaic *abba* (Hebrew equivalent: *ha'av*) was the formal address of "the ultimate authority in the household", who was an object of respect and obedience rather than that of affection (Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 21.). His address is similar to that of rabbis (*harav*) and teachers (*hamoreh/hamorah*) in modern Hebrew. Klein's *Etymological Dictionary* notes that *abba* was also the title of ancient rabbis, who were hardly addressed "daddy". (Klein, *Etymological Dictionary*, 1.)

[940] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 398.

[941] Ibid., 402.

[942] Ibid., 391. Klausner's argument seems to be the reversal of the Augustinian doctrine of Jews proving the truth of Christianity.

[943] Ibid., 394. It is a reminiscent of the medieval polemical argument discussed in section 4.4. See also footnote 409 on page 84.

[944] Ibid., 392.

[945] Ibid., 416.

[946] Ibid., 413.

[947] Ibid., 388–90.

[948] Ibid., 397.

Gospels are "one of the most wonderful collections of ethical teaching in the world"[949] and "one of the choicest treasures in the literature of Israel for all time", possessing "a sublimity, distinctiveness and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code"[950].

Klausner's emphasis on Jesus' thorough Jewishness and praiseworthy ethics is, however, in stark contrast to his criticism of Jesus' teaching and, latently, personality, with which he explains why Jesus was and is still unacceptable for the Jews. Klausner finds a seemingly ingenious way out of this dilemma by claiming that the Jewish people rejected Jesus not because his teaching was not Jewish enough but precisely because it was *too* Jewish, whereby he "broke through the barriers of national Judaism",[951] resulting in a "non-Judaism" (**לא-יהדות**)[952] that Jewish people could not accept. In doing so, Klausner ultimately argues that Jesus' ethics, theology, and messianism are not so praiseworthy as they seem for the first sight—in fact they are a "deadly kiss" (**מיתת-נשיקה**)[953] for Judaism.

Klausner argues that Jesus' ethical teaching, which prioritized moral laws over traditional ceremonial ones, effectively nullified Judaism's national and civil foundations. By treating these laws as outdated, Jesus undermined the structures necessary for Jewish survival, especially during Roman rule. Klausner suggests that Jesus' ethics of self-abnegation, driven by pessimism over his failures and by facing opposition, are impractical and disconnected from everyday life. This detachment, Klausner contends, made Jesus' teaching incompatible with civilization and led Judaism to ultimately reject the radically different Christianity that emerged from it.[954] Klausner's criticism of Jesus' ethics sounds very much like the apology of Rabbinic Judaism, which he represents as mature and balanced in its ethical approach, arguing that the "dangerous fantasies and extremism" of Jesus' teaching could not take hold because Pharisaic Judaism wisely integrated religion with everyday life. This synthesis, upheld by Talmudic Judaism, provided the stability needed for the Jewish people to survive as a nation without land or state, enduring through nearly two millennia of challenges.[955]

Concerning Jesus' theology, Klausner acknowledges that he believed in the absolute unity of God and sought divine help in times of trouble. However, his exaggerated sense of nearness to God, stemming from believing himself to be the Messiah and manifesting itself in claiming a uniquely close relationship with God, however, represents God as showing favouritism and undermines pure monotheism as preference to one person over the mankind may lead to idolatry. Also, by suggesting that all people, sinners and righteous alike, are equally valued by God, Jesus

[949] Ibid., 381.
[950] Ibid., 414.
[951] Ibid., 369.
[952] Ibid., 413; Klausner, *Yeshu hanotsri*, 447.
[953] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 376; Klausner, *Yeshu hanotsri*, 410.
[954] Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 371–75, 390–95.
[955] Ibid., 373.

portrayed a deity who is not the God of justice or history. While this view may elevate individual morality, it threatens the social, national, and universal order, which Judaism could not accept.[956]

Klausner stresses the Jewish roots of Jesus' messianic belief, but at the same time, he considers it dangerous to the Jews. His conviction of the imminence of the messianic age, which would begin at any time with the collective repentance of the Jewish people, led to an extremist ethical system, characterized by gloomy apocalyptic thinking and self-abnegation. This view, Klausner argues, rendered Jesus' kingdom literally "not of this world", in contrast to Judaism's focus on the present world. The Jews, therefore, could not compromise their Pharisaic teaching for the sake of a messianic vision and an extremist ethical code founded on unfulfilled hopes, the result of which Klausner believes ultimately led to semi-idolatry and demoralization.[957]

Although Klausner does not criticize Jesus' personality directly, he represents him as a man of extremes and contradictions, who is both humble, tender, and extraordinarily tolerant, yet also possesses a strong belief in his mission that is close to self-veneration.[958] Jesus is depicted as gentle and charming, but also as someone who makes extreme moral demands, capable of being forgiving and indulgent in one moment, and unyielding, passionate, and severe in the next. Klausner's Jesus combines extreme kindliness with violent passion, as well as mystic faith and visionary idealism with practical wisdom and worldly realism.[959] On the surface, Klausner praises Jesus by saying that his extreme and "contradictory attributes are the sign of the great man",[960] but actually he seems to be criticizing him as being an abusive leader. If extremes and contradictions are dangerous in the field of ethics and messianism, it is hard to imagine that they suddenly become positive when it comes to personality traits.

