

THE JEWISH- CHRISTIAN DEBATE IN THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

A Critical Edition of the
Nizzahon Vetus

introduction, translation
and commentary by -

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Abbreviations

- Auteurs B. Blumenkranz, *Les Auteurs Chrétiens Latins du Moyen Age sur les Juifs et le Judaïsme*, Paris, La Haye, 1963
- \ B. Bavli (Babylonian Talmud)
- CC, Ser. Lat. *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*
- CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
- De Fide Cath. Isidore of Seville, *De Fide Catholica ex Veteri et Novo Testamento Contra Judaeos*, PL 83.449-538
- Eggers *Der Althochdeutsche Isidor*, edited by Hans Eggers, Tübingen, 1964 (*Altdutsche Textbibliothek*, no. 63)—includes an edition of the early chapters of *De Fide Catholica*
- Gloss *Glossa Ordinaria*
- HTR *Harvard Theological Review*
- HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual*
- JJS *Journal of Jewish Studies*
- JQR *Jewish Quarterly Review*
- Judenpredigt B. Blumenkranz, *Die Judenpredigt Augustins*, Basel, 1946
- Juifs et Chrét. B. Blumenkranz, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le Monde Occidental 430-1096*, Paris, 1960
- M.E. Mordecai of Avignon, *Mahaziq (or Mehazzeq) Emunah*, Vatican ms. 271, pp. 1a-17b
- MGH *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
- MGWJ *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*
- Mil. HaShem Jacob ben Reuben, *Milhamot HaShem*, ed. by J. Rosenthal, Jerusalem, 1963
- Mil. Hovah *Milhemet Hovah*, Constantinople, 1710
- Mil. Mizvah Meir of Narbonne, *Milhemet Mizvah*
- N.V. *Nizzahon Vetus*
- PG *Patrologia Graeca*
- PL *Patrologia Latina (1844-65)*
- Pos. ms. Posnanski manuscript (Posnanski alone refers to A. Posnanski's manuscript notes on N.V.)
- REJ *Revue des Études Juives*
- Tela J. Wagenseil, *Tela Ignea Satanae*, Altdorf, 1681
- TNA E. Martène and U. Durand, *Thesaurus Novus Anecdotorum*, vol. 5, Paris, 1717
- Tränkle H. Tränkle, *Q.S.F. Tertulliani Adversus Judaeos mit Einleitung und Kritischen Kommentar*, Wiesbaden, 1964
- Trypho Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*
- Ver. Israel M. Simon, *Verus Israel*, Paris, 1948
- Yer. *Yerushalmi (Palestinian Talmud)*

INTRODUCTION

I. On Jewish-Christian Polemic

Polemical literature is one of the liveliest manifestations of Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages. At times calm and almost dispassionate, at other times angry and bitter, religious polemic is a reflection of the mood and character not only of the disputants themselves but of the age in which they wrote and spoke. While the tone of the Jewish-Christian debate ranges from somber to sarcastic to playfully humorous, the underlying issues were as serious to the participants as life itself. Failure on the part of the Christian polemicist could encourage Jews in their mockery of all that was sacred and might engender doubts in Christian minds; failure by the Jew could lead to apostasy and, on some occasions, severe persecution and even martyrdom. Religious arguments could be stimulating and enjoyable, but the stakes involved were monumental.

The *Nizzahon Vetus*, or *Old Book of Polemic*, is a striking example of Jewish disputation in its most aggressive mode. The anonymous author collected an encyclopedic array of anti-Christian arguments current among late thirteenth-century Franco-German Jews. Refutations of christological exegesis, attacks on the rationality of Christian doctrine, a critique of the Gospels and Church ritual, denunciations of Christian morality—all these and more are presented in an exceptionally vigorous style that is not especially scrupulous about overstepping the bounds of civility. Although both the style and comprehensiveness of the book are not altogether typical of Jewish polemic, they make the *Nizzahon Vetus* an excellent and unusually interesting vehicle for the study of this crucial and intriguing dimension of medieval Jewish-Christian relations.

Jewish-Christian polemic begins at the very dawn of Christianity. The reasons for this are built into the essence of the Christian faith, for a religion that was born out of Judaism had to justify the rejection of its parent. Indeed, theological and exegetical approaches which can be labeled polemic can also be seen as the elementary building blocks of the developing faith, since certain early doctrines grew naturally out of a reading of the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah 53, which could easily be read as a reference to the vicarious atonement of a "servant of the Lord," served as an almost inevitable explanation of the paradox of the Messiah's crucifixion. Whether or not Jesus applied such an understanding of this passage to his own career (and he probably did not),¹ this is a case in which a crux of later polemic was read christologically for fundamental, internal reasons.

Some doctrines, of course, did not develop out of the Hebrew Scriptures. Nevertheless, Christian acceptance of the divine origin of those Scriptures, together with an espousal of central beliefs that did not seem to be there, generated a need to explain this omission. Thus, even if Jews had not pressed their opposition to statements concerning the divinity of the Messiah, the virgin birth, or the abrogation of the Law, almost any serious Christian would have tried to find biblical justification for these doctrines. It is, in fact, often difficult to tell when a given Christian argument is directed against Jews and when it is an attempt to deal with a problem raised by the writer's own study of the Bible. This uncertainty applies even to some works ostensibly aimed against the Jews, because the number of such works through the ages seems disproportionate to the threat that Judaism could have posed.²

Were Jewish questions, then, the primary factor behind the search for biblical testimonies to Christian truth? Was it, as one

1. See M. D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant* (London, 1959); Y. Kaufmann, *Golah VeNekhar* (Tel Aviv, 1929/30), 1: 381-89.

2. The major anti-Jewish polemics through the twelfth century were summarized by A. L. Williams, *Adversus Judaeos* (Cambridge, 1935). See also B. Blumenkranz, *Les Auteurs Chrétiens Latins du Moyen Age sur les Juifs et le Judaïsme* (Paris, La Haye, 1963). J. Pelikan has remarked that as Judaism became less of a threat to Christianity, Christian writers tended "to take their opponents less and less seriously" (*The Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition [100-600]*, [Chicago and London, 1971], p. 21). There is some validity to this observation, but precisely this fact leads one to ask why Christians continue to write books refuting people that they do not take seriously.

scholar has suggested, because of Jewish arguments that Christians became concerned with the conflict between the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke?³ Did the incredulous inquiries of Jews inspire the various rationales concerning the need for the incarnation, up to and including Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*?⁴ The extent of Jewish influence is difficult to determine, but it is clear that such issues would not have been ignored in the absence of Jewish disputants. It is surely evident that when Isidore of Seville, in a work on Leviticus, has a Jew ask why Christians fail to bring sacrifices or observe the sabbatical year, he is raising problems suggested by his own reading of the Bible, and yet Peter Damian transferred these passages without change into a polemical work against the Jews.⁵ Christians undoubtedly wrote books against Judaism in response to a challenge actually raised by Jews, but they were also motivated by the internal need to deal with issues that were both crucial and profoundly disturbing.

One approach to the puzzling conflict between the Hebrew Bible and Christian beliefs was a frontal attack. Marcion and other Christian heretics rejected the Jewish Scriptures and subjected them to a wide-ranging critique. In one respect this was a simple and straightforward solution since the problem vanishes entirely; there was no longer any need to engage in point by point exegesis of individual passages. On the other hand, this radical solution of one problem created another even more intractable difficulty. The Gospels, after all, clearly recognized the divine origin of the Hebrew Bible; indeed, many of the biblical testimonies central to later polemic are found in the New Testament. The suggestion that offending New Testament passages be emended was hardly palatable to most Christians, and mainstream Christianity rejected the one approach that would have sharply limited the scope of the Jewish-Christian debate.

3. See A. B. Hulén, "The Dialogue with the Jews as Source for the Early Jewish Argument against Christianity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932): 61.

4. On the polemical implications of *Cur Deus Homo?* see A. Funkenstein, "HaTemurot Be-Vikkuah HaDat Shebein Yehudim LeNozerim BaMe'ah HaYod-Bet," *Zion* 33 (1968): 129-32.

5. See my "St. Peter Damian: His Attitude toward the Jews and the Old Testament," *Yavneh Review* 4 (1965): 102-4. The issue of Christian sacrifices in the Middle Ages is raised in N.V. (pp. 207-09), but only in response to a Christian argument.

It seems a bit strange to assert that the vigorous anti-Jewish position of the heretics would have minimized polemical activity, but this is indeed the case. Absolute rejection of the Hebrew Bible by Christians would have eliminated much of the wrangling over the meaning of verses which plays such a prominent role in medieval polemic. Moreover, the heretics' reading of the Bible was, in an ironic way, closer to that of the Jews than to that of orthodox Christians, because, like the Jews, they understood it literally. Total rejection eliminated the need for allegory entirely.⁶

In one area, however, such heretics enriched the Jewish-Christian argument. One of the central heretical methods of defending their pejorative evaluation of the Hebrew Bible was to show that it is replete with absurdities and contradictions. In discussions with heretics, orthodox Christians tended to shrink from such arguments, but in debates with Jews they changed their tune. Of course, the arguments were rechanneled; they were no longer proof of the absurdity of the Hebrew Bible, only of the absurdity of literal interpretation. In effect, therefore, Jews found themselves defending their Bible against both heretical barbs and orthodox allegory.⁷

One of the sharpest points of contention in the early confrontation between Jews and Christians—one in which the Christian position was formed by both internal and external factors—was the famous assertion that Christians are the true (verus) Israel. Here again, acceptance of the Hebrew Bible led naturally to the need to transform it into a Christian document, and the process through which Israel came to refer to Christians was almost inevitable. In this case, however, powerful forces from the outside combined to make this an argument of extraordinary significance. The pagan accusation that Christianity was an innovation had to be answered because it could affect the very legitimacy of the new faith, and the only effective response was to don the mantle of antiquity through the identification of Christendom with Israel.

6. For a summary of Marcion's attitude toward the Hebrew Bible and his manipulation of the New Testament text, see E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London, 1948), pp. 42-60, 113-24. Cf. also Pelikan, p. 77.

