

WORKSHOP: Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Period

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Polemics, Religion and Scepticism in Judah Halevi's *Book of Kuzari*¹

The present talk allows me to revisit some themes of the research I have been carrying out for the last four decades. Over the years, my interest in medieval Jewish philosophy has centered on a number of themes, one of which has been interreligious polemics, most specifically Jewish anti-Christian polemics, with a special attention to those debates in the Islamic realm; and another theme has been the philosophy of Rabbi Judah Halevi, especially his view of the opponents of Rabbinic Judaism, whether they be philosophers, members of other religions or Karaites. Two articles which I particularly enjoyed writing were "Proselyte Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Thought of Judah Halevi," which appeared in 1990;² and "The Jewish Critique of Christianity Under Islam in the Middle Ages," which appeared in 1991.³ Since it is now been a quarter century since these articles appeared, it is appropriate to consider them once again.

Since Judah Halevi wrote the *Kuzari* in an Islamic country, and since it includes polemics against Christianity, let me begin with that topic, namely the nature of the Jewish debate with Christianity in those countries with Muslim governments.⁴ When I began studying Jewish-Christian polemics, at the behest of my late, lamented Doktorvater, Prof. Alexander Altmann, I assumed like most Jews that these works were a reaction to Christian attempts to convert Jews to Christianity, resulting in the Jewish critique of Christianity. Now, it is true that my dissertation, which became my first book, included Jewish philosophical arguments from Islamic countries written in Ju-

1 Research for this paper was sponsored by the Israel Science Foundation (grant 531/12) as part of a larger project dedicated to writing an academic commentary on Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*. I would like to thank Prof. Giuseppe Veltri, director of the Maimonides Center, Prof. Carsten Wilke, who made the first arrangements for the workshop at which this talk was presented, and Dr. Racheli Haliva who organized the workshop. Only partial annotation is provided in this written version of the lecture.

2 *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81.1–2 (1990): 75–91.

3 *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1991): 121–153.

4 The demographic issues during the first few Islamic centuries are not as simple as we usually think and some Judeo-Arabic anti-Christian polemics might have been written in areas which had a Christian majority but a Muslim government.

daeo-Arabic;⁵ and the article I mentioned from 1991 was dedicated specifically to Judeo-Arabic texts; and an article published in 1993 outlined the Andalusian Jewish origin of anti-Christian arguments used in Provence in the twelfth century;⁶ and the book I edited with Sarah Stroumsa in 1996 presented all the texts associated with the highly influential *Book of Nestor the Priest* and demonstrated that it was written in the ninth century in the Islamic Middle East and not in sixth-century Byzantium as once believed;⁷ and despite all this, I never addressed specifically the question: if Jewish anti-Christian polemics are a reaction to a Christian mission, why are there so many such polemical works in Islamic countries?

As I continued my research, I realized that there were other anomalies in the history of Jewish-Christian polemics, for instance, that in Ashkenaz (I refer to northern and eastern Europe as a collective), where there was much Christian pressure on Jews and active persecutions, forced baptisms, blood libels and expulsions, there were almost no Jewish polemical compositions, let alone the use of rationalist arguments.⁸ I also started doubting whether Ashkenazi biblical commentaries were as chock full of anti-Christian polemic as claimed by some important students of the genre.⁹ And I asked myself as well: why in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy, not a Garden of Eden for Jews but not a place with an oppressive anti-Jewish mission, there were dozens of Jewish anti-Christian works;¹⁰ but in Eastern Europe, home of many more Jews and many unsympathetic Christians, there were almost no such treatises. It

5 *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977; 2nd ed., Oxford and Portland, Or.: Littman Library, 2007).

6 "Judeo-Christian Polemics and Their Origins in Muslim Countries" [in Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 57 (1993): 4–16; for a shortened English version, see "The Jewish-Christian Debate in Transition: From the Lands of Ishmael to the Lands of Edom," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Interaction, and Communication*, eds. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 53–65.

7 Daniel J. Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1996).

8 "Jewish Philosophical Polemics in Ashkenaz," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews*, eds. Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996): 195–213; "Joseph ben Nathan's *Sefer Yosef Ha-Mekanné* and the Medieval Jewish Critique of Christianity," in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century France*, eds. Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah D. Galinsky (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 113–122.

9 "Rashi and Maimonides on Christianity," in *Between Rashi and Maimonides: Themes in Medieval Jewish Thought, Literature and Exegesis*, eds. Ephraim Kanarfogel and Moshe Sokolow (New York: Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, 2010): 3–21.

10 Károly Dániel Dobos and Gerhard Langer have identified at least 56 anti-Christian treatises in Hebrew from that period, which does not include treatises written in other languages; this information is contained in a research proposal which the authors were kind enough to share with me. See, as well, Daniel J. Lasker, "Anti-Christian Polemics in Eighteenth-Century Italy" [in Hebrew], in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division B, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1994): 185–192.

slowly dawned on me that the old narrative of Jewish criticism of Christianity as a reaction to Christian pressure was under need of revision.¹¹

In searching for a new narrative concerning Jewish anti-Christian writings, I have come to the conclusion that the Jewish critique of Christianity is not necessarily tied intrinsically to a so-called Christian threat, even though sometimes they are connected.¹² When there was increased pressure on Jews to convert, there usually was a Jewish reaction.¹³ But that does not mean that when there is no such pressure, there are no Jewish anti-Christian polemics. They still exist in the absence of any presumed need, without a specific stimulus.

Yet, not all Jewish thinkers engaged in polemic. Which Jews did write anti-Christian polemics in the Middle Ages? The answer is that Jewish anti-Christian argumentation was mainly a function of Jewish rationalist theology. Almost every Jewish author of a philosophical treatise was involved in one way or another with interreligious polemic, sometimes against Islam but usually against Christianity. If we start at the beginning of medieval Jewish philosophy, we see that Daoud al-Muqammas's ninth-century pioneering *Twenty Treatises* is replete with anti-Christian polemic, and, in addition, he wrote two specifically anti-Christian treatises.¹⁴ Saadia Gaon takes on Christianity in his *Beliefs and Opinions*, as well as in his commentaries on the Torah and other writings.¹⁵ The Karaite followers of *kalam*, such as Yaqub al-Qirqisani, Yefet ben Eli, and Yusuf al-Basir, all include anti-Christian argumentation in their legal code, biblical commentaries, and theological works respectively. In Andalusia, Judah Halevi's predecessors, including Baḥya ibn Paquda, Abraham bar Ḥiyya, and Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona, all have anti-Christian passages in their works.¹⁶ After Judah Halevi, we can look to Maimonides, Ḥasdai Crescas, Isaac Abravanel, and many other Jewish rationalists as sources for anti-Christian polemic. In contrast, in Ashkenaz, where Jewish rationalism was suspect if not worse, Jewish authors rarely engaged in specific anti-Christian polemics, and those who did

¹¹ See Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity – In Search of a New Narrative," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 6 (2011): Lasker 1–9.

¹² I was reminded of this conclusion on a recent trip to Panama. I had a guide who said that although there is crime in Panama, it is really not necessary since anyone who wants a job can find one. The guide assumed that when the economy is not doing well, then crime is understandable, but in a good economy crime is unnecessary. I do not know if the guide's facts or analysis were accurate, but it is clear that crime exists even when there is no economic threat to the criminal. It is part of the human condition and does not need a specific stimulus to occur. Such is the case with polemics as well.

¹³ See Daniel J. Lasker, "Jewish Anti-Christian Polemics in Light of Mass Conversion to Christianity," forthcoming.

¹⁴ Stroumsa, Sarah, *Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiš's Twenty Chapters ('Ishrūn Maqāla)* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

¹⁵ Daniel J. Lasker, "Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. Daniel Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995): 165–177.

¹⁶ See note 6.

were not in the forefront of Ashkenazic Jewish intellectual activities. We do not even know the name of a number of these polemicists. The leading Ashkenazic rabbinic authorities, such as the tosafists, who were not inclined to philosophical investigation, never wrote anti-Christian treatises. When there was an eruption of anti-Christian polemics in late fourteenth-century Prague, it was executed by a small coterie of philosophically adept authors, which may be the reason they engaged in polemics.¹⁷ Jewish anti-Christian polemic, therefore, is first and foremost a rationalist enterprise, even when specifically rationalist argumentation is not in use, not necessarily a defense mechanism against a real or perceived threat.

And Judah Halevi was a Jewish rationalist.¹⁸ I know that he is often considered the anti-philosophical Jewish philosopher, and such a judgment can be reinforced by a number of statements in *Kuzari*, such as:

But we have been promised that we are to be attached to the divine order through prophecy and whatever approximates it and that this divine order will be attached to us through acts of providence, marvels, and miracles¹⁹ [...]. [God said]: ‘The world will conduct its affairs according to the natural course of events, except for you, because simultaneously with the indwelling of the Divine Presence among you, you will see the fertility of your land and the regulation of your rainfall, the times of which will not exceed what is needed. You will conquer your enemies without preparation, by which you will understand that your affairs do not proceed according to a natural norm, but one that is willed [...]. And then you will also know that your affairs are governed by an order that is higher than the natural order.’ All this has come to pass, and so the promises of this Law guaranteed.²⁰

It would seem that Halevi’s denial of a central aspect of philosophy, namely that the laws of nature have a necessary and immutable status, and his positing of a special divine order which attaches itself solely to Israel, are hallmarks of anti-rationalism.

Nevertheless, I would argue, and indeed have argued, that Halevi is not an anti-rationalist but rather a critic of Aristotelian a priori rationalism in favor of a sort of

¹⁷ See my “Jewish Philosophical Polemics in Ashkenaz” (n. 8).

¹⁸ When calling Halevi a rationalist, I do not mean that he believed in innate ideas or non-empirical truths (similar to the early modern Continental Rationalists), but that he used reasoned argumentation to support his doctrines (even if one might think that his argumentation is unreasonable). Thus, he was part of the Jewish philosophical tradition and not an anti-rationalist in the style of some of the opponents of Jewish philosophy in the Maimonidean controversies of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

¹⁹ ‘Divine order’ is Barry Kogan’s translation of the key term, *amr ilahi*; Michael Schwarz renders it *ha-davar ha-elohi*.

²⁰ Judah Halevi, *Kitāb al-radd wa-’l-dalīl fī ’l-dīn al-dhalīl (Al-kitāb al-khazari)*, eds. David H. Baneth and Hagga Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977): 36 (1:109) (below: *Kuzari*). The English is from the forthcoming translation by Barry S. Kogan; I would like to thank Prof. Kogan for making this translation available to me. I have also made use of the new Hebrew translation of the *Kuzari*: R. Judah Halevi, *The Book of Kuzari. The Book of Rejoinder and Proof of the Despised Religion*, trans. Michael Schwarz (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2017). I would like to thank the late Prof. Schwarz for making his translation available to me before its publication.

empiricism.²¹ His goal in the *Kuzari* is to present a defense of Jewish theology and to refute those who challenge it. Thus, it is only natural that one of the major targets in the book would be Christianity, even though he lived mostly in Jewish communities in Islamic lands which were not the target of Christian missionary activity. And so, even though Judah Halevi did not write a specifically anti-Christian polemical treatise, he can be added to a list of medieval Jewish anti-Christian polemicists.

