Jews and Christians: Intolerance and Creative Competition in the Middle Ages

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Prof. Marc Saperstein of George Washington University offers a fresh view of the relation between Christians and Jews in medieval Europe, asking whether, beyond the well-known competition and conflict, these traditions ever recognized anything of value in the other religion and society.

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Marc Saperstein

I want to emphasize that while I am extremely interested in, and committed to, contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue, I approach that subject not as a theologian, or as an official representative of any organization, but as an historian. I shall address, from the Jewish perspective, not so much what I consider to be the burning issues in the relations between Christians and Jews today, but rather the baggage we bring with us in facing each other. Now I certainly believe that a knowledge of the past is important; nevertheless, I would argue that many Jews nurture an overly simplistic, almost mythic view of the history of Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages, and that the impact of this view on the present is not beneficial or salutary. I therefore take it as my task to paint a picture rather different from the one that is so widely prevalent.

Persecution

Ask most educated Jews – and many Christians as well – about their associations with Jewish life in Christian Europe during the Middle Ages, and they are likely to paint an extremely bleak picture. The first association with this topic will probably be persecution. If pushed to exemplify, they might mention the Crusades: religious emotion raised to a peak and then spinning out of control, bands of warriors under the sign of the cross attacking Jewish communities in the Rhineland, giving a choice of baptism or death (in violation of papal doctrine which prohibited forced baptism), killing thousands of Jewish men, women and children, producing a wave of Jewish martyrdom unprecedented in Europe.[1]

Or the charge of “ritual murder,” the outrageous accusation that Jews nefariously plotted to kidnap and kill Christian children, whether in a ritual re-enactment of the original torture and crucifixion of Jesus, or in order to use the blood of these children for their own purposes, including – incredibly – the preparation of matzot for Passover.[2]

Or the accusation that Jews schemed to get possession of the consecrated host, which Christians believed to have been transformed into the actual body of Christ, so that by stabbing the host they could once again inflict torture on the rejected messiah. Note that the accusation assumes that Jews believed fully in the doctrine of transubstantiation, a problematic doctrine for many thoughtful Christians at the time.[3]

Or the campaign against the Talmud – that foundational text of rabbinic Judaism which became alongside the Hebrew Scripture the basis of Jewish scholarship and life in the Middle Ages. Now it was accused of blasphemies against the Christian faith, brought before the newly established Papal Inquisition in Paris, and – after all copies in the kingdom of France had been seized – consigned to bonfires at the order of King Louis IX, later popularly known as “Saint Louis”.[4]

Or the accusations that the Black Plague, which devastated Europe in the mid 14th century, leading to the loss of one third of the population in many areas, was caused by Jews who poisoned the wells of their cities, accusations that led to violent attacks against Jewish communities and many deaths in addition to those caused by the Plague itself.[5]

Or the Inquisitions established under papal or national auspices, judicial institutions that investigated and brought to trial men and women defined by the Church as Christians who were suspected of the heresy of “Judaizing,” namely, continuing after baptism to profess a Jewish belief or observe a Jewish practice.[6] The image of Jews massacred under the sign of the cross, Jewish books or Jewish martyrs burned at the stake, remains a powerful one in the minds of many Jews.

Disputations

If pushed to go beyond the rubric of “persecution,” some may well think of “disputation”. The spectacular public disputations of Barcelona and Tortosa, in which Jewish leaders were compelled to defend their faith against the attacks of Christian intellectuals in a classic “no-win” situation.[7] As the ground-rules guaranteed the Jewish participant could not attack Christian faith, the best they could hope for was to avoid the public perception that they had lost and humiliated their people. No Jews sought out such disputations, for they were well aware of the dangers if they appeared to be doing too well; some, apparently, attended them with burial shrouds under their clothes.