7. See appendix 3.

Jews could hardly have been expected to suffer such a claim with equanimity. The most succinct summary of the instinctive Jewish reaction to this assertion is the Greek quotation from the *Dialogue with Trypho* which Marcel Simon placed on the cover of his *Verus Israel*. "What?!" said Trypho. "You are Israel?!"⁸ After the initial shock wore off, Jews realized that this was a direct assault against the fundamental underpinnings of Judaism, an effort to abscond with the Bible. They pointed with outrage to the arbitrariness of applying all favorable biblical statements about Israel to the church and all pejorative ones to the Jews, and by the high Middle Ages they had assembled passages from the Bible in which favorable and unfavorable references were inextricably intertwined. The same Israel would be exiled and redeemed, and since the church would not suffer the former fate it could hardly lay claim to the latter reward.⁹ Whatever the Jewish response, the issue was critical, because it appeared that Christianity could lay claim to legitimacy only by denying it to Judaism. There was no room (at least according to the dominant view) for two spiritual Israels.

The corpus of early Christian works directed against Judaism is, as we have already noted, rather extensive. Anti-Christian works by Jews, on the other hand, are virtually nonexistent before the twelfth century. One reason for this disparity is that Jews had no internal motivation for writing polemics against Christians; in times or places where Christianity was not a threat, we cannot expect Jews to be concerned with a refutation of its claims. Moreover, during much of the so-called Dark Ages, Jews in Christian lands produced no literature that has survived. Consequently, aside from some largely philosophical material in Arabic, our sources for the Jewish side of the discussion consist of scattered references in rabbinic literature,¹⁰ the collections of folk polemic that go by the name *Toledot*

8. *Τί οὖν; φησὶν ὁ Τρύφων. Ὑμεῖς Ἰσραὴλ ἐστε;* *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 123.

9. On the subject of *verus Israel*, see pp. 169-71, and the notes to p. 126. On the typology of Jacob and Esau, see G. D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann, pp. 19-48, and cf. the notes to p. 55.

10. A list of such references appears in H. H. Ben Sasson's "Disputations and Polemics," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), 6: cols. 81-82.

Yeshu,¹¹ and quotations in Christian works.¹² The last group of sources is by far the richest, but determining the authenticity of Jewish arguments cited in some of the purely literary Christian dialogues is a risky procedure. The genuineness of such arguments can usually be tested by their appearance in later Jewish polemic or by their inherent plausibility, and despite the usefulness of these criteria it hardly needs to be said that they are far from foolproof. It is therefore not until the second half of the twelfth century that we can begin to speak with confidence about the details of the Jewish argument against Christianity.

An examination of Jewish-Christian polemic in the high Middle Ages reveals an arena in which most of the battles take place along well-charted lines but where certain new approaches are beginning to make themselves heard. The Christian side is usually on the offensive with respect to biblical verses, although, as I have indicated, there is a fundamentally defensive element in the entire enterprise of searching for biblical testimonies. Indeed, we find Jews arguing that Christianity is so inherently implausible that only the clearest biblical evidence could suffice to establish its validity.¹³ Nevertheless, the structure of the Jewish-Christian debate was such that the initiative was taken by Christians in the area of scriptural evidence. On the other hand, Jews usually initiated the discussion of doctrinal questions, because they felt that the irrationality of Christianity could be established through such an approach. In each area, however, the initiative could shift; Jews did not refrain from citing specific verses to refute Christian beliefs and Christians did not hesitate to attack Jewish doctrines on philosophical or moral grounds.

11. See S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach Jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin, 1902).

12. See B. Blumenkranz's "Die Jüdischen Beweisgründe im Religionsgespräch mit den Christen," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 4 (1948): 119-47, and his *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le Monde Occidental, 430-1096* (Paris, 1960), pp. 213-89. It is likely that the brief *Sefer Nestor HaKomer* (Altona, 1875) also predates the high Middle Ages. For a short summary of some sporadic references to other early Jewish polemics, see J. Rosenthal, "Haganah VeHatqafah BeSifrut HaVikkuah shel Yemei HaBeinayim," *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1969) 2: 354-55. On the degree to which early disputations reflect real encounters, see the summary in A. P. Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew*, vol. 2 (Louvain, 1973), introd., pp. 64*-70*.

13. See J. Rosenthal's introduction to his edition of *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 27.

The bulk of polemical discussions continued to center around the time-honored issue of christological verses in the Hebrew Bible. Before such discussions could take place, ground rules had to be set up. What is the scope of the Hebrew Bible, and what text can legitimately be cited? Particularly in the early centuries, Christians would have liked very much to include the apocrypha in their arsenal, and they were even more anxious to quote certain Septuagint readings. The very nature of this issue, however, forced a resolution in favor of the Jews. It can be very frustrating and unprofitable to argue with someone who simply denies the legitimacy of your quotations, and it was nearly impossible to prove that the apocrypha should be canonical or that Septuagint variants are superior to the Masoretic text (especially when some of those variants were a result of the corruption of the Septuagint text itself). Jerome's respect for the Hebrew text accelerated the resolution of this matter in favor of the Jewish position, and despite the persistence of a handful of apocryphal quotations and a few Septuagint variants, Christians settled down to the task of demonstrating the christological nature of the biblical text accepted by Jews.¹⁴

This task was pursued on two levels, and it would be useful to draw a distinction between genuine polemic and what could be called exegetical polemic. Genuine polemic involved those verses whose christological interpretation provided a genuine challenge to a Jew. If *'almah* meant virgin, then Isaiah 7:14 really seemed to speak of a virgin birth. Jeremiah 31:31 really spoke of a new covenant that God would make with the house of Israel. What did that mean? Isaiah 53 really did refer to a servant of the Lord who would suffer, despite his innocence, as a result of the sins of others. Who was that servant, and how was such suffering to be explained? If *shiloh* somehow meant Messiah (and many Jews conceded that it did), then Genesis 49:10 could reasonably be taken to mean that Jewish kingship would last until the messianic age and then cease. If the Messiah had not yet come, why was there no Jewish king? Specific rejoinders were necessary to blunt the force of such arguments, and it is no accident that

14. See the notes to p. 132.

the verses which fall into this category constitute the *loci classici* of polemical literature.

Nevertheless, a great deal of that literature is devoted to a discussion of passages of such weak polemical force that specific refutation was hardly even necessary. Such passages multiplied as a result of Christian exegesis of the Bible, and their christological interpretation was probably not even intended to persuade the non-believer. As time passed, however, this type of material began to make its way into polemical works, and the refutation of such "exegetical polemic" became a major concern of some Jewish writers. Although they used many of the same techniques that were applied to more serious arguments, Jewish polemicists confronted a situation in which the most straightforward response was the observation that there was simply no evidence for the christological assertion. Why should Cyrus in Isaiah 45 be Jesus? On what basis are the heavens in Psalm 19 identified with the apostles? Who says that David in Psalm 17 is Jesus, and why should we assume that the speaker in Psalm 13 is the church?¹⁵ The inclusion of such material blurred the already fuzzy line between polemic and exegesis, and biblical commentaries become a particularly important source of polemical material.

This is true not only of Christian commentaries, which are obviously a major source of exegetical polemic, but of Jewish commentaries as well. When a Jewish exegete reached a passage that was a crux of Christian polemic, he would frequently make an effort, whether implicitly or explicitly, to undermine the christological interpretation.¹⁶ One exegetical tendency that was greatly encouraged by such polemical goals was the denial of the messianic nature of certain biblical passages and the assertion that they referred instead to historical figures. Such a tendency appears in nonpolemical

15. Naturally, there are many scriptural arguments that resist neat classification, and not every weak argument should be labeled "exegetical." Nevertheless, these examples are illustrative of christological interpretations that hardly made any pretense of being demonstrably true. (Isaiah 45 was in a different category during the early stages of its polemical history; see the notes to p. 111.)

16. Some examples can be found in E.I.J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Medieval Bible Commentaries," *JJS* 11 (1960): 115-35. Jewish commentaries, of course, deal primarily with what I have called genuine polemic.

contexts as well, and some scholars have argued that the polemical motivation has been overstated; it is, nevertheless, beyond question that the desire to refute Christian interpretation played some role in the development of this type of exegesis. This is especially clear when surprising historical interpretations appear in overtly polemical works. In the *Nizzahon Vetus*, the most striking use of such exegesis appears in the discussion of Isaiah 11. While the author himself apparently understood that chapter messianically, he made use of a long-standing but clearly radical Jewish interpretation by maintaining that it could be referred to Hezekiah and Sennacherib. This view eliminates any christological reference, but it also does away with one of the central messianic passages in the Bible. Polemic, then, was at least a factor in stimulating and legitimizing an important development in medieval Jewish exegesis.¹⁷

Christians were genuinely puzzled at the Jewish failure to accept the overwhelming array of scriptural arguments which they had marshaled. Every major Christian doctrine could be supported by several verses in the Hebrew Bible, and some of these appeared utterly irrefutable. Indeed, a few verses seemed so impressive that the persuasive force of any one of them should in itself have caused Jews to abandon their faith.¹⁸ Only preternatural blindness or a conscious refusal to accept the truth could account for Jewish resistance, and both of these explanations played a major role in the medieval conception of the Jew.¹⁹

Jewish refutations of Christian interpretations of the Bible had to proceed on a verse-by-verse basis. There are, nevertheless, certain general principles that were applied time and again, and the most important of these was the argument from context. Jews argued that christological explanations of individual verses could rarely withstand scrutiny from the wider perspective of the passage as a

17. On Isaiah 11, see the notes to p. 108. Cf. also p. 125 and the notes there. For a general treatment of medieval Ashkenazic exegesis, see S. Poznanski, *Mavo lePerush 'al Yehezqel u-Terei 'Asar leRabbi Eliezer miBalgenzi* (Warsaw, 1913; reprinted Jerusalem, 1965).

18. So Peter the Venerable with respect to Proverbs 30:4; see his *Tractatus adversus Judaeorum Inveteratam Duritiem*, PL 189.519.