What also appears among Klausner's lines is hidden polemics against traditional Judaism. Neta Stahl notes that in the early 20th century, particularly among Zionists, Jesus was reinterpreted not as a figure for bridging Judaism and Christianity or for external apologetic or polemical purposes, but as a symbol of the emerging national identity. Zionist writers of that era embraced Jesus as a model for the "New Hebrew man" they aspired to create.[961] This means that Zionist writers, as it became apparent in the Brenner Affair, were more interested in *internal* apologetics or polemics against traditional religious, Judaism, especially the one in the Diaspora. So, while Klausner reclaims Jesus and is openly critical with him and less openly with Christianity at the same time, his insistence that exaggerated Judaism is non-Judaism can be

[956] Ibid., 378–79.
[957] Ibid., 402–6.
[958] Ibid., 408.
[959] Ibid., 410–11. This criticism of Jesus not adhering to his own moral code also appears in medieval polemics and at Benamozegh, see pages 58 and 165.
[960] Ibid., 410.
[961] Stahl, *Other and Brother*, 10.

considered a polemic against any contemporary Jewish movement or individual who takes Jewishness to the extreme.

Matthew Hoffman points out that "Klausner's evaluation of Jesus […] contains striking ambivalence" by praising and repudiating his teaching at the same time.[962] This sounds like an understatement as Klausner's evaluation contains outright contradictions. For example, Klausner evaluates Jesus' ethics as practical and impractical at the same time by saying that it "closely concerned the conduct of ordinary, daily life" and that it "left the course of ordinary life untouched"[963]. Also, Klausner claims that Jesus manifests a positive attitude to traditional Judaism while he also argues that Jesus had a subconscious negative attitude towards it.[964] Most importantly, Klausner does not resolve the contradiction between his praise of Jesus' high ethical standards and the danger of their extreme and one-sided nature, whereby his teaching is simultaneously represented as acceptable and unacceptable for the Jewish people. It seems that Klausner's way out of the dilemma of Jesus' acceptability is no way out after all as his own "extreme and one-sided" national standpoint is the same as what he criticizes in Jesus, whereby Klausner apparently polemicizes not only with Christianity and traditional Judaism but with himself as well.

As to the third layer of reclamation, Klausner identifies the Isaian Suffering Servant in his book titled *The Messianic Idea in Israel from its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah,* first published in German in 1904.[965] He begins by distinguishing between two sides of messianism: a political-nationalistic part and an ethical-universalistic one, which go hand in hand, and claims that the Jewish Messiah is both at the same time. Until the messianic age, however, the two sides receive varying degrees of emphasis depending on whether the Jews are politically independent or subject to other nations. In the latter case, the political side is emphasized, just as in modern times when Jews live in the Diaspora. Klausner concludes that Zionism is the embodiment of the "politico-national" side of Jewish messianism and identifies the return of Jews to their homeland as a messianic event.[966] In the book, Klausner analyses the prophetic, apocryphal, pseudepigraphic, and tannaitic references to the return of the Jews to their homeland and concludes that "the return to Zion" is "the cornerstone of the Jewish Messianic ideal".[967]

[962] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 113.
[963] Compare Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 361. with Ibid., 397.
[964] Compare Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 366, 367. with Ibid., 370, 371.
[965] Klausner, Joseph. *Die Messianischen Vorstellungen des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter der Tannaiten kritisch untersucht und im Rahmen der Zeitgeschichte dargestellt.* Berlin: Verlag M. Poppelauer, 1904.
[966] Klausner, *The Messianic Idea*, 10–12.
[967] Ibid., 33.

Klausner classifies the Servant Songs as part of a larger section of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40 to 55) "concerned almost entirely with preaching the return to Zion and with glowing assurances for the future".[968] In identifying the Suffering Servant, Klausner briefly argues against the Christological interpretation but takes a kind of middle position, noting that "some of [Jesus'] career did resemble what is described in Chapter 53; and the rest of his career is intentionally portrayed in the Gospels in such a manner that the events appear to have happened in fulfillment of the words in this chapter" and in support cites Christian scholars such as Ernst Sellin and Bernhard Duhm, who also reject the Christological interpretation.[969]

According to North's classification, Klausner falls into the "Righteous Remnant" subcategory of the collective interpretation, in which the righteous remnant represents all of Israel, thus the Servant is given a double symbolism:

> "The collective "servant of the LORD" is the best of the people Israel. Thus the *whole* people Israel *in the form of the elect of the nation* gradually became *the Messiah of the world, the redeemer of humankind.* This Messiah must suffer just as the prophet suffers. Here also punishment precedes redemption; but this punishment is unique: it comes as a penalty *for the sin of others.* And it redeems the world; for if Israel had not been willing to suffer and to spread the knowledge of God and of pure morality in the earth, the world would have remained sunk in sin against religion and morality. And for this punishment, bringing good to all peoples except Israel, this people receives a worthy reward in "the end of days" [future age], in that it becomes "a light to the Gentiles", in that it is placed in the center of humankind".[970]

Klausner applies the image of the Servant to Israel's past, present, and future mission, which will terminate in the Messianic Age, the aim of which is "spread[ing] the knowledge of God and of pure morality in the earth" among the nations from whose hands it must endure divine punishment. In this regard, Israel has a dual saving function for the nations, who not only learn about God and morality from the Jews, but their sins will also be forgiven because of Israel's redemptive suffering. In this respect, Israel functions for the world in the same way as Jesus in Christian theology. Just like Jesus, Israel seemingly suffers in vain and spends its strength for nothing, but in reality, its apparent failure is a success, rewarded by God by becoming a "light to the nations", set in the centre of the humankind at "the end of days",[971] which Klausner distinguishes from "the return to Zion" as a separate event.[972]

[968] Ibid., 145.
[969] Ibid., 162.
[970] Ibid., 163. Italics his.
[971] Ibid., 162–63.
[972] Ibid., 115.