Beyond the public spectacles, there was a large polemical literature, which Jews felt pressed to write in every generation to defend their faith against the constant pressure by Christian writers. The word almah in Isaiah 7 did not mean “virgin”, and the context could not predict the birth of a messiah seven centuries in the future. There was no proof of a triune God in the Hebrew Scripture. The covenant with the Jewish people and its commandments had not been rescinded by God. The suffering and scattering of the Jewish people did not mean that God had abandoned them. The Messiah had not yet come.[8]

Isolation

In addition to “persecution” and “disputation,” many might think of the word “isolation”. That unlike the Jews living in the Islamic orbit, who shared a literary and cultural language – Arabic – with their neighbors, Jews and Christians in medieval Europe had no common culture. That Jews were physically isolated from Christians, forced to live in “ghettos,” cramped and dismal areas surrounded by walls, the gates locked every night. That Jews were compelled to wear something that would immediately identify them at a glance – a badge affixed to their clothing, a special kind of hat – a policy intended not only to identify but to isolate and humiliate them. That Jews were increasingly imagined to be allies of Satan, collaborators with the demonic forces of evil, engaged in a constant battle to subvert and destroy all that was sacred in medieval Christian Europe.[9]

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Persecution, Disputation, Isolation, largely because of the Church and its “teaching of contempt”. (Indeed, the Vatican document on the “sins of the past” issued in the spring of 2000 mentioned some of these themes, including the Crusades, forced conversions, and the Inquisition.) Let it be clear: I am not suggesting that the image of Jewish life based on the negatives is a myth with no basis in fact. There are, indeed, elements of truth in all that I have mentioned above, though they are commonly misunderstood, and many are unaware of basic historical data – for example, that the “ghetto” was formally imposed only in the sixteenth century, or that the Inquisition had primary jurisdiction not over Jews at all, but only over Christians (the rampant misconception leads at times to utter absurdity, as in Mel Brooks 1981 movie “History of the World, Part I”, which has a scene depicting Jews in Hasidic dress being burned at the stake by the Spanish Inquisition).

What I want to insist upon is that this image – what the great historian Salo W. Baron dubbed the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history” as a series of unending persecutions by Christians[10] – is not the entire story. If it were, it would be impossible to understand how Jewish communities were able to survive for more than a thousand years under Christian rulers, who had the power to destroy them completely if they had so chosen. And how they were able not only to survive but in many cases to flourish, to prosper, to produce vital expressions of spirituality and important works of scholarship in many fields.

A Different Set of Issues

I would like, therefore, to raise a different set of issues. Not why was there so much intolerance and persecution. That model of inter-group relations is characteristic not only of the Middle Ages but of our own, much more “enlightened” era as well. But rather questions such as the following.

On what basis did the toleration of a minority Jewish community become possible? That Christian rulers would allow Jews to observe their own religion in many lands throughout most of the Middle Ages is not to be taken for granted, particularly when we recall that no such toleration was permitted for pagans, or for those Christians defined as “heretics.” The Church launched Crusades against the Muslims, and against Christian heretics, but never against the Jews. To understand why, we need to appreciate the significance of decisions made by Christians such as Augustine, who developed a theory to explain why the continued existence of scattered Jewish communities was part of God’s plan, and Pope Gregory I, who prohibited forced baptism of Jews and the unjust seizure of synagogues.[11]

Secondly, how did the treatment of Jews compare with that of other groups in Christian society? Did Christianity become less tolerant of Jews alone in the High Middle Ages, or did it also become less tolerant of heretics, homosexuals, prostitutes, witches? How did the status of a Jewish community in Christian Spain compare with the status of a tolerated minority Muslim community in the same city? Might a Christian who needed to borrow money actually prefer to do business with a Jewish money-lender than with his Christian counterpart?[12] How did the life expectancy of the average Jew in thirteenth-century England compare with the life expectancy of the average Christian serf, or noble, or city dweller?

These are important questions that I cannot treat at length on this occasion (and I am afraid that no one, as yet, knows the answer to the last questions about life expectancy). I will, instead, turn now to another set of questions.