19. On blindness, see p. 68 and the notes there. For a possible Jewish reversal of the argument that Jews reject what they know to be the truth, see the notes to pp. 216 and 219.

whole, and they constantly cited adjoining verses to demonstrate this point. Perhaps the most important use of this argument was its application to the virgin birth explanation of Isaiah 7:14. This verse was by far the most significant evidence for the virgin birth in the Hebrew Bible, and its importance was enhanced by the fact that it was cited for this purpose in Matthew. Nevertheless, it was only with the greatest difficulty that Christians could respond to the Jewish argument that the birth was clearly expected to take place very shortly after Isaiah's announcement.²⁰ While the argument from context was not always as effective as it was here, it was the stock-in-trade of any medieval Jewish polemicist.

The Jewish posture with respect to the citation of biblical verses was not always defensive. Indeed, the very essence of the Jewish position rested upon certain monumental assertions built upon the straightforward reading of the Hebrew Bible as a whole; it is precisely because of this that Jews were less concerned with the citation of specific controversial verses. A reading of the Bible as a whole leaves the unmistakable impression that the Messiah would bring peace, that he would be a human being, that God is one, and that the ritual law means what it says. The burden of proof that any of these impressions should be modified, elaborated, or rejected was upon the Christians; this was recognized to some degree by the Christian side, and it was one of the fundamental assumptions of Jewish writers. Nevertheless, some Jewish polemicists did compile lists of verses to demonstrate the validity of certain basic Jewish beliefs.²¹

There was another Jewish approach that involved the citation of specific verses, but it is difficult to decide how seriously to take it. *The Nizzahon Vetus*, the earlier *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, and some other Jewish polemics cite a series of verses which, they say, are aimed directly at Christianity. Several of these constitute clever responses to Christian assertions and are surely not to be taken seriously (e.g.,

20. See the notes to p. 101.

21. The clearest instance of such an approach in pre-fourteenth-century Jewish polemic is Solomon de' Rossi's *'Edut HaShem Ne'emanah*, ed. J. Rosenthal, *Mehqarim u-Meqorot* (Jerusalem, 1967), 1:373-430. Jewish arguments based on the nonfulfillment of messianic prophecies of peace were very common; see the notes to p. 107.

the copper serpent does indeed represent Jesus and that is why Moses was commanded to hang it). I am inclined to think, however, that Jews were entirely serious about some of these quotations. One polemicist, in fact, cited such a verse immediately after a Christian question asking how the Torah could have omitted all reference to Jesus. Thus, the Bible explicitly warned against trusting in a man (Jer. 17:5; Ps. 146:3); it told Jews to punish a man who would claim to have a mother but not a father (Deut. 13:7); and it spoke of the humbling of anyone who pretended to be divine (Isa. 2:11). Such citations were hardly central to Jewish polemic, but they represent an effort by Jews to turn the tables on their opponents by finding "christological" verses of their own.²²

With respect to doctrinal issues, it was the Jewish side that usually took the offensive. Jews were convinced that some of the central articles of faith professed by Christians were not only devoid of scriptural foundation but were without logical justification as well; to use Christian terminology, they lacked both *ratio* and *auctoritas*.

The trinity, which was an obvious target for logical questions, posed a peculiar problem for Jewish polemicists; they considered it so irrational that they had trouble in coming to grips with it. Although no Jewish writer formulates his difficulties in precisely this fashion, it seems clear that Jews, in effect, asked themselves the following questions: "What do they mean when they talk about a triune God? They say that there are three, and then they say that the three are one. But this is patent nonsense. What, then, do they really believe? Which of these contradictory assertions am I to take seriously and which shall I dismiss as meaningless double-talk? Since they talk about the separate incarnation of one of the three persons, it

22. See pp. 46 and 147 and the notes there. The problem of determining how serious Jews were in their citations of such verses was pointed out briefly by Judah Rosenthal in connection with a sixteenth-century polemic; see his introduction to Ya'ir ben Shabbetai da Correggio's *He'er Pitsiyot* (Jerusalem, 1958), p. 9. Cf. also his citation of several relevant verses in his "Haganah VeHatqafah . . ." pp. 348-49. There is a non-polemical source which may contribute to the impression that there was some degree of seriousness in this enterprise. R. Jacob Tam, we are told, requested divine guidance in a dream to determine whether or not Jesus and Mary are alluded to in Scripture; see A. J. Heschel, "'Al Rual HaQodesh Bimei HaBeinayim," *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, New York, 1950, Heb. vol., p. 182, n27. See also Talmage's note in "HaPulmus HaAnti-Nozri BaHibbur Leqet Qazar," *Michael* 4 (1976): 71.

is apparently the assertion of multiplicity that they really mean. In that case, I shall have to demonstrate to them that there is only one God."

It is only some such line of reasoning that can explain the persistent Jewish efforts to persuade Christians to accept monotheism on both logical and scriptural grounds. Jacob ben Reuben cites philosophical evidence that the world was created by no more than one God. The author of the *Nizzahon Vetus* wants to know what will happen if one person of the trinity makes a decision and another person reverses it. Solomon de' Rossi compiles a list of biblical verses which say that there is one God. Writer after writer reminds Christians that God proclaimed, "I, I am he, and there is no God beside me" (Deut. 32:39). To the Christian polemicist, of course, such arguments were virtually inexplicable and missed the point entirely. Christians, he would reply, believe in monotheism as much as Jews; the question is only the nature of that one God. On this issue, Jews and Christians were operating on different wavelengths, and the essence of the problem was the rationality of the Christian belief.²³

Christians attempted to defend the plausibility of the trinitarian faith by analogies with physical phenomena or by the identification of the three persons of the trinity with major attributes of God. Such arguments raised complex philosophical questions about divine attributes which transcended the boundaries of the Jewish-Christian debate but did play a role in some of the more sophisticated polemical works. Some Jews tried to undermine this type of explanation by arguing that it could not coexist comfortably with the doctrine of the incarnation which implied the sort of separability among the persons of the trinity that could not be attributed to divine power, wisdom, and will.²⁴

23. See the notes to pp. 42 (l. 12) and 75. The most sophisticated Jewish discussion of the trinity during our period is in Moses of Salerno's *Ta'anot*, and not all Jewish polemicists based their arguments on the undefended assumption that trinitarianism is simply a polytheism of three. There was, nevertheless, a pervasive Jewish feeling that this is the case. On this topic in general, see D. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977), pp. 48-104. (Lasker's important study appeared too late to be utilized systematically in this book; for an assessment, see my review in the *Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter* 22 [March 1978]: 16-17, 19.)

24. See appendix 5 for a detailed discussion.

The incarnation itself was subjected to a Jewish critique that ranged from the questioning of its necessity to the contention that it is impossible even for an omnipotent God.²⁵ Christian works quote several Jewish polemicists who became so carried away with the tendency to maintain the impossibility of Christian dogmas that they made such an assertion even with respect to the virgin birth. Here they were on very shaky ground; Christians presented effective rebuttals, and the extant Jewish polemics which discuss the matter concede that God could theoretically have caused a virgin to conceive.²⁶

One Christian doctrine that Jews attacked on moral rather than philosophical grounds was the belief in the universal damnation which came in the wake of original sin. They argued that such treatment is clearly unfair and inconsistent with the mercy of God, and at least one Jewish writer made the same argument with respect to the damnation of the unbaptized, especially unbaptized infants.²⁷ The terrible consequences of a failure to accept Christianity seemed particularly unjust in light of what Jews considered the unimpressive nature of the miracles associated with Jesus' career.²⁸ Moreover, some of the central assertions of the Christian faith appeared not only implausible but demeaning to God, and it did not seem right that someone who refused to believe such doctrines should be punished so severely.²⁹

For their part, Christians were more than willing to engage in arguments appealing to reason, morality, or fairness. The ritual law, they said, was demonstrably unreasonable. Even where it did not contradict itself, no plausible reasons could be discovered for many of its precepts, and the contention that no reasons need to be given for the divine will is the refuge of desperate, unintelligent men.³⁰ The very fate of the Jewish people constitutes a rational argument against the validity of Judaism.³¹ As for moral arguments, Jews believed that

25. See appendix 2.

26. See p. 103 and the notes there.

27. See the notes to p. 218.

28. See especially the notes to p. 146.

29. See the notes to p. 222.

30. See appendix 3.

31. See the notes to p. 89.

God revealed himself only to them,³² they apparently thought that only they would be saved,³³ and they possessed a harsh and carnal Law.³⁴

Each side, then, was well fortified with arguments from both Scripture and reason, and polemical activity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries reached new heights. Among Christians, the outpouring of anti-Jewish polemic began in the late eleventh century and reached a crescendo in the twelfth. Peter Damian, Gilbert Crispin, Petrus Alfonsi, Rupert of Deutz, Peter the Venerable, "William of Champeaux," Peter of Blois, Walter of Châtillon, Alan of Lille—these and others made their contributions to the refutation of Judaism. Among Jews, the writing of polemic began in the late twelfth century and reached a peak (at least in France and Germany) in the thirteenth. Joseph Kimḥi, Jacob ben Reuben, the author of the *Vikkuaḥ LehaRadaq*, Meir of Narbonne, Joseph Official (Yosef HaMeqanne) and his father Nathan, Moses of Salerno, Mordecai of Avignon, Nahmanides, Jacob of Venice, Solomon de' Rossi and, finally, the anonymous author of the *Nizzahon Vetus* were the representatives of a concerted Jewish effort to present the case against Christianity. The renaissance of Christian polemic was as much a result of a general intellectual revival as of a new concern with Jews; the Jewish response, though somewhat delayed, was inevitable, and in two important instances, it was imposed in the form of forced disputations. Confrontations between Jews and Christians were on the increase, and their frequency, their tone, and even their content were being deeply influenced by the political, social, and economic changes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

32. See Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos*, PL 2.599 = Tränkle, p. 4. On Jewish selfishness, cf. also the citations from Bernard in my study, "The Attitude of St. Bernard of Clairvaux toward the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 40 (1972): 100.

33. So a priest of Étampes quoted by Joseph Official; see the notes to p. 89 for the full quotation and reference. There is, of course, a well-known talmudic view that righteous Gentiles are admitted into the world to come (*Tosefta Sanhedrin*, ch. 13; *B. Sanhedrin* 105a), but the definition of righteousness was subject to several ambiguities. Moreover, this priest can hardly be faulted in light of comments made by Joseph Official's own father; see below, p. 68.