All this leads me to consider how exactly Halevi's arguments against Christianity fit into the tradition of anti-Christian polemics in Islamic countries and what is specific to the author of the *Kuzari*. In my articles outlining the Andalusian influence on Jewish anti-Christian polemics in Christian Europe, I identified six features of the Jewish criticism of Christianity as found in works written by Iberian Jews who were either Andalusian or influenced by Andalusian culture. These features are: 1) Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible are distorted; 2) a correct understanding of divine attributes precludes the doctrines of Trinity and incarnation; 3) Jesus was not the messiah; 4) Jesus was not as bad as Paul, the true founder of Christianity; 5) Christianity contradicts reason; and 6) even though Christianity is a poor imitation of Judaism, it does have a role to play in the divine scheme for salvation. Not all Iberian authors made all six points, but these form the general outline of their critique of Christianity.²²

If we look specifically at Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, we see that he does not provide exegetical arguments against Christianity based on verses from the Hebrew Bible. He does interpret verses concerning the suffering servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52–53) as referring to Israel (2:44), and makes a number of other references to this verse as proof that Jewish temporal degradation is a sign of the truth of Judaism (4:22–23). Missing from the *Kuzari*, however, are most of the classical texts of the Jewish-Christian debate, such as Genesis 1:26 ('Let us make man'); Genesis 18 (the three men who visit Abraham); Genesis 49:10 (scepter of Judah); Isaiah 7:14 (the *almah* who will give birth); Jeremiah 31 (new covenant); Psalm 110 (Melchizedek); and many more.

Halevi also does not make a connection between the correct interpretation of divine attributes and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. As Harry A. Wolfson demonstrated, the medieval philosophical discussions of attributes have their original source in Christian-Muslim debates over the Trinity. Among Jewish philosophers writing in Arabic, including Daoud al-Muqammas, Saadiah Gaon, Yaquob al-Qirqisani, and Maimonides, the connection between attributes and Trinity is expressed clearly.²³ For Halevi, the technical discussion of attributes at the beginning of Book 2 of the *Kuzari*, and the longer discourse on divine names at the beginning of Book 4, both ignore any Christian aspect of the topic.

²¹ Daniel J. Lasker, "Judah Halevi as a Philosopher – Some Preliminary Comments," in *Judeo-Arabic Culture in al-Andalus. Proceedings of the 13th Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies Cordoba 2007*, ed. Amir Ashur (Cordoba: CNERU – CSIC; Oriens Academics, 2013): 99–109.

²² See note 6 above.

²³ See Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 51–63.

The third point, Jesus was not the messiah, is implicit in the refutation of Christianity, but there are none of the specific arguments based either on the unredeemed nature of the world, such as Saadiah's arguments against the view that messianic promises were fulfilled in the past, or denigrations of Jesus, as found in *Toledot Yeshu* or the *Account of the Disputation of the Priest*, the Judaeo-Arabic original of *Nestor the Priest*. No mention is made as well of Paul and his founding of Christianity, as explicit in al-Muqammas's work as cited by al-Qirqisani, and implicitly in Maimonides's *Epistle to Yemen*. The Christian interlocutor with the King of the Khazars does say (in *Kuzari* 1:4) that Christianity follows the laws of Peter (perhaps under the influence of certain versions of *Toledot Yeshu*). He contrasts these laws with the statement of Jesus in Matthew 5:17, in Halevi's rendering: 'I have not come to remove even a single one of the Moses' commandments. Rather, I have come to support them and to enlarge them.' This verse is perhaps the one most cited by Jewish critics of Christianity and it is the only New Testament verse cited in the Talmud (*Shabbat* 116b); Halevi also cites Matthew 5:39–40 concerning turning the other cheek and giving up one's cloak (1:113).

Halevi is closer to previous anti-Christian polemics concerning the fifth point, namely, Christianity is illogical, and this accusation is made at the beginning of his book. As is well known, the literary framework of the *Kuzari* is based on the story of the King of the Khazars who searches for a new religion to replace his Khazarian one, because he dreams repeatedly that an angel-like figure tells him his intentions are desirable but his act is not. He first calls upon a philosopher, whose Aristotelian views represent twelfth-century Andalusia and not eighth century Khazaria. This encounter is unsatisfying since Aristotelianism is incompatible with the dreams which stimulated the King's search for the correct way of divine worship. After dismissing the philosopher, the King then calls upon a Christian who is the first representative of a revealed religion. The Christian begins his exposition of Christianity in *Kuzari* 1:4 with the assertion of a belief in the creator God who revealed Himself to the Jews, revelation which was pervasive among the Jews and cannot be denied because of its public nature and widespread exposure. Turning to specifically Christian doctrines, the King's interlocutor states that at the time of the last of these things and closely following upon them, divinity became incarnate and turned into a fetus in the womb of a distinguished virgin. She gave birth to a person who was human in his external appearance, but divine internally; in his outer appearance, a prophet who was sent, but in his inner character, a God who sends. This is the messiah, Son of God. There is a triune divine unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a God whose divine order dwelt with Israel until they rebelled against Him and crucified the messiah. The followers of the messiah are now those who please God and are properly called Israel. All peoples are called upon to become Christians, whose laws, as I mentioned, follow those of Simon the apostle, namely Peter, since Jesus himself had stated that he had not come to abolish the law but to support it and to enlarge it.

This description of Christianity reflects not only a Jewish understanding of that religion, but also a literary device which is part of the strategy intended to force the King eventually to turn to a Jewish Sage. The Christian's opening statement about creation, mirrored by the same initial comments by the Muslim, allows Halevi to portray both religions as political and conventional but not divine ones. The assertion that the divine order dwelt among the Israelites introduces this key term into the book and establishes Jewish temporal priority to Christianity. In addition, the unique Christian doctrines of Trinity, incarnation and virgin birth are presented to the pagan King who is likely to reject them. Ultimately, the pervasiveness of the references to Judaism by the Christian sage, and in turn by the Muslim sage in 1:5–9, is what leads the King to find out more about Judaism.

As noted, the King immediately objects to Christianity as illogical by saying: 'there is no place here for logic (the Arabic is *qiyās*, a central term in the book); indeed, logic rejects most of these things.' The King does say that if he had been brought up a Christian, he would have felt a need to manipulate his logic to justify these beliefs, a task not dissimilar to that of the Jewish Sage who explains Jewish doctrines and practices which at first glance might appear illogical. It is also of interest that the King does not indicate which of the Christian doctrines logic rejects, nor does he explain why. We can assume, however, on the basis of previous Jewish critiques of Christianity in Andalusia as well as from the East, that he was referring specifically to Trinity and incarnation. He may also have had in mind virgin birth, even though Halevi's predecessors did not discuss the illogical aspects of that doctrine.²⁴

In contrast to their views that Christianity is illogical, Jews under Islam did not generally consider the latter religion to be false because it is contradicted by reason. Instead, they argued that Muhammad's status as a prophet is not amenable to historical verification, and the so-called inimitability of the Quran is a fabricated claim, also not subject to substantiation.²⁵ Thus, the King's major objection to the Muslim's

²⁴ For arguments against Trinity and incarnation in Islamic countries, see my *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, e.g., 51–63; 93–96; 109; 126. In his response to my talk, Prof. Lawrence Kaplan suggested that the King may well have considered other Christian doctrines which were held in common Judaism, such as creation of the world, the choice of Israel and prophetic revelation, to be against logic as well. It is true that the philosopher had rejected creation of the world, and it is obvious that the King is sceptical of the possibility of divine-human communication (e.g., *Kuzari* 1:8, in response to the Muslim sage). Since, eventually, the King is convinced by the Jewish Sage that such communication really occurred, it is important for Halevi's argumentation that the specifically Christian doctrines be judged illogical, since religion could not maintain a patently illogical belief (1:67; 89).

²⁵ See, e.g., David E. Sklare, "Responses to Islamic Polemics by Jewish Mutakallimun in the Tenth Century," in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, eds. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Mark R. Cohen, Sasson Somekh, and Sidney H. Griffith (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999): 137–161.

speech was his inability to read the Quran in the original in order to verify its unique status.²⁶

Before turning to the last point, the contribution of Christianity (and Islam) to the coming of the messiah, I would like to review a few more references to Christianity in the *Kuzari*, most of which consider Christianity and Islam as almost one unit. Adherents of both religions are called incomplete proselytes (4:11), since they adopt some of the beliefs of Judaism but continue to maintain pagan practices, such as their adoration of ‘the wood and the stone’ of Deuteronomy 28:36, namely the cross of Christianity and the black stone of the Kaaba of Islam. Followers of both religions once saw *lack of worldly success* as proof of their truth, although now they point to *worldly success* as such a proof (1:113 and 4:22). Both religions are fighting wars and promising their followers a reward in the afterlife (1:2), and both have a high regard for the Land of Israel (2:23); both try unsuccessfully to imitate Judaism (3:9). Ironically, it is a perceived closeness to Judaism which distances these two religions from their source, compared to philosophy which has no pretensions of superseding Judaism (4:12–13). Halevi also argues in 1:83 that the Law of Moses did not annul the commandments given to Adam and Noam, perhaps an allusion to the Christian and Muslim views that that God can replace previous laws with a new revelation. In a passage in 4:29, Halevi mentions only the Christians in the context of an argument concerning the Jewish calendar and its incompatibility with astronomical calculations.²⁷

Returning to Jewish responses to Christianity in Iberia, the last point was the perception that Christianity is part of the redemptive process (along with Islam). In actuality, that was not part of the Judaeo-Arabic polemical tradition but rather Judah Halevi’s own innovation, which was later adopted by Maimonides. Using an imagery which I argue has its origins in Romans 11 (with perhaps a nod to I Corinthians 15:36), the Jewish Sage compares Judaism to a tree growing out of a seed which appears to decompose into the earth, water and manure which surround it. In reality, however, the seed transforms the earth and water into itself as it grows into a mature tree which casts off husks, leaves and other such things, leaving the pure kernel suitable to receive the divine order. This will be the case with the Christians and Muslims who had originally rejected the tree, but actually serve as ‘a preparation and prelude

²⁶ Here, again, Prof. Kaplan suggested that the King considered the Muslim’s belief in creation and revelation to be impossible, but the language of logical syllogism (*qiyās*) is not used. Without the objection that a reader who did not control Arabic would not be able to judge whether or not the Quran is inimitable, there would be no way to refute Islam once the possibility of prophecy were granted.

²⁷ Ehud Krinis has argued that Halevi’s polemic against Christianity and Islam should be understood not only in the context of the traditional rivalry among the three religions but also specifically in terms of Halevi’s innovative view of Jewish chosenness based on Shi’ite concepts and themes. Thus, the true dispute is over ‘legitimate succession’ from Adam and his select descendants, in which Halevi presents the Christian and Muslim views that they are the legitimate successors. In contrast, the Jewish sage convinces the King of Jewish legitimacy and chosenness; see Ehud Krinis, *God’s Chosen People: Judah Halevi’s Kuzari and the Shi’i Imām Doctrine* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014): 241–283.

to the awaited messiah, who is the fruit of this process [...]. The Christians and the Muslims will come to be [the messiah's] fruit when they recognize him, and the tree will also become one. At that time, they will recognize the excellence of the root that they used to disdain.'