Learning From Each Other

Did Jews and Christians ever actually learn from each other? Are there signs of influence by neighbors of the other faith? Did members of these competing religious traditions ever recognize anything of value in the religion or society of the Other? My answer to these questions is a

cautious, limited, yet emphatic “yes.” I could illustrate this with examples of Christian openness to Jewish culture, especially in the area of Biblical studies – where Christian scholars consulted with medieval Jews to learn more about the original text of the Hebrew Scriptures, what they called the “hebraica veritas”[13] – and in scholastic philosophy – where Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed was translated into Latin so that it could be used by Thomas Aquinas, who frequently cites ‘Rabbi Moses the Egyptian’ with accuracy and respect – and in the Jewish mystical doctrine called Kabbalah – where Renaissance Christian intellectuals hired Jewish tutors to provide them access to this arcane yet powerful tradition.[14]

To be sure, the motivations of the Christian Hebraists varied from intellectual curiosity to a desire to exploit Jewish sources for conversionary purposes. Nor does it follow that greater scholarship devoted to Jewish sources necessarily led to warmer relations or deeper tolerance.[15] But the interest on the part of many leading Christian intellectuals in contemporary Jews and their culture is undeniable. I will, however, concentrate on examples of Jewish openness to Christian influences – an openness that betokens not a weakness of Jewish faith, or an eagerness to abandon it, but rather a confidence that it could accommodate the best in its rival religion while remaining absolutely faithful to Jewish commitments. I can give just a few brief examples.

Every Jewish family that observes a seder for the holiday of Pesach knows the ceremony of the afikomen, in which a piece of matzah is hidden away for much of the service, to be eaten – when found by the children – at the conclusion of the festival meal. There is no actual liturgy in the Passover Haggadah associated with this custom, and its origin is not entirely clear. In a Hebrew book just recently published, Yisrael Yuval points to a widespread custom in late medieval Europe in which the burial and resurrection of Christ during Holy Week were re-enacted by sequestering the host consecrated on Good Friday in a sepulchre until Easter morning, when it would be removed, elevated, and consumed in the Easter Eucharist. Yuval makes a strong case that this and other Pesach customs are closely bound up with contemporary Christian practices.[16]

Doctrine of Repentance

A second example involves a small yet influential movement within medieval Judaism known as Hasidei Ashkenaz, or “German Pietists,” that emerged in the second half of the twelfth century, in the period following the massacres of the First and Second Crusades. It is perhaps not surprising that the teachings of this group express extreme hostility toward Christianity and its sancta.[17] This is clearly not a movement of rapprochement with Christianity. Yet among the most important teachings of this movement is a distinctive doctrine of repentance, a theological category at the heart of rabbinic Judaism. Quite at variance with the classical formulation of Moses Maimonides, the German Pietists introduced into Judaism an elaborate system of penances.

For example, a Jew who is guilty of forbidden sexual relations, in addition to renouncing meat and wine and sleeping on a wooden board (except for the Sabbath and holidays), must suffer pain as grievous as death. He should sit in ice or in snow once or twice for an hour, and in the summer he should sit among flies or ants or bees, so as to suffer afflictions as painful as death.... He must weep and confess each day, and suffer all manner of affliction, because he made the woman forbidden to her husband.

Here we have an extreme form of asceticism, including mortification of the flesh, that has no parallel in Maimonides’ Code of Jewish Law, and at best ambiguous grounding in the rabbinic literature. This appears to be a dramatic example of the influence of the medieval Christian penitential literature, which had earlier ordained many of the same penances.[18]

It is as if the Jewish writers felt on some level that a purely internal transformation was not enough. The standards set by their Christian neighbors were perceived to be higher, and for Jews to have

what appeared to be an easier way to repentance was psychologically intolerable. But there is something more.