Klausner's novelty in interpreting the Suffering Servant is that he draws a parallel between the return from Babylonian exile and the Zionist project. He argues that Israel, particularly in exile, realized its greatness and historic mission to the peoples of the world, who will ultimately understand the same and accept its minority faith as the universal true religion. Klausner seems to suggest that this change in perspective made the exiles willing and suitable to return to the Land of Israel to become completely different people there. Although Klausner speaks primarily of the return of Babylonian exiles ("disciples and friends of the Second Isaiah"), he actually seems to be talking about the Zionist venture,[973] which, according to Klausner, has been made possible by the experience of the Diaspora and will give rise to a new type of Jew once attained. Klausner repeatedly draws parallels between the return of the Babylonian exiles to Zion and the Aliyah, concluding that "when we turn our attention to the beginning of the settlement in Palestine in our own times, it is hard to refrain from crying out, 'Everything hath been already!' [Ecclesiastes 1:9–10]".[974] There are also several allusions to Klausner's time in the book. Although Klausner does not draw a direct parallel to modern times, he emphasizes that the Jewish Diaspora covered a large geographical area and there were more Jews living there than in the Holy Land around the destruction of the Second Temple.[975] Furthermore, he describes the restoration of the Jewish nation to its homeland not as something that occurs in "the little province of Judah" but as a "great *world* event, at which the Gentiles would be amazed" (italics his) and concludes that returning Jews would be politically powerful.[976]

Much like Jesus in the New Testament, Israel innocently and willingly suffers for the sins of other nations, the first and most important of which, paradoxically, is the persecution of the Jews. In contrast, it is this suffering that indicates that Israel is under divine approval and will endure for eternity.[977] Klausner is essentially saying that the nations have no choice but to persecute the Jews so that Israel can fulfil its historic mission of being a sacrifice for the sins of the nations, of which the persecution of Jews being the greatest. With this argument, Klausner includes Jews and non-Jews in a vicious circle and seems to fall into a Catch-22 trap similar to that of Christian theology, where the death of Jesus redeems the world from the sin of rejecting God and killing his Son: if Jesus had not been killed, there would be no forgiveness for sins, the greatest of which is killing Jesus. So, if the Gentiles came to their senses on their own and stopped persecuting the Jews, Israel would not be able fulfil its historic mission and would have no right to exist. In Klausner's model, as in Kohler's theology (see page 159), Israel is predestined to suffer and the Gentiles to persecute, and neither side can break out of this vicious circle

[973] Ibid., 168.
[974] Ibid., 188.
[975] Ibid., 470. See also footnote 123 on page 35.
[976] Ibid., 185–86.
[977] Ibid., 168.

by their own initiative; Jews and Gentiles are interdependent, live in symbiosis, and neither can function without the other.

6.10. A. A. Kabak

One of the writers inspired by Klausner's book was Aaron Abraham (Aharon Avraham) Kabak (1880–1944), whose 1937 novel entitled *Bamishol hatsar* (published in English in 1968 as *The Narrow Path*)[978] depicts Jesus of Nazareth as a Jew who initially believes in armed revolt for the freedom of Judea but becomes disillusioned when Joseph, his father, is killed by the Romans in an uprising. From then on, his teaching focuses on the idea that man must seek the Kingdom of God in himself. According to Tzvi Sadan, it was "the first historical novel whose protagonist was Jesus of Nazareth and was written in Hebrew, in the Land of Israel, by a Zionist Jew".[979] Amitai Mendelsohn mentions that the novel was an assigned reading for Israeli high school students in the 1950s and 1960s and, since the New Testament has never been part of the Israeli curriculum, this was the text that "introduced a number of adolescents who would grow up to be prominent Israeli creative artists to the Christian story and the figure of Jesus".[980] Tzvi Sadan points out that despite the popularity and influence of the book, there are surprisingly few studies on it, and a comprehensive study on *The Narrow Path* is still lacking.[981] For example, despite the popularity of the novel and its role in the formation of modern Jewish culture, Hoffman mentions him only in passing.[982] The longest analyses of the novel to date are

[978] Kabak, Aharon A. *The Narrow Path: The Man of Nazareth*. Translated by Julian Louis Meltzer. Tel Aviv: Masada Press, 1968. The Hebrew original is available online at https://benyehuda.org/read/18079#ch8198. Kabak attributes the title of the novel to the deuterocanonical 4Esdras (2Esdras in Christian translations) 7:6-9, a parable about a dangerous narrow path leading to a city "built and set on a plain, and it is full of all good things" (Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 5.), but it is also reminiscent of Matthew 7:14, where Jesus says that "small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life" (NIV). Interestingly, chapter 13 of Part One on the background story of the apostle Thomas until his meeting Jesus and chapter 14 on the meeting and conversation of Jesus and John the Baptist are not translated into English without any indication and reason given anywhere in the book or in scholarly literature. Since the translator has already passed away (he was born in 1914) and the publisher seems to be defunct, one can only guess that since the translation was published in 1968, the political climate after the Six-Day War was probably inappropriate to portray Thomas as a "proto-Labour Zionist" coming from Egypt, whose figure Kabak uses to articulate criticism to Diaspora Judaism (Thomas' poor rural family), assimilation (his rich uncle in Alexandria), and the Yishuv (Jerusalem described as intellectually empty and socially divided). In fact, there are several solutions in the translation where Meltzer apparently wished to render the text more politically correct or digestible for Christian audience by attenuating the strength of Kabak's Hebrew, see for example footnotes 999, 1003, and 1018 below. Also, we must not forget that the novel was originally published 11 years before and the translation 20 years after the foundation of the State of Israel, which had been over three victorious wars, and by the Six-Day War, it already had developed nuclear weapons, although it was not public knowledge at the time. (Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 1.). These factors might have contributed to a high sense of confidence compared to the *Yishuv*'s outlook, which is probably also reflected in the translation.