As I noted, Maimonides says similar things about these two religions at the end of the *Mishneh Torah*, and some Jewish thinkers to this very day have adopted the position that the other religions are part of salvation history, in an attempt to fashion a positive Jewish evaluation of Christianity and Islam. What remains unclear, however, was Judah Halevi's motivation for such a positive evaluation of these two religions, in light of the many negative comments he makes about them in the rest of the *Kuzari*. I believe the answer has to do with Halevi's view of theodicy and providence. Throughout the *Kuzari*, the point is made that temporal success is not a criterion for determining the truth of a religion. This assertion was part and parcel of Halevi's defense of his despised religion, as the alternate title of the book has it. Christianity and Islam, with all their wars between them, had a great measure of temporal success; Judaism did not. How, then, can Jews claim to be God's chosen, essentially different from their more successful competitors and subject to a non-naturalistic providence? And if temporal success is so unnecessary for a truth claim, why did Halevi choose the story of the conversion of the Khazars as the framework for his book; was not their success after conversion, as described at the beginning of Book 2, an indication of the truth of Judaism? Undoubtedly, Judah Halevi had to find some reason why Christianity and Islam prospered.

The answer to Halevi's quandary is his assertion that Christianity and Islam are imitators of Judaism. They adopted Jewish beliefs, but not fully, since they misunderstood the place of Jesus and Muhammad. They adopted Jewish practices, but also not fully, since they distorted some rituals, such as the correct day of the Shabbat, while not fully jettisoning their old rituals, the idolatrous use of wood and stone. Nevertheless, they were successful enough imitators in order to prosper and grow strong; after all, they offered the same benefits of being a Jew but at a much lower price. Eventually, however, they and all mankind will take upon themselves the full burden of Judaism although, as proselytes, they will never be fully equal to native-born Jews.

I would say that Halevi hints at another positive aspect of Christianity and Islam. Throughout the book, references are made to belief systems which are human inventions based on the diligent exertion (*idjtihād*) of unapproved cognitive methodologies like logical analogy, arbitrary judgment, intellectual speculation, supposition, conjecture, or ingenuity (Halevi uses quite a number of terms, such as *qiyās*, *tafarruḍ*, *ta'aqqul*, and *taḥakkum*). These parallel human endeavors include philosophy, Karaism, astrology, the use of amulets, dualism, sun-worship, child sacrifices, alchemy, and golden calf worship. Christianity and Islam are not included in Halevi's lists of mistaken intellectual systems. If anything, he hints to a certain divine help which was instrumental in the spread of Christianity and Islam (1:80–81), a divine help which endows them with a role to play in salvation. Presumably in the messianic age, all of Rabbinic Judaism's competitors will disappear: Karaites, philosophers,

sun-worshippers, dualists, spiritualists, astrologers, purveyors of amulets, materialists and the like. Christianity and Islam will disappear as well but perhaps their former adherents will look back fondly on them as semi-inspired, incomplete forms of Judaism necessary to bring them to the truth, just as they were stepping stones on the King's journey to the one true religion. This will not be the case of the other competitors, whose doctrines were fully human in origin.

If my analysis of Judah Halevi's critique of Christianity is correct, then it is obvious that he was not a typical anti-Christian polemicist who used the standard arguments developed by Jews ever since the ninth century. He took on Christianity and Islam as the most successful of non-Jewish religions, just as he took on philosophy as the most successful of the non-religions, and Karaism as the most successful of non-rabbinic Judaisms. A Christian mission did not bring him to refute Christianity; rather, his rationalistic defense of Judaism required a reasoned rejection of that religion. This interpretation reinforces the point I made at the beginning of the talk: Jewish critiques of Christianity are not necessarily tied to a Christian threat. They can be, but they do not have to be. Even Jews not threatened by Christianity can find a good reason to polemicize against that religion.

I would like to add a comment about scepticism, the main *raison d'être* of this Centre. Without giving a second lecture about Judah Halevi, let me say that with all the self-assurance of the Jewish Sage's defense of Judaism in the *Kuzari*, with the claim that empirical facts substantiate the Bible's narrative, there remain many aspects of Jewish belief and practice which are beyond intellectual explanation. In 1:88, the King states that in light of the veracity of the theophany on Sinai, the Jews can be forgiven for believing that God is corporeal. The Sage denies divine corporeality and explains revelation in terms of a created glory which is not God Himself. Although the King says that that explanation is convincing, the Sage declares that that is only one possible explanation and he is not committed to it; there has to be some explanation of the corporeal aspects of revelation which do not imply a corporeal God, but one cannot know what they are with full confidence. When the King asks for the reasons for sacrifices, the Sage gives a detailed interpretation of the relation between the ritual and the functions of the human body and other aspects of the cosmos, again without a commitment to the details of his explanation. And at the beginning of Book 5, when the King asks for an account of Aristotelian philosophy and *Kalam* theology, he does so by admitting that he has not reached the level of acceptance of the tradition without question. The Sage responds that such reliance on tradition is the ultimate goal, but very few people can reach it. Thus, it is necessary to investigate other systems and refute them in the pursuit of truth. It would seem, then, that Judah Halevi understood that his defense of Judaism is not necessarily meant as a definitive statement of truth since absolute truth may be beyond human comprehension. I think that a full examination of the *Kuzari* will allow us a greater appreciation of Judah Halevi's scepticism, but that will have to wait for some other opportunity.

Lawrence Kaplan

Response to Daniel J. Lasker's "Polemics, Religion, and Scepticism in Judah Halevi's *Book of Kuzari*"

As did Professor Lasker, I, too, would like to start out by thanking both Prof. Giuseppe Veltri, founder and director of the Maimonides Center, and my former doctoral student, current colleague, and co-director of the center, Dr. Racheli Haliva, who planned this workshop.

Above all, I am deeply honored to have been chosen to be the respondent to Professor Daniel Lasker's paper, "Polemics, Religion, and Scepticism in Judah Halevi's *Book of Kuzari*." But this honor brings with it a daunting task. Lasker modestly notes. Over the years my interest in medieval Jewish philosophy has centered on a number of themes, one of which has been interreligious polemics, most specifically Jewish anti-Christian polemics, with a special attention to those debates in the Islamic realm; and another theme has been the philosophy of Rabbi Judah Halevi, especially his view of the opponents of Rabbinic Judaism, whether they be philosophers, members of other religions, or Karaites.' In truth, Lasker is widely acknowledged as being as one of the world's leading scholars in both these areas (and other areas as well). To have to respond, then, to a paper of Lasker that deals with *both* these areas of his expertise is no small challenge.

Lasker begins his paper with a thoroughly documented and entirely convincing critique of 'the old narrative of Jewish criticism of Christianity as a reaction to Christian pressure.' In its stead, he skillfully, learnedly, and, again, entirely convincingly argues in favor of a 'new narrative' that 'Jewish anti-Christian argumentation was mainly a function of Jewish rationalist theology. Almost every Jewish author of a philosophical treatise was involved in one way or another with interreligious polemic, sometimes against Islam but usually against Christianity.'

Coming to the subject at hand, Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, Lasker argues that Halevi's polemic against Christianity in the *Kuzari* fits, with certain variations, into this model, inasmuch as Halevi himself was a rationalist. To be sure, Lasker immediately notes that Halevi 'is often considered the anti-philosophical Jewish philosopher,' and even brings evidence that might be used to support that view. But he rejects this view, and, referring to his excellent and illuminating article, "Judah Halevi as a Philosopher—Some Preliminary Comments,"¹ he argues that 'Halevi is not an anti-rationalist, but rather a critic of Aristotelian a priori rationalism in favor of a sort of empiricism. His goal in the *Kuzari* is to present a defense of Jewish theology and to refute those who challenge it.'

¹ Daniel J. Lasker, "Judah Halevi as a Philosopher – Some Preliminary Comments," in *Judeo-Arabic Culture in al-Andalus. Proceedings of the 13th Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies, Cordoba 2007*, ed. Amir Ashur (Cordoba: CNERU – CSIC; Oriens Academics, 2013): 99–109.

Here I must pose a question. I agree entirely with this characterization of both Halevi and his goal in the *Kuzari*, but, I do not see how this makes Halevi into a rationalist. What it makes him, as Lasker correctly notes, is an empiricist. To be sure, Halevi, as an empiricist, was not an anti-rationalist, but neither was he a rationalist. He was, to repeat, an empiricist.

To elaborate: As Lasker notes, the key claim of Jewish rationalists against Christianity is that it ‘contradicts reason,’ or, as I would put it to be more precise, that it, unlike Judaism, ‘contradicts reason.’ A bit later, Lasker reformulates this claim to read that ‘Christianity is illogical,’ or, again, as I would put it, that, unlike Judaism, which is logical, ‘Christianity is illogical.’ Since Lasker believes that Halevi was a rationalist, he sees him as leveling this accusation against Christianity at the beginning of his book. But is this the case?

The Christian scholar’s speech in *Kuzari* 1:4,² is, we may say, divided into two parts: a shorter ‘Jewish’ part, in which he sets forth the belief in the providential, creator God who revealed Himself to the Jews, followed by a longer ‘Christian’ part, in which he sets forth such specifically Christian doctrines as Jesus as the Messiah and son of God, as God incarnate, and as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The King objects to this presentation as illogical by saying: ‘there is no place here for logic (*qiyās*); indeed, logic rejects most of these things’ (1:5). Note my formulation, ‘The King objects to this presentation as illogical,’ as contrasted to Lasker’s formulation, ‘The King immediately objects to Christianity as illogical.’ Lasker insightfully observes that ‘It is also of interest that the King does not indicate which of the Christian doctrines logic rejects, nor does he explain why;’ but he does not pursue this insight, and immediately continues ‘We can assume, however, on the basis of previous Jewish critiques of Christianity in Andalusia as well as from the East, that he was referring specifically to Trinity and incarnation.’ But why, indeed, doesn’t the King spell out to which Christian doctrines he is objecting?

Moreover, since the Christian scholar’s speech includes as already noted, both a Jewish part and a Christian part, why should we assume that the King objects only to the speech’s specifically Christian doctrines? After all, the Christian, in the speech’s Jewish part, refers to such teachings as God’s ‘providential concern for creation, and contact with human beings [through expressions of] anger, satisfaction, mercy, speech, self-disclosure, and revelation to His prophets and pious friends’ (1:4). All these doctrines, which, as the Christian states, are contained in the ‘Torah and in the traditions of the children of Israel,’ were already dismissed by the philosopher in his lengthy opening speech to the King (1:1) on the basis of arguments that the king himself admitted were persuasive, even if not demonstrative (1:2). So why not

2 For a critical edition of the Judeo-Arabic original, see Judah Halevi, *Kitāb al-radd wa-’l-dalīl fī ’l-dīn al-dhalīl* (*Al-kitāb al-khazari*), eds. David H. Baneth and Haggai Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977). The English is from the forthcoming translation by Barry S. Kogan. I would like to thank Prof. Kogan for making this translation available to me. All references in the body of my essay are to the Book and Section of the *Kuzari*.

assume that the King also had in mind these Jewish teachings as being illogical, as being rejected by *qiyās*?

But to return to the main question: Why doesn't the King in his response to the Christian scholar's speech specify to which doctrines set forth in that speech he is objecting?