Maimonides spoke of individual confession to God, a confession that must “allocute” to the sin by putting vague feelings into words, but should not be public, and not necessarily even out loud. Indeed, the Talmud explicitly states that “one is impertinent [to God] in proclaiming one’s sins [to others]” (b. Ber. 34b), indicating that disclosing one’s sins to other human beings can, paradoxically, be an egotistical act of calling attention to one’s own behavior. Yet the Pietists finessed the Talmudic statement while introducing a new practice: individual confession of sins to a sage who instructs the penitent about the appropriate acts of penance. And this precisely at the time when confession to the priest was being made mandatory for all Roman Catholics (through an ordinance of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215). A rather dramatic example of openness to the dynamic environment of medieval Christianity.[19]

Doctrine of the Messiah

Another doctrine of obvious centrality both to Judaism and the Jewish-Christian debate is the doctrine of the Messiah. We find differences not just on the identification and timing of the Messiah, but on his nature and function. For Christians, the Messiah came as an incarnation of the divine, who took upon himself the sins of the world and, through his suffering and death, provided atonement for all who believe in him, atonement that cannot be achieved through human initiative alone.

For Jews this idea of vicarious atonement – that the Messiah takes upon himself suffering that would otherwise come as punishment to the people for their sins – seems totally alien. Individuals are themselves directly accountable to God, who may forgive as an act of divine grace, and needs no Messiah to suffer in their stead. But let us turn to a passage in the Zohar, the classical text of medieval Jewish mysticism or Kabbalah.

The passage begins by describing the destiny of souls in the Lower Paradise. At times, we are told, they roam about the world in which we live, observing the suffering of human beings, “the bodies of sinners undergoing their punishment” as victims of pain and disease. They observe also the undeserved suffering of those Jews who “suffer for their belief in the unity of [God]. They then return [to their place in the Lower Paradise], and make all this known to the Messiah,” who, the Kabbalists believed, exists at present in the supernal realm, awaiting the signal from God to enter our world. The passage continues: The Messiah then enters a certain Hall in the Garden of Eden, called the Hall of the Afflicted. There he calls for all the diseases and pains and sufferings of Israel, bidding them settle on himself, which they do. And were it not that he thus eases the burden from Israel, taking it on himself, no one could endure the sufferings meted out to Israel in expiation on account of their neglect of the Torah. So Scripture says, surely our diseases he did bear (Isa. 53:4). . . .

As long as Israel were in the Holy Land, by means of the Temple service and sacrifices, they averted all evil diseases and afflictions from the world. Now it is the Messiah who is the means of averting them from mankind until the time when a person quits this world and receives his punishment. In this passage, with its prooftext from the “suffering servant” passage in Isaiah 53, the “vicarious atonement” doctrine is unmistakable. The Messiah takes upon himself the suffering deserved by Jews, thereby removing much of it from them.[20]

Note the difference from the Christian doctrine: the suffering messiah does not remove individual accountability in life after death. His suffering occurs before he enters the world, not after. But the insistence that it is part of the Messiah’s role to suffer and thereby to remove affliction from the Jewish people is unmistakable, and dramatic, and it seems to me undeniable that this reveals the

power of the contemporary Christian model. The message to thirteenth-century Jews is clear: if you are prospering, it is not because you are blameless but because the Messiah is suffering the afflictions that you deserve; if you are suffering, know that what you really deserve for your sins is actually far, far greater. In either case, your religious failures cause the Messiah untold anguish and pain.[21]

Christians Influenced Jews

I mentioned above the influence of Jewish Biblical scholars on Christians interested in the meaning of the original Hebrew texts. But Christians influenced Jews as well. In the late thirteenth century, Jewish exegetes began to work with the idea of four levels of Biblical interpretation, known by the acronym pardes: *peshat*, the simple meaning; *remez*, philosophical allegory; *derash*, homiletical interpretation; and *sod*, mystery, or Kabbalistic symbolism. There is a consensus among scholars that this crystallization reflects, in Jewish terms, the Christian doctrine of four levels of meaning that had been formulated some centuries earlier.[22]

Let me provide one concrete example of the impact of Christian values upon the substance of Jewish exegesis. This is the problematic and disturbing story of Jephthah's daughter, found in Judges chapter 11. About to undertake a military campaign against the Ammonites, Jephthah makes a vow to God that if he prevails, then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering (Judges 11:31). When Jephthah did return, his daughter came out to meet him. Constrained to fulfill his vow, he allowed her to go with her companions for two months to bewail her maidenhood, and then he did to her as he had vowed (11:39).