34. On the carnality of the Law, see p. 80 and the notes there.

II. Polemic and Historical Reality

The *Nizzahon Vetus*, as we shall see, is a virtual anthology of Ashkenazic polemic in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and these centuries constitute a pivotal period in the history of the Jews of France and Germany. In France a major factor in the inexorable decline of the status of the Jews was the growing centralization of power in the hands of an unfriendly monarchy. The growing national unification, together with the increase in mass piety that had been stimulated as early as the eleventh century by the Gregorian reform and the Crusades, sharpened the awareness of the alien character of the Jew both nationally and religiously. The Christian piety of some of the French monarchs, particularly Louis IX, resulted in a major effort to bring about large-scale Jewish conversion, and considerable sums were expended for this purpose.³⁵ An investigation of the Talmud was pursued in 1240 by means of a Jewish-Christian debate that was really a trial, and the eventual burning of the Talmud shortly thereafter was a devastating psychological and cultural blow to French Jewry.³⁶ One Jewish source reports that the king of France encouraged the arrangement of public disputations in 1272-73 by a Jewish convert to Christianity who promised to show the Jews that they were without faith and that, like heretics, they deserved to be burned.³⁷ Thus, for at least some Jews in thirteenth-century France, religious polemic was simply unavoidable.

Religious motives, however, were not the only factors which undermined the position of the Jews. The French monarchy saw its Jewish subjects as a convenient target for fiscal exploitation, and the

35. See S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York, 1965), 10: 60.

36. See Ch. Merchavia, *HaTalmud BiRe'i HaNazrut* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 227-48.

37. See A. Neubauer, "Literary Gleanings, IX," *JQR*, o.s. 5 (1893): 713-14; cf. Baron, *op. cit.*, 10: 63-64. See also R. Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France* (Baltimore and London, 1973), pp. 149-153, for indications that this convert was Pablo C(h)ristia(ni) and that the events may have taken place in 1269.

economic security of the Jews grew more and more precarious.³⁸ A feeling of economic insecurity had, in fact, been developing for some time and had even made its way into legal discussions by the twelfth century. The Talmud had recorded a view limiting the amount of interest that a Jew might collect from a Gentile to whatever the Jew needed for bare sustenance. In discussing this passage, some French Jewish commentators argued that such a ruling was of no practical effect under prevailing conditions; since "we do not know how much tax the king will demand," any sum must be regarded as bare sustenance.³⁹ *Rabbi Tam's view*

Similar evidence of such insecurity can be found in the application of another talmudic law. A Jew who was owed money by a Gentile was not supposed to collect the debt on a pagan holiday unless it was an oral debt; in the latter case, he could collect at any time because he had no assurance that he would be able to collect later. Here again Ashkenazic jurists maintained that under the conditions prevailing in medieval Europe, a debt for which the Jew had written proof (or even a pledge) could be collected on a Christian holiday because there was never any real assurance that even such a debt could be collected at a later date.⁴⁰

It would, of course, be easy to argue that these rulings were rationalizations to justify widespread violations of the relevant talmudic regulations and that they do not therefore reflect genuine insecurity. The tosafists, however, did not manipulate talmudic law in quite so facile a manner. Whatever their motivations, they were convinced that they were describing their status accurately. It is clear, then, that considerable economic uncertainty was a genuine element in the Jewish psyche as early as the twelfth century, and in the thirteenth such uncertainty must have become more disturbing than ever. Legal attacks against Jewish moneylending were made by

38. See Baron, *op. cit.*, 10: 57 ff. On the economic and political decline of French Jewry in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see esp. Chazan, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40, 63-96, 100-24, 133-41, 148, 154-86.

39. See S. Albeck, "Rabbenu Tam's Attitude to the Problems of His Time," (Hebrew), *Zion* 19 (1954): 107-08; cf. *Tosafot Bava Mezi'a*, 70b, s. v. *tashshikh*.

40. *Tosafot Avodah Zarah*, 2a, s. v. *velifroa' mehen*. On Christian efforts to minimize the effectiveness of documents held by Jews which proved Christian indebtedness, see S. Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1933), p. 57, note 78, and pp. 106-07, note 3. The Jewish feeling of economic insecurity is also reflected in the texts in B. Dinur, *Yisrael BaGolah* II. 1 (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 157-68.

both Louis IX and Philip the Bold, while Philip the Fair resorted to outright extortion and eventual banishment in 1306. Even during those periods in the fourteenth century when the Jews were invited back, their security was tenuous. They were subjected to the indirect pressure of the Inquisition, they were vulnerable to the depredations of mobs like the Pastoureaux in 1320, and they were constantly aware of the possibility of another sudden expulsion.⁴¹

The status of German Jewry in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was also undergoing a precipitous decline. The most important change involved a new application of the old conception of Jewish servitude. As a theological concept, this doctrine goes back to the early Christian centuries, and it even gave rise to certain practical conclusions. Jews, for example, were not supposed to hold positions that would give them control over Christians, since that would constitute a violation of the biblical injunction (Gen. 25:23) that the older (i.e., the synagogue) must serve the younger (i.e., the church);⁴² although honored more in the breach than the observance, this rule was not entirely without practical effect. Even the contention that Jews somehow belong to the royal treasury appears much earlier than the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, it was in that century that the fateful phrase *servi camerae* (serfs of the chamber) first appeared, and it was then that the potentially disastrous consequences of that phrase came to be applied in earnest.

Ironically, the immediate origins of this expression probably lie in a conflict that had no direct connection with the Jews and affected them at first in the form of an offer of protection. The Jewish question was a peripheral element in the struggle between pope and emperor concerning papal "fullness of power," and the assertion by Frederick II that the Jews were the serfs of his chamber meant, at least initially, that he was their legitimate protector.⁴³ It did not take long, however, for this doctrine to be transformed into an instrument

41. On the early fourteenth century, see Y. Yerushalmi, "The Inquisition and the Jews of France in the Time of Bernard Gui," *HTR* 63 (1970): 317-77. See also R. Anchel, *Les Juifs de France* (1946), pp. 79-91, and Chazan, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-205.

42. See the notes to p. 55.

43. See Baron, *op. cit.*, 9: 141-47. For a recent discussion of the doctrine of fullness of power, see W. D. McCready, "Papal *Plenitudo Potestatis* and the Source of Temporal Authority in Late Medieval Papal Hierocratic Theory," *Speculum* 48 (1973): 654-74.

of severe economic exploitation that reflected an effort to deny to Jews the status of free men.⁴⁴ This development was aggravated by recurring blood libels, anti-Jewish riots, local expulsions, and "feudal anarchy";⁴⁵ consequently, although German Jews were spared the agony of a nationwide banishment, their legal and social status had sunk to an almost intolerable level.

Polemical works in general and the *Nizzahon Vetus* in particular both reflect and illuminate the historical epoch in which they appear. It is true that many aspects of polemic remained relatively static throughout the Middle Ages, particularly the various arguments and counterarguments regarding the exegesis of specific biblical verses. Nevertheless, the *realia* of any historical period quickly found expression in polemic, and the impact of various political, philosophical, and religious developments can be measured in part by the degree to which they are reflected in this literature. Examples of this can be cited from virtually every period in the development of polemic. The failure of the Bar-Kokheba revolt was reflected almost immediately in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*; the problems of "Judaizers" in the church were discussed in the diatribes of John Chrysostom; Agobard's works reflected the challenge of Jewish economic development and political influence; the relatively calm tone of the polemics of Peter Damian and Gilbert Crispin as compared with the vituperation in works of the later Middle Ages mirrored basic differences in Jewish-Christian relations; various philosophical developments had a major impact on the discussions of the trinity, incarnation, and virgin birth.⁴⁶

In light of the deteriorating status of Ashkenazic Jewry described above, it is particularly interesting that one of the most striking characteristics of the *Nizzahon Vetus* and other Ashkenazic

44. See especially G. Kisch, *The Jews in Medieval Germany* (Chicago, 1949), pp. 159-68, and cf. Baron, op. cit., pp. 152 ff.

45. Baron, op. cit., pp. 193 ff.

46. There is no really good survey of Jewish-Christian polemic as a whole until the fourteenth century. A few studies, however, do give a picture of some of the areas of interaction between polemic and historical *realia*. See *Ver. Israel; Auteurs; Juifs et Chrét.*; J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (London, 1934); I. Loeb, "La Controverse Religieuse entre les Chrétiens et les Juifs au Moyen Age," *Revue d'histoire des Religions* 17 (1888): 311-37; 18 (1888): 133-56 (also printed as a separate monograph); Baron, op. cit. 9:55-134, 266-307; Funkenstein, op. cit., pp. 125-44.

polemics of this period is their aggressiveness, vigor, and vituperation. The Jewish reader is instructed to press his arguments vigorously and not to permit the Christian to change the subject.⁴⁷ Christians are told that they will be condemned to hellfire.⁴⁸ A rabbi is said to have informed the king of Germany that "if one were to load a donkey with vomit and filth and lead him through the church, he would remain unharmed."⁴⁹ Sarcastic stories are told of conversations between Jesus and God,⁵⁰ while Jesus, Peter, Mary, and the holy spirit are all referred to in an insulting manner.⁵¹ Some of these comments and witticisms are a reflection of what might be called folk polemic, since such arguments and anecdotes must have enjoyed wide circulation among Jews who were incapable of appreciating more complex and abstract discussions.⁵²

Aggressiveness and vituperation were by no means universal among Jewish polemicists of this period and are characteristic primarily of *Sefer Yosef HaMeganne* and the *Nizzahon Vetus*, which were written in northern France and Germany. Other writers were far more cautious and restrained. Jacob ben Reuben, for example, prefixed his pioneering critique of Matthew with a diffident, even fearful, introduction. He wrote that Jews should really keep silent on such matters, that he recorded only a few of the errors in Matthew, and that he did even this much only at the insistence of his friends. Moreover, he asked that his name not be mentioned in connection with the critique for fear that Christians would find out.⁵³ Solomon de' Rossi also counseled restraint at the beginning of his *Edut HaShem Ne'emanah*. Indeed, he suggested that the Jewish polemicist avoid entirely such subjects as the trinity, incarnation, host, saints,

47. N.V., p. 169.

48. Ibid., p. 68.

49. Ibid., p. 69.

50. See pp. 43, 77.

51. See the notes to p. 152.

52. Nevertheless, Rosenthal (*Jewish Social Studies* 27 [1965]: 121) justly rejects H. J. Schoeps's contention that N.V. stems from "the completely uneducated circles of German Jewry."