Perhaps an examination of the exchange between the King and the Muslim scholar, immediately following upon the former's exchange with the Christian scholar, will help us answer our question. Asked by the King about 'his knowledge and actions' (1:5), the Muslim scholar responds:

We affirm the unity and eternity of God, the complete innovation of the world, and [our common] descent from Adam and Noah. We deny the corporeality [of God] completely, and if something [implying corporeality] appears in speech, we interpret it and say that it is a metaphor and an approximation [of the truth]. At the same time, we affirm that our book [the Quran] is the word of God. It is in itself a miracle that we must accept because of its very nature, since no one can produce anything like it or even anything like one of its verses. Our prophet is the seal of the prophets, who abrogates every previous Law and summons all nations to accept Islam. The reward for one who obeys is the return of his soul to his body in a garden and [a state of] bliss, which does not lack for eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, and anything else he desires. The punishment for one who rebels is for him to be consigned to a fire from which the torment never ends. (1:5)

Let us note that the Muslim scholar in his presentation, unlike the Christian scholar, speaks about God in a philosophical manner, referring to His 'unity and eternity.' More important, as if he were directly responding to the Christian scholar,³ he de-anthropomorphizes all the anthropomorphic expressions used by the latter in his presentation, explicitly stating 'We deny the corporeality [of God] completely, and if something [implying corporeality] appears in speech, we interpret it and say that it is a metaphor and an approximation [of the truth].'

This philosophical, non-anthropomorphic description of God on the part of the Muslim scholar and his immediately following assertion that the Quran is the word of God, as evidenced by its miraculous inimitable nature, lend support to Lasker's historical claim that 'In contrast to their views about Christianity as illogical, Jews under Islam did not generally consider that religion to be false because it is contradicted by reason. Instead, they argued that Muhammed's status as a prophet is not amenable to historical verification, and that the so-called inimitability of the Quran is a fabricated claim, not subject to substantiation.'

These general historical observations are certainly valid, though one would imagine that many Jewish rationalists—though certainly not all Jews—would also find the Muslim scholar's highly corporeal description of the afterlife objectionable.

³ Of course, in truth, the King only 'called upon a certain scholar of Islam, and asked him about his knowledge and his actions' (1:5) *after* he had dismissed the speech of the Christian scholar as unsatisfactory, and had resolved to 'investigate further.'

But let us set that point to the side. What I find problematic in Lasker's discussion is that he uses these generally unimpeachable historical observations to draw a conclusion about the nature of the King's objections to Islam in his response to the Muslim scholar's speech. Thus, Lasker concludes, 'Thus'—that is, in accord with the immediately above mentioned historical observations—'the King's major objection to the Muslim was his [the King's] inability to read the Quran in the original in order to verify its status.' But is this the case? How does the King respond to the Muslim scholar's speech, and what objections to it does he in fact raise?

Then the Khazar said to him: Someone who wishes to be rightly guided in connection with God's command and also to have it confirmed that God speaks to flesh and blood, when he thinks that that is quite unlikely, ought to have it established in his mind by well-known facts that cannot be rejected. And [even then], it would hardly be verified for him that God has really spoken with a human being. Now if your book is a miracle, but the book is in Arabic, then a non-Arab like myself will not be able to recognize its miraculous and extraordinary character. Even if it is recited to me, I won't be able to distinguish between it and anything else expressed in Arabic. (1:6)

In this response of the Khazar King, we, in my view, arrive at the heart of Halevi's view. As the King's response indicates, his major objection to the Muslim scholar was not 'his [the King's] inability to read the Quran in the original in order to verify its status,' but rather the Muslim scholar's claim that God speaks to and comes into contact with man. The point the King makes about his inability to read the Quran in the original in order to verify its status, is that on account of his inability he is unable to judge whether the Muslim claim that the inimitability of the Quran shows that it is the word of God is sufficiently grounded to *overcome* his key objection to the Muslim scholar, which, to repeat, is the latter's claim that God speaks to and comes into contact with man. That is, the King's default position is that God does not speak to and come into contact with man. If someone claims otherwise, as does the Muslim scholar, it follows that the burden of proof is upon him—that is, it is incumbent upon him to bring proofs that are of sufficient weight to overcome the default position. And, in the King's view, the Muslim scholar's claim about the inimitability of the Quran does not possess that sufficient weight, or, at least, he is unable to judge whether it does so or not.⁴

That this, indeed, constitutes the King's major objection is reinforced by the subsequent exchange between him and the Muslim scholar:

Therefore, the scholar said to him: Miracles have been performed by him, but they have not been offered as proof for accepting his Law. (1:7)

The Khazar said: Yes, of course. But people are not inclined to affirm that the deity enters into contact with human beings, unless it is by means of a miracle through which the essences [of things] are transformed. Then we know that only He who created things from nothing has the

⁴ The King seems to be suggesting between the lines that the Muslim doctrine of the inimitability of the Quran is so subjective in nature, that even were he proficient in Arabic—as, of course, Halevi himself was—he would be unable to accord it sufficient weight to overcome the default position.

power to do that. Moreover, this should take place in the presence of multitudes which see it with their own eyes, and not come to them by means of a report and a chain of authorities transmitting it. It should be studied and tested time and again, so that it would not occur to anyone to think that imagining or magic were involved there. And [even then] people would hardly accept this grand thing, I mean, that the Creator of this world and the next, of the angels, the heavens, and the luminaries enters into contact with this dirty piece of filth—I mean man—speaks to him, and also fulfills his longing as well as his arbitrary whims. (1:8)

What we have in 1:8, I would suggest, is a variation of the objection set forth in 1:6. In 1:6 the King's objection is directed against the claim that 'God's command' can provide 'right guidance' for man, 'that God speaks to flesh and blood,' and 'that God has really spoken with a human being.' The background of this objection appears to be the philosopher's speech in 1:1 denying that God can address men and reveal a Law to them, inasmuch as He, precisely on account of His divine perfection, is 'beyond desires and aims,' as well as 'beyond the knowledge of particulars,' as a consequence of which God is 'not aware of [individuals] let alone of [their] intentions and [their] actions.' In 1:8, the King's objection is directed against the claim 'that the deity enters into contact with human beings,' and more elaborately, 'that the Creator of this world and the next, of the angels, the heavens, and the luminaries enters into contact with this dirty piece of filth—I mean man,' and the specific objection to the claim that God speaks to man is just a subsidiary point. As Ehud Krinis, developing an observation of Shlomo Pines,⁵ notes,⁶ the King here is expressing a 'late Hellenistic pagan worldview'⁷ that God is so spiritual, sublime, and pure that He cannot come into contact with corporeal, filthy, flesh and blood man.⁸

But, I believe, this key objection of the King to the Muslim scholar, namely the implausibility of the latter's claim that God speaks to and comes into contact with man, whether that implausibility flows from philosophical or late Hellenistic pagan principles, is also his key objection to both Judaism and Christianity as revealed religions. And here, I would suggest, we may have an answer to our question as to why the King did not spell out his objections to the Christian scholar's teachings. No doubt the King—and in this respect he faithfully reflects Halevi's views—felt that many of the specific doctrines of the Christian scholar, such as Trinity and incarnation, are, indeed, illogical. But, in light of the King's fundamental objection to the claim that God speaks to and comes into contact with man, espoused by all three

5 Shlomo Pines, "Shī'ī te Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 65–166 and 196–210.

6 Ehud Krinis, *God's Chosen People: Judah Halevi's Kuzari and Shī'ī Imām Doctrine* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014): 171–177.

7 *Ibidem*, 171.

8 *Ibidem*, 174; Krinis does not distinguish between the King's objection in 1:6 and his objection in 1:8. Instead, he reads 1:6 in light of 1:8, and sees them both as stemming from the King's adherence to the 'late Hellenistic pagan worldview.' This, in my view, is to ignore the differences between the two paragraphs, and to make the King repeat himself unnecessarily.

Abrahamic religions, they are beside the point—and had Halevi had the King discuss them, it would have just muddled the waters. Unlike, however, the many problematic theological claims set forth in the Christian scholar's speech, the *only* problematic theological claim set forth in the Muslim scholar's speech is that God speaks to and comes into contact with man. Halevi, therefore, had the King wait until the latter's speech in order to object to this claim, so that, thereby, this core issue would be, as it properly ought to be, at the center of discussion.

Here we return to the issue of Halevi's 'rationalism.' For what I believe emerges from my discussion is that Halevi in the *Kuzari* confronts us with two conflicting claims: the claim that God neither speaks to nor comes into contact with man, whether based on the arguments of the philosopher that God's perfection entails that He has no knowledge of human beings and their actions, much less is concerned about them and pleased or displeased by them, or on the principles of late Hellenistic paganism that God's spirituality and sublimity preclude His coming into contact with corporeal man; and the common assertions of all three Abrahamic religions affirming the contrary. The King's point—and Halevi's point—is that the claim that God neither speaks to nor comes into contact with man, whether based on philosophical or late pagan principles, is intrinsically more reasonable than the common claim of the three Abrahamic religions affirming the contrary. In this respect one cannot call Halevi a rationalist.

What the King—and Halevi—maintain on the other side, however, is that since the claim that God neither speaks to nor comes into contact with man, while intrinsically reasonable and plausible, has not been established through demonstration, one can *defeat* this claim and vindicate the common Jewish-Christian-Muslim claim, even if it is intrinsically less reasonable and plausible than the contrary claim of the philosophers and the late pagans, by bringing empirical evidence indicating that God in fact did speak to and come into contact with men. In this respect, as Lasker correctly notes, Halevi is an empiricist.

Coming to the competing claims of all three religions to be the true revealed religion, positively, the *Haver*, the Jewish sage—who here is a faithful spokesman of Halevi—maintains that only the history of the Jewish people provides empirical evidence in the form of God's performing ongoing and public miracles before the eyes of multitudes sufficient to both establish the veracity of Judaism as a revealed religion and to defeat the philosophical/late pagan claim.⁹ Negatively, what emerges from the King's discussions with both the Christian and the Muslim scholars is that neither has brought empirical evidence in the form of God's performing ongoing and public miracles before the eyes of multitudes sufficient to establish its veracity as a revealed religion and to defeat the philosophical/late pagan claim. The empirical evidence the Christian scholar offers in support of the specific Christian part of his speech is the historical suffering of those Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah

⁹ This, of course, is the point of the *Haver's* famous parable about the king of India; see *Kuzari* 1:17–25.

and the historical temporal success of those Gentiles who accepted him as the Messiah. The King does not respond to this point, but the *Haver* addresses it at length later in the *Kuzari*.¹⁰ Lasker analyzes this issue with his customary learning and insight, and thus I need not discuss it.¹¹ The empirical evidence the Muslim scholar offers in support of the Quran being the word of God is its inimitability, and we saw why the King did not accept this argument.¹² The bottom line—the empirical bottom line—remains that only Judaism is supported by empirical evidence sufficient to establish its veracity as a revealed religion and to defeat the philosophical/late pagan claim God does not speak to and come into contact with men.

Regarding Lasker's incisive and authoritative discussion regarding the nature of Christianity and Islam as semi-inspired imitations of Judaism and the role these religions will play in the coming of the Messiah, I have nothing to add.¹³

I certainly agree with Lasker that Halevi's 'defense of Judaism required a reasoned rejection of Christianity.' But I do not agree with him, for reasons which I have tried to explain, that that defense was a 'rationalistic defense.'