It seems absolutely clear that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering. Yet there is a Jewish exegetical tradition that spared the daughter's life. It depends on two things. First, a grammatical, semantic point: the *vav in ve-ha'alitihu*, usually translated "and I will offer it," can mean "or I will offer it." (Precedent is in Exodus 21:15, *makkeh aviv ve-imo mot yumat*, which the rabbis interpret to mean not just "Whoever strikes his father and his mother will be put to death," but "Whoever strikes his father or his mother."[23]) So in this case, Jephthah vows two alternatives: as the thirteenth-century commentator David Kimhi paraphrased, "whatever comes forth from my house to meet me shall be the Lord's consecrated to God if it is not appropriate for a burnt offering, or I will offer it as a burnt offering."

More relevant to our subject, the interpretation depends also on an understanding of what it could mean for a young woman to be "devoted to the Lord" other than being sacrificed. So Kimhi wrote, "Jephthah made her a house and put her in it, and there she was separated from other human beings and the ways of the world. . . . Throughout the year she lived in isolation, just as those recluses who are shut off in certain houses." He is referring here not to a model in Jewish society, but to Christian world-renouncing hermits. If this is not clear enough, here is the late-fifteenth century Spaniard Don Isaac Abravanel:

She had to be secluded in one house and not to emerge from it all the rest of her life. . . . She said, "I will bewail my virginity," meaning that she would not be able to marry. He also had to go and choose a place where she would stay in her seclusion. I believe that from this the Christians learned to make cloisters for women, into which they would enter, never to set forth again for the rest of their lives and never to see a man as long as they live.[24]

Now clearly the Christians did not learn about cloisters from this ambiguous passage. Rather, Jewish intellectuals derived their interpretation from the Christian practice of nuns in cloisters.[25] What is striking is that the Biblical phrase in the vow, "devoted to God," is interpreted to be fulfilled through a life of seclusion and virginity. It is impossible to derive this from an internal Jewish

tradition of celibate eremiticism. What it shows is that this aspect of Christian spirituality, far removed as it was from most Jewish sources and actual behavior, apparently had some impact.

The examples provided above are of openness on a relatively high cultural level. The extent of interaction on lower levels of society, both social and cultural, especially in the areas of popular beliefs and superstition, is one of the most exciting areas of recent research, although much of the evidence – by its very nature non-literary – has been lost to the historical record.[26]

Conclusion

I conclude with one final expression of this theme of openness to the Other. Some time ago I started collecting passages in which, in the context of self-criticism, particularly in sermons, Christian writers point to areas of religious life where they claim the Jews are doing better, and Jewish preachers identify those aspects of Christian behavior from which their listeners would do well to learn. To summarize my conclusions, medieval and early modern Christian preachers – occasionally – spoke with a grudging admiration about the Jews' devotion to the Sabbath and holy days, their abhorrence for blasphemous language and profanity, their commitment to education, and their willingness to suffer and sacrifice for their faith.[27] As for Jewish writers, I will share just two passages, among my favorites.

First is an early-fifteenth century Spanish Jew, who denounced the shortcomings of Jewish religious society following the catastrophic pogroms of 1391. Eventually he turns to behavior in the synagogue:

Look what happens when a congregation [of Jews] gathers to hear words of Torah from a sage. Slumber weighs upon the eyes of the officers; others converse about trivial affairs. The preacher is dumbfounded by the talking of men and the chattering of women standing behind the synagogue. If he should reproach them because of their behavior, they continue to sin, behaving corruptly, abominably. This is the opposite of the Christians. When their men and women gather to hear a preacher, they stand together in absolute silence, marveling at his rebuke. Not one of them dozes as he pours out his words upon them. They await him as they do the rain, eager for the waters of his counsel. We have not learned properly from those around us.[28]

Two centuries later, the leading rabbi of the recently established Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam berated his congregation by citing and then exemplifying a statement from the Talmud, "You have followed them in their corruption, you have failed to emulate their good" (b. Sanh. 39b):