[979] Sadan, *Basar mibsarenu*, 163.

[980] Mendelsohn, *Behold the Man*, 30.

[981] Sadan, *Basar mibsarenu*, 165.

[982] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 123.

a chapter in Sadan's 2008 book titled *Basar mibsarenu: yeshua minatzrat bahagut hatsiyonit* (Flesh from our Flesh: Jesus of Nazareth in Zionist Thought)[983] and a paper by Melissa Weinberger entitled "An Ethical Zionist: Jesus in A. A. Kabak's *Bemish'ol hatsar*". I will follow the structure of her article in identifying Zionist themes and values that are embodied in Jesus in Kabak's reclamation of him for Zionism. Some of them are inherently Jewish but others have parallels with Christian theology on Jesus and redemption, which can be regarded as the third layer of the reclamation of Jesus. In doing so, acknowledging that I am not a literary critic, I follow Melissa Weininger's attitude formulated in her PhD dissertation on the representation of Jesus in modern Jewish literature, which she summarizes as follows: "I read Jewish literature about Jesus not only as literature, but as cultural-historical documents that reveal something about the processes and politics of Jewish culture at a particular historical moment".[984]

One of the themes Weininger highlights is the connection of Jesus with the nature of the Land of Israel. Based on the remark of the novel saying, "the young man of Nazareth always carried roots and herbs of various kinds around with him [...] for the treatment of different ailments".[985] Weininger suggests that the healing power of Kabak's Jesus comes from these medicinal herbs, suggesting that the Land of Israel has healing power for the Jewish people, and Jesus is used to tie "the identity of the "new Jew" to the landscape of Palestine".[986] It has no Christian counterpart because when Kabak wrote the novel, there was already physical Jewish presence in the Land of Israel in the form of the *Yishuv* in Mandatory Palestine, and the establishment of the State of Israel was 11 years away in the future.

Another Zionist value represented in the novel according to Weininger is the negation of the Jewish Diaspora (*shlilat hagalut* or *shlilat hagolah*) by "skip[ping] over the difficult questions about Christianity" and ignoring "the difficult history of the Jewish people in exile from the land of Israel".[987] She understands that by ending the novel with Jesus' crucifixion, Kabak presents a historical situation in which Jews lived in their homeland and there was no Christianity and exile, which creates a sense of continuity and suggests that Jews can resume where they left off two thousand years earlier as if the Diaspora did not happen. However, Weininger's argument is unconvincing because Kabak did not "remove any suggestion of Christianity from the figure or teaching of his Jesus" as she claims.[988] He could not even do so as the story is full of overt allusions to the Gospels and internalizations of Christian theological concepts (see later). Second, *shlilat hagalut* is not the denial of the fact that Jews have a *past* in the Diaspora, as implied

[983] Sadan, *Basar mibsarenu*, 163–90. Sadan appears to be more interested in the critical reception of the novel than its in-depth analysis.
[984] Weininger, 'Imagining Jesus, Imagining Jews', 14.
[985] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 10.
[986] Weininger, 'An Ethical Zionist', 16.
[987] Ibid., 5.
[988] Ibid., 4–5, 23. The quotation is from page 4.

by Weininger, but in all of its forms, it is the assertion that "the Jews as a people have no future in the Diaspora without an independent 'spiritual center' in the Land of Israel".[989] Third, as Sadan points out, the novel explicitly refers to the times after Jesus' death and implicitly to the sufferings of the Jews under Christian rule.[990] When Jesus declares to Nakdimon, his Pharisee confidant,[991] that he will survive crucifixion with his teachings in his disciples' hearts, Nakdimon tells him that "the disciples of the disciples" will turn from "lambs among wolves" into power hungry "persecutors and torturers" hunting for "the few who will refuse to accept their teachings, and these will become as lambs among the wolves of your disciples",[992] reminiscent of the Jewish polemics that Christianity abandoned Jesus' teachings, and also of idea of the sacrificial suffering of the Jews.

However, among the elements Weininger highlights, there are some that can be seen as internalizations of Christian values. In this respect, it is worthwhile to note that Klausner criticized the novel heavily, claiming that Kabak's enthusiasm for Jesus endangered Judaism by propagating foreign ideals, one of which being presenting Jesus as a model figure.[993] Weininger notes that Kabak presents Jesus as an identity model of the archetypal Zionist pioneer, portraying Jesus as a "social and cultural outsider" within his own people, who does not work in his father's carpentry shop but instead wander lonely in the fields with peculiar ideas in his head, "unable to bring himself to conform to familial and social expectations". This Jesus is as an outsider from Judaism but dedicated to the Jewish people, willing to fight against oppression, representing "an idealized, utopian version of the Jewish nationalist".[994] Even Jesus' looks intensify his outsiderness because Kabak represents him according to traditional Christian iconography: "fine, sensitive face, with the great hazel eyes shadowed by thick lashes, the beautiful head crowned with long curling hair which framed both temples of the broad brow like two golden pinions".[995] Kabak takes up on the traditional allegation that Jesus' might be the illegitimate child of a Roman soldier (see page 74), presented as a gossip among the women of Nazareth, who explain Jesus' idleness with his Roman father.

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[989] Schweid, 'The Rejection of the Diaspora in Zionist Thought', 43. See also: Engel, 'Zionism and the Negation of the Diaspora'.

[990] Sadan, *Basar mibsarenu*, 188.