To conclude: In an article in which he took issue with certain theses of Gershom Scholem, Yehudah Liebes commented that it was only owing to Scholem's towering scholarly accomplishments that he, Liebes, was able to take issue with him. And, Liebes concluded, this is the way that scholarship progresses.¹⁴ In a similar vein, let me state that if I have expressed certain reservations regarding some of Lasker's theses, I have been able to do so only thanks to his many learned, brilliant, and enduring contributions to both the fields of Jewish anti-Christian polemics and the philosophy of Rabbi Judah Halevi. And, let me close with the hope that here too this is the way that scholarship progresses.

¹⁰ See *Kuzari* 1:113; 2:29–44; and 4:22–23.

¹¹ See, as well, Krinis, *God's Chosen People*, 243–282 (Chapter 12: The Question of Legitimate Succession in the *Kuzari*).

¹² As Lasker commented in the discussion following his presentation and my response, *once* the King accepted the claim of the *Haver* that the history of the Jewish people provides empirical evidence in the form of God's performing ongoing and public miracles before the eyes of multitudes that God in fact did speak to and come into contact with men, at *that* point his major and only objection to the claim that the Quran is the word of God would, indeed, be 'his inability to read the Quran in the original in order to verify its status'. This is no doubt the case, but since Halevi does not bring the Muslim scholar back on stage for an encore, any suggestion as to how a further, 'post-*Haver*,' exchange between them might have proceeded must remain speculative and beside the point. One can judge the *Kuzari*'s world view and defense of Judaism only on the basis of what it says, not on what it does not but might have said. See above, Note 4.

¹³ See Daniel Lasker, "Proselyte Judaism Christianity and Islam in the Thought of Judah Halevi," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81.1–2 (1990): 75–91.

¹⁴ I cannot remember in which of the many articles of Liebes I have read I came across this comment, and am citing from memory.

Abner's Double Standard Approach towards the Jewish Rabbis

From Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* who argues against Christianity while living under Muslim rule, now we turn to Abner of Burgos, a Jewish convert to Christianity who lived in Christian northern Spain between the second half of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century.

In this article I focus on Abner's approach towards the Rabbis as it appears in his *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref* ('Response to the Blasphemer'), a long letter he addresses to Isaac Polqar, his former student, who defends the philosophical interpretation of the Jewish faith. On the one hand, in several places in his letter, Abner harshly criticizes the Jewish sages for creating the Oral Law in order to establish two different ethical systems, one for Jews and one for non-Jews; and for stubbornly rejecting Christianity as the true religion. On the other hand, however, it seems as if Abner puts a great effort in convincing his readers, most likely a Jewish audience whom he tried to convince to convert to Christianity, that the Jewish sages were, in fact, Christian believers who had to conceal their true belief for political reasons. In *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref*, Abner consistently uses Jewish sources in order to prove that the doctrines of the Christian faith are true from the Jewish sources themselves. He aims to show that although the Jews of his own time reject Christianity altogether, the talmudic sages, upon whom they rely, tacitly accepted Christianity's fundamental beliefs.

First, I will cite a passage from the *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref* where Abner slanders the Jewish sages' ethical behaviour, accusing them of teaching their adherents to behave immorally. Then, I shall focus on two Midrashim, which Abner interprets in such a way as to justify his claim that the Jewish sages embraced Christian doctrines but had to conceal this fact from the Jewish community. At the end of this article, I will offer several possible explanations regarding Abner's motivation to ascribe two opposing views to the Jewish sages.

At the beginning of *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref*, Abner accuses the Jewish sages of behaving unethically, as a result of which others behave unethically towards them.¹ He writes:

In the *Teacher of Righteousness* (Moreh Šedeq), I have already described those ten evil commandments which were juxtaposed to the Ten Commandments. They are found in their Babylonian Talmud and include theft and swearing falsely in a deceitful manner. On account of them, it would be fitting for it to be designated darkness and gloom [...]. This is the Babylonian Talmud. It is said after that, 'That is the curse which goes out over the whole land. For everyone who has stolen, as is forbidden on one side [of the scroll], has gone unpunished; and everyone who has sworn [falsely], as is forbidden on the other side of it, has gone unpunished.' That is their *EIFAH* and 'measurement,' through which they receive and give. As they say, 'the degree to which a man measures, they measure him.' Just as they made that Oral Law in order to injure others,

1 *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref*, 33b; 34b.

it, in turn, was the reason for their being injured by others. On account of this, it [the Oral Law] was extended and spread among them, which is the opposite of (the verse) *For out of Zion shall go forth the Law* (Isaiah 2:3). This is the meaning of (the verse), what is this approaching? (There the angel) says, 'This is the *eifah* which is approaching.' He then gives a reason for why he called the scroll an *eifah* and the 'measurement.' He says, 'This is their eye in all the land.' It is the 'eye,' the 'vision' of reasoning they present to the world concerning their commentary on the Torah. According to this, they 'were seen' and judged 'in all the land,' that is, for themselves and by others. This is what happened to them: just as they declared from the logic of the Talmud that it is permitted to steal and to swear falsely for such and such a reason, they were robbed and false testimony was given about them for those very reasons.²

Abner claims here two things: First, the Talmud, or more precisely, the rabbis of the Talmud changed the ten 'good' commandments of the Written Law to ten 'evil' commandments of the Oral Law. In the *Moreh Şedeq* ('Teacher of Righteousness') he spells out what these ten 'evil' commandments are: (1) to steal, (2) to rob, (3) to give false testimony, (4) to pervert justice, (5) to be proud, (6) to swear falsely, (7) to kill, (8) to be unchaste, (9) to loan at interest, and (10) to serve and worship idols.

His second claim is that since the talmudic rabbis replaced the original 'good' Ten Commandments with these ten 'evil' commandments, those who act in accordance with these 'evil' commandments, will find themselves mistreated in the same way by others. In other words, if they allow stealing from and killing gentiles, then they, in turn, will be subjected to the gentiles stealing from and killing them. This is the *middah ke'neged middah*, the degree to which one judges, he will be judged himself.

Contrary to this negative view of the rabbis, ascribing to them an unethical double standard, Abner also presents a positive view of them. According to him, the talmudic sages were esoterically Christians. Naturally, Abner claims, the sages could not openly teach their disciples to believe in the three persons of God or in the incarnation, for, were they to do so, they would be charged with heresy. But, this indeed was their true opinion, which they concealed and only obliquely alluded to.³ By claiming this, Abner implies that the sages used the Maimonidean method of concealing true knowledge from the multitude because of the latter's inability to understand it. However, while for Maimonides the knowledge that the sages concealed from the multitude was *philosophical* knowledge, for Abner the knowledge they concealed were the *fundamental doctrines of Christianity*.

² *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref*, 33b.

³ One might wonder why the sages could not have explained to their disciples that these three persons do not contradict God's unity. Perhaps we can suggest that acknowledging the three persons was so closely identified with Christianity that the rabbis, even if they possessed the 'true' knowledge of the Trinity, could not disclose this knowledge to their disciples. Since they would have been accused of heresy, they could only allude to God's three persons.

Abner uses several examples to substantiate his argument. Here I shall focus on two Midrashim, which, according to Abner, clearly show that it was this Christian position that the Jewish sages genuinely espoused.

The first Midrash that Abner cites is from *Genesis Rabbah*; his reading of this Midrash focuses on the grammatical analysis of the plural name *Elohim* and the singular verb *bara'* that follows it. Abner's main purpose in this Midrash is to demonstrate that, in the sages' view, *Elohim* alludes to the Trinity. The Midrash states:

The sectarians asked Rabbi Simlai: 'How many deities created the world?' 'I and you must inquire of the first day,' replied he, as it is written, *For ask now of the first days* (Deuteronomy 4:32) Not 'since the days gods created man' is written here, but 'God created (*bara'*).' Then they asked him a second time: 'Why is it written in the beginning *Elohim* [plural] created?' 'In the beginning *baru* *Elohim* is not written here,' answers he, 'but *bara'* *Elohim*.' Rabbi Simlai said: 'Wherever you find a point [apparently] supporting the sectarians, you find the refutation at its side.'⁴

The second Midrash Abner cites is from *Exodus Rabbah*, which elaborates on the first Midrash. The Midrash states:

Some sectarians once asked R. Simlai:⁵ 'Are there not many deities in the world?' He replied, 'What makes you think so?' 'Because,' they said, 'it is written, *Did ever a people hear the voice of God* (*Elohim* in the plural form)? (Deuteronomy 4:33)' To which he replied, 'It does not say *medabberim* but *medabber*.' Whereupon his disciples said to him: 'O teacher, you have thrust those off with a broken reed, but what answer will you give to us?' R. Levi then offered this explanation. It says, '*Did ever a people hear the voice of God?* What does this mean? Had it said, "The voice of God in His power," the world would not have been able to survive, but it says instead, *The voice of the Lord is with power* (Psalm 29:4)—that is, according to the power of each individual [each one] according to the power of the young, the old, and the very small ones.'⁶

4 *Genesis Rabbah* 8:9.

5 Rabbi Levi is referring to the Midrash in *Genesis Rabbah* 8:9, which states: 'The sectarians (*minim*) asked Rabbi Simlai: "How many deities created the world?" "I and you must inquire of the first day," replied he, as it is written, *For ask now of the first days* (Deuteronomy 4:32) Not "since the days gods created (*bar'u*) man" is written here, but God created (*bara'*). Then they asked him a second time: "Why is it written in the beginning *Elohim* [plural] created?" "*In the beginning baru* *Elohim* is not written here," answers he, "but *bara'* *Elohim the heaven and the earth*." Rabbi Simlai said: "Wherever you find a point [apparently] supporting the sectarians, you find the refutation at its side." They asked him again: "What is meant by *And God said: Let us make a man?*" "Read what follows," replied he: "not, And god created [*va-yevr'u*] man, is written here, but *And God created – va-yivra'* (Genesis 1:27)." When they went out his disciples said to him: "Them you have dismissed with a mere make-shift, but how will you answer us?" Cf. Jonathan Hecht, *The Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid according to Parma MS 2440* (PhD thesis, New York University, 1993): 489–491.

6 *Exodus Rabbah*, 29:1; cf. Shalom Žadik, *Trinity and Determinism in the Thought of Abner of Burgos* (PhD thesis, University of Ben Gurion, 2011): 47–51.

The name *Elohim* in the plural form appears to suggest, so the sectarians claim, that there are many gods, which raises troubling theological questions. Rabbi Simlai's grammatical explanation, according to which the use of the form *medabber* in the singular form indicates that *Elohim* should be understood as referring to one God, is criticized by his disciples as being unsatisfactory.⁷ Abner emphasizes that Rabbi Simlai's students did not accept his simple reply as representing his true view. This is crucial, for it suggests that his genuine opinion differed from the answer he offered to the sectarians: Rabbi Simlai, then, must have believed that the true meaning of the biblical verse needed to be hidden from outsiders.

Abner suggests that for both Rabbi Simlai and Rabbi Levi, the plural form of *Elohim* indeed carries with it a plural meaning, but this plural meaning refers not to God's 'honor and exaltation,' but to 'relationships and actions.'