Look at the Gentiles among whom we live. We learn from them styles of clothing and arrogance, but we do not learn from them silence during prayer. We are like them in consuming their cheeses and their wine, but we are not like them with regard to justice, righteousness, and honesty. We are like them in shaving our beard or modeling it in their style, but we are not like them in their refraining from cursing or swearing in God's name. We are like them in frequenting underground game rooms, but we are not like them in turning from vengeance and refraining from bearing hatred in our hearts. We are like them in fornicating with their daughters, but we are not like them in conducting business affairs with integrity and fairness.[29]

Needless to say, contemporary Christian moralists, whether in Spain or in Amsterdam, painted a considerably less rosy picture of their own societies. The point here is not so much the reality of the other as the perception: there were areas in which the competition appeared to be doing better. As part of the rhetoric of rebuke, it was effective to be able to argue that, measured against the actual behavior of Christian neighbors, Jews should find themselves to be wanting.

I hope I have succeeded in presenting an alternative to the regnant, totally dismal picture of inter-

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group relations in pre-modern times. In most areas of medieval Europe, Jews were not sealed off from the world around them. Despite the occasional outbursts of persecution, despite their own hostility toward much of the Christian world, they were open to positive influences of the external, Christian culture, capable of incorporating aspects of this culture in Judaism. More than this, it might be argued that Judaism survived and flourished not because of its insularity, but precisely because of this openness.[30] Indeed, each side was capable of learning from the other, of using the other not just as a dangerous or demonic adversary, but as a challenge to creative competition in ethical and religious living. Perhaps that is a model that can help us set our agenda today.

Notes

1. For an accessible survey including the main Jewish chronicles in translation, see Robert Chazan, European Jewry and the First Crusade (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
2. See Gavin Langmuir, Toward a Definition of Antisemitism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 209-36, 282-98; R. Po-Chia Hsia, Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
3. See Miri Rubin, Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
4. Jeremy Cohen, The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 60-76; for relevant documents, see Robert Chazan, Church, State and Jew in the Middle Ages (New York: Behrman Press, 1980), pp. 221-37.
5. See Philip Ziegler, The Black Death (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 85-111; Mordechai Breuer, “The ‘Black Death’ and Antisemitism”, in Antisemitism Through the Ages, ed. Shmuel Almog (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), pp. 139-51.
6. There is a huge literature on this. See, for example, Haim Beinart, Conversos on Trial: The Inquisition in Ciudad Real (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), and, for a more general survey of the different Inquisitions, Edward Peters, Inquisition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
7. For the “Disputation of Barcelona”, see Robert Chazan, Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); for Tortosa: Yitzhak Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: JPS, 1961-1966), 2:170-243.
8. For useful surveys of Jewish polemical and apologetical arguments, see David Berger, The Jewish- Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages (Philadelphia: JPS, 1979); Hanne Trautner-Kromann, Shield and Sword (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck, 1993).
9. For a now classic survey of material on these themes, see Joshua Trachtenberg, The Devil and the Jews (Philadelphia, JPS, 1983).
10. See on this Ismar Schorsch, From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1994), pp. 376-88.
11. For a brief overview of these central figures, see Marc Saperstein, Moments of Crisis in Jewish- Christian Relations (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), pp. 8-16 [for French version, refer to the French translation: Juifs et chrétiens: moments de crise (Paris: Cerf, 1991), 26-40]. For a more thorough study, see Jeremy Cohen, Living Letters of the Law (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 23-79.
12. On these questions, see R. I. Moore, The Formation of a Persecuting Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); David Nirenberg, Communities of Violence (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Joseph Shatzmiller, Shylock Reconsidered: Jews, Moneylending and Medieval Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
13. See on this the path-breaking studies by Beryl Smalley, Aryeh Grabois, and Michael Signer, listed in Sara Lipton, Images of Intolerance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 184 n. 77.
14. Gershom Scholem, “The Beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah”, in The Christian Kabbalah