[991] The Nicodemus of the Gospel of John, Jesus' secret Pharisee friend (John 3:1-21), who demands a fair hearing of Jesus before he is judged, thereby risking his reputation among his peers (John 7:50-52) and who provides the large amount of spice necessary for anointing Jesus after his death (John 19:39-40).

[992] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 377.

[993] Weininger, 'An Ethical Zionist', 7; Sadan, *Basar mibsarenu*, 179–80. Sadan finds Klausner's criticism striking in light of the warm praise he wrote about Jesus and his legacy 25 years earlier in the final pages of the book that inspired Kabak, for example that "Jesus is, for the Jewish nation, a great teacher of morality and an artist in parable" in whose "ethical code there is a sublimity, distinctiveness and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code" (Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 414.). See also page 181 above.

[994] Weininger, 'An Ethical Zionist', 10.

[995] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 28.

> They remembered that when Jesus was being suckled, the gossips said he bore an uncanny resemblance to Pandurra, a Roman officer then stationed with the garrison at Nazareth, else how otherwise could Joseph the carpenter have sired a child with golden curls and hazel eyes?[996]

Jesus' stigmatization as an outsider based on the rumour about Pandera by the townspeople of his native Nazareth reminds of the remark made in the Gospel about the incarnated Logos in John 1:11, saying "his own people did not accept him", and of Luke 4:24, where Jesus, after reading a (non-existent) haftarah in the synagogue of Nazareth on a sabbath,[997] concludes from the reaction of the others that "no prophet is accepted in his hometown".

Weininger argues that the novel denies collective redemption and proclaims individual salvation by saying that Jesus' "new message is one of personal redemption without immediate regard for the collective. Instead, Jesus' teaching is predicated on individual self-worth and communion with God as an ethical basis for redemption".[998] In the novel, Jesus initially supports external and collective liberation through armed revolt against Roman rule. Its most striking example is a scene where Jesus listens to merchants complaining about Roman exploitation, and he tells them, "If we really willed it, we could be rid of all this",[999] echoing Herzl's line, "If you want, it's no fairy tale".[1000] However, when his father is killed in a battle with the Romans, Jesus realizes that "true liberty is not outside ourselves, but within us" and decides to visit John the Baptist.[1001] Apparently he has always had this inclination because earlier in the novel he comes to the conclusion that "the way to deliverance and salvation lay open to every person in Israel within his and her *heart!* Man could only find the image of God within himself through righteousness and mercy".[1002]

Kabak's focus on personal redemption over the collective one becomes apparent in a scene towards the end of the novel, in which Jesus privately expresses regret to Judas Iscariot for having started a movement rather than proclaiming the kingdom of heaven by himself. Jesus realizes that he is becoming the "property" of his disciples, who are starting to deify him, and he must purge himself from their hearts to prevent future followers from becoming "Satan's apostles".[1003] Jesus and Judas conclude that Jesus' crucifixion is necessary to prevent this deification,

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[996] Ibid.

[997] See footnote 398 on page 82.

[998] Weininger, 'An Ethical Zionist', 12–14.

[999] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 18. The phrase "we could be rid of all this" in the English translation does not accentuate the religious overtones of the verb *nig'al* (be redeemed), and the auxiliary "could" downplays the strength of Kabak's original wording: "אילו היינו רוצים באמת היינו נגאלים מכל זאת", literally meaning "if we truly wanted, we would be redeemed of all this" (Kabak, 'Bamishol hatsar'.).

[1000] Herzl, *Old-New Land*, 1.

[1001] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 168.

[1002] Ibid., 93–94.

[1003] Ibid., 363–67. The English translation says, "Satan's emissaries", but Kabak uses the expression שליחי השטן, which can also be translated as "Satan's

making the crucifixion an act of self-sacrifice to cleanse his disciples' hearts, basically a staged suicide, for which he requests Judas' assistance in "betraying" him.[1004] Jesus' death as a means to cleanse people's hearts from sin echoes Christianity's "moral influence" theory of atonement and the "soteriology" of Samuel Hirsch.[1005]

Weininger highlights that the way the novel represents Jesus echoes cultural Zionism's preference of haggadah to halakha, the overemphasis of the latter being perceived as making Jewish society corrupt and alienating it from God, and even from the spirit of Judaism,[1006] echoes Paul's view formulated in 2Corinthians 3:6, that "the letter kills, but the spirit gives life". Kabak's Jesus apparently seeks and displays the spirit of the Torah as opposed to its letter, portraying him as someone who is, "while educated and raised wholly within Jewish tradition, criticizes and reimagines it".[1007] The novel describes him as lenient in halakha, and even making up a prayer for himself. Hananya, Jesus' Torah teacher, is forgiving with him because he thinks "righteousness and charity carry more weight than all the precepts in the Torah"[1008] but both were frowned upon by "the bigots in the city".[1009] In the untranslated part of the novel, Hananya's views also have an influence on Thomas, the epitome of Labour Zionist, who becomes as an innkeeper in Galilee before he ends up as one of Jesus' apostles. Thomas bursts out to his wife against the mitzvot and Torah scholars:

> "The commandments! He shouted, "learned commandments of men […] And those there… the scholars who know the Torah… they are no better than the passing guests, the traders who fill the air here all week long with noise and filth… Even those there in the study halls, seeking escape from the Blessed Name, masters of the minutiae of the commandments, as if behind a wall!"[1010]

Kabak's anti-elitism also appears in the messianism represented in the novel, which denies Jesus' messiahship, let alone his divinity. However, Kabak suggests that Jesus is a *potential* messiah by being a son of Israel, which Weininger calls a "democratic conception of messianism—that any child, any person, might be the savior".[1011] In the novel, Jesus recalls a childhood memory when his father is having a conversation with other men at the porch of their house at

apostles". Kabak might be deliberate in using a loaded word.