Abner first refers to the end of the Midrash in *Exodus Rabbah* and goes on to give his analysis:

Then Rabbi Levi came and explained it. He said: 'If "the voice of the Lord (YHWH) in His power" had been written, the world could not have stood. Rather: *The voice of God (Elohim)* (is written in Deuteronomy 4:33). Each and every one according to his power, the young man according to his power and the old man according to his power.' His answer was that the plural form of the name, *Elohim*, of the one God was not for honor and exaltation—just as it was not for the plurality of His substance, according to the opinion of us who believe in unity—for then the students would have required a different answer (for them) from the questioner, [the question being] why this plurality is mentioned in the name 'God.' Neither Rabbi Levi nor Rabbi Simlai answered that it was for honor and exaltation, rather it was because of the *relationships and the actions* (between the names). Our rabbi, Moses Maimonides, wrote in chapters 51 and 52 of the first part of the *Guide of the Perplexed* that it is possible to attach (a notion of) multiplicity of attributes to the Creator, since a change in relationships does not necessitate a change in His essence [...]. Rather, Rabbi Levi interpreted the 'voices' as a metaphor to all the changing actions coming from the Holy One, blessed be He. So, since there is no multiplicity in His essence, the verse uses the singular form, 'speaking out of a fire,' and not 'speaking' in the plural form. Thus, 'God created,' 'and God created,' (are written) and not 'Gods created,' nor 'and Gods created,' and others be-

7 In *Teshuvot la-Meharef*, 17a-b, Abner also examines the Midrash in *Genesis Rabbah* and states, 'It is explained in *Genesis Rabbah*, and also in *Exodus Rabbah*, that the name "God" was not written in the plural form for embellishment and exaltation as the commentators who argue with us thought. It is not as they understand from Rabbi Simlai, when he argued with the sectarians who believed in the plurality of deities, when he said, "In every place that the sectarians profane, the answer to them is at their side: When the Gods began to create [...] is not written here, rather: (When God began to) create. And the Gods created man [...] is not written, rather: And (God) created. The voice of Gods are speaking is not said, rather (the voice of God) is speaking. Thus it is in every case like this." They (the students) wished to say that this response is not convincing. That is to say because of the mention of unity, plurality cannot be understood in it in any way. For the students say to Rabbi Simlai: "You have put (the sectarians) off with straw. What do you say to us?" (The students) called that particular response concerning His uniqueness, "straw," and a weak response. It is not a convincing answer. This is because there still remains doubt so they ask him, saying, "if the deity is one, why is the name 'God' (Elohim), which indicates plurality because it is in the plural form, used. After all, we have found the name, 'God' (Eloha), in the singular?"'

sides these. Rather, because the power of the Holy One, blessed be He, is actually infinite, and the world—because it is created—is not actually infinite, it must be that the power of the Holy One, blessed be He—which is actually infinite in actuality perform an infinite number of actions—one after the other—which are the details of existence. Thus, the world will be one, qua totality and purposive, appropriately coming from the One; and it [the world] will be [filled with] multiplicity by virtue of the many parts which deserve to exist because He is a power without end.⁸

Abner employs here Maimonides' view of God's attributes, which stresses that God's unity is not diminished by ascribing these attributes, for they do not cause any change in Him. Rabbi Levi explains that the verse does not states 'the voice of the Lord [YHVH],' but rather 'the voice of God [*Elohim*] is with power' in order to affirm God's unity and at the same time to allow for His multiple actions and relationships, which do not diminish His unity and perfection. The 'voices,' according to Rabbi Levi, are the sum of all the actions that occur in the world.⁹ However, according to Abner, the only way we can explain the multiplicity of actions in the world is to accept the three aspects of *Elohim*. If we look carefully on Abner's analysis of the two Midrashim, we arrive at Abner's conclusion that the talmudic sages possessed the knowledge that *Elohim* in its plural form alludes to the three aspects in God. However, they had to conceal it from the people for social and political reasons, namely, that the people were not ready to accept these truths and consequently could believe that God is not only one, but also three.

Now, the main question remains: why would Abner introduce two contradictory opinions regarding the talmudic sages, namely, on the one hand claiming that they were esoterically Christians, and on the other, accusing them of creating a set of laws which educate their adherents to act in as an unethical manner?

Teshuvot la-Meḥaref should be seen, in my view, as an apologetic treatise whose main goal is to attack Jewish principles, while showing the superiority of Christianity. In this light I would like to suggest three possible answers to this question:

1. From an apologetical/ political point of view—One of Abner's main goals, writing his *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref* is to convince as many Jews as possible to convert to Christianity. That means that he mainly addresses his writings to a Jewish audience, which would explain his extensive use of rabbinic texts. His audience—Jews, who are familiar with rabbinic literature, biblical verses, and biblical commentaries, are more likely to understand the weak points of the Jewish Law pointed out by Abner.

2. From a theological point of view—Abner adopts the Christian method of interpreting the Bible, namely, on the one hand, it has been replaced by the New Testament. On the other, it alludes to Jesus. Here too, only true philosophical teaching of the Rabbis should be taken seriously, while the political/social laws must be disre-

⁸ *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref*, 17b.

⁹ See Hecht, *The Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid*, 489.

garded. What is important is the inner meaning—the *tokh*, the internal meaning of their teaching, and the exoteric, the external meanings are useless and misleading. In other words, the Christian method is to disregard the exoteric message of the bible—for example the practical commandments—and to accept the internal/esoteric truth of the Old Testament, namely, the verses which allude to Jesus. Here too, the Oral Law conveys two different types of teaching; an exoteric one—the Jewish Law; and an esoteric one—accepting the Christian doctrines.

3. The last option, which in my view is unlikely to be true, would be to suggest that Abner truly believed that the talmudic sages were esoterically Christians and that the only reason they did not disclose their Christian belief to the Jewish community was their [the sages'] fear that the Jewish community would aggressively reject the sages' new Christian view. The main reason I doubt this explanation is the correct one is because presenting the talmudic sages as esoterically Christians would serve Abner's purpose perfectly; by presenting to the Jewish community the option that the talmudic rabbis accepted the Christian doctrines, would bring the desired result—more Jews would convert to Christianity. Why, then, does Abner spend so much time and effort attacking the rabbis? It is difficult, then, to accept that the rabbis were esoterically Christians. Abner understood that this argument does not hold water from the point of view of the Jewish community.

This paper does not aim to provide a decisive conclusion to the question: what was Abner's motivation in presenting two contradictory opinions about the Jewish sages. I merely wish to point out to the way Abner employs the Maimonidean method—conveying two different messages to different audiences—and to suggest few options of reading his treatise *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref*.

Michael Engel

Response to Racheli Haliva's "Abner's Double Standard Approach towards the Jewish Rabbis"

At the heart of Haliva's thought-provoking reading of Abner, one finds two conflicting approaches towards Judaism and Jewish sources. Haliva finds these approaches at the heart of Abner's reply to Isaac Polqar, and the crux of her argument is an attempt to contextualize and harmonize the two seemingly conflicting attitudes. My reply is concerned less with Haliva's attempts at reconciliation and regards more fundamentally the aforementioned tension she locates in Abner's reply. On the one hand, Abner is explicitly critical towards Jews and Jewish sources. On the other, Abner is sympathetic towards the early sages of Judaism, whom he perceives as esoteric Christians. As I will argue, in viewing these sages as Christians, Abner, himself a converted Christian, is interpreting the Jewish sources too broadly. The Midrashim cited by Abner, which concern a certain plurality within God's essence, do not necessarily indicate a Trinitarian position. In fact, a certain tension between God's unity on the one hand and some aspects of Divine plurality on the other was also acknowledged by a host of Jewish thinkers, first and foremost by Maimonides. This last point, in fact, was acknowledged by Abner himself.

Haliva begins by illustrating Abner's critical stance towards Judaism. She presents a powerful accusation made by Abner against the Jewish sages, formulated in particularly harsh language. Abner refers to the 'ten evil commandments' that are 'juxtaposed to the ten commandments.' The Oral Law, he argues, was made 'to injure others,' and he concludes with the following assertion: 'This is what happened to them: just as they declared that from the logic of the Talmud it is permitted to steal and to bear false witness for such and such a reason, they were robbed and false testimony was given about them for those very reasons.'¹ These are undoubtedly harsh criticisms, directed at the moral code (and core) of the Jews as manifestly expressed in the ultimate source of Jewish law, the Babylonian Talmud.

Yet in addition to this highly critical stance and derogatory depiction of the Jewish moral position, Haliva cites another view expressed by Abner concerning the teaching of the Jewish sages, a view less explicit, yet far more favorable. According to this view, the sages of the Talmud were in fact secretly Christians. Haliva correctly notes that both Rabbi Simlai and Rabbi Levi, in the Midrashim cited by Abner, appear to conceal a secret concerning God's plurality and the plural form *Elohim*. Furthermore, in these Midrashim, she observes that 'Abner interprets [this] in such a way as to justify his claim that the Jewish sages embraced Christian doctrines but had to conceal this fact from the Jewish community.' Yet it should be noted that in the passages cited by Abner, there is no reference to Christianity, but to a certain tension concerning Divine unity, which is not to be equated with an allusion to the

¹ *Teshuvot la-Meharef*, 33b.

Christian Trinity. In other words, a Trinitarian Christian model is not the only model which can resolve the tension between God's unity and certain aspects of plurality associated with God. We find one such example in Maimonides. As Abner himself acknowledges, Maimonides offered a model for reconciling unity and plurality with regard to the Divine in his *Guide*:

Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity, may He be exalted, is therefore an attribute of His action and not an attribute of His essence [...]. There accordingly is not, as these people believe, an essence composed of diverse notions. [...]

Thus it has become clear to you that these attributes too are not to be considered in reference to His essence, but in reference to the things that are created. (*Guide*, I:53; Pines' translation)

Maimonides does not see a concession to Trinitarian ideas in this, and in one of the preceding chapters he says explicitly:

If, however, someone believes that He is one, but possesses a certain number of essential attributes, he says in his words that He is one, but believes Him in his thought to be many. This resembles what the Christians say: namely, that He is one but also three, and that the three are one. (*Guide* I:50; Pines' translation)

What is relevant here is the general structure of Maimonides' reasoning. Maimonides does not reject the idea of God's attributes altogether, but only the idea of essential plurality. In other words, he interprets—and thus implicitly accepts—certain authoritative passages which seem to jeopardize God's unity, but without succumbing to a Trinitarian model or any similar model which relies on essential differentiation in God.

In sum, this reply seeks to highlight that the tension in Abner's response, which Haliva attempts to resolve, is to a large extent an artificial one. The presence of an esoteric Christian position, embraced by the Jewish scholars and hinted at Abner, is highly contentious, and is not based on solid textual grounds—at least not in the Midrashim cited above. This is not to undermine the value of Abner's general direction nor Haliva's interpretation. The reply does, however, point to the strong ideological undercurrent in Abner's response to Polqar, of the kind that one may indeed expect in a medieval treatise which bears, to a very large extent, a polemical nature.