, ed. by Joseph Dan (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard College Library, 1997), pp. 17-51; Chaim Wirszubski, Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

15. For an argument to the contrary, see Jeremy Cohen, "Scholarship and Intolerance in the Medieval Academy: The Study and Evaluation of Judaism in European Christendom", American Historical Review 91 (1986): 592-613.
16. Israel Jacob Yuval, "Two Nations In Your Womb": Perceptions of Jews and Christians (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001), p. 254; cf. Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 294-97.
17. See on this Jacob Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), p. 95.
18. For a fine review of the scholarly controversy over the sources of this doctrine, see Talia Fishman, "The Penitential System of Hasidei Ashkenaz and the Problem of Cultural Boundaries", Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 9 (1999): 1-29. For the classical formulation by Maimonides, see his "Laws of Repentance", 2:2.
19. On confession to the sage among the German Pietists, see Ivan Marcus, Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany (Leiden: Brill, 1981), pp. 49, 74-79. On the later development of this practice among the Polish Hasidim, see Ada Rapoport Albert, "Confession in the Circle of R. Nahman of Braslav", Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies 1 (1973-1975): 65-96. This article notes that in the medieval confession, unlike its Christian counterpart, the function of confession is merely to receive knowledge of the appropriate penitential act from an expert, not to receive absolution from the confessor. The Hasidic doctrine is more radical: confession to the tsaddik is what effects atonement for the sin even before any penitential act is performed (pp. 66-67, 86-87).
20. A few earlier Jewish sources express the idea of a suffering Messiah, including a passage that looks quite close to vicarious atonement. See, especially, Pesikta Rabbati, transl. by William Braude, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), Piska 36, p. 679; Isaiah 53 is not used in this context. For the question whether this midrashic passage reflects Christian influence, see Braude's note, p. 678 n. 5. For later expressions of the suffering messiah, see Moshe Idel, Messianic Mystics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 34, and Gershom Scholem, Sabbatai Zevi: The Mystical Messiah (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 272, 284.
21. Zohar 2:212a. On the possibility of influence of the Christian Trinity on the Zohar, see Yehuda Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar" (Hebrew), in The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), pp. 130-31 n. 182.
22. See, for example, Gershom Scholem, "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism", in his On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 61-62, and cf. Frank Talmage, "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism", in Jewish Spirituality From the Bible Through the Middle Ages, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 319-21. On the four levels in Christian exegesis, see Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 28, Henri de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, vol. 1: The Four Senses of Scr ipture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 1-9.
23. Mekilta ad loc., ed. Jacob Lauterbach, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: JPS, 1935), 3: 42.
24. Isaac Abravanel, Perush 'al Nevi'im Rishonim (Jerusalem: Torah ve-Da'at, 1955), p. 130.
25. See the Biblical Encyclopedia (Hebrew), 9 vols. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1955-1988, 3:751: Kimhi was "apparently influenced in his interpretation by the eremitical practices (minhagei nezirut) of those days".
26. E.g. Joseph Dan, "Demonological Stories of R. Judah the Hasid" (Hebrew), Tarbiz 30 (1961): 273- 89; Ivan Marcus, Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), especially pp. 83-111; Emily Taitz, "Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages: The Underside of a Shared Culture", in Yakar Le'Mordecai: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Rabbi Mordecai Waxman, ed. Zvia Ginor

(Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1998), pp. 189-201.

27. Marc Saperstein, “Christians and Jews: Some Positive Images”, in “Your Voice Is Like a Ram’s Horn” (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1996), pp. 46-50.
28. Solomon Alami, “Iggeret Musar”, St. Petersburg, 1912; reprinted Jerusalem, 1965, p. 51; cf. translation in Nahum Glatzer, Faith and Knowledge (Boston: Beacon press, 1965), pp. 124-25.
29. Saul Levi Morteira, Giv‘at Sha’ul (Vilna, 1912), end of sermon on Devarim p. 129a.
30. See on this, Gerson Cohen, “The Blessing of Assimilation”, in Jewish History and Jewish Destiny (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), pp. 145-56.

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