53. *Mil. HaShem*, p. 141. While Rosenthal is no doubt correct in suggesting that such factors as the higher philosophical level of *Mil. HaShem* were largely responsible for its less vituperative tone (introduction to *Sefer Yosef HaMeganne*, p. 28), this passage shows that fear was also a factor. These observations by Rosenthal revise his earlier judgment that *Mil. HaShem* was the sharpest polemic written by a medieval Jew (introduction to *Mil. HaShem*, p. 19).

priesthood—in short, anything that might be offensive. Discussion should be limited to “the coming of the Messiah, the signs of his time, the commandments of the Torah, and the words of the prophets.” Moreover, Solomon’s advice on the tactics of the Jewish polemicist provides a striking contrast with the above-mentioned instructions given by the author of the *Nizzahon Vetus*. “One who argues with them,” says our author, “should be strong willed by asking questions and giving responses that deal with the specific issue at hand and not permitting his antagonist to extricate himself from that issue until it has been completed.”⁵⁴ Solomon, on the other hand, suggests that if the Jew sees that he is winning the argument, he should not try to appear like the victor but should instead change the subject.⁵⁵

Our author’s practical advice to the Jewish polemicist is not the only evidence indicating that the aggressiveness reflected in the *Nizzahon Vetus* was at least partly expressed in actual debate. Agobard accused Jews of blaspheming Jesus in the presence of Christians.⁵⁶ In the twelfth century, Jews were said to have challenged Christians to battle in the manner of Goliath.⁵⁷ Walter of Châtillon asserted that Jews not only fail to accept the truth of Christianity but actively pose objections to it.⁵⁸ The oft-quoted remark of Louis IX that a Christian layman who is confronted by a Jewish polemicist should refute his adversary by stabbing him assumes that Jews were in the habit of initiating religious discussions.⁵⁹ Recent research has revealed that the unflattering explanation of Christian confession proposed in the *Nizzahon Vetus* was actually suggested to a Christian by a thirteenth-century French Jew; the priest, it was said, uses confession to obtain a list of adulterous women whom he can then

54. N.V., p. 169.

55. See Solomon de’ Rossi, *‘Edut HaShem Ne’emanah*, Rosenthal’s *Mehqarim*, 1:378-79. Cf. also the citations in Rosenthal’s introduction to *Yosef HaMeqanne*, p. 17. The contrast between Solomon and N.V. was noted briefly by E. Urbach, “Études sur la littérature polémique au moyen âge,” *REJ* 100 (1935): 61.

56. PL 104.71, quoted in Williams, p. 355.

57. The *Tractatus* in TNA 5.1509 = PL 213.749; cf. M. Guedemann, *HaTorah VehaHaggim Bimei HaBeinayim* . . . (Tel Aviv, 1968; first printing, Warsaw, 1897), pp. 11-12.

58. Walter of Châtillon, *Tractatus* . . . , PL 209.424.

59. See Anchel, op. cit., pp. 106-7. On “the Jewish mission” through the eleventh century, see also *Juifs et Chrét.*, pp. 159-211.

seduce.⁶⁰ In light of this evidence, it appears that the assertiveness and self-confidence of Ashkenazic Jews were remarkable, and the view that most of the sarcastic comments in Jewish polemic were intended for internal consumption should probably be modified though not entirely discarded.⁶¹

Whether or not vituperative polemical remarks were intended for a Christian audience, such expressions of contempt toward the *sancta* of Christianity became known to the Inquisition. Bernard Gui, who directed the Inquisition in France in the early fourteenth century, referred to a *cematha* (= *shamta*, or curse) proclaimed by the Jews on the Day of Atonement which indicated through circumlocution that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a prostitute and Mary a woman of voluptuousness. In his study of Gui and the Jews of France, Y. Yerushalmi points to a liturgical poem quoted in *Endecktes Judenthum* that reads: “The nations link your holiness to the yoke of promiscuity, [but] your betrothed revile the relation to the promiscuous woman (יָרוּם אֵשֶׁת הַיּוֹמָה).”⁶²

60. See J. Shatzmiller, *Recherches sur la communauté juive de Manosque au moyen âge* (Paris, La Haye, 1973), pp. 123-27; cf. below, p. 223. Although I find Shatzmiller’s analysis quite persuasive, several cautionary remarks should be added. First of all, the text is fragmentary, and Shatzmiller’s reconstruction is based in part on the existence of the parallel in N.V. Secondly, the Jew was subjected to a formal accusation as a result of his remarks, and this must obviously temper any conclusions to be drawn from this incident concerning Jewish aggressiveness and freedom of speech. Finally, the Jew denied the charges by presenting a significantly different version of what he had said, and this denial, as Shatzmiller indicates, cannot be dismissed with absolute certainty.

61. See Urbach, op. cit., pp. 60 ff., for a discussion of this problem. I. Levi had pointed to several sources which reflected Jewish initiation of vigorous religious debate, but he considered this a pre-thirteenth-century phenomenon; see his “Controverse entre un Juif et un Chrétien au XI^e Siècle,” *REJ* 5 (1882): 238. The view that Provençal Jews “took advantage of their freedom of speech” to a greater extent than other Jews was expressed by Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century*, p. 29. Baron has even suggested that outspoken polemical remarks may have been inspired by the Official family, and they themselves may have spoken as they did because of their roots in Narbonne, where Jews enjoyed exceptional privileges (op. cit., 9:277). Many remarks of this type, however, cannot be traced to the Officials, and quite a few are attributed to earlier Ashkenazic figures. The truth probably lies in the most straightforward reading of the evidence, which indicates that the Jews of northern France and Germany did not shrink from outspoken polemic, at least in private conversation, even in the dark days of the late thirteenth century. On the assertiveness that marked Ashkenazic Jewry in the pre-Crusade period, see I. Agus, *The Heroic Age of Franco-German Jewry* (New York, 1969), especially pp. 11-20; despite certain exaggerations, the main thrust of Agus’s portrayal of this characteristic is valid. For an even earlier period, see Anchel, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

62. Yerushalmi, op. cit., pp. 362-63. The phrase אֵשֶׁת הַיּוֹמָה is taken from Ezekiel 23:44. See also Merchavia, “HaShamta BeSifrut HaPulmus HaNogerit Bimei HaBeinayim,” *Tarbiz* 41 (1971): 95-115; cf. especially pp. 97, 100, where he cites the reading יָרוּם rather than יָרוּם

This sort of expression appears in the *Nizzahon Vetus* several times, and Gui's attack points up the danger inherent in the use of such rhetoric even to a Jewish audience. Indeed, Gui was aware of a substantial number of Jewish works and expressions that he felt were directed against Christians or contained blasphemies. Among these were the *Alenu* prayer, Rashi's commentaries, Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, R. David Kimhi's commentary on Psalms, and the Talmud itself. Moreover, he was particularly sensitive to the Jewish practice of calling Christians "heretics" (*minim*), a practice that goes back to the Talmud and is reflected frequently in the *Nizzahon Vetus*.⁶³ Finally, it might be pointed out that a religious disputation actually became part of an inquisitorial proceeding in 1320; not surprisingly, the inquisitor emerged victorious in a debate whose ground rules left something to be desired.⁶⁴

The increasing economic exploitation of Jews was reflected all too clearly in the polemical work of Meir of Narbonne. Here the satirical veneer that often concealed Jewish bitterness was dropped, and Meir allowed himself an undisguised outburst which reveals how deeply Jews were hurt by their growing insecurity. The unfair expropriation of property on such a scale "is worse for a man than being murdered. When a person is subjected to shame and disgrace, he would rather be dead; moreover, when he loses his money and he and his family remain 'in hunger, in nakedness, and in want of all things' (Deut. 28:48), then he will in fact die before his time." The culmination of this cry of anguish is Meir's anticipation of the day when the Gentiles will have to repay what they stole from the Jews.⁶⁵

Many other aspects of the changing historical situation were also reflected in Jewish polemic. The growing importance of money-lending, for example, led to considerable discussion of its ethics and its biblical justification. Christians not only cited various time-

63. See Yerushalmi, op. cit., pp. 350 ff. In the Talmud, *minim* probably referred primarily to Jewish Christians. For the charge that Jews curse Christians in prayer, cf. also Jerome and Agobard cited in Merchavia, *HaTalmud BiRe'i HaNazrut*, pp. 82-83. Cf. also the list of pejorative Jewish expressions about Christianity compiled by Christians in 1239 and summarized by Merchavia, p. 278.

64. See S. Grayzel, "The Confessions of a Medieval Jewish Convert," *Historia Judaica* 17 (1955): 89-120, and cf. Yerushalmi, op. cit., pp. 328-33.

65. *Mil. Mizvah*, p. 23b. See also the quotation from Meir in Chazan, op. cit., p. 123.

honored verses to prove that usury is a moral offense of universal relevance, but were apparently willing to use Jewish typology to buttress their argument. Several Jewish works of this period cite the Christian contention that even if Christians are Edom (a Jewish stereotype), Jews should be forbidden to take interest from them in light of the verses which refer to Edom and Israel as brothers. Moreover, the Jewish response did not restrict itself solely to legalistic refutations; Christian polemicists were charged with hypocrisy on the grounds that Christians themselves were involved in extensive usurious activities.⁶⁶

The truth is that this last accusation is but one expression of the more general contention that Christians behave immorally. Whatever the historical validity of such remarks may be, they are significant for what they reveal about the self-image of the Jews and the use of polemic to strengthen that image. One of the beliefs which sustained medieval Jewry through centuries of adversity was the firm conviction that Jews were clearly superior to their Gentile persecutors. No medieval Jew felt that he was subjected to other nations because they were morally, let alone religiously, superior to him. On the contrary, Ashkenazic Jewry in particular developed the theory that one reason for its suffering was that it was chosen because of its unique qualities to sanctify the divine name through martyrdom.⁶⁷ Consequently, martyrdom itself became evidence of the outstanding qualities of the Jews of France and Germany.