[1004] Ibid., 367.

[1005] See footnote 771 on page 152.

[1006] Weininger, 'An Ethical Zionist', 18–21.

[1007] Ibid., 10.

[1008] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 89.

[1009] Ibid., 29.

[1010] […] קרא – מצוות אנשים מלומדות ״המצוות! ואותם שם...תלמידי־החכמים שיודעים את התורה...לא עדיפים הם מן האורחים־הפורחים, מן התגרים שכל ימות השבוע ממלאים כאן את חלל האויר צוחות וזוהמה... אף אותם שם בבתי־המדרשות, מבקשים מנוס מפני השם יתברך מארי דקדוקי המצוות, כמו מאחרי כותל!״ (Kabak, 'Bamishol hatsar'.)

[1011] Weininger, 'An Ethical Zionist', 25.

sunset. They talk about the Messiah while Joseph, after scolding Jesus for some wrongdoing, puts him between his knees to listen in silence.

> One of the others said, "It is written, 'Touch ye not my Messiahs.'[1012] These 'Messiahs' are the infants of Israel. No one knows, Joseph, where the future True Messiah may now be toddling at his play; whether he is still in his cradle or stands between his father's knees." His mother happened to be passing through the yard and halted as she overheard. […] Later, at night, as he lay on the pile of woodshavings, she came to him, knelt and bent over him and whispered through her warm kisses: "My Messiah, my little Messiah…"[1013]

Beyond his democratic messianism, Kabak is also suggesting that all "infants of Israel" are the Messiahs, which resonates with other Jewish authors who interpreted the concept of the Messiah as representing the people of Israel collectively. Kabak's view is further underscored by a scene in the untranslated Chapter 13 of Part 1, in which Thomas, still in Egypt, overhears the speech of an old man around a campfire:

> "Judgment Day is near, and the Son of Man, whom God has chosen, is already walking among us, but nobody knows who he is or where he is. He might be here in Egypt or there in our land, maybe in the city, maybe in the village… Nobody knows, for he is the least of the least, the lowliest of the lowly".[1014]

This idea of "universal messiahship" sounds very much like the Protestant concept of universal priesthood of all believers based on 1Peter 2:5 and 9.[1015] The childhood scene, with the elements of scolding and putting a child among the grown-ups discussing adult matters as an example is reminiscent of a Gospel story in Matthew 18:1-5 when Jesus' disciples argue about who the greatest is in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus calls a child, whom he puts among them as an example of humility and says, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me," thus identifying himself with the child. The quote from the Psalms "touch ye not my Messiahs" (*al tige'u bimshiḥay,* NRSVue and JPS: "do not touch my anointed ones") echoes another Gospel story when children are brought to Jesus to bless them, but his disciples rebuke them. Upon seeing this, Jesus becomes angry and scolds his disciples saying, "Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs".[1016] This is

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[1012] Psalms 105:15.

[1013] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 59.

[1014] "יום הדין קרוב ובן־האדם שה' בחר בו כבר מהלך בינינו, אך אין שום בריה יודעת מיהו והיכן הוא. שמא הוא כאן במצרים או שמא שם בארצנו, שמא בעיר, שמא בכפר... אין שום בריה יודעת, שכן קטן שבקטנים הוא, שפל שבשפלים." (Kabak, 'Bamishol hatsar'.)

[1015] Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:248. See also page 170 above.

[1016] Mark 10:13-16 and Luke 18:15-17.

not the idea that all Israel is a messiah-nation but an individualist approach asserting that every single Jew is a potential Messiah—the less and the lowlier, the more.

Kabak sees no meaning in Israel's suffering or Jesus' passion or in the possibility of salvation. Probably in the middle of the 1930s, with Nazism and anti-Semitism emerging in Europe and with the *Yishuv* under British rule, restricting immigration unable (or unwilling) to control the Arab Revolt of 1936-39, the increasing insensitivity of the British Government and decreasing Jewish trust in it, as well as the 1937 recommendation to partition Mandatory Palestine into a larger Arab state and a smaller, highly vulnerable Jewish state, it might have seemed that the Zionist dream failed and there was little hope that the Jewish people can ever have their own state.[1017] If this is so, no wonder the novel has a rather pessimistic outlook as Kabak, by making Jesus turn from collective national salvation, denies Herzl's heritage that Jews can (re)build their own "fatherland" through collective effort. Kabak's novel ends with Jesus' exclamation on the cross:

> He tried [wanted] to direct his mind and being to the [his] heavenly Father, but he had only the strength to cry aloud in an imploring groan [send *him* his cry of anguish]:
>
> "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? — My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"[1018]

The message seems to be that Jesus tried communal redemption but failed; then, he turned to individual redemption, but he failed in that, too, and what is more, all now his dedication to his people and to God seems to vanish into thin air with his meaningless death. The archetypal religious Zionist outsider, Kabak's identity model, dies left alone by both his people and his God, implying that neither nationalism nor religious traditionalism leads to national salvation. Moreover, as we know from subsequent history, he did become the property of his disciples even more by his deification, and in terms of politics and anti-Judaism, their hearts were not purged from sin. Thus, says Kabak implicitly, the self-sacrifice of a leader to this end is not meaningful in this respect either. This is a rather pessimistic outlook from a Zionist who returned to orthodox Judaism, but *The Narrow Path* understood as a "cultural-historical document", it reveals much about the internal struggles of the *Yishuv* of the 1930s, and the Jesus it represents

[1017] Efron, Weitzman, and Lehmann, *The Jews: A History*, 411–12. Although according to Walter Laqueur, the years from 1933 to 1935 were calm years of prosperity so the *Yishuv* seemed to be a safe haven (Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 511.), the reason for Kabak's lack of enthusiasm might be that idealistic and self-sacrificing Zionism was the thing of the youth (Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 133.) and Kabak was over 50 when he wrote his novel.