Paolo L. Bernardini

Fighting For the Truth? Some Remarks on the Real Meaning of the Early Modern Jewish-Christian Controversies and the Briel-Pinamonti Polemics (1694–1702)

This paper aims to shed some light on the ‘real meaning’—or rather the nature—of the Jewish-Christian polemics in the early modern age. While I have most recently been working on Jacob ben Amram’s *Porta Veritatis* (1634–40), providing an edition of one of its codices, I will refer in this paper to another polemic, the Briel-Pinamonti controversy, which took place between the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. Father Giuseppe Pinamonti (1622–1703), a rather prolific author and ‘ghost writer’ for the much more famous Paolo Segneri, wrote a great number of theological works. *La sinagoga disingannata* (Bologna and Rome, 1694) met with a certain success (the second edition was produced in 1754 and it was reprinted in 1911), but also with a fierce attack from the Mantuan Rabbi Leone ben Eliezer Briel (1643–1722), who wrote a confutation of Pinamonti’s work in 1702. Never published, Briel’s work, *La sinagoga disingannata dagli inganni di P. Pinamonti*, circulated widely in manuscript and is probably the most important of his works. Before addressing Judah Briel’s replies to Giuseppe Pinamonti, however, I will briefly reflect on the nature of theological controversies in general. This preliminary reflection will allow me to approach Briel’s work and the entire controversy, attempting to offer some new ideas in order to approach both it and the general spiritual environment in which the controversy took place.¹

¹ This case has been studied in depth by Piergabriele Mancuso, who provided the first (and only) edition of the work by Judah Briel, or Leone Brielli, in response to *La sinagoga disingannata* by Father Pinamonti. The work is preserved in six codices, henceforth quoted as S. or its complete and critical edition, see Piergabriele G. Mancuso, “Evangelizzazione gesuitica e tattiche di difesa a Mantova tra Sei e Settecento sotto il Rabbinato di Yehudah Leone Brielli,” *Materia Giudaica* 19.1–2 (2014): 331–445. I am most grateful to Dr Mancuso for having shown me his critical edition in advance, well before its publication. I first encountered Judah (Leone) Briel (Brielli) in the early 1990s when working on the Jewish community of Mantua. There are a number of similarities between the *Porta Veritatis* and Briel’s work, although it is likely that Brielli never read Jacob ben Amram’s text. As for the *Porta Veritatis*, while my edition of the text is close to completion, I would like to refer in the meantime to my essay published in this volume and to my other more historical and less theoretical paper devoted to the *Porta*: “Mysteries at the Gate of Truth. A Reappraisal of the *Porta Veritatis* (1634–1640),” *Nuova Rivista Storica* 101.1 (2017): 65–82. Before Mancuso approached the theme, the only publication about the Pinamonti-Briel controversy—still extremely valid from the theoretical point of view—was William Horbury, “Judah Briel and Seventeenth-Century Jewish Anti-Christian Polemics in Italy,” in idem, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998): 276–96. As Horbury pointed out, the main reference for this work, which is often used, is Cardoso’s *Excelencias*, which the author sent to Briel, who replied with a poem in Hebrew. Briel uses Cardoso extensively when dealing with miracles (a crucial passage in the structure of the text) and in many other passages. Briel writes—contrary to Pinamonti—in a very uncertain Italian, devoid of any style and occasionally

If there is a spiritual domain where ‘truth’ must be absolute, it is religion. Truth derives from a single source, the word of God, which, by definition and *per se*, cannot and may not be questioned. From a certain point of view, we find the same dogmatic truth in classical Aristotelian philosophy, where the principle of contradiction, $A=A$, is as dogmatic as the theological truth of the word of God. It cannot be denied, ‘cannot be outraged;’ it is an absolute, dogmatic truth whose stability is both at the *theoretical* and at the *moral* level. Interpreters are asked to identify the ‘real meaning’ of the word of God when it is subject to obscurity and contradiction. They cannot alter the meaning when it is clear, as it often is. Even when, in the Renaissance, the truth was often conceived as a product (daughter) of time—*veritas filia temporis*—it lost its immediacy, but not its content; the same truth that was hidden becomes evident over time.²

It has not changed, it is only ‘revealed.’ ‘Revelation’ is a key word, and not only in the domain of theology. There is a lay form of revelation ‘by arguments’ and a correct usage of it, even within a purely speculative and non-theological context. In the Middle Ages, the Jewish-Christian controversies were deeply philosophical, for their authors used logical along with theological arguments. From renewed research on the ‘history of emotions,’ it is clear that there was a strong ‘emotional adherence’ to the arguments by both contenders. Emotions also play an important role in the early modern controversies, where, occasionally, references to the current philosophical debates emerge, although there are strong similarities, in the construction of the arguments as well as of the controversial treatises themselves, with their antecedents from the Middle Ages.³ The line of continuity is stronger than the breaks, and quite often contemporary authors are not even mentioned in the controversies, or are only marginally cited, as if their relevance to the arguments could be easily dismissed or is quite remote.

The Jewish authors often reacted to Christian provocations, although occasionally they stood up to defend their own faith without any particular reason or *casus belli*. The dimension of public controversy was also progressively lost. If a public controversy, as a contest for the truth, had quite a lot to do with a theatrical conception of life, where dialectic fights with arguments and the final victory is often left in the

very poor. Sometimes, it is difficult to understand what he really meant, even for a native Italian speaker. In the translations of some passages, I have tried to render its obscure Italian in English, so the translation is far from being completely adherent to the letter of the text, although I have tried to preserve the meaning of the sentences.

2 I am working on a manuscript provisionally entitled “The Daughter of Earth and Time. Truth in the Renaissance,” which will be completed, *si Deus vult*, by the end of 2017.

3 It is worth noting that the new discipline of the history of emotions is growing all over the world. Most recently, the Society for the History of Emotions was created in Australia. I deem that emotions play a substantial role in the controversies we are discussing, and theoretical tools coming from the history of emotions as a new discipline can provide important ideas for new approaches to this old theme. I wish to thank my colleague and friend Professor Giovanni Tarantino, University of Melbourne, ARC Centre for the History of Emotions, for this information.

hands of the public, a merely 'bookish' controversy was, in a way, blind and most often completely devoid of an audience. The reason for this is that in many cases Jewish books against Christianity remained in manuscript, and even as manuscripts, they had a very limited circulation. Occasionally, they did not circulate at all. With no stage, or even a public, a Jewish anti-Christian work remained a 'dead letter,' although possibly it had a real benefit as a sort of 'stream of consciousness' for the author who wrote it. It was a personal and intellectual as well as, once again, an 'emotional benefit.'⁴ So, both Pinamonti's and Briel's works are aimed at Christians and Jews alike; they are not simple apologetic works, but aim to convince all their readers of the truth of their statements. Briel denounces the surge of 'atheism' as a threat to both religions.

In many ways, the genre of the anti-Christian treatise or pamphlet was a mere exercise of logic and erudition, with an extremely limited circulation. If written by a rabbi, he demonstrated to his community that he was indeed able 'to defend Judaism' and to oppose counter-arguments, possibly solid and grounded in the Holy Scripture, against those who attacked Judaism and the Jews. This was probably enough within the Jewish community and was what the Jews required from him. It was not necessary, therefore, to publish the work. Furthermore, it could be extremely difficult to find a publisher prepared to accept the risk.

The speculative dimension of those works is normally inferior to their practical aim. They could be written in cold blood, as exercises of a speculative and erudite mind, or, more often, because there was an immediate threat to the community (more than a generic intellectual threat to the tenets and the very essence of Judaism). Contrary to the controversial literature of the Catholics and Protestants, of extreme importance from Luther's time up until the end of the seventeenth century, there were no major events or upheavals at stake. However, every apologetic work was normally meant as a weapon of defence against immediate threats, particularly when the force of a Catholic preacher's arguments was able to convert, or bring close to conversion, a large number of Jews. Acute heirs to a long medieval tradition, the Jesuits, this new, vibrant, brilliant, and incisive cohort of soldiers of Christ, were a major threat for the Jews. During the difficult period of the last half—and particularly the last quarter—of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits actively pursued a conversionist policy in Italy and all over the world. Clearly, the Jews were their main target, at least where they were present.

In those polemics, when Jewish authors defended their faith, the immediate needs—to prevent mass conversions, even occasionally expulsion, and so on—were

⁴ This is also true for the Christian authors, who, by writing these anti-Jewish polemics, were looking for a rational as well as an emotional confirmation of their own faith. The degree of 'passion' in Pinamonti's writing caught the attention of James Joyce, as is well known. On Joyce as a reader of Pinamonti, see Vincent J. Cheng, "James Joyce and the (Modernist) Hellmouth," in *Hell and Its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Margaret Toscano and Isabel Moreira (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): 165–174.

stronger than the merely theoretical needs, to provide readers with absolute genuine and incontestable arguments based on the purest doctrine and speculation. The issue was not to demonstrate the *veritatem religionis Christianae* or the *veritatem religionis Judaicae*, but to demonstrate that some legends, held to be ‘true,’ were not such. All the theoretical content of merely speculative disputes—such as those which involved philosophers such as Leibniz, Malebranche, Spinoza etc.—were either lost or not present at all in the Jewish apologetic works. The matters at stake were much more concrete and contingent. Some arguments were merely historical and deprived of any theoretical side. Some arguments were more logical, but never went so far as to deny the entire ‘truth’ of the opposite religion and to reduce the adversary to *nihil*. Masters of rhetoric, the Jesuits had to be opposed by authors who had the same skills in rhetoric and eloquence. The adherence to one or to the other, opposite thesis was often—or rather could often be—more ‘emotional’ than ‘rational,’ instinctive rather than theoretical. The Catholics aimed to convert the Jews. The contrary was not true. In a way, this hampered the ability of Jewish authors, often confined to the Ghetto and unable to obtain all the works they needed to write sound apologetic texts, to provide solid counter-arguments. But in general, counter-arguments were solid and ‘passionate’—once again, we enter the realm of the history of emotions—enough to give substance to lengthy and profound works. Unfortunately, in most cases those works remained unpublished and unnoticed even by those whom they aimed to attack and debunk. The game was not a fair one.