Indeed, Ashkenazic Jews were hardly able to discuss the issue of martyrdom, even in a halakhic context, without a passionate, emotional response. A remarkable *tosafot*, for example, points out that a certain talmudic passage seems to require a normative legal decision that a Jew is not obligated to resist to the death when forced to engage in a private idolatrous act. But, say the *tosafists*, "this is difficult," and one expects that this standard formula will be followed by the ordinary kind of legal or exegetical argumentation.

66. See pp. 133-34 and the notes there. For a discussion of the Christian accusations that Jews engage in extensive usury, see Kisch, op. cit., pp. 327-9.

67. See H. H. Ben-Sasson, *Peraqim beToledot HaYehudim Bimei HaBeinayim* (Tel Aviv, 1958), pp. 174-84. Cf. N.V., p. 70, and the notes there.

Instead, we are confronted, at least initially, by an emotional outburst. "This is difficult, for God forbid that we should rule in a case of idolatry that one should transgress rather than die."⁶⁸ A similar reaction appears in a responsum of R. Meir of Rothenburg, who was asked whether atonement is necessary for a man who had killed his wife and children (with their consent) to prevent their capture by a mob demanding conversion to Christianity. Although he concedes the difficulty of finding justification for such an act in rabbinic sources, R. Meir will not even consider seriously the possibility that such behavior is illegal. "This is a matter," he says, "whose permissibility has been widely accepted, for we have heard of many great rabbis who slaughtered their sons and daughters. . . . And anyone who requires atonement for this is besmirching the name of the pious men of old."⁶⁹

The *Nizzahon Vetus* supplies additional evidence of the centrality of martyrdom in the thought of Franco-German Jewry in this period. It contains a fascinating passage which illustrates how an Ashkenazic Jew transformed a story that contained no reference to martyrdom into one in which it emerges as the central theme; indeed, it becomes virtually a criterion of religious truth. In Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, a pagan king calls in a philosopher, a Jew, a Muslim, and a Christian so that each can argue the merits of his position. The king is eventually persuaded of the truth of Judaism, partly because both the Muslim and the Christian grant it a certain degree of authenticity. The *Nizzahon Vetus*, on the other hand, tells an elaborate story in which a king threatens a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim with death unless each one will convert to one of the other faiths. The Jew remains steadfast even at the very edge of the grave, while the other two ultimately lose their resolve and succumb to the king's threats. Both, however, choose Judaism, and "when the emperor heard that the Jew was willing to die for his Torah and would not move from his

68. *Tosafot Avodah Zarah*, 54a s. v. *ha bezin'a*. See J. Katz, *Bein Yehudim LeGoyim* (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 90. The equivalent passage in the English version [*Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York, 1961), pp. 83-84] presents such a bland paraphrase of the *Tosafot* that the emotional force of the argument is virtually lost.)

69. R. Meir of Rothenburg, *Teshuvot, Pesaqim, U-Minhagim*, ed. Y.Z. Kahane (Jerusalem, 1960), 2:54.

faith one bit, while the priest and the Muslim both denied their vain beliefs and accepted our faith, he himself chose our religion; he, the priest, and the Muslim were all converted and became true and genuine proselytes." The modification of the *Kuzari* story to make the willingness to die a proof of the truth of Judaism is a truly striking indication of the role martyrdom had come to play in the psyche of the medieval Ashkenazic Jew.⁷⁰

The one aspect of medieval Christian life that challenged the Jewish image of moral superiority was the monastic ideal. At least some Christians, it appeared, were leading pure and ethical lives which could be compared favorably with those of ordinary Jews and perhaps even of rabbinic leaders. It is possible that it was the implicit challenge of monasticism that provoked the vigorous attacks against both the monastic ideal and its practical implementation which are found in Jewish polemic. The author of the *Nizzahon Vetus* argues that at best monks and nuns are overcome with lustful desires that cannot be consummated, and at worst, "they wallow in licentiousness in secret." Only marriage can assure that a person will remain pious and God-fearing. Moreover, monastic orders, some of which were expanding vigorously in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were accused of unfair appropriation of land and portrayed as depraved and unethical. Thus, the threat to the Jewish self-image was negated, and Jews were even able to strengthen their conviction of ethical superiority by a partisan examination of monasticism.⁷¹

It is significant that the relatively recent charge of ritual murder appears in Ashkenazic polemic of the thirteenth century. Whatever the roots of this accusation may be, official church doctrine never sanctioned it. Indeed, at least the charge of ritual consumption of Christian blood was vigorously condemned by the

70. For further references, see the notes to pp. 216-18.

71. See pp. 69-70, 98-99, 223, and cf. the notes there. On the alleged immorality of priests, see also Guedemann, op. cit., pp. 42-43, 67-68. My feeling that monasticism posed a psychological threat to the Jewish self-image is almost impossible to substantiate definitively because no medieval Jew would say this openly. There is, however, interesting evidence that some Ashkenazic Jews in the early modern period felt insecure in the presence of genuine priestly celibacy; see the curious legend in *Shivhei HaBesht* about the Baal Shem Tov's conversation with a priest (D. Ben-Amos and J. Mintz, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* [Bloomington, 1970], p. 248).

papacy, and it may even be appropriate to speak of a thirteenth-century rivalry between pope and emperor over the right to protect the Jews against this libel.⁷² It is consequently a matter of particular interest to find Christians searching the Scriptures to discover evidence, and rather complicated evidence at that, to prove that Jews eat human beings and drink their blood.⁷³ This is one of the earliest concrete indications of an attempt at a reasoned defense of the blood libel.

The spread of heresy was one of the most important social and religious developments in this period and had particularly sensitive implications with regard to Jewish-Christian relations. Christians had traditionally labeled members of any schismatic group "Jews," and had occasionally attacked the latter as a means of getting at the former.⁷⁴ Moreover, Jews were occasionally accused of harboring heretics, encouraging them, and even of leading orthodox Christians into heresy.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, despite considerable scholarly efforts, virtually no hard evidence concerning significant contacts between Jews and medieval heretics has been unearthed.⁷⁶

Precisely such evidence, however, may be found in Jewish polemic. I have argued elsewhere that the *Nizzahon Vetus* contains a refutation of a heretical Christian doctrine, that a thirteenth-century French polemicist makes explicit reference to Albigensians and Bogomils in order to attack orthodox Christianity, and that Jacob ben Reuben's *Milhamot HaShem* may preserve evidence of an even more intriguing nature. Jacob's Christian disputant may have unwittingly quoted the arguments of a friend which were ostensibly aimed at Judaism but were really designed to undermine orthodox Christian-

72. Baron, op. cit., 9:144-45.

73. See pp. 54, 229 and the notes there.

74. So Cassiodorus, PL 70.74D ("Judaei vel Donatistae"); Hadrian I, PL 98.1255-56. Cf. *Juifs et Chrét.*, pp. xvii-xviii and note 11 there. See also Damian's *De Sacramentis per Improbos Administratis*, PL 145.529, and his *Liber Qui Dicitur Gratissimus*, ch. 37, PL 145.153, discussed in my "St. Peter Damian," pp. 86-87, 89-90. Cf. Humbert, PL 143.1093 C. On this practice in the Byzantine Empire, see Parkes, op. cit., pp. 300-03. Cf. also Baron, op. cit., 9:58-60.

75. Cf. Baron, op. cit., 59, 267-68.

76. See L. I. Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements* (New York, 1925); G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 206-210; F. Talmage, "An Hebrew Polemical Treatise: Anti-Cathar and Anti-Orthodox," *HTR* 60 (1967): 335-37.

ity. Thus, Christian heretics may have used anti-Jewish polemic as a cover for attacks against the orthodox Christian faith.⁷⁷

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were also characterized by the broadening of the horizons of Europe that took place in the wake of the Crusades; indeed, the rise of heresy in Western Europe may have been stimulated by the new contacts between East and West.⁷⁸ These contacts with the Muslim world aided Jewish apologists in a very old and critical area of polemic, namely, the Christian argument that the success and wide diffusion of Christianity proved its superiority over a religion with a small number of adherents who were growing progressively weaker. Jews could now argue with genuine conviction and greater effectiveness that even by the numerical test alone, Christianity would not prevail; Muslims, they said, rule "half the world," and God's promise to Abraham that all nations of the world would be blessed in him and his seed was certainly not fulfilled through Christianity. Jews even attempted to make Christians feel isolated by arguing that the disgust at eating pork is really a *consensus omnium* with the sole exception of Christians. In fact, even the existence of Christian heresy could be cited as proof of the limited extent of orthodox Christianity. Finally, the failure of the Crusades was cited to show that the alleged success of Christianity was illusory; consequently, Christians would have to admit that temporal success is unrelated to religious truth. Once this admission was made, the old argument against Judaism would have to be abandoned.⁷⁹

One of the most striking characteristics of the polemic reflected in the *Nizzahon Vetus* is the extensive use of the New Testament. The first extant critique of the New Testament by a European Jew is in the eleventh chapter of Jacob ben Reuben's *Milhamot HaShem* (1170);⁸⁰ this work, however, deals only with Matthew.

77. See my "Christian Heresy and Jewish Polemic in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *HTR* 68 (1975):287-303. See also p. 153 below and the notes there.

78. On the causes of the rise of heresy, see J. Russell's "Interpretations of the Origins of Medieval Heresy," *Medieval Studies* 25 (1963): 26-53, and his *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1965).