[1018] Kabak, *The Narrow Path*, 380. The insertions are Kabak's original wording as the English translation seems to weaken Kabak's religious language and Jesus' Jewishness, which is also apparent in the fact that the translation of Jesus' cry is a direct quotation from the Gospel (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 in the King James Bible), whereas Kabak quotes directly from Psalms 22:1, see Kabak, 'Bamishol hatsar'.

reflects Kabak's dim outlook. Interestingly, Kabak uses Christian language, but he does not use it to claim Jesus to the Jewish people Christologically as he does not identify a Jewish mission—the status quo will never end. Thus, although not mentioned in the scholarly literature on Kabak, in my view, his hidden polemics is directed more against Zionism itself than Christianity.

6.11. Conclusions

According to the thinkers discussed in this chapter, the people of Israel or a part of it are the true "body of Christ", which is understood in Christianity as the collective of Christian believers.[1019] This interpretation is a powerful covert polemic against the Christian claim that they are *Verus Israel,* the True Israel. Instead, this idea suggests that the Jewish people, understood collectively, is *Verus Christus,* the True Christ. This argument reverses Christian supersessionism and its language argues for a Jewish one in order to support the legitimacy of Jewish communal existence. Augustine's doctrine inevitably led to the theological delegitimization and internal colonization of the Jews. Although the main goal of Jewish thinkers was to boost Jewish self-esteem and counter Augustinian attitudes, their arguments inadvertently led to the delegitimization and counter-colonization of Christianity. As Heschel points out, the nature of colonization is that the colonizer does not destroy the colonized but exploits them,[1020] which is exactly what happened to the Jews in premodern times both economically and theologically. The Jewish counterargument, no matter to what extent the author expressed their respect for Christianity, resulted in its delegitimization between the lines, as Christianity became exploited as a Jewish instrument to further Jewish goals. At the same time, Jewish existence was made dependent on the non-Jewish world. After all, the salvific mission of Judaism only makes sense if there are other peoples to save.

[1019] 1Corinthians 12:27.

[1020] Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 27.

7. Summary and conclusions

In August 2015, I photocopied the Hebrew edition of *Jesus of Nazareth* by Joseph Klausner in the library of the University of Haifa, and I had it spiral bound at the photocopy store. When the assistant, with a kippah on his head, saw the title of the book, told me with a hint of resentment in his voice: "Jesus wasn't Christian but Jewish", almost the same words as Wellhausen wrote: "Jesus was not a Christian, he was a Jew".[1021] Since I did not understand why he had to emphasize something so obvious, I felt his remark somewhat off and hostile. Since the time and place was not appropriate to discuss such a controversial topic, I ended the conversation by answering, "Yes, that's what the book is about", hoping not to hurt his feelings. Only later did I realize that the reason for his objection was that the Hebrew title of the book has a double meaning: *Yeshu hanotsri* means both "Jesus of Nazareth" and "the Christian Jesus" at the same time,[1022] and he may have felt that the book he was working on argued that Jesus, whom he presumably thought of as a Jew, was in fact Christian, and it provoked his tone, which was at once apologetical and polemical. Assuming from his reaction that the photocopy guy was not an expert of the topic, this incident shows how deeply the "the Jewish reclamation of Jesus" is already anchored in everyday Jewish thinking.

7.1. Summary of findings

What I discovered during my research leading to this dissertation is that (1) "Judaization" of foreign cultural elements as an inversive form of cultural resistance date back to ancient times, most likely until the Neo-Assyrian period (8th century BCE) or even earlier; (2) in addition to the medieval hostile Jewish attitude toward Jesus, several premodern Jewish intellectuals expressed more nuanced and accepting views of his figure; (3) even hostile literature such as the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu* can be understood as using Jesus as a vehicle for internal polemics and an identity model; (4) Jewish thinkers, both premodern and modern, Judaized not only the figure of Jesus but also the Christological language, with which they portrayed the people of Israel as a Christ-nation, and used Jesus as a collective identity model for the Jewish people; (5) Jewish views of Jesus were closely related to changes in Christian understanding in both the premodern and modern times; and finally, as it became apparent during the writing of this

[1021] Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei Evangelien*, 113.

[1022] Probably this is why Tzvi Sadan calls Jesus *Yeshua minatsrat* (Jesus of Nazareth) instead of *Yeshua hanotsri.*

dissertation, (6) the modern emphasis on Jesus' Jewishness was a deliberate strategy to legitimize a separate Jewish communal existence either in the Diaspora or in the Land of Israel.

7.2. New scholarly results

The thorough analysis of the Jewish reclamation of Jesus and its comparison with the Christian quest for the historical Jesus shows that Jewish thought is influenced by the philosophy and discourse of the non-Jewish world on a much deeper and complex level than we might think. There is strong evidence that the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus has premodern antecedents and appears to fit within a paradigm of Jewish internalization of the symbols and language of the surrounding culture to construct its own distinct identity; therefore, it contains a strong polemical element in it. Similarly to the Christian endeavours, Jewish thinkers also used the figure of Jesus as a vehicle to articulate their contemporary problems and struggles, which also has premodern roots, even in the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu*. All this means that Judaism has always been in a closer and deeper interaction with the surrounding culture than it was once thought by many scholars and is still believed by non-experts, and we cannot speak of a "pure" Jewish or Christian culture. It appears that the Judaization of the opponent's philosophical premises and the discourse the opponent is not just a passive reception of influence from the cultural environment but an active and proven Jewish strategy for polemicizing with the intellectually more powerful and socially more prestigious opponent.