Rabbi vs. Jesuit, however, was a battle of titans. The new religious company and the heirs of the oldest revealed religion—the ‘tragic couple’ with much shared history and occasionally a common destiny of ‘expulsion’ in the eighteenth century—shared a passion for offering and constructing their arguments, reviving the passion that had been alive and well in the Middle Ages, during the public controversies. In polemical works, and in most of the Christian-Jewish polemics in general, the space reserved for ‘passion’ is almost equal to that reserved for ‘reason.’ A false argument, prone to be debunked by the adversary, is usually based on the intention to lie, on bad faith, and on the writer’s sheer hatred of the Jews and their religion. For Briel, the misinterpretation of the biblical and talmudic texts is derived from the fact that the Christian interpreters are often driven by the most anti-rational force, the power of hatred; ‘la forza dell’odio’ in Italian. This goes well beyond any logical and dialectical reasoning.⁵

Let us analyse some of the passages where the word ‘odio’ (‘hatred,’ ‘hate’), is present in the lengthy apologetic work by Briel:

It is a matter of pain for a wise man, when the opposite sect tries to completely alter his own reasonings, turning them into the most blasphemous and erroneous things, when, in reality,

⁵ See James W. Bernauer and Robert A. Maryks, eds., *The Tragic Couple: Encounters between Jews and Jesuits* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), particularly Gianfranco Miletto’s essay in this collection, “Jesuit Influence on Italian Jewish Culture in the 16th and 17th Centuries,” see *ibidem*, 103–123.

it is clear that those arguments and the relevant way of reasoning are entirely metaphorical and allegorical. They had much more fortune with the Heathens and the Christians, by the way, all peoples who borrowed from the Jews whatever beauty and goodness is in their own doctrines. There are so many allegories and metaphors in the classical authors, Aesop and Ovid, and they all praise those works, although they are all metaphorical and often filled with impious and blasphemous phrases, but they do not want to accept that there are also metaphors and allegories in Hebrew works, and they take everything according to the literal sense, which is not the appropriate one. So did Aristotle, a bad pupil, with his Master Plato in his work on Ideas. Oh, how mighty is the power of Hatred that shades the light of reason and forces us to see poorly those things that are enlightened by the purest divine Truth.⁶

Here, Briel defends the metaphorical and allegorical interpretation of the Jewish texts, which is as legitimate for them as it was and is legitimate for the classical texts, for example, Ovid and Aesop. Only the 'power of hate' forces the Christian interpreters to see only the literal meaning and base their attacks of Judaism on it. Furthermore, it also legitimates a degree of 'error' in the writings of a talmudic author. There are also quite a few errors in Christian authors. Hatred, an irrational element, prevents the correct reading of the text. The force of hatred not only prevents a correct understanding of the metaphors and allegories in the sacred text, but also forces misreading where the correct sense is literal, such as in the case of Leviticus, with references to the obligation of marriage of the brother's widow:

It is laughable to state that the Talmud suggests marriage to your own sister or daughter, as if the doctors of the law wanted to destroy the same Law they were meant to preserve; it is all but slander, *invented by Hatred*, as if it was legitimate for a man to marry the daughter of his own sister. It is all based on false translations, for the translator did not know Hebrew, even very simple Hebrew, for the real meaning of that passage is clear even to children.⁷

6 S., 357: 'Ma è Infelicità troppo grande d'un savio che La setta nimica vog[li]a tirare in sentimenti ridicoli, Ingiuriosi, et Impossibili i suoi ragionamenti, quando effettivam[en]te è Infallibile esser quelli mettafforici, et allegorici, in somma ebbero piu fortuna appresso i Cristianj, i Gentili, che gl'Hebrei, da quali presero q[uan]to di buono, e bello, hano nelle loro Dottrine, Li passano da loro gl'Appologi d'Esopo, le metamorfosi d'Ovidio con amirazione di quei grand'huominj, che fecero cosi virtuose compositionj, per le moralità e Dottrine, che rachiudono, se bene nell'apparente , hano coperte non solo Improprie, ma sacrilighe e pure non vogliono tollerare i discorsi mettaforicj che gl'Ebrei hano con sensi piu reconditi e fondati nelle sacre carte , e vogliono malamente, e litteralmente intenderle per malevolenze, e derisione, come si dice haver fatto il Cattivo discepolo Aristotele con Platone suo maestro nel trattato dell'Idee, *Oh forza dell'odio*, [my italics] ch'offusca il lume dell'Intelletto in modo tale che non vede gl'oggetti ben che Illuminati dalla fulgentissima Luce della Verità [...].'

7 S., 364: 'E ridicolo poi il dire ch'il Talmud stabilisce esser opera di merito il pigliarsi per moglie la sua propria sorella, o la figliola, ne so, come posse credersi ne anco che i veri professori della Legge di D:o volessero appertamente distruggere la med[esi]ma Legge, che conservino, e qui devo altamente esclamare, e chiamare tutti i Dotti, acio possino argomentare giustam[en]te dalla parte al tutto esser mere calunie *inventate dall'odio* [my italics], quelle che si dicono dall'autore, contro la Dottrina del Talmud, hor sentite, dicesi collà ch'è opera meritoria il prendere per moglie la figlia di sua sorella, puotendosj, secondo la legge di D:o nel livitico maritare il Zio con la nipote, e chi trasportò questo

Finally, the Christian authors, imbued with hatred towards the Jews, attribute to them the same hatred they personally feel by a typical psychological reversal of the arguments:

As for what the Author [Pinamonti] says about the hatred felt by the Jews towards the Christians and Christ, he offers the cases of children allegedly killed by Jews, and he says that those killings actually happened, for the Jews were condemned for them. As a matter of fact, every religion says evil things about the other religions and hates them, but the cases he brings forth are but inventions, and the depositions against the Jews were all false, dictated by hatred. It is not the fault of the judges, for they judged according to the depositions, *iuxta allegata et probata*, and they did not possess divine inspiration so as to be able to know hell on earth and enter therefore in the righteous Truth.⁸

If we go looking for merely rational arguments and reasoning, the references to logic, as well as those to reason, are few. The example of an irrational argument *par excellence* is the incarnation of God in Christ, an argument shared by the whole Jewish apologetic tradition:

The author [Pinamonti] admits that he cannot understand through reason how God could become a man. The Jew does not believe that, and he is not obliged to this belief by reason or by authority. On the contrary, he deems that the humanisation of God is impossible; it is a contradiction for what is indivisible to be divided, and this is just one of the arguments that prove its impossibility.⁹

At the very end of the long confutation, Briel makes another interesting appeal to 'reason':

When a Jew appears in front of the Divine Tribunal, he will be able to defend his own faith, for he will say to God that he followed the law that God himself has given in a solemn way, so that there was never in history a more abundant people, all contemplating the same God, as it is said

Testo ha detto con Vizio, ò con Ignoranza Crassissima sua figliola, e sua sorella, anzi ben considerando si scorge haver così fatto vitiosamente poi che quanto che fosse Ignorante, ò Imperito della Santa Lingua, non poteva dare tall' interpretat[i]one alle parole del Testo chiaro anco a Fanciulli, e principianti nella notitia dell'Heb[rai]co.'

8 S., 413 (and see also Mancuso's introduction, 338): 'Quanto al resto che v'è dicendo l'autore in questo numero dell'Odio che portano gli Hebrei al Cristo e Cristiani, adducendo alcuni casi d'Innocenti uccisi da hebrei, provandoli dalle pene riportate da trasgressori; si dice ch'ogni religione per il più odia, e dice male delle religioni contrarie, ed i casi addotti furono inventioni de malevoli contrarij, che volsero sfogare la loro Rabbia contro gl'Ebrei, onde deposero falsamente, ed'impegnati sostenessero le deposizioni, non però se ne incolpavano i Giudici, per che giudicavano iuxta allegata et probata, e non havevano spirito Divino di poter conoscere L'Inferno degl'huomini, e penetrare nella Giusta Verità [...].'

9 S., 440: 'Gia che confessa l'autore, non poter con la ragione penetrare, come dio, potesse farsi huomo, L'hebreo, non lo vuol credere; non trovandosi obbligato a tal Credenza, ne dalla ragione, ne dalle autorità, anzi stima impossibile L'humanarsi una sol delle persone Divine, essendo contradditorio l'esser Indivisibile, e diviso, appresso ad'altri motivi che ne fanno conoscere L'Insussistenza [...].'

in Deuteronomy 4, that law will never be repealed, a law that God declared to be the most perfect, and as in the Psalms (18; 19 for us), perfectly adhering to reason; the Jew will say to God that in spite of all the persecutions, difficulties, and miseries, he always lived in that faith and never wanted to listen to things that are against reason and against the authority of the Prophets.¹⁰

In order to prove his arguments, therefore, Briel attributes a good deal of ‘irrationality’ to the adversary. Hatred plays a fundamental role in Pinamonti’s argument, but so too does the goal to convince in order to convert, not to convince for the sake of a pure truth. The combination of ‘reason’ and ‘revelation’—in an age in which free thinkers were questioning the same ratio of revelation, considered as a myth—seals Briel’s argument in a strong and unbeatable mechanism. He is rather diffident towards a merely philosophical argumentation. This is made clear by the references to philosophy in the text, which are normally negative:

He [Pinamonti] says that the Law of Moses does not teach that much on the perfections of God; it merely teaches that God is One, who cares about everything, gives rewards and punishments, and is holy and perfect, completely; I do not know what more a philosopher might add to this with his own sophisms. On the contrary, a philosopher can meet with heresies, an occurrence not present for the believer, who stays with God and does not engage himself with human speculations.¹¹

As has been noted by Mancuso, Brielli’s rigid defence of Jewish orthodoxy counted among its targets not only Pinamonti, but also all the Jews who, devoted to mysticism, Kabbalah, and messianic views, were potential ‘Trojan horses’ within those same Jewish communities. Here, the key concept of this polemical skirmish, the ‘inganno’—‘deceit,’ but also ‘deception,’ ‘trick,’ or, as Professor Horbury suggests, ‘enchantment’—plays another major role. ‘Inganno’ can be everywhere, not only in the literal interpretation of some talmudic passages, not only in texts and arguments, but also in souls and hearts. And here the controversy appears to be well rooted in the Baroque sensibility, where ‘inganno’ and ‘simulation’ as well ‘dissimulation’ played a major role.

10 S., 440: ‘L’Hebreo quando comparirà avanti al Tribunal divino, renderà buona ragione della sua fede, dicendo, sig: Iddio io hò seguitato la legge, data da voi con Sollenità tale, che non hà pari, dove mai si trovò popolo sì numeroso, tutto sollevato alla visione d’Iddio, come nel Deutoronomio cap: 4, legge che non fu mai abrogata, legge dichiarata da voi perfettissima, come in davide Salmo 18 (a noi 19) legge unniforme alla raggione, e non ostante le persecuzioni, turbolenze, captività, e [f. 151b] miserie, hò vissuto sempre costante in questa Fede, et non hò volluto credere cose repugnanti, et alla ragione, et all’autorità de vostri Profeti [...]’

11 S., 356: ‘Dice ancora che la Legge di Moisè poco insegna delle perfettioni di D:o et basta ch’insegna, che ci è un sol Id: autore della tutta providente, premiante e castigante, santiss[i]mo, e perfett [issi]mo, ne sò che possa Intendere di più un filosofo colle sue sottigliezze, anzi con questa puo urtare nello scoglio di qualh’eresia cosa che non succede a chi stà con la parola di D:o, e non applica ad humane speculat[i]o[n]i.’

If we analyse the use of the word ‘verità,’ truth, we see it on many occasions with different meanings, ranging from the moral to the theological, from the theoretical to the practical. As I have said, my paper is merely an attempt to invite scholars to reflect on the ‘hidden meaning(s)’ of a controversy, or, in general, of Jewish-Christian polemics.

Also, the structure of the polemics is not systematic. As a matter of fact, Briel does not confute a large number of points in Pinamonti’s work. Why? Does he agree with Pinamonti’s point, or does he simply not deem that those criticisms and attacks are worth a reply? This is difficult to establish. Perhaps there were points of contact in the two ‘enemies’ about some ‘errors’ in Judaism, not so much in orthodoxy, but certainly in post-talmudic reading and interpretations.

The means of proving the ‘truth’ are twofold and only very occasionally based on reason. In most cases, authorities play a leading role in the construction of the truth, not only religious authorities and the Old Testament, in Hebrew, but often lay political authorities: Charles V, denying the blood libel accusation, certainly not a ‘thing of the past,’ or felt as such, at the end of the seventeenth century.