79. See p. 89 and the notes there for specific references and a fuller discussion.

80. For a discussion of this date, see J. Rosenthal's edition of *Mil. HaShem*, introduction,

On the other hand, *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, *Milhemet Mizvah* of Meir b. Simon of Narbonne, and the *Nizzahon Vetus* reflect an intimate knowledge of all the Gospels and some awareness of the other books of the New Testament.⁸¹

There are certain instructive similarities between Jewish use of the New Testament in polemic and the Christian approach to the Talmud, which became important in the thirteenth century. Both religions had one sacred text—the Hebrew Scriptures—which they held in common, and another sacred body of teaching about whose authority they differed. Traditionally, polemical writings had largely restricted themselves to different interpretations of the text whose authority and divine origin both groups accepted. In our period, however, the usefulness of the New Testament for Jewish polemicists and of the Talmud for Christians began to become evident. There is, in fact, a clear parallelism between the approaches developed by each group to the sacred literature of its adversaries. On the one hand, that literature was subjected to a vigorous critique; on the other, it was exploited to disprove the beliefs of its own adherents.

Thus, beginning in the twelfth century a series of Christian authors attacked the Talmud as a work replete with absurdities, and in the 1230s, Nicholas Donin asserted that it contained blasphemies against Jesus which made it a candidate for destruction. The Jewish defense presented at the so-called disputation in Paris in 1240 did not succeed in thwarting Donin's wishes, and within a relatively short time a public burning of the Talmud took place. A few decades later in Spain the Talmud was again the focus of a disputation, but the approach was entirely different. Here, Pablo C(h)ristia(ni) maintained that the dogmas of Christianity could be demonstrated from the Talmud; the rabbis, for example, were said to have indicated that

81. Cf. the reference to 1 Corinthians on p. 70. The impression of close familiarity with the New Testament is marred by the frequent attribution of a quotation to the wrong book of the Gospels. See, e.g., pp. 180, 183, 188. These inaccurate ascriptions may offer a partial explanation for the lack of a systematic order in the section of N.V. that contains a critique of the Gospels. N.V. also contains some non-authentic quotations from Christian literature (e.g., pp. 160, 201) which J. Wakius complained about in a late seventeenth-century refutation. See his *Teshuvat HaDin 'al HaYehudim sive Recriminatio Actionis in nuperos Christi Accusatores cujus pars prima agit contra. . . librum Nizzachon Vetus* (Jenac, 1699), pp. 20–21, 28–29.

the Messiah had already come and that he is a preexistent being. Significant, though less spectacular, consequences resulted from this disputation as well, and the use of the Talmud to support Christianity became a central element of the Jewish-Christian debate in the centuries to come. Some later Christians even combined the two approaches, arguing that the Talmud contains both blasphemies and evidence of Christian truths.⁸²

The Jewish critique of the Gospels had a similar twofold nature. Jews attacked the Christian Scriptures for their alleged absurdities and contradictions, and at the same time they tried to prove that later Christian dogmas are inconsistent with the Gospels themselves. It was, of course, much easier to maintain both Jewish attitudes at the same time than it was to do the same for both Christian arguments, and the dual approach is used without hesitation throughout the latter section of the *Nizzahon Vetus*.⁸³

The knowledge of the New Testament displayed in *Yosef HaMeqanne* and the *Nizzahon Vetus* was at least partly firsthand since there are a substantial number of Latin quotations in both works.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, various citations of the opinions of proselytes leave no room for doubt that some of the familiarity with Christian texts

82. Both views were expressed in the Tortosa disputation in the early fifteenth century; cf. the citations in Baron, op. cit., 9: 90, 91. Baron, however, does not note that two originally disparate approaches are represented here. On medieval Christian use of the Talmud through the Donin episode, see Merchavia, *HaTalmud BiRe'i HaNazrut*, passim. Pablo's approach was adopted by Raymond Martini in his classic *Pugio Fidei* (Leipzig, 1687), which became a manual for Christian polemicists in late medieval Spain. For Donin's approach in thirteenth-century Italy, cf. C. Roth, *History of the Jews of Italy* (Philadelphia, 1946), pp. 99–100.

83. On the search for contradictions, see, for example, N.V., pp. 167–68, regarding the contradictory genealogies in Matthew and Luke. The argument against Christian dogma through Gospel citations is very common; see especially the notes to p. 183.

84. There is some discussion of Jacob ben Reuben's Hebrew translations of Matthew in Rosenthal's "Targum shel HaBesorah 'al pi Matti leYa'aqov ben Reuven," *Tarbiz* 32 (1962): 48–66. On Jacob's translation of selections from Gilbert Crispin's *Disputatio*, see my "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Polemic," *Speculum* 49 (1974): 34–47. On Jewish knowledge of Latin see also the references in Merchavia, op. cit., p. 245. The author of the *Dialogus* attributed to William of Champeaux refers to his supposed Jewish disputant as a man expert in Jewish law and "not ignorant" of Christian literature (PL 163.1045). Gilbert Crispin, after whose work "William" modelled this passage, had used an even stronger expression; the Jew "was well-versed (*bene sciens*) in our law and literature" (*Disputatio*, ed. Blumenkranz, p. 27). Solomon de' Rossi lists such knowledge as one of the requirements for a Jewish polemicist (*'Edut HaShem Ne'emanah*, in Rosenthal's *Mehqarim*, 1: 378).

and especially with Christian prayers, festivals, and rituals resulted from contact with these converts; indeed, the Rome manuscript passages that served as a source of the *Nizzahon Vetus* may well have been written by a student of a proselyte's son. Similarly, the Christian awareness of the Talmud stemmed largely from information supplied by Jewish converts. Petrus Alfonsi, for example, had proposed arguments against certain talmudic passages as early as the beginning of the twelfth century,⁸⁵ and both Nicholas Donin and Pablo C(h)ristia(ni) were recent converts to Christianity when they began their polemical activities.⁸⁶

Jewish polemic, then, reflects some of the most important social, economic, and intellectual changes that were taking place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Embittered relations, economic exploitation, usury, the expansion of monasticism, martyrdom, the blood libel, Christian heresy, the failure of the Crusades, wider familiarity with the New Testament and the Talmud—all these played a role in the Jewish-Christian debate, and polemical works can frequently supply insights into the impact of some of these momentous developments. Relations between Christians and Jews were indeed deteriorating, but the very symptoms of that deterioration lent greater variety and renewed interest to the vigorous religious discussions that persisted throughout this tragic age in the history of medieval Jewry.

III. The Book and Its Author

Finally, we come to the *Nizzahon Vetus* itself. Some of the basic information concerning the work is either unknown or uncertain, and even the very title has been subjected to varying translations. In this context, the word *nizzahon* probably means polemic rather than victory;⁸⁷ the reason that this is the "old *Nizzahon*" is that

85. See Merchavia, op. cit., pp. 93-127.

86. See below, note 91. On the role of converts, see Blumenkranz, "Jüdische und Christliche Konvertiten im Jüdisch-Christlichen Religionsgespräch des Mittelalters," in Paul Wilpert's *Judenrum im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1966), pp. 264-82, and cf. Guedemann, op. cit., p. 11.

87. See the notes to p. 41.

a more famous polemic of the same name was written by Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and the later work came to be the *Sefer HaNizzahon* par excellence. Our *Nizzahon* was published in the seventeenth century by a Christian scholar who hesitantly dated it in the twelfth century, because, he said, no one who lived after that time is mentioned in the book.⁸⁸

We now know that at least one or two later figures are named and that the book is probably dependent upon the thirteenth-century *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*;⁸⁹ consequently, the most plausible date for the *Nizzahon Vetus* is the latter part of the thirteenth century, and this is the date that has been accepted by most modern scholars.⁹⁰ Urbach dates the work in the fourteenth century, apparently because its two major sources are from the second half of the thirteenth; this reasoning, however, does not preclude a late thirteenth-century date.⁹¹ In the absence of clearer evidence, therefore, a cautious approach is advisable, and the book must be dated either in the late thirteenth or early

88. *Tela*, 2: 1.

89. This work was probably written in the mid-thirteenth century. See the discussion and references in Rosenthal, *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, pp. 15 ff.

90. See L. Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur* (Berlin 1845), p. 85 (cited also in M. Steinschneider, *Catalog der Hebräischen Handschriften in der Stadtbibliothek zu Hamburg und der sich anschliessenden in anderen Sprachen* [Hamburg, 1878], p. 72); A. Posnanski, *Schiloh*. . . (Leipzig, 1904), p. 148; J. Rosenthal, "Sifrut HaVikkuah HaAnti-Nozerit," *Areshet* 2 (1960): 173; Baron, op. cit., 9: 294. Zunz dates the work a bit earlier than the others. See especially Rosenthal's introduction to *Yosef HaMeqanne*, p. 15.

91. Urbach, op. cit., pp. 60, 76-77. The sources are *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne* and the third part of Hebrew manuscript no. 53 in the Vittorio Emanuele library in Rome.

In an unpublished dissertation written after this book was substantially completed (*The Sefer Nitzahon: A Thirteenth Century Defense of Judaism*, New York University, October, 1974), A. Ehrman has argued for a date between 1220 and 1229 (pp. 4-5) or 1220 and 1235 (p. 163), and in a forthcoming article he has extended the final terminus to 1242. His most important arguments are the author's failure to mention the disputation at Paris in the short final paragraph on the Talmud and the fact that none of the few names that we can identify with certainty belongs to anyone who flourished in the second half of the century. Neither of these arguments strikes me as especially persuasive. That final passage on the Talmud in itself suggests a *terminus a quo* of 1240 or even a bit later, and since the events of 1240 were in France while N.V. is largely an anthology written in Germany, prudence would appear to dictate our allowing a decent interval after that date for its composition. Moreover, there is no internal evidence that *Yosef HaMeqanne* is an anthology as there is with respect to N.V. (see just below), but if we date N.V. before *Yosef HaMeqanne*, we would have to assume that much of the Gospel critique in the Rome manuscript version of the latter work was copied from N.V. or its source while the source of N.V. is lost. Finally, our anthology would have to be credited with a whole series of polemical firsts probably originating in lost sources. None of this is impossible, but it hardly seems like the course to choose in the absence of compelling evidence.

fourteenth century. As we shall see, however, the bulk of its material stems from an earlier period.