In the 19th century, Jews hoped that the more Jewish Jesus proved to be, the more Christians would respect Jews. However, it appears that modern Jewish thinkers were too far ahead of their time and their arguments backfired, as the denial of Christianity's originality challenged the prevailing Christian interpretation of Christianity's origins and influence, as well as the conventional depiction of Western history and established understanding of Christian origins.[1023] Instead of "breaking down boundaries" between Judaism and Christianity,[1024] the implicit polemical content of the Jewish reclamation of Jesus further tightened the boundaries and failed to achieve the desired goal, the disappearance of anti-Semitism.

Jews presented Jesus as a Jew *par excellence*, and Protestants as a restorer of pre-Rabbinic prophetic Judaism, a Christian *par excellence*, contrasting him with the decadent priestly and rabbinic Judaism of the first century. Jesus' Jewishness or "Gentileness" became an element of identity for both sides. At the same time when Zionists such as Klausner and Kabak represented Jesus as a model of the "New Jew",[1025] liberal Protestants invented the "Aryan Jesus", ironically

[1023] Heschel, 'Jewish Views of Jesus', 152.
[1024] Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi*, 2.
[1025] Stahl, 'Jesus as the New Jew'.

taking the stance of a later version of the *Toledot Yeshu* according to which Pandera, Jesus' father was not Jewish.[1026] In Homi Bhabha's words, in their respective colonial and counter-colonial discourse, both Christians and Jews applied a "strategy of containment where the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation. The Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated, encased in the shot / reverse-shot strategy of a serial enlightenment. Narrative and the cultural politics of difference become the closed circle of interpretation. The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse."[1027]

7.3. Further directions of research

Since the topic of Jewish perceptions of Jesus is inexhaustible, I was able to present only a small section of it here. There are several directions in which the theme of the role of Jesus of Nazareth in Jewish thought and in Jewish-Christian interaction can be pursued. One possible continuation of this study could be the analysis of the extent of premodern and modern polemical concepts and multi-layer strategies in Jewish interpretations of Jesus after the Holocaust by authors such as Schalom Ben-Chorin, Shmuley Boteach, Daniel Boyarin, Harvey Falk, Hyam Maccoby, Samuel Sandmel, and Géza Vermès. Since all the thinkers discussed in this dissertation are male, the above study could be supplemented with interpretations of Jesus by postwar Jewish female scholars such as Lena Einhorn, Susannah Heschel, Paula Fredriksen, Amy-Jill Levine, Rivi Litvin, and Adele Reinhartz, with particular attention to their polemical advance. Jesus as a personal and collective identity model in the works of Zionist and Israeli scholars, writers, and artists could also be explored, complementing Matthew Hoffman's studies on the role of Jesus in the formation of modern Jewish culture and Amitai Mendelsohn's exploration of Jesus in Israeli art.[1028] The role of Jesus as a non-Jewish and Jewish national and individual identity model can also be investigated, examining parallels and possible connections between Jesus' role in the preparation of enlightened Western modernity interpreted as a secular messianic age, in the construction of national identities, in the legitimation the nation state, and in

[1026] The idea that Jesus was racially Aryan was formulated in 1899 by Houston Steward Chamberlain, the son-in-law of Richard Wagner (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 41–42.). Strikingly, the Nazi scholar Walter Grundmann explicitly cited Jewish tradition to argue that Jesus' father was Aryan (Grundmann, *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judentum*, 197–99; Zeichmann, 'Jesus "Ben Pantera"', 146.). See also footnote 340 on page 73. Taking the de-Judaization of Christianity to extremes, including the "Aryanization" of Jesus, enabled the German Protestant churches, united by Hitler under the name German Evangelical Church, to support the Holocaust. Dissident Lutheran and Reformed leaders opposing the *Reichskirche* created the Confessing Church in 1934, joined by influential theologians including Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Niemöller, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2010, 2:462–65.).

[1027] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 31.

[1028] See: Mendelsohn, *Behold the Man*.

subsequent European colonialism, in parallel with Jesus' role in Jewish nationalism and Zionism. Another possible direction is the formulation of a postwar Jewish theology of Jesus, grounded not in historical scholarship but in classical Jewish theological concepts in a post-assimilationist and multicultural Western society,[1029] with particular attention to the contemporary post-polemical world that began in the 21st century, which apparently resulted in the fading away of the Jewish reclamation of Jesus in parallel with the Christian "Third Quest", and with the decline of modernity and the emergence of postmodernity (or post-postmodernity). A promising research topic would be the role of the Vatican documents and rabbinic statements referred to in the Introduction in giving up Jewish-Christian polemics, and the contribution of the French Jewish historian Jules Isaac, whose books *Jesus and Israel* (1948) and *The Teaching of Contempt* (1962) had a direct impact on the modification of the Catholic Church's teachings about Jews and Judaism, ultimately resulting in *Nostra aetate* and the 2015 Vatican document. And since this dissertation was written in the Hungarian cultural context, and scholarly analyses of the role of Jesus in the formation of contemporary Jewish identity is available only in an American setting, empirical research on the same in Europe could also be informative, with particular attention to Eastern Europe and Hungary.

[1029] Magid, *American Post-Judaism*, 137.

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