Several writers have assumed that the seventeenth-century scholar Wilhelm Schickard reported that the author of the *Nizzahon Vetus* was named R. Mattiyahu; moreover, this assertion by Schickard is supposed to have been repeated by Wagenseil in the introduction to his edition of the book. The very brief introduction to the Jerusalem reprint of the Hebrew section of *Tela Ignea Satanae* attributes this view to Wagenseil, and this attribution has been repeated by at least two other scholars.⁹² Judah Rosenthal also pointed to a book by Schickard that refers to a *Triumphator R. Matthias* (which Rosenthal evidently identified with the *Nizzahon Vetus*),⁹³ and he went on to note Schickard's unfinished *Nizzahon Beli Nezah sive Triumphator Vapulans* (Tübingen, 1623), which he described as a refutation of the *Nizzahon Vetus* that he was unable to consult. Finally, he suggested that the attribution of the *Nizzahon Vetus* to a R. Mattiyahu may have resulted from a confusion with the fifteenth-century author of *Sefer Ahituv VeZalmon*, which was also called *Nizzahon*.⁹⁴

It can now be asserted with full confidence that Rosenthal's conjecture is correct, but neither Schickard nor Wagenseil were guilty of confusing the two books. The *Nizzahon Beli Nezah*, which is available from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, does not deal with the *Nizzahon Vetus* at all; the book Schickard had in fact was the later *Sefer Ahituv VeZalmon*, and his only error was in dating it somewhat too early. It was to this *Triumphator* that he referred in *Jus Regium Hebraeorum*, where he even cited a poetic passage from *Sefer Ahituv VeZalmon* that is nowhere in the *Nizzahon Vetus*. Moreover, a careful reading of Wagenseil's introduction shows that he never meant to say that Schickard had begun editing the same *Nizzahon* that he was now publishing. Wagenseil was merely reviewing the history of the publication of Jewish polemics called *Nizzahon*, and he therefore mentioned both Schickard's work and T. Hacksenius's edition of Mühlhausen's polemic.

92. J. Rosenthal, introduction to *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne*, p. 15, note 15; J. Shatzmiller, op. cit., p. 126.

93. See Schickard's *Jus Regium Hebraeorum* (Leipzig, 1764), p. 449.

94. Rosenthal, loc. cit.

All references by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars to a *Nizzahon* of R. Matthaëus are to the work utilized by Schickard. Although there was some confusion about the various books called *Nizzahon*, these writers generally knew that Schickard's text was not the same as the book edited by Wagenseil. Nevertheless, neither they nor any subsequent scholar that I know recognized the fact that Schickard's *Triumphator* was the same as *Sefer Ahituv VeZalmon*, which some of them list separately.⁹⁵ In any event, there is no tradition at all concerning the author of the *Nizzahon Vetus*, and any search for the appropriate "R. Mattiyahu" would be futile.

Although the identity of the author himself is unknown, it is very likely that he was a German Jew. The book contains a substantial number of German words as well as a passage that says that "the main body of the Gentiles is called Ashkenazim."⁹⁶ There is no evidence for the assumption made by Loeb that the German words are later interpolations;⁹⁷ consequently, although there is a great deal (perhaps even a preponderance) of French material in the work, the author himself almost certainly lived in Germany.⁹⁸

The *Nizzahon Vetus* is largely an anthology whose two major identifiable sources were *Sefer Yosef HaMeqanne* (at least in the section on the Gospels)⁹⁹ and the third part of Hebrew manuscript number 53 in the Vittorio Emanuele library in Rome.¹⁰⁰ Its character as an anthology is clear not only from the fact that we have some of its sources but from the occasional repetition of similar material in the same section of the work¹⁰¹ and from the scattered references to issues that are not found in the book as matters discussed by the

95. See T. Hacksenius, *Liber Nizachon Rabbi Lipmanni* (Nuremberg, 1644), pp. 218-219; J. Buxtorf, *Bibliotheca Rabbinica* (Herborn, 1708), pp. 145-47; J. C. Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, vol. 1 (Hamburg and Leipzig), 1715, pp. 738-41, and cf. vol. 2 (Hamburg, 1721), pp. 1051, 1052, 1259; G. B. de Rossi, *Bibliotheca Judaica Antichristiana* (Parma, 1800), pp. 63-64.

96. P. 156. Ashkenazim in this passage probably means specifically Germans; cf. the notes there. See also Steinschneider, loc. cit.

97. Loeb, op. cit., p. 329.

98. So Zunz and Urbach, loc. cit. Posnanski, loc. cit., places the book in either northern France or Germany.

99. Cf. below in the discussion of "The Text of the *Nizzahon Vetus*."

100. Cf. note 91 and see the section on the text. Urbach (op. cit., p. 77) refers to N.V. as "an anthology of all the [Ashkenazic] polemical literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."

101. See especially pp. 48-51; 100-104.

author.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the *Nizzahon Vetus* contains a great deal of material for which we cannot identify precise parallels, let alone word-for-word sources, and there is every reason to believe that the author added his own material and revised that of others. Consequently, although he followed the widespread medieval practice of making extensive, often verbatim, use of his predecessors' works, he deserves the title of author and not merely compiler.¹⁰³

The array of arguments in the *Nizzahon Vetus* is almost encyclopedic, and the book is therefore an excellent vehicle for an analysis of virtually all the central issues in the Jewish-Christian debate during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the Commentary I have tried to indicate many of the parallels with earlier works,¹⁰⁴ and these

102. See, e.g., p. 65, and cf. the notes to p. 122.

103. On the order of the book, see p. 388.

104. Both Jewish and Christian parallels have been cited only through the thirteenth century and have usually been arranged chronologically. I have tried to consult all Jewish polemics and what I hope is a representative selection of Christian works. (In some respects, Raymund Martini's *Pugio Fidei* can be regarded as the inauguration of a new era of Spanish polemic, and I have not cited it here even though its appearance toward the end of the thirteenth century makes it technically eligible for inclusion.) Needless to say, the citation of a parallel in the notes is not always intended to show that the author of N.V. was influenced by that particular source.

There is one recurring reference which requires some clarification at this point. The passage in Rome ms. 53, pp. 21a-21b, begins with a report that Pablo C(h)ristia(ni) arrived in Montpellier in 1269 and continues with a summary of Nahmanides' earlier disputation with him; this summary is followed by an unrelated collection of miscellaneous arguments (pp. 22a-25b), some of which are in the standard form of a debate between a "believer" and a "heretic." (A lengthy section of this collection [pp. 22b-23a] is a reworking of a passage from Joseph Kimhi's *Sefer HaBerit* [Talmage's edition, pp. 26-29].) Most of the material from p. 21a through p. 25a, line 16, was transcribed (though never published) by Adolph Posnanski and attributed by him to Mordecai b. Yehosafah of Avignon, apparently because Mordecai is known to have had a dispute with Pablo. Recently, Judah Rosenthal published this section of the manuscript (through p. 25b) as "Vikkuaḥ Dati Bein Ḥakham BeShem Menaḥem U-vein HaMumar VehaNazir HaDomiḥani Pablo Christiani," *Hagut 'Ivrit BaAmeriqah*, ed. by M. Zohori, A. Tartakover, and H. Ormian (Tel Aviv, 1974), pp. 61-74. Rosenthal's ascription of the work to a "Menaḥem" is based on the remark that "these are the words of Menaḥem," which appears twice in the final passage (on "true Israel"); that passage, which begins on p. 25a, line 17, was omitted by Posnanski and placed instead in his edition of N.V. (It is clear that Rosenthal was unaware of Posnanski's edition, which is generally superior to his.) There is really no firm basis for any decision about the authorship of this collection (which also contains a note in a different hand that "these are the words of Asher" [p. 22a]), and I have cited it by giving the page number of the Rome ms. followed by references to both Posnanski's "Mordecai of Avignon" ms. and Rosenthal's "Menaḥem."

Finally—an apology. For a variety of not particularly good reasons, translations of biblical verses are not consistently based on a single translation of the Bible (although I have avoided inconsistent translations of any one verse). The enormous effort that would have been necessary to correct this defect did not seem worth the trouble, and the rabbinic observation that no two prophets prophesy in the same style no longer needs to be restricted to the original Hebrew text. (When the author of N.V. misquotes a verse or understands it in a peculiar fashion, I have, of course, deliberately "mistranslated" it in order to reflect his text or interpretation.)

similarities leave no doubt about the existence of a Jewish polemical tradition. Whether or not the author of the *Nizzahon Vetus* read such works as Kimhi's *Sefer HaBerit* or Jacob ben Reuben's *Milhamot HaShem*, their influence, or the influence of the tradition upon which they drew, certainly reached him. The argument that the christological interpretation of Isaiah 53:2-3 is inconsistent with the christological interpretation of Psalms 45:2-3 is not likely to have been made independently in *Milhamot HaShem* and the *Nizzahon Vetus*.¹⁰⁵ Our author's discussion of signs in connection with the Immanuel prophecy is clearly indebted to a tradition represented in *Sefer HaBerit*, in Meir of Narbonne's *Milhemet Mizvah*, and in Moses of Salerno.¹⁰⁶ The fact that at least five Jewish polemicists cite the argument from the limited diffusion of Christianity specifically in connection with Psalms 72:11 is no coincidence.¹⁰⁷ These examples can easily be multiplied, and it is clear that both Christians and Jews had polemical traditions that drew upon the past but which remained flexible enough to accommodate, and sometimes even influence, new social, political, religious, and philosophical realities.

105. See the notes to p. 115.

106. See the notes to p. 101. Note immediately that parallels between *Mil. Mizvah* and Moses of Salerno's *Ta'anot* result from the fact that much of the nonphilosophical section of the *Ta'anot* consists of verbatim copying from Meir's work. See page correlations in Joel Rembaum, "The Influence of *Sefer Nestor Hakomer* on Medieval Jewish Polemics," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 45 (1978):167, note 54. (Those correlations require two corrections: "41-55" should be "40-55," and the material on Isa. 7:14 in *Mil. Mizvah*, pp. 111a-12a, should be listed as appearing on pp. 33-34 of the Posnanski ms. Although I had noted almost all the relevant parallels between these two works, I had not realized the full extent of the copying before reading Rembaum's article.) Most of the remaining material in this section of the *Ta'anot* is found in the Rome ms. version of *Yosef HaMeqanne* and in N.V.; see the notes to pp. 180, 192, 193 and 198.

107. See the notes to p. 159.